

Citizens of Heaven in a Land of Exile

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Preacher: Eric Tully

[0:00] Pastor Mike is away this week, and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to preach this morning. We're going to take a short break from the series on the Gospel of Matthew, and we're going to look at the well-known story of Daniel in the lion's den.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 6? If you're using one of those paperback pew Bibles, it's page 828. The title is Citizens of Heaven in a Land of Exile. We're going to be in Daniel chapter 6. This is a story about Daniel and God's people living in a land far away from home.

Sometimes that word home can be a little bit complicated. Until I was a teenager, I lived as a missionary kid in Zaire, Africa, in Central Africa.

It's now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And it was a wonderful life there. I went to the market with my mom. We played tag in the neighborhood, and there were these grassy hills behind our house, and we would go up there and play.

[1:08] And I just loved my home there. I loved the people there in Central Africa. I loved their big smiles and the laughter and the dancing and the fruit on the trees and the climate.

And it was just a wonderful place to grow up. Just outdoors all the time and a slow pace of life. But there was a tension because even though that was my home, it wasn't really my home.

You know what I mean by that? My parents taught me the Pledge of Allegiance and the U.S. National Anthem, and I learned about the U.S. Presidents. And people would ask me there in Zaire, where do you come from?

And I would say, Ohio. Ohio. That wasn't really true, but it was kind of true. That was at least where my parents were from. And people would say to me, where are your grandparents?

And I would say, well, they're in Ohio. That was true, but I didn't know them, really. I had met them when I was very young. So it was sort of confusing because my blue passport said that I was a citizen of the United States, but my real home was kind of in Africa, but technically my home was a place in the U.S.

[2:18] where I had spent very little time. And so then when we came back to the States permanently when I was in high school, I was living in Ohio, and then people would say to me, where are you from? And I would always hesitate.

Two places, I guess, right? On the one hand, I was from Africa. That place felt like home, but I guess technically it really wasn't.

And then on the other hand, I was in Ohio, which was technically my home, but sure didn't feel like it. Israel, too, had a home that had been a glorious gift of God.

It was part of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And that was where God had fought for them and delivered them from their enemies. That was the land of Joshua and Ruth and King David and King Solomon and Elijah and Elisha.

That was where the temple was. That was where the priesthood was. That's where God's presence was manifested in a very special way, unlike any place else on earth. That was Israel.

[3:18] And that was where they were deeply connected to their faith and their identity as the people of God. So when they were conquered by the Babylonians and taken into exile, and the Babylonians tore down their temple and destroyed the priesthood and stole the furniture and the equipment out of the temple and brutally murdered some of the people of

God and took others away into a foreign land, there was a crisis of some sort because they were now in danger of assimilating.

They were in danger of becoming just like everybody else and losing their distinctives as the people of God and even disrupting God's promised plan of salvation that he would bring through Christ. Babylon and Persia were their new home, sort of, but not really their home. It couldn't be their ultimate home because they had to remain faithful to God even as they lived in a foreign land that was often quite hostile to them.

So the book of Daniel was written to encourage the people of God as they lived in a foreign land. It's divided into two parts. The first six chapters are stories about God delivering Daniel and his friends from intense pressure and persecution at times.

They're miraculously protected by him. And then chapters 7 through 12 are apocalyptic visions about the fact that God is in complete control of the affairs of the world and he will be victorious in the end.

[4:47] So it's a great encouragement to God's people who are tempted to despair. They may face difficulty and persecution. They may be hated and despised for their faith.

But they are on the winning team. So no matter how bad things look right now for Daniel and his friends, God will vindicate his people. And this is good news for us.

This is a powerful book for us because now we are the people of God living in exile. Before we knew Christ, we were full citizens of this world.

Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 that we follow the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air. This world is destined for destruction and that was our destiny too because we were citizens of this world.

We were strangers and aliens to God's country. Separated from God and hostile to him. But when we committed our lives to Christ, we defected to his country.

[5:51] Paul says that we became fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. When you think about it, most defectors, when they defect, they move to the new country, right?

If you're a Russian citizen and you defect to the United States, you move to the United States because otherwise it would not be safe for you. But we don't move right to heaven. We defect to heaven and defect to God's country, but we stay here.

We represent God in a fallen world and now it's complicated because we have two homes. We have this home and we have that home. This is the only world we've ever known, but now we're strangers here.

We really belong someplace else. Our real home is in heaven, but we've never been there before. So it's not very easy. And sometimes in this society, people think we're crazy.

We're crazy because of what we believe. We're crazy because we follow this Jesus who lived a long time ago. Or they think we're dangerous. They think we're dangerous because our stance on marriage means that we're bigots and hypocrites.

[7:00] Our stance on life in the womb means that we are anti-women. We're dangerously out of step with a progressive society, modern society, because we take our values from the Bible.

And so the question is, I mean always, what should we do? How do we live here in exile in a faithful way, away from our home? And I think this is one of the key things that the book of Daniel in chapter 6 addresses for us.

So let's take a look at Daniel chapter 6. We can divide this short story into three sections. Each of the sections has a little bit of a surprise for us. There's three sections and there's three surprises. And the first section is in verses 1 through 13.

So I'm going to read that first part and then we'll talk about it and we'll read the second part. So please don't read ahead. I know it's hard. I know it's hard. Here we go. You're probably familiar with this story anyway. Here we go.

It says in verse 1, 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.

[8:05] Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the entire 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 these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said, May 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 human being during the next 30 days, except to you, your majesty, shall be thrown into the lion's den.

Now your majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered in accordance with the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be repealed. 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 toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God just as he had done before.

[9:28] 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 30 days, anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, your majesty, would be thrown into the lion's den?

The king answered, The decree stands in accordance with the law of the Medes and the 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, your majesty, or to the decree you put in writing.

He still prays three times a day. So the story begins with King Darius, who has not really been introduced to us, except in the previous verses back in chapter 5, 30 through 31, which tell us that Darius took over the kingdom from King Belshazzar at the age of 62.

Persia was a massive empire that stretched from India in the east all the way over to Egypt and Asia Minor in the west. It was the largest empire ever seen.

And it was divided into 120 regions that were governed by these satraps. So they had to have some sort of a complex bureaucracy because this is a very, very large empire. And verse 2 tells us that the king had placed three high officials over the 120 satraps.

[10:50] And verse 3 tells us that not only was Daniel one of these three high officials, but he was in line for promotion to run the entire kingdom. And why was this?

Well, because it tells us in verse 2 that he was not corrupt. The king felt he would not suffer loss. And in verse 3 it says that he had distinguished himself by his exceptional qualities. Now you know how it is when someone in the office is promoted to a higher position.

Everybody grumbles and they gather around the water cooler and they all complain and get angry. And here the satraps and the high officials created a conspiracy against Daniel.

They wanted him gone. But he was so exceptional and his character was so impressive that they couldn't find any way to take him down. Look what it says in verse 4. It says he was trustworthy.

[11:47] He was not corrupt. He was not negligent in his duties. In other words, he was a very, very strange government official. So there are two hints in the story, though, that the conspiracy was actually about more than just envy of his upcoming promotion.

Because the first hint comes in verse 5 when it says that we will bring a charge for him in accordance with the law of his God. And then look down at verse 13. It says in 13 that he was one of the exiles from Judah.

Now, everybody knows that Daniel was one of the exiles from Judah. That had been long established. The king knew that. They knew that. So why bring it up? Well, it's just insight into their underlying motives.

Maybe they thought that Daniel was not quite loyal enough to Persia. He's not really one of us. He doesn't belong here. He's not a true Persian. And so they hatch a conspiracy, and everyone is in on it.

Look at verse 7. The royal administrators and the prefects and the satraps and the advisors and the governors have all agreed. They're all ganging up on him.

[13:01] And to appeal to the king's vanity, they recommend a law that prohibits praying to anyone but the king for a period of 30 days, just enough to prove that Daniel is unfaithful to the king.

And so the king signs a decree that cannot be repealed, and now Daniel is in a very tough spot. To this point, his faith and his identity as a Jew have not gotten into conflict with his role in the Persian government.

There hasn't been any conflict there. But now they've made it an issue. They've made it a problem. And he can take a break from his faith for 30 days, or he can be thrown to a den of lions.

Now I know we're all probably pretty familiar with this story, but we don't want that to get in the way of some of the details here. Let's take just a moment and imagine death by lion.

We don't want to minimize the threat here. You know, there are a lot of terrible ways to die. There are some ways to die that are not so bad, and then there are some terrible ways to die, and I would think that death by lions would be at the top.

[14:13] The Persians had all kinds of ways that they could have killed people. Very quick, very painless. Take a sword, for example. But to go through the trouble of death by lion, you have to procure the lions, and you have to house the lions and feed the lions.

It's a big deal. Why would they do that? Because it was so brutal. We're talking about growling, biting, ripping, tearing, eating.

I mean, we can stop there, right? It's bad. It's bad. It's a bad way to die. And so what Daniel is facing here for his faith is not being mocked.

It's not being fired from his job. It's not going to jail. It's not even a painless beheading or something like that. It is death by lion. And in verse 10, we see the first surprise in this section, which is that when Daniel learned what was up, he went home to his upstairs room, got down on his knees and prayed, just as he had done before.

He is well aware of the trap that they have laid for him, but without missing a beat, he goes home, gets on his knees, and prays to God. And think about the way that this is presented to us.

[15:32] It doesn't, the narrator does not present any conflict or any inner turmoil to us. It is just a reflex for him. It is time to pray, so he goes down and prays. He doesn't care what the edict was.

But you can imagine the temptation that he was feeling. It is not a compromise. It is a little compromise. He is not actually being asked to break one of God's laws.

He is only being asked to omit a spiritual discipline. It is not so big. He is not actually being asked to pray to the king.

He is only being asked to refrain from praying to God. That is not quite, that is not idolatry, right? I mean, I have neglected prayer to listen to sports radio or because I was hungry for a snack.

It is a big deal. He could change his routine. Why can't Daniel just pray in private? Or why can't he just pray secretly in his head? He could be doing other things and praying in his head and no one would even know.

[16:32] Why not just do that? It does not even have to look like he is praying. And he is only giving thanks to God, it says here. He is only giving thanks to God.

It is not, surely that can go on hold for a couple of weeks. But besides, if he is killed, then he won't be able to look out for the other Jewish exiles and to exert positive influence in the Persian government.

Think about the loss of good godly influence that will be lost in the government. Which is more important, to thank God or to have a faithful Yahweh honoring man with great character in power?

I mean, surely you can take a break for 30 days. But even though the compromise seems small, look what it says in the text. It says, He went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem.

Now, why is that detail in there? The narrator doesn't have to tell us that little detail about Jerusalem, but it does because it's a way of showing us that Daniel's home was someplace else. [17:39] Daniel's true home, he lived in Persia, he worked in Persia, but his true home was in Jerusalem. And so when he got down to pray, he faced Jerusalem, and that was the sticking point.

The Persian conspirators knew that this wasn't just about a little prayer. This was about loyalty. This was about Daniel's ultimate loyalty. And Daniel doesn't make a big show of his prayer. He doesn't ring the bells and make a big to-do of it, but he doesn't hide it either. He simply gets down, as always, and prays. And in verse 11, he's discovered by the officials, and they report him to the king, and they interpret his prayer as a disloyal act.

Look what they say in verse 13. No one pays any attention to you, your majesty. He still prays three times a day. So the immovable object of Persian law has met the unstoppable force of Daniel's prayer, and something is going to have to give.

So this first section of Daniel is dominated by these conspiring government officials. They're the only ones who speak, and the narrator presents them as a large group, all in agreement, who are scheming against Daniel.

[18:52] Daniel wasn't provocative. He didn't cause any trouble. He got up every day, and he went into the office, and he worked hard for the good of the Persian Empire, and he did what was best for the king, and for the welfare of his society, and he lost sleep over their problems, and he built relationships and networked with them, but at night, he went home and prayed toward Jerusalem.

He lived in Persia, but he knew where his true home was. So when he was commanded to neglect even a small aspect of his faith, only a daily thanksgiving prayer, when his ultimate loyalty was challenged, he would not compromise even an inch.

And we've seen this before in the book of Daniel. Back in chapter 1, Daniel and his friends are accommodating to the Babylonians, and they learn their language, and they eat their food, and they take Babylonian names, but it says, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the unclean food.

He drew a line, a hard line. He said, I will live in this land, and I will flourish in this land, but I will do nothing, no matter how small, that betrays my loyalty to God and my true home.

And in chapter 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are commanded to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, or be thrown into a fire and burned alive. And they refuse, and they say, we will not worship your gods or the golden image that you have set up.

[20:20] And now here in Daniel 6, the decree goes out, no praying to God for 30 days, or you will be ripped open and eaten alive by lions. And Daniel says, what can I do? I will not compromise when it comes to my faith.

So Daniel serves as a model for us because life in exile can be tricky. In some countries and in some times, we have more freedom than others.

But when the conflict comes down to a matter of our ultimate loyalty, we choose our identity as the people of God. We draw a line, and we say, with God's help, I will not cross that line.

I will not serve what is apostate. I will not cease to serve the living God, no matter the consequences. Someone might say to us, well, it's not a gospel issue.

It's not really a key point of Christian doctrine. Well, maybe so, but I will not deny what God has revealed to me. Someone might say to me, well, but if you make this small compromise, it might open up other kinds of opportunities and influence for you.

[21:32] No. And they might say, well, this little issue isn't worth your job. I mean, this little issue, it's not worth fighting over this for your reputation. It certainly isn't worth your life.

Yes, but this is not my home. When loyalty to the land of our exile is in conflict with loyalty to God, no matter how small that issue is, we choose God.

Daniel would rather be eaten by lions than take a 30-day break from his prayer. Let's look at the next section in verses 14 through 22.

It says, 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 King Darius and said to him, Remember, your majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed. So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den.

[22:33] The king said to Daniel, May your God, whom 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, May the 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, your majesty.

Now it says in verse 14, when the king heard this, he was greatly distressed. And right here at the front of this section is the first surprise, is the surprise in this section here.

[23:38] The surprise here is that we expect the king to be greatly distressed because one of his top administrators has been disloyal to him. But that's not why he's distressed. The reason he's distressed is because Daniel is in trouble.

Look what it says. It says in verse 14, It's instructive for us to compare this reaction to King Nebuchadnezzar back in chapter 3 with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

When King Nebuchadnezzar finds out that three Jews have refused to bow down to his image, listen to his reaction. He says in 3.13, it says, He taunts them in verse 15.

What God will be able to rescue you out of my hand? He says in verse 19, It was furious with them with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and his attitude toward them changed.

And in verse 22, His command to throw them in the fire was urgent. This is a hostile king who was angry at these three guys and couldn't wait to chuck them into the fiery furnace.

[24:47] But here in chapter 6, Darius' reaction is the opposite. Look what it says in verse 13. Sorry. Look what it says in verse 16.

It says, May your God whom you serve continually rescue you. Verse 18, He spent the night without eating and without entertainment. He could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, he hurried to the lion's den.

He was speaking in an anguished voice when he said, Daniel, servant of the living God, have you been rescued? Here's the question. Why does the king care for Daniel like this?

Why is he so concerned to rescue Daniel instead of hastening his death? We expect the king to be offended. This law was supposedly about loyalty to himself that no one could pray to anyone but him.

And now Daniel, his trusted advisor, has broken it. And instead, he's up all night. He doesn't know what to do. How is he going to find a loophole in this Persian law and find a way of rescuing Daniel?

[25:52] He's trapped by his own law. He's frantic. What is he going to do here? When he goes down to the lion's den, Daniel calls out to him in verse 21, May the king live forever.

That's Daniel's answer to say, I am alive. May the king live forever. Now, Daniel's response in verses 21 and 22 is important because these are the only two verses in the entire story where Daniel speaks.

So if we want to know what Daniel thinks about all of this, here it is. Here's our chance in verses 21 and 22. First of all, in verse 21, when he says, May the king live forever.

This is exactly the same way that the other administrators in satraps addressed the king back in verse 6. It's subtle, but it suggests that he is just as loyal to the king as they are.

In fact, based on the fact that they're conspiring and trying to trick the king, I think Daniel's actually more loyal to the king than they are. Then he says in verse 22, My God sent his angel and he shut

the mouths of the lions and they haven't heard me because I was innocent in his sight.

[27:08] I have not been unfaithful to God. But then he says, Nor have I done any wrong before you, your majesty. I am faithful to you, O king. I am faithful to you. In other words, he was loyal both to God and to King Darius and it's like he's saying, Just because I pray to my God and my priority is to my God, that does not mean that I am not also loyal to you.

So this tension, the king's concern for Daniel and Daniel's loyalty to the king suggests something very important about Daniel's approach to living in exile.

Even though he is absolutely unbending and uncompromising about his true home back in Jerusalem, he is equally invested in working for the good of his present home, the king.

We've already seen this at the beginning of the story that Daniel distinguished himself in his government service, that he was trustworthy, that he had integrity and fulfilled all his duties.

And now, when he comes out of the den of lions, he says to the king, I am faithful to you. Daniel, at this point in the book, is about 70 years old and he has proven over a lifetime of service that he is committed to the good of the Persian empire.

[28:23] It's not his ultimate home, but it's his home for now. And so his character, compelled by his faith in God, causes him to work for the good of the king and the nation and that has earned the king's respect.

Daniel has dual citizenship. It has a hierarchy. He knows to whom he really belongs, but at the end of the day, that is not a threat to the king because he has proven himself day after day after day. If the government makes his faith incompatible with Persia, he will choose his faith. But otherwise, Daniel will be a loyal Persian citizen. As Paul says in 1 Timothy, he will live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Daniel is a model for us to live joyfully and responsibly and engaged in our land of exile as well.

This is a little bit of a difficult balance for us sometimes because it's easy when we're trying to walk this narrow road to fall into the ditch on either side.

On the one hand, we can sort of fall into the ditch of compromise, to become like everybody else, to betray our faith, maybe not even without thinking about it, to accept the values of our culture and just sort of think like everyone else and to neglect our heavenly citizenship.

[29:49] That's one ditch that we can fall into. But then on the other side of the road, we can overcorrect and we can fall in that other ditch and that is that we get rigid and bitter and angry and we just, we just can't wait for the world to burn.

We look at everything around us, our culture, and we just say, I just can't wait until this place burns and I go to heaven. That's the other ditch, right? And Daniel is a model of walking that thin line.

He is both uncompromising, in his faith, but also fully engaged in his present land for its good.

When loyalty to the nation, whichever nation that is, is not in conflict with loyalty to God, we should be the best of citizens.

Loyal, serving, doing what is right, working hard, innocent before God, and faithful to the king.

Finally, let's look at the last section in verses 23 to 28.

The king was overjoyed, right? There was this moment of suspense. Daniel, are you in there? Are you alive? Long pause. May the king live forever.

[31:04] Oh, he's alive. 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 on 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, 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 nations and the peoples of every language in all the earth, 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 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. The surprise here is that while Daniel has been saved, which is a shock, his enemies have been destroyed.

[32:16] The king has lifted Daniel out of the den of lions and no wound is found on him. It's not like he was down there all night long with a stick, you know, fending them off and when they pull him out of the lion's den, he's just a wreck, right?

He's just a mess and he's got to go straight to the ER because he's barely alive. No, there's no wound on him at all. It was a miracle. God shut the mouths of those lions and saved him.

Why? Because of what it says in verse 23, because he had trusted in his God. The narrator does not want you to miss that. You might be able to pick it up on your own, but the narrator doesn't want you to have to figure that out.

God protected Daniel because Daniel put his trust in God. And in verse 24, Daniel's accusers are thrown to the lions along with their wives and children.

And this verse tells us two pretty important things. First of all, it tells us that Daniel was saved only by the power of God. I've read some scholars on the book of Daniel who have said, well, maybe the lions were ill that night.

[33:21] Maybe they just weren't really up to it. They weren't feeling well. Or maybe they had been drugged by some ancient drug. Or maybe they had been fed previously that day and they just weren't hungry.

But here, when the men and their wives and children are thrown into the lion's den, before they even touch the ground, the lions crush and kill them. Did Daniel fight off the lions?

No. God's angel had shut their mouths and no matter how hungry they were as they prowled and looked at him, they could just drool. There's nothing they could do. There's no way that they could touch him.

But not only was it a miracle, but verse 24 also tells us that not only is God's servant Daniel saved, but God's enemies are destroyed. That is good news.

Maybe it feels a little bit uncomfortable to us to be cheering over the hideous death of Daniel's enemies, but for God's oppressed people, oppressed and persecuted people who are suffering terribly, who are tormented and abused by evildoers, this is great comfort to know that God will fight for his people and that his justice will prevail in the end.

[34:35] This is an incredible miracle and look how it affects King Darius in verses 26 and 27. Let me read this again. He is the living God, Darius says, and God endures forever.

His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion, that other home, the home of Daniel, will never end. He rescues and saves. He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. And in a great irony, here at the end of the story, we learn about the nature and the power of God from the mouth of a pagan king.

The story concludes in verse 28 that Daniel is prospering in his land of exile. Daniel was miraculously saved because he had trusted in God. If he had primarily been a citizen of Persia, then he would have attempted to solve his problem through Persian means.

Right? He would have tried to exploit some kind of legal loophole or political maneuver. Maybe he would have called in some favors from some other politicians or bribed some officials.

[35:42] He would have used some kind of Persian tactics. But Daniel is not ultimately a citizen of Persia. He is a citizen of heaven. And that is to whom he belongs. That's why when he hears the decree about being chucked in the lion's den, he doesn't call up his social network.

He doesn't get a lawyer. He doesn't huddle in some dark room with some advisors to figure out what they're going to do. He gets home and he gets down on his knees and he prays to God and asks him for help.

And that is why he will not compromise his faith because he knows that God is the ultimate answer for what he needs. And his faithfulness is rewarded. God is the living God.

His dominion, Daniel's true home country, will never end and God will be victorious. God has saved his servant Daniel and he has destroyed his enemies and he has brought glory to himself.

God's miracle proves that he is the one who is worthy of respect and honor and ultimate loyalty.

This story is a paradigm. It's not a rule.

[36:50] It's a paradigm. It's a model for us. It's a pattern. And patterns sometimes have exceptions. So it's true that God does not always deliver his people from martyrdom in their land of exile.

Sometimes God's people suffer terribly. Terrible persecution. Terrible marginalization and death. They suffer and they're exploited and imprisoned and poor and chased from one region to the next. Even in Daniel chapter 3 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego tell the king our God can save us. We don't know if he will save us but even if he does not we're still not going to do what you say. So there's a recognition there that sometimes God does not save his people and he lets them suffer terribly. But ultimately God wins and that's the point of the story. His people always end up victorious if they trust in him.

When we experience pressure to conform when we're persecuted for our faith when we are rejected because of our values we can have confidence in the final victory of God.

[38:02] We will go to our own country and we will finally be home. It says in Hebrews chapter 11 13 through 16 that the people of God have acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth but they desire a better country that is a heavenly one for God has prepared for them a city.

So when we struggle in this land of exile and we start to get discouraged when someone asks us hey where are you from we hesitate right? I guess I have two homes.

When King Darius watched Daniel stay true to his God and then watched God deliver Daniel the king said he is the living God. and he endures forever.

His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion will never end. He rescues and saves. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for your word. We thank you for the reality that is here the realism about what Daniel faced about the kinds of things that your people have faced throughout history.

[39:31] We are not flippant about the challenges of persecution and the difficulties that Christians face today in different parts of the world and we pray Lord for your people everywhere who suffer sometimes even to the point of death because of their faith in you.

We pray that you would strengthen them and help them and make your presence known to them. We pray that by the power of your spirit you would give them grace to stand true to the gospel to stay true to their faith and their trust in you.

We pray that you would deliver them from their enemies that you would ruin their enemies that you would ruin those people who have set their face against you.

And for all of us Lord we pray here that you would teach us to serve you with total commitment and unrelenting allegiance. We don't know all the things that you have called us to.

We don't know what the future of each of us holds but we pray that you would help us to serve our world here in each of our spheres of influence with integrity and diligence and love toward other people.

[40:47] We pray that you would help us to be the best citizens of Kenosha and of Wisconsin and of the U.S. But we also pray that we would be wise to know when and how to be uncompromising in our loyalty to you.

Lord we are looking forward in the future to seeing your ultimate victory and to seeing our eternal home with you. And so we pray with the Apostle John even so come Lord Jesus.

Amen.