

Daniel in the Lions Den

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[0 : 00] Well friends, welcome back to church this evening, or welcome if you've joined us for the first time. We're going to be finishing off our study in the life of Daniel from the Old Testament, thinking about perhaps the most famous incident in his life, the time when he finds himself in the den of lions.

But before we do that, we're going to hear from God's Word. Our call to worship comes from the book of Philippians, Paul's letter written from a prison cell. Where he says, rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Following Jesus doesn't mean that we never suffer. The Bible is realistic about that. But it does say in Jesus we can have a deep joy. And we can know God's presence and God's help through our suffering.

[1 : 20] And we have this invitation to pray and to seek the peace of God. And we're going to see Daniel do that when we get there in a few minutes.

But before we do, we're going to sing a hymn. We're going to sing the hymn Cornerstone. And then we're very glad to have the help of a couple of our students in our service this evening.

So Gideon Haffenden is going to pray. And then Grace Corley is going to read for us from Daniel chapter 6.

So let's sing and then we'll pray and then we'll hear God's word. So we come to Daniel chapter 6. And I'm calling this sermon A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, borrowing the title of a Eugene Peterson book.

[2 : 23] Now I'm guessing the story is familiar to most of you. But I wonder in your mind, how old is Daniel at this stage?

I did some, I wouldn't say extensive, research into the children's storybook Bibles we've got at home. But for some, the illustrators keep Daniel at basically the same age, chapters 1 to chapter 6. Maybe he gets a tiny bit older. But others more helpfully show him in old age. Because the reality is Daniel chapter 6 takes place when Daniel is in his 80s, most likely.

Here is a portrait of a mature, godly believer. However, like Joseph in the book of Genesis, who we studied early in the year, he spends decades serving a foreign king in a foreign empire.

But he never lost his core identity of being a child of God and belonging to God's people. And he is presented to us, Daniel is presented really as a model believer for the exiles.

[3 : 35] Because he is consistent in walking with God, in trusting in his God, in refusing to compromise. And then we remember Peter's words in the New Testament saying to the church, the suffering church, that we are living as exiles.

So therefore, we can learn too from the story of Daniel. So let's begin to look for the last time at his story.

We see, first of all, a life of integrity in the first five verses. Now, Daniel chapter 1 to 6 has spanned three royal courts.

This is the second empire that we meet. The Babylonians have now been replaced by the Persians. And Daniel has spent some 60 plus years serving these foreign empires, foreign kings.

And now we see he's one of the leading three as Darius looks to appoint 120 satraps to rule his vast empire. There's three at the head of that.

[4 : 47] And Darius aims to promote Daniel right to the top. Plans set him over the whole kingdom. And this is amazing.

A career in the royal court that spans over 60 years, avoiding the long knives and the power plays within the royal court, all the battling and jockeying for position.

His, too, is a life that stands up to scrutiny. You know, when we think about the background work that's done on our political candidates, the skeletons in the closet that people look for, the digging of dirt, to make sure here is a candidate for prime minister or presidency that we believe will pass scrutiny.

Daniel's been there for 60 years and his work is described in glowing terms. Daniel so distinguished himself because his work is exceptional.

And we need to recognise that God has gifted Daniel. God has a purpose for Daniel that through his life, God's glory will be seen in the Babylonian empire.

[6 : 00] So God gifts him. So his work is exceptional. But we also see in Daniel's character there is integrity. He is somebody who is trustworthy.

He is hardworking. He has attention to detail. So his rivals conclude in verse 5, we will never find any basis for charges against this man unless it has something to do with the law of his God.

So they want to get rid of Daniel, this exile, and they think of a new point of attack and that's his faith. And that's striking too. Here is Daniel working for 60 years in pagan empires, surrounded by idolatry.

And he is known in this court for his faith, for honouring and walking in obedience to God and his laws.

So we have here a wonderful portrait of a man who has learned how to live well as an exile. Just like the letter of Jeremiah called the exiles to, he is seeking the peace and prosperity of his city.

[7 : 12] He's working for the good of the king and for the nation. But we also see that he's working for God's glory and not his own. There is no hint of moral compromise. He's not stepping on others to get ahead.

He's not squashing down his beliefs, blending in in order to get to the top. Wouldn't this be a great way for others to speak of us?

Where they would recognise in us that we were a people who were looking to bless others in the quality of our work. Looking to be a blessing in how we relate to others in the workplace.

Able to integrate our faith and our work in a positive way. Let me encourage you to pray for yourself as a worker.

To pray for other Christians you know in their workplace. To recognise work as a key frontline mission for you. That we would be praying for each other to have wisdom and integrity.

[8 : 21] To work hard, to be a blessing. To have opportunities to bring glory to God in how we work. But recognise too there's realism here.

That for the Christian the workplace may bring persecution. It may bring opposition. And so it's important for us to stand firm in our trust of God.

The next part of the story sees a test of faith for Daniel.

In verses 6 to 9 the trap is set. These royal officials who want to get rid of Daniel. They think well let's work on the king's pride.

They come to the king and they say here's a great new law to enact. Why don't you claim the status of God for 30 days?

[9 : 22] A month of being divine. And Darius in his pride says okay let's do it. And because of that Daniel's public faith is under attack.

It is conform or die. It is stop praying or face the den of lions. Now how is Daniel going to react?

And here's where we see an aspect of Daniel's long obedience in the same direction. Back in chapter 1 Daniel refused the king's diet. He wanted freedom to show loyalty to God first.

God most of all. Now it's with prayer. And he will not dishonour God. He will not waver in his faith.

So we see when Daniel learned that the decree had been published.

He went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed. Giving thanks to his God just as he had done before.

[10 : 29] Nothing changes. He still wants to honour. And there's a beautiful balance to his prayer life. Did you notice he still begins with thanksgiving.

It's his relationship with God that he treasures. And that's not dependent on his circumstances. His focus is on God and the life that he enjoys from God.

The salvation that he has. The place in that covenant relationship. That's what sets the tone for his prayers. In a sense it reminded me of the Lord's prayer.

That model that Jesus gave to his disciples. To see first who it is that we pray to. To remember our Father in heaven.

To pray for his kingdom. To recognise his holiness. To be concerned about his glory and honour. And as we have that perspective. That then helps how we pray for ourselves.

[11 : 26] How we pray about our situations. As we remember this is the God that we know. The God who is in heaven. Who is our Father. Who is building his kingdom. Who is pursuing and working out his glory.

So Daniel prays with thanksgiving. And then he prays asking for help. And again we've seen this as a pattern in Daniel's life. Back in chapter 2.

King Nebuchadnezzar at that time has a dream. Nobody can interpret it. He threatens to kill all the wise men. Including Daniel and his friends. What does Daniel do? He pulls them together for a prayer meeting.

So that God might give them wisdom. So that their lives and the lives of the others might be spared. So here is Daniel as is his pattern. Praying three times a day.

Can you imagine the temptation he was facing? Or perhaps people sort of encouraging him. In a different course of action. Think of your position Daniel. Think of the influence you have.

[12 : 25] Don't give that up. It's only 30 days. Just keep the windows closed. Just do it in private. God will understand. But what we see in Daniel.

Is that where his nation had folded. Compromising and giving up on worship. Daniel holds firm. And it's in his unchanging pattern of worship.

That we. That the exiles. That Babylon will have the chance to see. God's faithfulness. And God's deliverance. It's striking too.

That he resists. The cultural idols. That can so often have a tight grip on our heart. Daniel wasn't driven by success.

He would choose faithfulness to God over. Pursuing being number one in the kingdom. He wasn't living for that status. He was living for God saying well done.

[13 : 29] Good and faithful servant. He wasn't dominated by a drive for security. And comfort. But was willing to risk and to give his life.

To honour God. For you and me. When we feel the pull of those cultural idols. In order for us to give glory to God.

We will do that only. If Jesus Christ is our treasure. If he truly is our centre. If we see that knowing him.

Being approved by him. Knowing that in Jesus we are adopted into the family of God. That we have treasure in heaven. And hope for eternity.

Only if we see that as everything. If we see to live is Christ and to die is gain. Only then can we lay aside those idols that can strangle our faith in God.

[14 : 31] Daniel here puts me to mind of another old believer. Polycarp. The Bishop of Smyrna. In the early church.

And as he was facing his own martyrdom and death. He said. In 80 and 6 years. Have I served Christ. And he has never done me any harm.

How then. Could I blaspheme my king. Who saved me. Perhaps today is a good day to reflect. Honestly.

What is my hope. Who is my hope. In life. And death. The story then moves on.

With the focus on. The divine rescue. In verse 12 to 23. So the trap has been sprung. David. Daniel continues to pray.

[15 : 32] Daniel is clearly being hunted. Because there are men who are watching. For him to pray. They are in for the kill. And they take the message.

Immediately. To Darius. They said to the king. Daniel. Who is one of the exiles. He is an outsider. Pays no attention to you. Your majesty. Or to the decree.

You put in writing. He still prays. Three times a day. And perhaps. This is the point. Where Darius recognizes. He has been trapped. He had no idea. That foolish law. Was politically motivated.

But he has no way out. He is distressed. He is trying to find a way. To save him. But. His officials insist. You wrote this down.

According to the laws. Of the Medes and the Persons. And that law can't be broken. So Daniel here. Is facing. Certain death. And again. We think about the pattern. In the story of. The book of Daniel. Similar to chapter 3.

[16:29] There. Daniel's friends. Were facing the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar built. A huge statue. To his own glory. Demanding people worship. And.

They say no. But it's different. There. There is a refusal. To commit. The sin of idolatry. But here. Daniel is refusing.

To omit. True. Worship. And maybe here. When we think about. Living out. Our Christian faith. In public. Here are the two challenges. Two sides. Two temptations. For us. On the one hand. A temptation. To follow.

Sinful patterns. The values. Of the world. To pursue. What the world. Would treasure. And hold. Dearest. The other hand. The other hand. The other hand. There's that temptation.

[17:23] To keep faith. Private. To live. A double life. To conceal. As best as we can. Our Christian identity.

And now comes. One of the mega themes. Of Daniel. Where we see. A confrontation. Between. The true God. Of Israel. And. Kings. And nations. And empires. That are opposed. To God. God. Except there's hardly any. Contest. As you would expect. The one true God.

Is greater. And gains victory. Over. The false gods. And here. There's so much. Kind of irony. It's almost. Comedic. The contrast.

Between. This self-appointed. Thirty day. God. King. Darius. Not really. Very divine. At all. Versus. The most high.

[18:18] God. Of heaven. Look at how. Darius. Is described. In verse 14. You know. We should only pray. To him. He's. He's God. For a month. But he's.

Distressed. In verse. 14. And 15. He's. Unable. To rescue. Daniel. Though he wants to. In verse 15. It becomes clear. He has no control. Or wisdom. In the situation. Because he's been. Tricked. By his own officials. In verse 18. Here is this. False. Self-appointed.

God. Who is. Restless. He can't sleep. He can't eat. He has. Limited. Power. He cannot save. In fact. This false. God's only hope. And he's very honest.

About it. May your God. Daniel. Whom you serve. Continually rescue you. I can't. Perhaps. Your God. Can. Taking the position.

[19:13] Of. God. Darius. Has. No peace. Whereas. Daniel. Is living. Under. The rule. Of God. Living.

As. He is. Supposed to. And as. We are. Supposed to. And he. By contrast. He is. Perfect peace. So. Daniel. Gets. Thrown. Into. The lion's den. It gets. All sealed up.

For the night. First light of dawn. The king. Comes back. Daniel. Serving the living God. Has your God. Whom you serve. Continually. Been able to rescue you. From the lions. And what do we discover?

We discover. Daniel. Has been sleeping. Peacefully. Among the lions. Maybe the children's storybook. Bibles. Have got it right there. That. The angel. Has so protected. Daniel. He's able to. Sort of. Snuggle up. To the lions. For warmth. What does he say? My God. Sent his angel. And he shut the mouth of the lions. God.

[20:06] Has. Saved. They have not hurt me. Because I was found innocent. In God's sight. God has judged him. And God has vindicated him. And the conclusion.

Of our author. Is this. No wound. Was found on him. On Daniel. Because he trusted in God. Daniel survives. Because he honours God.

And so God has honoured him. Now what can we learn. As we think about this part of the story. We recognise that life as an exile.

Life as one of God's people. Can be dangerous. Jesus said in this world you'll have trouble. If they hated me they'll hate you. We will almost certainly face opposition.

But. We can never be hurt. Beyond. God's permission. And we need to recognise that God does allow. Suffering.

[21:06] In all of that. The Lord is our true judge. And we are called to live. For his. Final. Verdict. It's his approval.

We want. Daniel 6. Anticipates for us. Future judgment. On the day of the Lord. Because when we look around church history.

When we look around the world today. Maybe even if we think about our own experience. Martyrs still die. There is a church that is fiercely persecuted.

In many parts of the world. There is a church that is not always relieved. So it's not as simple as to say. Trust in God. And we will always be delivered.

But it is saying. Trust God. And in the end. God will give a positive verdict. On the life of those who are trusting in Jesus. So.

[22 : 05] Knowing that reality. What is the hope for the Christian? Where do we find hope? As we suffer. Maybe today. And we think about suffering today.

How do we find hope? Well we need to look back. And we need to recognise. Jesus our saviour. Who enters into a world of suffering.

And endures suffering. And faces death. Jesus goes into his lion's den for us. And now Jesus is in suffering and trials. With us.

He doesn't leave us on our own. So we look back. And we know that God loves us. Even when we suffer. But we also look forward.

We look forward. With hope to the resurrection. And glory to come. Eternal life to come. When death will be swallowed up in victory.

[22 : 59] We look and we see. That Jesus was raised to glory. And as it was with him. So we too. Will be raised to glory. For trusting in him. So we look back.

To see what Jesus has done. We look ahead. To our destiny. Our future with Jesus. And we look in. To the gospel. To keep reminding ourselves. Of the love.

And the compassion. And the mercy. Of God. Through Jesus. And by the spirit. And the last thing we see. In Daniel's history.

Is a life. That is honoured. Here is a final scene. In Daniel's history. As we're presented with it. And in verse 28.

We're told. Daniel prospered. During the reign of Darius. And the reign of Cyrus. The Lord prospered him. He had been raised up.

[23 : 53] And he had been honoured. And he is a man. Who lived that long walk. Of obedience. In the same direction. His enemies. Who tried to bring him down.

In verse 24. They face Darius's punishment. Just as we've seen. In every chapter. So far. It concludes.

With another pagan king. Praising Daniel's God. Another open letter. Goes out around the empire. There's only one true God. And guess what? It's not me. Darius recognises.

Daniel's God. Is the living God. He endures forever. His kingdom endures forever. He does powerful works. He is the God. Who saves and rescues. And so we see that.

Daniel's life story. Provides a unique way. For God's victory. And God's rule over empires. Against opposition. Opposition to be seen. Because of his faith.

[24 : 55] Because of his obedience. In Hebrews 11 and verse 6. We read that without faith. It is impossible to please God. Because anyone who comes to him.

Must believe that he exists. And that he rewards those. Who earnestly seek him. That's Daniel. And that's Daniel's faith. It's a faith that allowed the greatness of God to be seen.

It's a pattern for us as exiles. He lived knowing that God is there. And he lived for God's reward. Not any reward that the world could offer. And that's how we are called to live.

To live that long walk of obedience. In the same direction. For the glory of God. And the good of others. So Daniel gives us a wonderful pattern.

But he also presents a shadow. Of a greater than Daniel who was to come. He prepares the way for Jesus. Jesus too. Would be falsely accused.

[25 : 54] By enemies. He too would be condemned. He also would be cast into darkness. Not the darkness of a lion's den.

But the darkness of facing God's anger against sin. There on the cross. As he became the sin bearer of the world. Doing that for us.

For all those times when we compromise with our faith. For all of those times where we fail to speak up for God. Or where we fail to live to honour him. But praise God.

There was no sin in Jesus. So death had no claim on him. Death had no hold of him. And three days later. Jesus rose from the dead.

Risen by the power of God. God's final verdict on Jesus. That he was satisfied with that sacrifice. He is vindicated, honoured and glorified by his father.

[26 : 56] A verdict that we share as his people. So we are called in the story of Daniel. And by the story of Jesus.

To trust Jesus. To walk by faith. To make that long walk of obedience ourselves. Now let's sing. Let's sing praise to God. Our King God. Our great hope. We are going to sing Psalm 96 verses 1 to 10. And then we are going to sing the hymn. Christ our hope in life and death.

And let's pray together. Father we are so thankful for the example of Daniel. Thank you for his consistent, prayerful life of faith.

Seeking to be a blessing to others. Working hard and working well for your glory. And for the good of those around him. Thank you for his refusal to compromise. As he looked to you.

[28 : 08] And to your reward. And we pray that you would so fill our hearts and minds with the Lord Jesus. To make him our treasure.

That we would be able to do likewise. Please use us this week in whatever we have to do. Help us to do it for your glory. And for the sake of the people around us.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. So just to remind you that there is a Monday night prayer. And our community groups meet again this coming Wednesday.

Okay, take care. Thank you.