

Daniel 6 - Ordinary Faith in an Extraordinary God

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Amen. It's a great, great day to look forward to, to be thrilled about and have our lives today shaped by what's going to happen eternally.
- That's a big theme in the book of Daniel. We've made it this morning to Daniel 6 in the lion's den, as I mentioned to the kids earlier. This is the final and climactic scene in the first half of the book of Daniel that recounts the stories of Daniel and his friends living in Babylon and learning how to follow the true king while living in another's kingdom.
- You've heard this story before, I suspect. Perhaps sung about it. Perhaps told your kids about it. But what is Daniel and the lion's den all about?
- Let's pray and ask for God's help. We'll read parts of the familiar story as we go. Pray with me. Father, we will recognize many of these words.
- [1 : 1 6] Our kids have told us what happens here. But we need your spirit to speak to us through your word this morning. We need not to hear things that are assumptions of our own hearts, that feed our own idols and our own desires.
- We need to hear from you. Would you speak clearly and powerfully? And would you give us hearts to hear? Hearts to be sensitive to what you would teach us.
- Hearts to change and to become different people because we have encountered you in your word. Do that work this morning, we ask in Jesus' name.
- Amen. Imagine for me this morning as we get started that you're a journalist back in the 6th century BC. It's a very popular profession back then.
- There were a lot of them. Imagine that you are a reporter in Babylon for the Hebrew Herald. You know, the Hebrew Herald, the one that prints all the news for all the exiles in Babylon.
- [2 : 2 1] That's their motto. And you've been on staff for a while. You've been stuck covering typical, unimpressive stuff. You never make it past the bottom of page 8.
- And then one day, you get your big break. You hear that there's this story about a Hebrew prophet who has survived the king's lion's den.
- And you've been told that you get the big interview. You've got an exclusive sit-down with Daniel. This is your big moment. This is going to be the career-making interview and story.
- Front page headlines for sure for the first time. And so you get in your chariot and you drive across town to meet with Daniel for the interview.
- And in your mind are all of these wonderful headlines and what it's going to look like splashed across the front page. You know, you start thinking things like, ageless wonder, 90-year-old escapes again.
- [3 : 2 3] Yeah, that's what it's going to say. And then you think, no, no, no, miraculous. Hebrew shows overgrown cats what nine lives is all about. That's what it's going to say.

Then you think, no, maybe what it should be is lion lunch turns lion whisperer. That's what it is. Daniel, he's going to be the cover boy for my new series of articles that's really going to show this.

And then you think to yourself, no, none of those. The one that's really going to make it big is this one. And you settle on this. Cat food? Not our profit.

And you've got it. So there you go to your interview with Daniel, certain that these wonderful headlines are going to make your career. You can't wait to talk to Daniel.

This extraordinary guy who's obviously done amazing things. And you get to the interview and initially you're pretty unimpressed. Daniel's no young fella.

[4 : 24] He's pushing 90. He's tired. He's feeling weak the day that you talk with him. But you launch in and intent on finding the story here in Daniel.

Tell me about the big night with the lions. What did you do or say? Daniel says, well, I patted a couple of them on the head and prayed for a bit.

And then I slept for a bit. You think, all right, well, I'll try another angle. Tell me, how did you prepare for that moment of being thrown in? What did you do leading up to that moment?

And Daniel says, well, let's see. I mean, I did pray a little bit. But really nothing else. I mean, I didn't have much time to prepare. You say, well, Daniel, did you always know you'd be safe?

Maybe this is the angle, the faithful guy who was confident in the face of lions. And Daniel says, no, not at all, really. I was kind of wondering, actually.

[5 : 28] I mean, I knew God could save me. But I've lived a long life. And I was kind of thinking this might actually be the end. You're getting a little bit frustrated at this point.

It's not coming together the way you expected. Make it political, maybe. We'll go political with it. Daniel, your decision to defy the decree, you know, when you decided to disobey the king, you really hate that guy, don't you?

Tell me about that king, how awful he is. Well, actually, I mean, I don't really hate him. He's a pretty decent guy. And I just, I didn't make a big decision.

I just prayed like I do every other day. And with each answer from Daniel, your dreams of a front page career making story are dwindling, aren't they?

This is not the guy, the star you expected to play big on the front page. There's nothing extraordinary about him, really. God seems to have done all of the hard work.

[6 : 33] I mean, at least some of the heroes in the Bible got to do cool stuff like pick up a slingshot and several stones or do cool things with their staff. And Daniel didn't even get to do those things.

There's not much remarkable to tell about Daniel. Now, we know this morning that Daniel is famous, right? Particularly for this story, he's a hero of the Bible.

But what I want us to notice this morning is that even in this story, Daniel does nothing grand or super spiritual. He puts on display here what I would call a very ordinary faith.

But his faith, his ordinary faith, is in an extraordinary God who works beyond what Daniel or the rest of God's people could have ever imagined.

I mean, if you're a reporter interviewing Daniel for this story, you're realizing you've got the wrong hero, right? And sadly, you don't have any great front page photos of this awesome lion silencing, king conquering God, do you?

[7 : 41] That's not working out for you. Notice how the story ends in Daniel 6. Look at verse 25. At the end of the lion's den story, King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in the earth, Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, enduring forever.

His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues. He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. What happens at the end of the story? God is praised and honored, and Daniel gets a footnote, a brief mention.

If you're going to understand the point of the story, and what God wants his people to take away from it, it's this great God they need to see in the lion's den story.

[8 : 55] We learn here that God is the true king who is always on the throne and always able to deliver. That's what that proclamation says, right?

The one we just read there at the end of the story, he is the living God with the eternal kingdom. He delivers and rescues even when no one else can.

You see, Darius liked Daniel, didn't he? They were buddies. Darius got tricked into passing this law, and when he found out what it would do to Daniel, remember how Darius responded, verse 14?

The king, when he heard these words, when he heard about Daniel praying, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. The king said, no, I will deliver Daniel.

That's what I'm going to do. I'm setting my mind. That's what's going to happen. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. All day the king did nothing but seek to rescue Daniel. But his advisors remind him of the law he's passed.

[9 : 57] And at the end of the day, the king commanded, verse 16, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. Despite all the king's efforts, Daniel's cast into the lion's den.

And what does the king say to Daniel? May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you. Why? Because I can't.

I'm the most powerful man in the world. And there's nothing else I can do for you, even though I'd like to. The most powerful human leaders, even when they want to, are often powerless to rescue.

But God, who is the true king through the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, other kings, and now Darius, the true king, God is always powerful and able to deliver.

Daniel, Darius says, has your God been able to deliver you? Yes, he sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths. God is the one doing the miraculous in this passage.

[11 : 09] And Daniel has learned to trust him. Just to trust him. You see, Daniel knows who the true king is, doesn't he?

You've got to believe that Daniel helped Darius write this proclamation at the end of the chapter, don't you? First of all, it sounds like the ones at the end of most of the other stories we've read already, where one of these pagan kings writes a proclamation about the greatness of Yahweh, Daniel's God.

It sounds like that. It sounds like Daniel's been helping out. I mean, after all, if you were Darius, wouldn't you ask for Daniel's help and how to honor and praise Daniel's God?

So it's Daniel who knows and says in the proclamation what he's experienced over and over. The extraordinary reigning and rescuing nature of his God.

That's what we read about in this story. It's knowing a God like that, that Daniel knows deeply and intimately. It's knowing a God like that that enables Daniel to have the faith he's so famous for in this story.

[12 : 22] What is his faith like? You know, what do I have to do to be as amazing and spiritual as Daniel? Well, he doesn't do anything really remarkable.

It's just ordinary faith. The kind of faith that you and I are called to have day by day. And so we see in this story that knowing this extraordinary God enables ordinary faith to be first daily faith.

Daily faith. Daniel has been serving in leadership here in Babylon for the better part of seven decades.

He's served multiple administrations and even different nations since he first started. And King Darius is about to set him over the whole kingdom.

He trusts him so much. But then remember how the other officials feel about that. How do they feel about Daniel getting promoted? The high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel.

[13 : 34] They're jealous. They want to complain against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him.

Then these men said, we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

They're jealous of Daniel. They want to catch him in something. But as they puzzled over this together, they determined the only thing they could convict him of was what? Faith in his God.

You know that old question, if you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? You heard that one before? Well, Daniel can't get convicted of anything else.

There's nothing else that will stick. He hasn't been disrespectful or disruptive about his faith. He's been a trusted and faithful servant of multiple kings.

[14 : 43] And at the same time, those who work with him have learned over the years that there's no compromise on his faith in God. It's the one thing they know for sure about him. In other words, Daniel did his job with excellence day in and day out.

He was honest and above reproach in his dealings with people. He persevered through transitions and difficult seasons. And he didn't hide his faith in God from anyone around him.

Nothing really flashy there, is there? Pretty ordinary, right? Quite possibly what you are called to, where you are, day after day, year after year, faithful service in a pagan land with an uncompromising commitment to the true king.

Is that where God's called you? As the story goes, those who decide they want to get Daniel out of their way resort to catching Daniel.

How are they going to catch him with his faith to God? They say we're going to catch him praying, right? That we can count on. We're going to catch Daniel praying to his God and we need to come up with something so that it's a bad thing when we catch him praying to his God.

[16 : 05] So they tricked Darius into passing the law that people should pray only to him for the next month. Look at verse 10. When Daniel knew that the document, that that decree had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem.

He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. This verse is a beautiful picture of Daniel's praying faith.

If you like alliteration and you want three D words in your blanks, in your bulletin, you can call it dependent faith. But I didn't want us to miss the importance of prayer itself in this passage.

It is, after all, what gets Daniel thrown in the lion's den, right? The fact that he's praying to his God. The fact that Daniel won't compromise for even a month.

Just take a month off. The decree will expire and Daniel won't compromise even for a month on his praying faith. The kind of ordinary faith we are called to have trusts God enough to live daily in a way that is faithful to God.

[17 : 25] That God can take care of me if I live day by day for him. And at the same time, it also prays regularly to God. Because we know that he is the one who does the extraordinary.

That he is the true king. And so what my heart needs is to trust and depend on him. I need to be molded into someone who trusts and prays. Look at this verse more closely and notice just a few instructive things about Daniel's praying faith.

First, notice the windows in the upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. What does that mean? That's a strange detail to include. Well, what it means is that Daniel's prayers are focused on God's glory and God's people.

You see, back in 1 Kings 8, after King Solomon built the temple to God in Jerusalem, he prayed a prayer dedicating the temple to God.

And it anticipated some of the things that would happen to God's people, including where Daniel is in exile. In verse 48 of 1 Kings 8, Solomon's prayer says this, God, after they've gone into exile, if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart and the land of their enemies who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then here in heaven your dwelling place, their prayer and their plea and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you and all their transgressions they've committed against you.

[19 : 03] Grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them. For God, they are your people and your heritage which you brought out of Egypt.

It's not just speculation that Daniel was praying this way. In Daniel chapter 9, a prayer of Daniel is recorded from the exact same year as the lion's den story, and these are the things he's praying.

Praying for the people of God. God, forgive us. God, bless us. God, restore us to your land and the temple where you dwell with us. Your presence with your people is what I long for and hope for.

God, bless, forgive, restore your people. Do you pray that way? Do you pray for God's glory through His care for His people?

Do you get reoriented by focusing on God's glory and His kingdom? Is that what centers you? Is that what's most important? That's how Daniel prays.

[20 : 11] Next, notice that he got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God. Thanking God?

You may take that for granted in prayer, but seriously? For what? You're in exile. People are trying to kill you. No one you live with honors your God.

And you're thanking God three times a day? Every day? This is the eternal focus of Daniel's prayers. Thanking God despite the current circumstances because he trusts God's eternal promises to His people.

He looks toward Jerusalem. He knows God has promised to restore His people. He knows despite the pain of the day, He has a promise of a brighter future.

And so he thanks God over and over and over in prayer. Does God hear more gripes or gratitude from us?

[21 : 19] Listen, He does invite us to pour out our hearts before Him. But our prayers should be bathed in the promises of His Word so that our hearts pour out not only pleas for help in the difficulties of life, but also promises of God that ground us with an eternal perspective in the midst of those difficulties.

Listen, life is hard and God wants to hear about it. But He wants you to see His Word and to know His promises to care for you and His eternal hope stands sure.

And Daniel holds on to that, thanking God over and over, looking towards the promised land and saying, I know God has something for me. Finally, notice that he prays three times a day as he had done previously.

This isn't something Daniel like all of a sudden starts to do because it's a big crisis, is it? This is Daniel's pattern. Not some magic formula, kneel down, face Jerusalem three times a day and God will hear your prayers.

No, that's not the point. But this is Daniel's pattern. No decree from any human king is going to change his commitment. It's Daniel's pattern developed in the easy days that carries through the hard days.

[22 : 49] If we pray in peace, we will pray in peril when it's harder to start. If we depend on God in private, we will depend on God in public as we have seen Daniel do time and again already.

His public faithfulness, being able to live day by day for God, is rooted in what's going on up in his room facing Jerusalem, pleading with his God, his private faithfulness, where he entrusts himself to the true king and centers his heart, brings it back day after day and moment by moment to what really matters and who really reigns.

That's what Daniel re-centers on every day. What really matters as I go into where God's called me today and who really reigns? Who's in charge today even if it doesn't feel like it?

That's vital for us. Again, though, I mean, it makes it sound good but nothing really remarkable, right? He prays.

I mean, I was told when I was like two that God's people were supposed to pray. My daughters pray. They've been praying since that was one of the first things, ways they learned to talk.

[24 : 08] That's not really that impressive. Daniel prays. But in getting down on his knees day after day, Daniel reminds us that in the kingdom of the true king, greatness and heroism looks like bowing down, not stepping up.

Greatness is not remarkable feats of strength, some wonderful, amazing things you've never imagined doing before. It's not shutting lions' mouths with your wonderful skills or your magic powers.

God does that stuff. God does those extraordinary things. But it's faithful dependence. That's what greatness looks like in the kingdom of the true king.

Faithful dependence. Ordinary prayers to an extraordinary God. Finally, of course, we actually get to the lion's den.

Better get there. See briefly Daniel's desperate faith. His faith when the crisis hits. What does it look like then? He's trusted his God day in and day out for decades.

[25 : 15] He's been praying to his God over and over and then the crisis comes. Your world is suddenly turned upside down.

Your life is all of a sudden in the balance. what happens? Verse 23. The king comes.

Daniel's safe and he's exceedingly glad and commanded Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no kind of harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God.

Because even in the midst of the lions he had trusted in his God. Why did Daniel trust? Because God is always on the throne and always able to deliver.

He can be trusted even when it appears all is lost. Even when all other options seem to have been exhausted. Even when you look around and there's no good reason for hope.

[26 : 23] He can be trusted. We could suspect Daniel was probably like his friends in the face of the fiery furnace. Not certain how God would deliver but confident God would deliver.

Daniel didn't know what the lions would do but he knew that God could be trusted. He didn't depend on his own strength.

He didn't trust his own plans, try to come up with a way out. He didn't hope in his power or position to use his influence to rescue him. He entrusted himself to God which as we learned last week is always the safe place to be.

Even in the lion's den. Even in your crisis or tragedy. See Daniel may have been spared from the lions but he's still in exile in Babylon.

There's still a crisis for Daniel. He still hasn't seen some remarkable repentance or restoration on behalf of God's people the way a faithful prophet might hope to see in his lifetime.

[27 : 36] He's 90 now and not really seeing much change. He's still in a crisis. But God has reminded him again that Yahweh is the true king.

He's still on the throne and still able to deliver. That's what we want our kids to know isn't it? Daniel and the lion's den is one of those stories that kids love.

It's a great story to tell our kids isn't it? But what is it that we want them to hear? Listen if the message of the story of Daniel is about how great Daniel is in the face of lions we got two problems.

First of all that's not the point. We've missed the whole point of the story. Second of all how many of your kids have been thrown into a lion's den recently? I could have asked them up here and they all would have said no.

How great Daniel was when he hit the lion? No. Never been there. But what you have an opportunity to do when you look at the stories of the Bible that your kids love is to see what they learn about God.

[28 : 40] Who is God there in the story of Daniel in the lion's den? And when you find there a God who can be trusted in all kinds of circumstances then your kids are helped to trust him in whatever difficult circumstances they face.

When they see God as the true king always on the throne always able to deliver then they have a king they can trust wherever they are. One of the reasons I started out having you imagine being a journalist with all those silly headlines is that there's definitely a story to be told here in Daniel 6 isn't there?

Who recognizes that there's a story to be told? Darius a pagan king sees there's a story to be told he knows it at the end remember verse 25? Darius wrote to whom?

To all the peoples nations and languages that dwell in all the earth you got to know about this there's a story to be told a story that should be told to everyone by very ordinary people about the true king about the God they can trust about how this story is a picture of God's ultimate rescue and deliverance of his people through Jesus what's your story?

Is it very very ordinary? Do you feel much less spiritual than Daniel? I do God hasn't called us to be extraordinary by definition most of us on most days will be very ordinary we feel that don't we?

[30 : 28] Sometimes it hurts but being extraordinary is his job not ours I think of the amazing things God does with ordinary faith and I think of the elderly church member who can't get out much anymore but trusts God for every breath wakes up and faithfully gets through the day with the only activity more consistent than doctor's appointments being prayer day after day after day ordinary faith and an extraordinary God who does miraculous things with those mundane prayers I think of the young single mom who works so hard and in the face of seemingly overwhelming daily struggles tells her kids the story about a great

God who provides better than she can and then praise to that God for her kids over and over and over ordinary faith and an extraordinary God I think of the government engineer who goes to the same office every day for the 28th year doing things that many days don't seem to matter at all and like Daniel most of those days not seeing any of the amazing things that God is doing no evidence of him at work at all but praying for his co-workers working faithfully sharing his struggles with them over and over even when they mock his trust in God ordinary faith in an extraordinary God I think of the blog many of you will have read a young mom and PCA pastor's wife named Kara Tippetts who died last year of cancer who through her blog which you may know as mundane faithfulness shared her story with thousands an honest story of weakness sickness struggles and faith in the midst of cancer in a God who would deliver her forever and care for her husband and kids when she was gone

I think of the letter one of our members sent to co-workers this week after getting transferred at work it begins this way someday everything will make perfect sense so for now laugh at the confusion smile through the tears and keep reminding yourself everything happens for a reason my life has always brought change at inopportune times that don't line up with what I think should happen the Lord does that for me to teach me to trust him on a deeper level pretty ordinary people telling the story story of an extraordinary God who is worthy of their trust in some tough times just like Daniel I think making the hall of fame of faith alongside

Daniel because that's all he did isn't it faithful in work faithful in prayer faithful in crisis watching God do the extraordinary all peoples nations and languages need to hear the story of this delivering God that's the story that is your story just like it's the story that's Daniel's story will you tell that story of how he has rescued you through Jesus of how he delivered you from your most desperate crisis and your greatest enemies how he endured the cross for you and you just entrusted yourself to him that's the story isn't it he did the amazing work you just entrusted yourself to him I don't think one ordinary housewife in the 1700s in England could have foreseen how she would tell that story to peoples and nations and languages she was the 25th of 25 children in her family that wasn't hard enough she had 19 children of her own only 10 of those however survived infancy she buried 11 children in her life her husband left her for a season and she raised the others alone then during that time she faced poverty constantly sickness often and tragedy regularly but she told her children about

God and changed diapers and prayed for them and made meals and prayed for them and cleaned the house and prayed for them she hardly had time for praying to be honest but they would find her all the time with her apron thrown up over her head and they knew not to interrupt that was the way she got private time with God throwing her apron over her head and talking with him for a while they knew who she was talking to and they knew she was probably talking to God about them and they waited until she was finished she never did anything the world would call extraordinary never published a book never made a fortune but Susanna Wesley is called the mother of Methodism two of those 19 kids John and Charles Wesley began the Christian movement that has told the story of a great

[36 : 58] God who does extraordinary things for ordinary people to millions upon millions around the world you know what story they told they told the story that they heard from their mom they told the story of praying all the time in the midst of everything and a God who could be trusted who would listen and act she didn't get to see the millions God used her story to impact but you know neither did Daniel not during their ordinary lives on this earth but God worked he worked in extraordinary ways we serve an extraordinary God in very ordinary ways most days when we face lions when we go to work tomorrow morning when we kneel to pray tonight may that reality give us great hope let's pray father that you listen to our prayers that you care about our lives that you act on our behalf that you are the one on the throne today is our only comfort that there is a hope because of that for the future is a great gift of your grace to us that in sending your son you have rescued us forever thank you give us hearts to trust you give us hearts that trust you while we do very ordinary things while we do things that we wish were greater and gained more notoriety and fame for ourselves give us hearts that are delighted for you to be the one that gets all the headlines whose glory is promoted ahead of ours

Jesus meet us and remind us that you're working in great ways right where we are we give you thanks for that amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org