

The God who Saves

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're almost halfway through Daniel, and so I thought I'd do a quick recap for those of you who might have missed some parts of it. Daniel and his friends, we saw in chapter 1, because of Israel's rebellion against God, find themselves in exile far from Judah under God's judgment.

Nevertheless, he and his friends have actually done quite well in Babylon. Daniel, in particular, has been promoted progressively. He has gone from a nobody eating just veggies in chapter 1 to third in the kingdom in chapter 5.

And all this despite intense opposition and persecution. So in Daniel chapter 3, his friends found themselves in the fiery furnace.

And then now, here today, Daniel will find himself in the lion's den. But interspersed between Daniel chapter 1, chapter 3, and chapter 6, are God's intervention through dreams and writings on the wall, showing us the reality about kingdoms in the world.

So in chapter 2, God shows us the reality of his kingdom being triumphant over all the other kingdoms in the world. Only God's kingdom will endure.

[1 : 1 7] And then in chapter 4 and 5, we see God as king, having dominion over human kings, both Nebuchadnezzar and then his son, Belshazzar.

But the way the prophecy is written, there is an alternating picture or alternating chapters between the big picture of God's kingdom in conflict with the world and personal stories of Daniel and his friends.

And the reason being is that the collision of God's kingdom with the worlds happens at the personal level in the lives of individuals.

So what we're seeing with kingdoms colliding, gods and the worlds, is not some battle occurring just in the cosmos, like, you know, in Star Wars, but being played out in the lives of ordinary people, even people in positions of power.

The kingdoms of God and the world are colliding in our lives, playing out in the choices that we make, some of them mundane choices day in, day out.

[2 : 2 7] So let's pick up the action again here in Daniel chapter 6, verse 1. If you remember last week, Darius the Mede has taken over from Belshazzar. So here he 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.

So what we've got here is a government restructure, cabinet reshuffle maybe, 120 satraps appointed, then overseen by three administrators.

But Daniel was so good at his job that Darius wanted to set him over the whole kingdom, either by abolishing the three administrators or else putting him over them.

But as with all politics, jealousy takes hold, doesn't it? Verse 4. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs.

[3 : 3 9] But they were unable to do so. They could not find any corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Now if only we all had Daniel's reputation, you know, so that even when people try to dig dirt on us, they find nothing.

Now naturally, just by being good, Daniel was making them look bad, wasn't he? Further, they're fearful, aren't they? That if Daniel, this man of integrity, was made their boss, he might try to start cleaning things up.

You know, take away the abuse of power or corruption. But they come up with nothing. So 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 issued the decree and put it into writing so that it cannot be altered in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. So King Darius put the decree in writing.

[5 : 11] Now I think Darius here comes up looking a bit poor, poorly. You know, he's not really ruling as much as being directed by others. But perhaps as a new king, this decree would suit him.

You know, loyalty building exercise, get people to pray to you, that kind of thing. But if you notice, these administrators and satraps, I'm not sure how many of them there are, they claim that all, all the royal administrators, prefects, satraps, blah, blah, blah, have agreed to this.

Now, that's not true, is it? Because guess who didn't agree? Daniel, right? Who just happens to be one of the administrators.

He's not a low-ranking official. He's one of the administrators, and in fact, soon to be chief administrator. But it suited Darius' ego and pride to go along, isn't it?

Now, I don't know about you, but if you're not God, why would you even be tempted to command people to pray to you? You know, the expectation of having to answer all these prayers, just too much for me.

[6 : 23] You asked me to get you a cup of water, that's even hard enough already, but you want me to answer your prayers. But just as with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, pride comes easily, doesn't it, with those in power.

But what it does is it puts, pushes Daniel into a corner, doesn't it? And puts him in a tricky situation. Because you see, Daniel is not just a minion in this kingdom, is he?

Not even a low-ranking official. No, he's one of the administrators, which means he's actually representing the king. He's setting example to everyone, isn't he?

And so at the same time, though, he belongs to God's kingdom. And as a servant of God, he also serves and represents God. And so what this does is it puts him, or puts both kingdoms in collision within his one person, because of his two roles.

Now that's a sober reality for all of us, isn't it? You know, we naturally, some of you are young, up-and-coming, career-minded people, we all seek promotion in our places of work, don't we?

[7 : 33] You know, we want to have positions of responsibility in the organizations we belong to. But the fact is, the higher you climb up the ladder, the more you will face these tricky situations.

That's just a fact, because the secular organizations you work for answer to a different God or worldview. Even if you work for a Christian organization, they are caught up in this as well, because there are secular laws that apply, and they don't always align with the values of the Christian faith. So you want a promotion? Congratulations. Go for it. But are you prepared to remain a servant of God when situations like Daniel faces arises?

Are you prepared to stand up and remain firm despite the pressure? Well, Daniel did. Verse 10. 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.

[8 : 48] You know, there is wisdom that's required to know where we draw the line. But in this instance, it was clear to Daniel, isn't it, where the line was.

Praying to Darius and not to God was a clear line that he was not going to cross. And so he knew exactly what he was going to do, which was to do nothing different.

But note what his prayers were about. Even in this tricky, pressurizing situation, he was giving thanks to God. And then later, when the men deliberately caught him in the act, what they heard him asking was God for help.

Now people have asked me, how did they know in that culture in those days, people would pray aloud rather than pray in your heart. That's why they could hear. But what it showed with Daniel was that even in times of trial, he was thanking God.

He was looking to God for help. This was a posture of humility and dependence on God. Now all of this was set up by these men, and they knew Daniel was not going to compromise.

[10:02] So they were ready to pounce, verse 12. 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 Persians which cannot be repealed. So these people are real sly dogs, aren't they? Because they even want to trap the king.

For what they've done is initially withhold the fact that it's actually Daniel that was the one that disobeyed the decree. Now, of course, the king would never recant on his decree, right?

Particularly as it seems, these decrees cannot be repealed according to the laws of the Medes and Persians. And so the trap has been set, hasn't it? And 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 that you put in writing.

He still prays three times a day. And again here, they're pretty sly, aren't they? Because I thought Daniel was an administrator. No, he's just one of the exiles from Judah.

[11:16] Nobody. But such was the deception that they needed to do to trap the king because Daniel was actually one of the king's favorites, wasn't he?

So poor Darius, he too finds himself caught in this trap. And he tries his best in vain to get out of the mess. But he's not able to, verse 14, to rescue Daniel, even though he made every effort until sundown to save him.

Well, it's just as well Daniel didn't pray to Darius, isn't it? Because he can't rescue or save. And so, as we have it, 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 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. And the king said to Daniel, May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.

I think he was trying really hard to do, to save Daniel, but in the end he says, No, sorry Daniel, I can't do it. But your God, maybe your God, whom you refuse to disobey, perhaps he can rescue you.

[12:34] And so, a stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. Sounds a bit familiar? Stones over something?

Like another stone rolled over a tomb a hundred years, more than hundreds of years later? Well, the king sealed it with his 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, without any entertainment being brought to him and he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, again, sounds familiar that bit?

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 ever done any wrong before you, your majesty.

[13:42] 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.

Now I want to pause here for a moment. I think we all enjoy the feel-good part of this story, you know. Yes, God shut the mouths of the lions. Hooray! But it's important really to look also at what Daniel himself says.

He cites two reasons. Can you see? Why God shut the mouths of the lions. The first is that he was found innocent in God's sight. And then the second, that he had done no wrong before the king.

And then at the end there, we also discover why he was not harmed. The reason being because Daniel had trusted in his God. And these three details are actually very important for us to pick up because what we have here is a picture of vindication.

It occurs, vindication occurs, when God rescues the righteous. You see, you and I, you know, we can put our trust in God.

[14:55] And that's a good thing. We should do it. But, if we've done anything wrong, God actually isn't obliged to rescue you. I hope you realize that.

As Peter writes in that other reading, 1 Peter 2, verse 20, how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? If you did anything wrong, you know, put up with the punishment, isn't it?

That's only fair. God doesn't have to be gracious to us. By definition, grace is undeserved. No one is entitled to grace.

But when God rescues you for doing the right thing, that's vindication. And what Daniel does here is that even though he was right, what he did and what he didn't do to be precise, was take justice into his own hands.

He entrusted himself to God to save him. And God vindicated him. And when God vindicates him, it is a demonstration from God that Daniel is righteous.

[16:12] That in doing both before God and the king, he had done everything right. he was innocent and had done no wrong. Now it's not to suggest that Daniel was sinless all his life.

It merely shows that on this occasion he was faultless. And likewise for us, we may be vindicated from time to time when we do the right thing. But like Daniel as well, none of us are faultless for our entire lives, are we?

And yet, in this world, we know one person that is and has satisfied that condition, isn't it?

Remember my hint earlier that stone rolled over the tomb?

That's right. Jesus is that person, isn't it? And yet, if you think about it, Jesus wasn't kept from death, was he?

So did God vindicate him? Of course. but not by keeping him from death, but by raising him from it. Jesus' resurrection was his vindication.

[17:24] You might ask, well, why did not God keep him from death? And there's a good reason for that, isn't there? Because even though he himself knew no sin and therefore wasn't required to die, he died so that the benefits of his death can be made available for the rest of us, for us who deserve God's judgment because of sin.

And yet, this pattern of vindication is the same. Jesus, the righteous one, he entrusts himself to the Father. He didn't fight his way out of injustice or try and justify himself.

So if you remember, when he went before Pilate and the high priest, he didn't argue his case, did he? Or resist. Instead, he was led silent like a lamb to the cross.

And so Peter can say further in the next few verses, in verse 23 of chapter 2, when they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. And as a result, God vindicates him, raised him up because he is righteous.

[18:44] So Daniel here in chapter 6 is a type of Christ in that he foreshadows the vindication of the Lord Jesus. Now we, on the other hand, we have no rights of vindication.

I hope you realize that. The first thing we need to do is put our trust in Jesus to save us from our sins. we're not asking God to vindicate us first and foremost.

As Peter would now say in the next slide, by his wounds you have been healed. We need that first and foremost, not vindication. And yet, having been saved and made righteous in Christ, the next slide, if we then suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God.

So, in our small way, once we've been saved from the jaws of sin and death, we're called to then follow in Christ's example and suffer for doing good and wait for the Lord's vindication.

Now, friends, I don't know about you, but unjust suffering, I think, is doubly painful, isn't it? It's not just the physical pain of the suffering that we're going through, but the injustice as well.

[20:02] And if you ask me, sometimes it feels like the injustice is even worse than the physical suffering, isn't it? Because when we suffer for doing good, we suffer the pain of being wrongly accused, aren't we?

Being punished when we're not at fault. And our natural instinct is to retaliate, because we can't bear the injustice. We're made in God's image such that we have an innate moral compass that smells injustice a mile away.

And when that injustice applies to us personally, even a whiff, a whiff of it, just gets us upset, doesn't it? And angry.

And that's why I think to be like Jesus in the face of unjust suffering requires the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. You can't do it humanly by yourself. I mean, just recall the last time it happened to you.

I don't know when it was, might have been, you know, ten minutes ago or something, or many years ago. When that last happened to you and you were wrongly accused, how did you want to respond?

[21 : 13] Endure silently and patiently and wait calmly for the Lord's vindication? That's not our first go-to response, is it? It's not humanly natural.

So yes, to do what Jesus does takes the Spirit's work. And yet, it's not impossible because as children of God, we have the Spirit, don't we?

God's Spirit empowers us to endure and entrust our lives into God's just and loving hands. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it, to be able to do.

And what the Spirit does, I think, when these things happen, is to help us by reminding us that we've been saved in Christ, that actually the only reason we are saved is because Jesus himself suffered unjustly for us.

And because we know that, that inspires us, that gives us the strength to do the same. All right, let's wrap up the story. In verse 24, we want to hear the good bits, or maybe not, but anyway, 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.

[22 : 27] And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Now, this is simply the opposite of vindication, and I'm not going to go into why the wives and children were also thrown in.

You can ask me that later on. But if God vindicates those who do right, then here we see that the converse is also true, that the wicked will not go unpunished.

And you can see here that the lions are clearly God's agents, aren't they, doing his bidding, because even before the men touched the floor, you know, they were probably dangling or something, the lions were up at them, overpowering them and crushing all their bones.

I don't know how you can imagine that in your mind. 206 bones, all crushed. As for King Darius, he now writes to all the nations, issuing another decree.

May you prosper greatly. They love that introduction, don't they? 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.

[23 : 34] 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.

And I probably say that God did more than that, didn't he? God not only rescued Daniel from the power of lions, he also preserved Daniel from the corrupting influence of Babylon. And as a result, last verse, Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus, the Persian.

So yes, in worldly terms, we see Daniel doing quite well, but really he prospered also as a servant of God because he kept his trust in God who alone saves.

And God preserved him not only through the reign of one empire, that of Babylon, but also through the empires of the Medes and the Persians as well. He outlasted many more kings, didn't he?

And as he did, the name of God among the pagans grew greater and greater. Right? So you go back to chapter 2, the king merely acknowledged, you know, Daniel, your God is great.

[24 : 46] Acknowledgement. Chapter 4, he goes one step further, he praises himself and honors the living God. You know, I know that this is a great God. But now finally here in chapter 6, what we have is a decree being issued instructing and commanding everyone to worship the God of Daniel.

And that, my friends, is the same trajectory that will occur with Jesus' name. Because one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Governments will come and go. We'll go from one job to another. And throughout life, both God's kingdom and the kingdoms of the world will collide in our lives.

What we are being asked to do is to entrust ourselves into the hands of the God who saves, who has saved us already from the jaws of sin and death.

But now ask us to endure suffering for doing good. Let's pray. Father, we praise you as the living God who endures forever, whose kingdom will never be destroyed, whose dominion will never end. [26 : 06] Thank you for saving us from the jaws of sin and death. Teach us to endure suffering for the sake of following your Son. Preserve us until the glorious day of his coming.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.