

Daniel: Unavoidable Opposition

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[0 : 00] Daniel chapter 6 and we'll read the whole chapter.

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss.

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so.

They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally, these men said, we will never find any basis for charges against this man, Daniel, unless it has something to do with the law of his God.

So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said, O King Darius, live forever. The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days except to you, O King, shall be thrown into the lion's den.

[1 : 24] Now, O King, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered in accordance with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be repelled. So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Now, 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.

Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree. Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O King, would be thrown into the lion's den?

The king answered, The decree stands in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. Then they said to the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O King, or to the decree you put in writing.

He still prays three times a day. When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed. He was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, Remember, O King, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.

[2 : 45] So the king gave the order and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den. The king said to Daniel, May your God, who you serve continually, rescue you. A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him, and he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lion's den.

When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions? Daniel answered, O King, live forever.

My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight, nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O King. The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den.

And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found in him because he had trusted in his God. At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lion's den along with their wives and children.

[3 : 57] And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language throughout the land. May you prosper greatly.

Issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion will never end.

He rescues and he saves. He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Thanks very much, Connor. It's a long reading, but great to have it read. Thank you for that. Well, let's keep our Bibles open at Daniel 6 and we'll see what we can learn from it this morning.

We're going to pray and ask for God's help to us all. So let's just pray right now. Amen. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

[5 : 29] Father, as we look at this true story of Daniel, we pray that you will teach us something of your amazing salvation, the way in which you rescue.

But also would you teach us today about how we should live when we face suffering because we love you and follow you.

teach us this morning to live like Daniel lived and that our eyes would be fixed firmly on Jesus, the one who did suffer for us so that we could have life.

So by your Holy Spirit, teach us. Speak into our hearts. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, life seems to be on the up for Daniel. There's a new power in place.

[6 : 45] Look at chapter 5, verse 30, the last verse of chapter 5. That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

So there's a new power in place. And with that has come a new position for Daniel in verse 1 of chapter 6. It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the entire kingdom with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel.

So a very high position and no doubt with a good salary too. But not only has he got a new position, there's also the possibility of promotion, verse 3.

Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

So life seems to be on the up for Daniel. He's climbing the promotional ladder. But in reality, nothing has actually changed because Daniel is still living in Babylon.

[8 : 03] Babylon was the capital city, a place where rulers stood in opposition to God and where persecution was a reality for God's people.

In fact, so fierce was the opposition that the name Babylon throughout the Bible and into the New Testament symbolises a place of exile and suffering for God's people.

So the first letter of Peter in the New Testament, he's writing there to Christians who've been persecuted and he signs off that letter by talking about the church, those who are in Babylon.

It's kind of like a symbol, a sign for those who are facing struggles and suffering. And so it is today. Christians everywhere live in their own Babylon.

Some face discrimination, harassment and violence because of their beliefs. Others experience various levels of contempt, rejection and hostility.

[9 : 03] And even for us today, where we live and where we work and the colleges that we study in, there is pressure to water down or abandon Jesus Christ altogether.

We all live in our own little Babylon. How do we live in it? How do we face it? Well, there's four things that we're going to learn this morning from Daniel, who helps us to live life in our own little Babylon.

First is this. God promises us that we will face opposition. If you are a Christian, you will face opposition.

Daniel was a follower of God. He quickly gained recognition. He was offered promotion. But with it came opposition. Look at verse four. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so.

Here we have a normal follower of God getting on with living for God where he's been placed. He's not corrupt. He's not dodging tax.

[10 : 21] He's not making false expenses. He's a trustworthy character, never lying and never sneaking off work early. He's a man of integrity.

Look at the rest of verse four. They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. But faithful living is always going to be met by opposition.

If people can't find flaws in your character, they are going to find problems with your faith. So look at verse five. Finally, these men said, after trolling through and trying to find some kind of misconduct with him, finally they said, we'll never find any basis of charges against this man, Daniel, unless it has something to do with the law of his God, unless it's got something to do with his faith, the things that he believes in.

Everybody knew that Daniel was a follower of God. That was obvious. He didn't just walk the walk. He talked the talk. People in the office knew that he didn't gossip about other people.

He knew that he was a fair and honest kind of guy. And in his places of management and authority, well, he treated people fairly and kindly. He was the kind of boss you wanted to work under.

[11 : 46] But he was at the same time just an ordinary Christian, getting on with life, living for God where he worked, similar to where many of you are or where you study, being a Christian and getting on with where you work.

But people can't always tolerate this kind of living out and public faith. Your faith is fine if you leave it compartmentalised or leave it at home. But once you bring it into the public sphere, then we've got problems.

And so his work colleagues decided to go to the boss about it all. Verse 7. They got him right at the heart of where it was going to hurt Daniel.

He only prayed to God. How could he pray to anyone else? They got him. This was going to get rid of Daniel. Of course, what happened to Daniel is what happens to all God's people.

Christians should never, ever be surprised at opposition. Jesus himself warned us of the cost involved if we're to follow him. Let me read to you from John's Gospel, chapter 15.

[13 : 24] This is what Jesus said to his disciples. He said, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

Remember the words I spoke to you? If they persecuted me, says Jesus, they will persecute you also.

Opposition is promised. We can't avoid it. And we can't escape it. Do you know every year, over 2,000 Christians across the world are killed for their faith because of their public witness for Christ.

That doesn't include the 50,000 believers who remain in North Korea's labour camps today. Or the hundreds of believers in Syria who are trying to escape the violence of ISIS.

The reality is, 200 million Christians, not just cultural Christians, but those who have dedicated their life to Christ, 200 million face discrimination, harassment, prison, exclusion from health care, extreme poverty, every single day, simply because they have made their loyalty and love for God known to other people.

[14 : 54] That's the reality for the vast majority of those who follow Christ. Now we live in a different kind of country. We're maybe not going to face the same kind of opposition when you go to college or work tomorrow morning.

But don't be surprised if you get overlooked in promotion or a new post because you're not going to twist the truth a little bit.

Don't be surprised if people think you're weird because you've made the decision not to play sport or play a match on a Sunday and instead go to church. Don't be surprised if you feel left out of the crowd at college because you don't drink copious amounts or sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

And don't be surprised if you're disliked because of your views on abortion or same-sex marriage. Opposition is promised.

People will not always like you or agree with you. We can't escape it. And we can't avoid it. So God promises us that we will face opposition.

[16 : 07] Second, God calls us to be faithful in opposition. He calls us to be faithful. Look at how Daniel responds to the opposition, verse 10.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, He went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem.

Now why would he do that? It seems a bit strange. What's so special about Jerusalem and kind of praying towards Jerusalem? Well, you can have a flick back to 1 Kings chapter 8 if you want.

If not, just listen. 1 Kings chapter 8, verse 48. Here it's foretelling that God's people were going to end up in exile.

So this is before the exile has happened, before Daniel has been carted off to a new place. And how and what they should do when they find themselves in opposition.

[17 : 09] And we read in verse 48 of 1 Kings chapter 8. If they, if that's God's people, turn back to you with all their hearts and soul, in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you towards the land you gave their fathers, towards the city, that's Jerusalem, you have chosen and the temple I have built for your name, then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.

You see, Daniel was doing what every faithful follower of God was commanded to do, and that was to pray. He knew God's word. He knew what 1 Kings had said. That when they were in the troubled times and in the difficult times, they were to turn to God.

And this physical act of turning to Jerusalem was not some sort of religious act that made his prayers more powerful. No, the physical act of looking towards Jerusalem, which was a symbol of God's presence and power, reflected his complete dependence on God.

With his eyes, physical eyes, he was looking towards the city. But it demonstrated of where his own heart was looking towards. It was looking towards God.

His trust was in God. And so his prayer for the people and for himself was that God would come and help them to keep trusting God, that they wouldn't turn away from God, that they would remain faithful and strong in the opposition.

[18 : 53] Now, Daniel's prayer was not some sort of panic prayer. We know what panic prayers are like when we get ourselves into trouble and in some kind of difficulty.

We suddenly shoot off an arrow prayer towards God. That's not how it was with Daniel. Look at the rest of verse 10. Chapter 6, it says, He had a discipline of prayer.

His faith was a day-to-day experience. He lived it out every single day. So when the opposition did come, when trouble did come, he kept on doing what he had always done before, what was always his practice.

He had a relationship with God. And so that relationship continued. And I think there's a challenge for us here. If we don't have a living faith with God when things are easy, then we're not going to have a living faith when things get tough.

The point is, we don't turn to God when opposition comes. When opposition comes, we run away from God if we don't have a strong, vibrant relationship with him.

[20 : 21] That's what happens. When the opposition comes, people turn away. That is, unless we have a good relationship with our Father in Heaven.

Not surprisingly, Daniel's faithfulness to God has been found out. Verse 13. They've seen him and they report it to the king.

Verse 13. They said to the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.

When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed. And he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

We could imagine the pressure that Daniel was facing. The king was, to some extent, on his side. Look, Daniel, if you just stop praying, maybe there's something I can do for you here.

[21 : 27] Daniel, just promise that you won't pray again and you'll get that promotion that I talked to you about. Daniel, if you just leave God out of the picture, it's only for 30 days.

Just park God to one side, get on with your life, keep your head down, keep quiet, don't worry about your faith, and your life will be saved. Isn't that the pressure we face?

Just do what everybody else does and you'll be liked. Forget your views on sexuality for the interview, you'll get the job.

Just leave God at home and you'll find that life is really okay. Just keep silent about your faith. Don't bring it into your conversation.

If you want an easy way, if you want to get on with everybody, don't say anything. It's only going to upset them. Keep it quiet. Daniel had a living faith.

[22 : 37] It was a day-to-day experience that just flowed naturally from his life. And so when the pressure of opposition came, he was faithful.

It was his usual practice. As it says at the end of verse 10, he did it just as he had done before. So God calls his people to be faithful when opposition and struggles come.

But third, God will rescue his people in opposition. God will rescue his people in opposition.

Daniel's defiance, his loyalty, and his love towards God means only one thing. Breakfast for the lions. Verse 16.

So the king gave the order and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den. Verse 17.

[23 : 43] A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

It seems like it's lights out for Daniel, doesn't it? No one ever walked out of the lion's den. But something of Daniel's witness has rubbed off on this pagan king.

He's watched Daniel, he's listened to Daniel, and something he's got a hold of. Do you see what the king said to Daniel just before he threw him into the lions?

It comes at the end of verse 16. The king said to Daniel, may your God whom you serve continually rescue you.

Now I don't think this was a condescending kind of good luck wish to Daniel. Kind of you're off to the lions now. What's your God going to do about it?

[24 : 50] No, this is I think a statement of faith on behalf of the king. A pagan king has come to realize that God is able to save.

May your God whom you serve continually rescue you. And it's actually proved to us in verse 19. Look at verse 19.

At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lion's den. Why would he do that? When he came near the den he called to Daniel in an anguished voice Daniel servant of the living God has your God whom you serve continually been able to rescue you from the lions?

Now nobody goes to the lion's den expecting the lion's breakfast to come walking out. You just don't do that. That is unless you believe in God's power to be able to rescue and that's what Darius has got a hold of.

He knows that Daniel's God can rescue and he goes with this expectation that he's going to be alive. Verse 21 Daniel answered O king live forever my God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions they have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight nor have I done any wrong before you O king.

[26 : 30] An amazing story of God delivering and rescuing one of his servants just like he had rescued his three friends from the fiery furnace.

Now here's a question and I'm sure it's all in our minds here. If God is able to rescue his people like Daniel why is it that so many Christians lose their life or end up suffering in labour camps or facing prison today?

Why doesn't God rescue them? Has God failed? Has God not got the power to do it? Did Daniel have more faith than everybody else?

Do we need more faith? Is that the reason? No I don't think it is. I think God promises us that he will rescue us in life or he will rescue us through death.

He will rescue us in life or through death. Have a look please. Keep your finger in Daniel 6 and go to Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 11.

[27 : 44] Hebrews chapter 11 is a great chapter all about God's people throughout history, throughout time who had faith, who trusted in God.

And towards the end of the chapter we get to meet some of those people. Hebrews chapter 11 starting at verse 32 Hebrews 11 verse 32 and what more shall I say?

So he's been talking about all these great people in the past who trusted God. He says I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Japheth, David, Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what it was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

women even received back their dead, raised to life again. God is able to save his people in the most remarkable and the most amazing of ways.

He has done it and he can do it. Whether it's the fiery furnace or whether it's the lion's den, God can deliver his people.

[29 : 29] He even brought people back from the dead. But he doesn't always rescue in life. It's not always going to be victorious for every single person.

Because look at the rest of those verses. God also rescues through death. Look at the rest of verse 35. Well, let's read from verse 35.

Women receive back their dead, raised to life again. others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.

Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned. They were sawn in two.

They were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and ill treated. The world was not worthy of them.

[30 : 31] They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the grounds. You see, some, if not most, faced a violent and brutal death, terrible persecution.

They were rescued not in life, but they were rescued through death. How can we say that? Well, look at the end of verse 35 again. others were tortured and were refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.

They knew that something better and greater awaited them beyond the grave. They knew if they were to lose their life, they weren't losing out.

They were gaining something far better. We're told what that is, actually, in chapter 11, verse 16. Just look back a few verses. It's what all these people were looking forward to.

It says in 11, 16, Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

[31 : 46] Those who had lost their life, God rescued them through death, and he brought them into an eternal city, to their eternal rest.

The ultimate rescue for all of God's people is to go from this life into his eternal kingdom. Now, we as Christians have that same faith.

It's not that our faith is better or greater. It's because our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has defeated death, and who has conquered the grave, and gives eternal life to all who trust in him.

He will rescue us either in life or through death. And then last, God always works good from the opposition.

God always works good from the opposition. It shouldn't surprise us to read the ending of this story. It shouldn't be a surprise, but it should amaze us.

[32 : 56] Look at verse 25. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land. May you prosper greatly. I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God. he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves.

He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. It's an extraordinary turn of events.

At the beginning of the story, the kingdom must pray to Daniel. By the time we get to the end of the story, all the kingdom has been charged to honour the eternal God who rescues and saves.

If you've been following through Daniel, it's not going to surprise you because it's happened already. But it should not stop amazing us. What an amazing God.

[34 : 06] God always works good from opposition. He did it under Nebuchadnezzar. He did it under Belshazzar. He did it here under Darius.

And most of all, he did it under a king called Pilate. Under Pilate, Jesus faced opposition and persecution. He was tortured and beaten.

He faced the flogging and the jeers. He was put to death, crucified on the cross. But through it all, God, by his power, worked salvation for the world.

He rescued people, not from the lion's den, but from the claws of Satan so that we might have life in all its fullness. God always works good from opposition.

And it shouldn't surprise us that God continues to work like this through us and through his church in the world. Some of you may have listened to this interview I sent out a few weeks ago about a man named Victor, who is living and working in Syria and Iraq right now.

[35 : 19] He told how believers in Christ, pastors and their congregations in Mosul are facing terrible opposition and persecution.

He met with them as ISIS were sweeping through that city. Those Christians and the pastors were removed from their homes. Their money was taken, their belongings were taken, their medication was taken.

A sign was put up on their houses saying, property of ISIS, a big end for Nazarene, people of followers of Christ, were put on their house, don't return here again, left with all that they had on their backs.

Others we know have lost their life, some brutally beheaded because they wouldn't convert, because they wouldn't stop praying to the God that we've just been reading about.

Where's God? Well, through it all, God is working through the opposition. This man, Victor, shared how he was able to share the good news of Christ with those who had to leave their town.

[36 : 33] And 50 people, he said, became followers of Christ. What was he promising them? He was promising them salvation in Jesus Christ. And on the other hand, he said, if you follow him, you will suffer.

But they knew that in their suffering, they would gain eternal life with him. Near the border of Syria, where there were other Muslims fleeing to try and get away from the violence, he was able to talk to a bunch of them, and 20 became followers of Christ.

What did he tell them? salvation in Christ. But if you follow Christ, you will suffer. But they followed because they knew that whether in life or in death, God would rescue them for something far greater.

We shouldn't be surprised at this, but we should be eternally amazed at how God works. And it's how God works in your life, how he will work through this church.

He will work through you in college, in your work situation, and in your family, through the opposition. God will bring his people to faith.

[37 : 46] Why? Well, look at verse 26. He is the living God. He endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed.

His dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves. He performs signs wonders in heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions and he has rescued us from the claws of Satan and he will go on rescuing his people because God always works good from opposition.

Let's pray. for the government. Well, it's good for t■ claim