

Daniel 6

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- [0 : 0 0] As I conversed with a student on his experience as a Christian in the natural sciences, the student doing a PhD in physics uttered, it is the most difficult thing that I do every day.
- ! I was intrigued. I asked him to repeat what he had just shared with me and he said, Bing, every day I have to make a decision whether or not I'm going to pray at lunch.
- It's the hardest thing I do every day. I asked him to share more. He goes on to say, well, I'm in a lab with other students and researchers.
- We eat lunch together fairly often. And as we sit down, I have to make the decision on whether or not I will pause, bow my head, and pray before my meal.
- You see, Bing, it's easy to pray before breakfast and dinner because no one is there. However, at lunch, it's hard. It's hard. I'm not sure what my colleagues will say.
- [1 : 1 3] What will they think? What will they perceive or determine of me as a scientist? See, this student had perceived and had experienced that faith was somehow frowned upon in academia.
- It's the hardest thing I do every day. And as he shared this out of fear and anxiety, he was scared of being found out to be a Christian.
- Will there be negative repercussions if I'm discovered to be a Christian? What if I'm found guilty of being Christian?
- He struggled with the tension of being faithful in a difficult environment. What does it mean to be faithful to God?
- And that's a question we need to answer. We are in one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. It's well-known for its miraculous nature, its improbability, its incredibility.
- [2 : 2 1] Most of us, most people, I would think, who have grown up in the West, can tell you that Daniel spent a night in a den of lions.
- Some may tell you why. But this morning, my desire is to leave us with its lesson. What is its lesson? I've titled my sermon with the lesson, and it is this.
- Faithfulness comes first. Faithfulness comes first. Faithfulness to God comes first.
- For the Christian, our priority must always be our devotion towards God. We are those who have committed to living first and foremost before God, submitted to his reign, living under his rule.
- We are citizens of his kingdom, and this must be demonstrated and lived out faithfully. For you and I, our faithfulness comes first.
- [3 : 2 9] First, I will handle this text in three blocks. I readily acknowledge that given the fullness of this morning's worship service, I have tried to shorten this exposition.
- You could tell me on the back end how I did. Faithfulness comes first. Faithfulness comes first. I want us to see this morning, firstly, that Daniel was distinguished and despised.

He was distinguished and despised. This is now the third administration that Daniel was living under. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and now Darius, the third king to which Daniel had to come under.

He began as a youth, probably in his teens. Now he is aged, arguably roughly 80 years old at this point in his life. Kingdoms have literally risen and fallen in his lifetime.

Babylon has conceded to the Persians. Daniel has served the preceding kings in varying degrees. He was very involved with Nebuchadnezzar, not so much with Belshazzar.

[4 : 37] Now in his old age, he is tapped once again to serve in a leading role. Our text told us that Darius requested 120 satraps or provincial governors to oversee his kingdom.

These 120 would report to three, one of which was Daniel. The three would be accountable to the king. The king needed to implement an administration that had competence and character so that the king, as the text tells us, would not suffer loss.

Well, king is wise because corruption occurs and creeps into government. And Darius was well aware. And as it would turn out, Daniel would rise to the top, the cream of the crop, most likely because he was a man of character.

In previous chapters, Daniel is said to have the wisdom of the gods. He is said to have the spirit of the gods. And now in chapter six, the Persians recognize that he has an excellent spirit.

And this spirit distinguishes him before the king. So much so that the king, according to chapter six, verse three, wants to put him over the entirety of the kingdom.

[5 : 55] Daniel was approved by the king. But we find that his approval was not universal. He is distinguished before the king, yet despised by his colleagues.

The text does not explain why they sought to find ground for complaint against Daniel. We could surmise perhaps it's out of jealousy. Perhaps he is the honest politician who makes the others look bad.

Perhaps they disliked him because he was one of the exiles from Judah, almost as if it was a slight against his Jewish heritage. It could simply be what the psalmist says.

They hated me without any cause. Regardless of the motivation, they seek to find grounds for complaint against Daniel. They want to find flaws in his character.

They look for missing lines in the books that he kept. They seek out references that would testify against him and go out of their way to find fault in his ways. But they are unable to, according to verse five, because he was faithful.

[7 : 08] Eighty years in, still faithful. No error or fault was found in him. His character and conduct were consistent. And he was found to be blameless.

He is faithful to God and his character. He's not hypocritical. He's not duplicitous. He's not a phony. He does not pretend to be good, upright, and moral. Rather, no, he is good.

Because that's what God requires. Daniel embodies good character. For he knows that faithfulness comes first.

And having lived through two previous administrations under various laws, decrees, and injunctions, here was a man who did not bend to the Babylonians.

Who would not yield or compromise his character. He knew he was a citizen of another kingdom. At that point, a kingdom unseen. Israel had lost all their land.

[8 : 06] Had lost all their temple. Had lost all their worship. Had lost all the temple furnishings. He was living on a kingdom promise. We observed that even in chapter one, that Daniel refused to defile himself before his God.

Daniel would live faithfully to a heavenly kingdom, while earthly kingdoms would vie for his allegiance. Support this legislation, Daniel.

Contend for this right. Pass this policy. Bow the head. Bend the knee. Daniel, are you pro-Nebuchadnezzar? Are you pro-Belshazzar? You must be pro-Arius.

For Daniel, it did not matter. Admit it all. You know, we have a man who, regardless of who held all the earthly power, was faithful to the king above.

He had resolved that faithfulness comes first. It's certainly a lesson for us all that we could be, and can be, and ought to be faithful, irrespective of who occupies that Oval Office.

[9 : 27] The only way to find ground for complaint against Daniel was to pit the law of God against human law. And so that's what they do. In a devious and deceptive manner, the high officials surmise a policy that will feed the king's ego and set him up as a pseudo-God king for the next 30 days.

For the next 30 days, Darius, all prayers, all petitions, all worship must be directed to you and you alone, or be met by penalty of certain death.

Death by consumption, consumed by the appetite of lions. They hasten to enact the law, a law that is irrevocable, a law that cannot be rescinded or withdrawn, a bad law legislated with bad intentions by bad people.

And so we see Daniel distinguished and despised. The story moves that as they despise him, they will soon accuse and condemn him.

The injunction is signed and cannot be changed. And upon hearing of its passing, we are brought to verse 10. It's worth reading again.

[10 : 46] When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had the windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and give thanks before his God as he had done previously.

After a law was passed that altered the entire kingdom, Daniel did what was always done. The injunction signed by Darius made it illegal for him to pray.

It appears to be an act of blatant rebellion against the empire and against the king. Windows open, kneeling facing Jerusalem, arguably praying aloud.

I just think, you know, that's probably what he did. And that's how his accusers knew whether they climbed up a ladder and looked in his window or sat quietly to hear. Daniel did what had been forbidden.

To the plotting high officials, this was defiance. For Daniel, this was duty. You may recall when the temple of God was dedicated by King Solomon.

[11 : 57] It's a long, dedicatory prayer. But in it, Solomon says, if evil were to befall your people, this is just me paraphrasing.

And if the people get brought out of the land and are taken captive and fall victim to exile, what should they do? They should turn towards Jerusalem.

Repent and pray and God will hear their plea and maintain their cause. And that's what Daniel did out of duty. For God's people all had been taken already.

The land was taken. The temple was destroyed and worship ceased. Its furnishings were taken. Their loved ones had been taken. Their very lives have been taken. And now they will try to take prayer from Daniel.

They will soon find out that for the faithful, God cannot be taken.

[13 : 00] I paused to, I probably have shared this story. It was the early 2000s and I had an opportunity to go to East Asia. And there I was with my dad who was doing some Bible training.

And I remember one morning we were, it was a Sunday morning on the Lord's Day. And we were whisked off early in the morning before activity in this large city had happened. And we were, we didn't speak to the guy walking us.

He just said, follow me. And we followed and we meandered through alleys and back doors. And we ended up in the back door of a hair salon. And I'm like, wow, okay.

And there we proceeded to have church. Some sitting on the barber chairs, some sitting on stools. And I will never forget it.

And I will never forget it. And I will never forget it. Because that government wanted to make it illegal to gather in this way. And the people, there were nine of us.

[14 : 04] And we were invited to sing, but we couldn't sing. And so they hummed. They hummed in a low hum, the songs of the Lord that they knew.

And while the powers of the government wanted to silence the songs of the people. What that regime did not know is you cannot take the songs from the faithful.

You cannot take the prayers of the faithful. What would you do if prayer was made illegal for 30 days?

What would I do? You know, if Daniel consulted me, I'll tell you what I would have told him. Shut your windows. Pray in silence. Alter your schedule.

Change it up. Find a workaround. Don't be a target. Consider not praying for 30 days. I mean, come on. God knows it all.

[15 : 09] Opt out of faithfulness, Daniel. For some, maybe like myself, it would have been occasion to withdraw and find an exit strategy.

But what Daniel saw on that occasion was I am going to double down on faithfulness.

Our faithfulness is not proven in ease, but in difficulty. If you cut off prayer, you cut off power. And Daniel needed all the power he could get. And then, yes, so he prayed. And he knew very well that faithfulness comes first.

When Daniel learned about the law, he carried on as if nothing had changed. Because for Daniel, nothing had changed. God was still God.

God. And he would continue to receive his devotion and his worship. And as a result, Daniel is cast as a dangerous, subversive threat to the kingdom.

[16 : 10] He's accused. He is guilty of misdirected prayer according to the recently passed law. He refuses to cease praying. He's guilty of being Christian.

And as a result, he's sentenced and condemned. Darius the king is impotent, though he tries to spare Daniel. He desperately tries.

Legislation that the king himself could not overturn. The grand irony comes in verse 16. The king, the greatest on earth, concedes that only your God, even me, the little God king, cannot save you.

Only your God can save you. Only your God can deliver, Daniel. And his fate is sealed. He is all but dead.

A faithful and righteous man. Innocent in every way. Except for these charges that are brought from a rashly conceived law.

[17 : 11] There it was. Verse 17. A stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet.

And with the signet of the Lord's concerning that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. He is accused and condemned. Destined to die.

And that night, the king sensing the tragedy it was. His second in command was soon to die. He could not sleep.

He would not be entertained. He would not eat. Distinguished and despised. Accused and condemned. But.

But. But, but, but. And that should be the end of the story. Dead. Was Daniel. The king of heaven.

[18 : 06] But we find that all the powers of earthly kingdoms. When the powers of earthly kingdoms are impotent. When they dare rise up against the matchless power of the king of heaven.

When they dare rise up against the kingdom of God. God's servants are both delivered and prospered.

It's astounding. The king rises early the next day and in haste goes to the den. And he cries out in anguish. Daniel. Have you been delivered? And here resides the only speech from Daniel's mouth.

And he just summarizes that God had sent an angel and shut the mouths. And he has suffered no harm. The king has gone all night without sleeping.

Without entertainment. Without eating. And to his shock. The lions have not eaten as well. Daniel was taken up and out.

[19 : 11] And the narrator explains because he has trusted in God. Daniel the innocent. And the faithful one is raised up out of the den. And the malicious men and their families are cast down in the den.

Before they reach the bottom they are overpowered and broken into pieces. The violent end to those who sought to destroy Daniel. Really depict the judgment that will befall those who oppose the kingdom of God.

And thus Daniel is delivered and his enemies deposed. Salvation is from the Lord. He is their stronghold in time of trouble.

The Lord helps them because he delivers them from the wicked. And saves them because they take refuge in him. And for time's sake.

The chapter ends in another decree. You may have caught it. The initial decree made Darius the God-man. It elevated him above all other gods.

[20 : 12] But now at the end of the chapter. The first decree is superseded by a new decree. A new decree. The original injunction now bows to a new injunction.

The first ordinance now kneels before the new ordinance. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

Darius the God-king. Now acknowledges a greater king. And a more superior kingdom.

So Daniel prospered. We can infer that the king's original plan to set him over the kingdom came to pass. You see God is in the business of delivering the faithful.

The young men. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced the delivering God. They walked out of the fiery furnace without a hair on their heads singed. Cloaks intact.

[21 : 18] Not even smelling like fire. The aged Daniel experienced the same deliverance. No harm was found on him after being taken up out of the den.

The God of the Bible delivers the faithful from the fire and the den. We heard about it this morning. He delivered these four individuals from various life experiences.

Whether it be darkness, despair, despondency. He delivers. He delivers from sin, suffering, and sorrow. And these are just tastes, foretastes of deliverance.

Leaving us desiring full deliverance. See if you're delivered from sickness, you're grateful. But your heart, what does it do for your heart?

It cultivates this eternal longing for healing. Wouldn't it be great to live in a world with no sickness? If you're delivered from lack, you're grateful.

[22 : 23] But what does it do to your heart? It makes you wonder, well, wouldn't it be great if there was a world with no lack? And a world or a kingdom that exists and has everything in abundance.

We sample deliverance in this life because it builds our appetite for the next. And your question to me as I close is this.

Does he always deliver? Will he always deliver? Will he always do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you?

Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you? Will he do a gift for you?

There was a man just like Daniel, distinguished from all others. There was a man just like Daniel, despised by others.

[23 : 25] There was a man just like Daniel, righteous and blameless and innocent and plotted against by evil doers, accused just like Daniel.

Condemned to die just like Daniel. He died a criminal's death, suspended on a cross for crimes he did not commit.

This man was God's very own son, fastened upon a cross for our guilt and our sin. And this is the shocker of all the people God should have delivered.

It should have been that man. But God in that instance said, I will not deliver you from death. You will die.

And so his dead corpse was placed in a den. A stone was rolled over it.

[24 : 28] A different signet ring stamped it as if to say, this is final and permanent. Dead lies Jesus of Nazareth.

And of all the lives that should have been delivered, heaven's dear son lay dead in the tomb.

He did not receive deliverance. God would spare Daniel, but would not spare Jesus. I should continue, right?

I should finish how it happens. And as it would turn out, a small group of women would return to the tomb with all intention to anoint and treat Jesus's body.

Instead, they would find an empty tomb and are given a word that he who died is dead no longer. He had risen from death. Death could not hold heaven's faithful son, beloved son.

[25 : 35] And here we are. We discover the might and the power of the kingdom that we reside in, of which you belong. Though earthly kingdoms may lay claim on you, though the devil can wreak havoc upon you and your earthly life, though the gates of hell may come up against you, there is no greater God king than Jesus.

Christ who is faithful unto death to save and secure you. You see, he was delivered.

He not only prospered, I mean, Daniel prospered. Jesus wasn't delivered. And he's exalted. Daniel prospered in Persia.

Jesus is exalted on all the earth. And so the universal decree goes out. It's a universal decree. Jesus has been given the name above every name.

That at his name every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. And so here you have it. God did not spare his own son so that he could secure and save us as his sons and daughters.

[26 : 52] He died and was raised for your justification. Oh. Oh.

And so we're done. And so we're done. Let me pray. Father, we thank you. The Christ is king of kings and Lord of lords that at his name every knee will bow.

Heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every tongue will confess that he is Lord and he is king. And so, Father, we pray now as we desire to be those where faithfulness comes first.

We sing in a response that you would be the strength that we require. Be our help, we pray. Fortify our souls. That we may tell the world of a decree that Jesus saves.

Jesus saves all who come to him. We ask these things for his name. Amen.