

Daniel 6

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. We are looking at Daniel chapter 6 this morning.

Go ahead and turn there with me. That's page 743 in the Pew Bible. Daniel chapter 6, we're going to look at this whole chapter this morning. Page 743.

If you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are the chapters and the small numbers are the verses. Daniel chapter 6.

Let me read this text for us. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom.

And over them, three high officials of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give an account so that the king might suffer no loss.

[1 : 0 5] Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint 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, Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, O king Darius, live forever.

All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petition to any god or man for 30 days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and injunction.

[2 : 1 3] When Daniel knew that the document 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.

Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, O king, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within 30 days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?

The king answered and said, The thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked. Then they answered and said before the king, O Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.

Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed. Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions.

[3 : 31] The king declared to Daniel, May your God, whom you serve, continually deliver you. And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with a signet of his lord's, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him.

And also before you, O king, I have done no harm. Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that 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.

[4 : 35] And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions, they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble in 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. Let's pray together. Lord, we ask that you would grant us in these few moments as we've come before you, and as we are now attending to your word.

God, we ask that by your Holy Spirit, you would allow our hearts to be open to what this text has to say to us. Lord, you tell us that your word is living and active and sharp like a sword, that it burrows down into the deep recesses of our souls, and Lord, shows us what lies there.

[6 : 04] So God, we pray that that would be the case this morning, that you would uncover our hearts before you, help us to see you, Lord Jesus, in your glory and in your grace, and in worshiping you, Lord, may we be changed more and more into your image.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, friends, I wonder if you've ever been in the place where you've had to stand alone.

In the fourth century, the church leader Athanasius was in a place a bit like that. In his day, something called Arianism, a teaching that Jesus wasn't fully God, that is of one substance with the Father, but a lesser created being.

This false teaching in Athanasius' day seemed to have swallowed up the entire church. The emperor, the leading bishops of the day, the whole world, it seemed, was on the side of Arius.

And so Athanasius, standing up for biblical faith, seemed at times to be standing alone. Five times he was exiled from his home city and his church where he was a bishop for holding fast to the truth of the full Godhead of Jesus.

[7 : 26] A saying was even coined, Athanasius contramundum, Athanasius against the world. Now there were others holding fast to orthodox biblical faith in Jesus.

Of course, Athanasius wasn't the only Christian literally standing up, but at times it must have felt like he was standing alone. In our passage this morning, this famous passage of Daniel and the lion's den, we see Daniel doing just that, courageously standing alone.

Remaining faithful even when it seems like his whole world has turned against him. You know, many of us in our workplace or at school or even among our own families, we're in a setting where many or most of our coworkers or friends or family members don't share our faith in Christ.

What does it look like to be faithful there? Especially when it feels like we're standing alone. Well, let's consider three points that we see here in Daniel chapter 6.

The first point is this. I think we see quite clearly here that this text is teaching us that God's people will often face unjust opposition. You see this in verses 1 through 9 as the plot begins to unfold.

[8 : 51] Now, it's good to keep in mind that at this point in the story of Daniel, remember that the Persian Empire has just taken over Babylon. So this is an entirely new regime, a new kingdom, and they're setting up a new administration.

And notice that Daniel is given a position of great responsibility and authority in the new government. He's one of three high officials who oversee the 120 regional officials, the satraps.

And Darius is even intending to put Daniel at the head of those three. In other words, Daniel is slated to become the sole prime minister. So notice then how Daniel is approaching his life in exile here.

In this very secular pagan city, in this very, in some ways, hostile environment to biblical faith under a pagan regime, Daniel is doing what God, through the prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 29, told his people to do.

Seek the welfare of the city to which I have sent you into exile, God said. And pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare.

[10 : 02] That's Jeremiah 29, 7. Daniel's using the gifts and talents God has given him to seek the welfare, the peace, the shalom of the city.

And this is in many ways the call upon God's people wherever we are. To seek the good, the flourishing of those around us. To have a posture toward our city, toward our schools, toward our families that seeks their good.

Even when many elements in those places are adverse to faith in God. And for Daniel, at first, this faithful service of his results in what?

In the favor of Darius the king. We see in the rest of the chapter, too, how highly Darius regards Daniel. But then, just as Daniel is about to get his promotion, his co-workers begin to plot against him.

Jealous that Daniel is being given such a high-ranking position. They devise a plot to bring him down. But they find that it's not so easy to do that at first.

[11 : 14] So they crack into the files on his hard drive. And they tap his phones. And they corner his old interns and assistants. But they can't seem to find any dirt on this Daniel.

Imagine, here is a man, probably about 70 years old at this point. He's been in civil service and politics for nearly his entire life. And he has a clean record. But there's one area where they know they can trap him.

In his relationship with his God. So they trick Darius into signing this law. For 30 days, no one can pray to anyone but you, Darius.

And, oh, by the way, make it binding according to the law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked. And notice how they come with flattery in these verses. Oh, king, live forever.

We should just be praying to you for about a month, right? Wouldn't that be a great way to start off your kingdom? Notice how they come with much deception. We're all agreed. Of course, I'm pretty sure Daniel wasn't all agreed.

[12 : 29] And so the trap is set. Now, I should mention here, kind of as a sidebar in passing, that this chapter presents some interesting historical questions.

The first, as we sort of get into the weeds here, is the identity of this man named Darius. You know, outside the book of Daniel, we don't have any other historical records yet that speak of a ruler named Darius who lived before or during the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

There was a king named Darius a couple of generations after Cyrus, but none that we know of before or during Cyrus' reign. And this has led some scholars to view the book of Daniel as untrustworthy when it comes to getting its history straight.

But, you know, I think it's worth remembering what we saw last week in chapter 5. For many years, scholars thought that Belshazzar didn't exist either and made some fairly confident pronouncements to that regard. But then in the 19th century, archaeologists discovered a number of cuneiform tablets that give just undeniable and ample evidence that Belshazzar was indeed a real person in the Babylonian dynasty, just as Daniel describes.

So I think we should be cautious to pronounce on these things too quickly with respect to Darius. In fact, just a week or so ago, I was over at the Babylonian collection at Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, and the very gracious host there was telling us how they just keep unearthing these cuneiform tablets from the Middle East, and there's just stacks and stacks of them to be read and interpreted.

[14 : 02] So who knows what we're going to turn up? Interestingly, it seems like the Bible's always confirmed by these discoveries. So I think we should be a little humble as we come to the text.

But with the evidence available to us, it seems that there are two reasonable options for understanding who Darius is. On the one hand, he could be a general who served as sort of a sub-king under Cyrus, along with him, over this particular province of Babylon.

Some scholars have proposed that. On the other hand, some think that the name Darius might have actually been a throne name, another name for Cyrus himself. In that case, the last verse of our chapter here should be translated this way.

So this Daniel, prospered during the reign of Darius, that is the reign of Cyrus, the Persian. In other words, clarifying who this Darius is.

Darius, that is Cyrus, the Persian, which is a totally legitimate translation. The Hebrew word for and can often function like that. So either are reasonable options, but, you know, whereas the identity of Darius might not be completely clear to us, it's much too hasty to say that he never existed or that the book of Daniel simply gets its history all wrong.

[15 : 13] The second interesting question is this issue of the law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked. A number of times it comes up in this chapter. It's a key part of the plot.

Was there ever really such a thing? It sounds a bit odd that a king couldn't revoke a law that he had made. But if you think about it, such a custom ensured that everyone was treated equally under the law.

It made it so that the king couldn't willy-nilly just revoke laws or bypass them depending on whether he liked the person or not or whether it was convenient for his situation. It was a way to ensure justice, actually.

And again, there are historical precedents in the ancient Near East for this sort of thing, so there are good reasons to think that Daniel's giving us good historical information here. Which then leads us back to our main point.

The reality is that what we find happened to Daniel can often happen to us. There can be envy and malice and hatred aimed against us.

[16 : 27] Not that we go seeking it. Not that we go looking for it. But it comes. And perhaps no one will plot to have you murdered because you're about to be made prime minister.

I get that. But you know, there are plenty of Christians worldwide who suffer under unjust laws and discriminatory policies just because they are Christians. For most of its history, the church has been a suffering church.

And I think the initial lesson to learn here in Daniel chapter 6 is a lesson of the heart. It's a warning against putting our trust in human approval or in human institutions.

You see, Daniel started out under the new Persian administration gaining lots of favor, lots of approval, being handed a position of immense influence. Things were going great. But then things turned on a dime.

And not even Darius was able to help him. He was tricked into signing a bad law and was powerless. And you know, as we go about seeking the good of our city, of our neighborhoods, it's not a bad thing to be appreciated, to be acknowledged, to be recognized, to find favor.

[17 : 56] It's not a bad thing to work through good institutions. But realize that such approval is a terrible place to put your hope.

It's a shaky foundation to build upon. It's one that will be washed away sooner or later. But not your trust in princes, the psalmists often say.

But if the first thing we see here in Daniel chapter 6 is that we can often expect unjust opposition, the next point shows us how to respond to it.

So here's point number two. The right way to respond is often quiet faithfulness. We see this in verse 10. The law has been signed.

If anyone prays to anyone other than Darius, they'll be thrown to the lions and Daniel knowing that the document had been signed. Isn't that a great line? In full knowledge, he goes home, he goes upstairs and same as always, he prays.

[19 : 09] On the one hand, he doesn't make a scene. He doesn't march to the king's throne room and put up a protest. But on the other hand, he doesn't hide.

He doesn't cower in fear. He just does what he always does. Now, we've seen various responses in the book of Daniel to navigating life in exile, life in a pluralistic world, haven't we?

Remember, in chapter 1, Daniel and his friends try to find a creative third way. They respectfully negotiate an agreement about what foods they will and will not eat from the king's table. In chapter 3, however, remember, Daniel's three friends are forced to make a bold confession, a public demonstration to resist the king right to his face.

But here in chapter 6, Daniel isn't negotiating a third way and he isn't sort of doing bold, public defiance.

No, he's choosing the path of quiet, deliberate faithfulness. Friends, it's helpful to see those various paths, isn't it? It's helpful to see that there isn't always a one-size-fits-all response.

[20 : 29] And part of our community life together is prayerfully discerning how we should respond. Sometimes the right path is the path of quiet, deliberate faithfulness, which sometimes is the most courageous path of all.

Now, if you think about it, there are lots of responses Daniel might have taken here. I mean, put yourself in his shoes. How might you have responded? On the one hand, just think, you know, it struck me as I was thinking about this chapter compared to chapter 3, a few weeks ago, I preached on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, and here I am three weeks later preaching on Daniel in the lion's den, and as I was scratching my head this week thinking, what am I going to say that's different from what I said three weeks ago?

These are kind of the same story, aren't they? Both guys get in trouble with the law, they both get thrown into things that try to kill them, and they both come out. All right. But you know, it struck me that one of the differences between that story and this story is that for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter 3, they were young men.

They were just sort of breaking their way into the public sphere, coming into their own. And yet Daniel here is an old man.

He's in his 70s probably at this point in his life. He's run his race for many years. He's been faithfully following God in exile for nearly his whole life.

[22 : 00] And now, as he's reaching his final years, God puts him in a position where he has to make a choice between having his quiet time or getting thrown to the lions.

He has to endure his entire department at work. the most powerful men in the empire turning against him and literally plotting his death. You know, just think of how Daniel could have responded to that.

Really, God? After all these years of faithfulness, you're going to throw me into a lion's den? That's my reward for 50 years of service?

You know, some people get a gold watch. I get to be lunch for a beast at the bottom of a pit. Friend, let me ask you, what do you think you deserve for following God?

A comfortable ride through life? Health? Comfort? Ease? Deep down, don't we all feel like God owes us something?

[23 : 20] Well, friend, he doesn't owe you. That is the truth of the matter. God owes us nothing. And Daniel realized that.

His years of faithfulness didn't make him proud or make him think that he deserved anything from the holy creator God of the universe.

But those years of faithfulness, those years of praying three times a day, those years of having his character shaped through decision after decision after decision in the hard work of the mission that God had given him.

His years of faithfulness made him all the more trusting in God. Not thinking that God owed him anything, but trusting and knowing that God was good.

And it made him more trusting in God's sovereign ability to save. Daniel had seen empires come and go, enemies rise and fall, and here he was watching God's kingdom continue to endure.

[24 : 49] Well, even if we wouldn't have been shaking our fist at God, I think it might have been tempting to sort of change things up a bit for my normal prayer routine.

Wouldn't you? I mean, it's only 30 days, right? Maybe I'll just pray somewhere where no one notices. Maybe I'll just sit quietly on my couch, pretend like I'm reading this Pottery Barn catalog that I got in the mail, and just sort of pray quietly in my mind.

And whoever ends up peeking through the window will just see me shopping for a new table or something. No need to get unnecessarily in trouble, right? I mean, let's just let this whole thing blow over.

No need to be legalistic about prayer times and places and postures, wouldn't you say? After all, doesn't God know what we need even before we ask? And so on.

But you know, here's the problem with that strategy. If Daniel had happened to fly under the radar for those 30 days, the following month, his enemies would have just devised some other strategy to get rid of him.

[26 : 03] The word came by agreement in verses 6 and 11 and 15, it's the same word that we find in Psalm 2 that means noisily assembled or even raged.

Why do the nations rage, the psalmist says, and the people's plot in vain against the Lord and against his anointed one? Daniel knew that they had it in for him.

And it wasn't going to stop. So he wasn't going to play their game. He wasn't going to keep ducking and dodging. For his entire life in exile, it seems, Daniel had prayed facing Jerusalem.

Just as Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 8 had said the people would. Daniel, you see, knows where he's at in God's redemptive history. And he knows how to act in line with the word of God.

And this threat isn't going to stop him. We must obey God rather than men, the apostle said in Acts chapter 5.

[27 : 10] And for Daniel, he's ready to face the opposition when it comes. And that brings us to our third point, isn't it?

Where do we get the courage to stand like this? It's great to talk about daring to be a Daniel, that how many of us cower?

You know, the contrast between Daniel and Darius is striking in verses 16 through 18, isn't it? I think there's something of our hearts there. Daniel is confident and courageous, and there is Darius, anxious, fearful, sleepless.

Two men, both old, both at the top of their professions, and yet one is weak while the other is strong. There's that thick irony here, is there not?

Darius was happy to receive prayer as if he were a god in the opening of the chapter, and now he sits powerless before his own law. Darius sits in the middle of his royal palace and has no peace.

[28 : 15] And yet Daniel, stripped of his office, thrown into the pit, a stone rolled over the mouth of the den and sealed with the king's own seal so no one can tamper with it, and no one can come secretly in the night and rescue him.

Daniel descends into death, and he does so with confidence. How do we get such confidence?

This brings us to our third point. The courage to stand alone ultimately comes from seeing what God has done, not just through Daniel, but through the true and better Daniel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we know how this story ends, right? God rescues Daniel from the lion's den. An angel comes and shuts the lion's mouths, and Daniel emerges from the pit without any kind of harm, without a single scratch.

And that's meant to encourage us as if to say, God promises to preserve and vindicate those who cling to him in trust. Daniel clinged to God as he went down, and God rescued him.

[29 : 35] And indeed, as the history of Israel rolls on, we see that this is what God will do for the people of Israel as a whole in Daniel's own day. Cyrus, the Persian king, will issue a decree in 538, probably about a year after the events of this chapter, and he will send the Jews back to Judea to rebuild Jerusalem and to build the temple.

The whole people of God will emerge from the lion's den of exile, and they will be brought up from the pit, and they will be miraculously brought home.

But you know, as the book of Daniel unfolds, we realize that this promise of God's protection and vindication isn't necessarily a guarantee of physical safety in this life.

Starting next week, we embark on the second half of this book. And chapter 7 opens with a vision of four horrifying beasts, a lion's den of nightmarish proportions.

And Daniel is told that after the return from exile, persecution will come, and suffering, and even death for many of God's people. But the hope of emerging from the lion's den in chapter 6 becomes an even greater hope in the face of all these things in chapter 12.

[31 : 14] As the persecution fires intensify for God's people, as Daniel sees it coming, the hope becomes even greater. And as this book comes to an end, it's not just hope of rescue from death, but rescue through and after death.

God shows Daniel the hope of the resurrection, that God will undo death and evil, that he will defang the greatest of lions, that he will release his people from the greatest exile, the exile of their sin.

But how will God accomplish such a thing? Think again of Darius in our chapter. He's caught in quite a dilemma, isn't he?

How will he, Darius, the king, save his subject Daniel, whom he loves, and yet who has broken his law? How will he save the one who has broken his law?

The story of the Bible tells us that God also faces such a task. How will God save the people who have broken his law?

[32 : 44] Wasn't that the whole question of exile? The people had rebelled and God sent them away. But of course, Darius was a weak king who signed a stupid law.

God, however, is the perfect king. Utterly good in every way. And his laws are pure and perfectly just.

God's laws are so just and so right that if you and I were to live our whole lives by them, you know, it wouldn't feel like obedience.

It would feel like freedom. Like the joy of riding a bike downhill, lifting your feet from the pedals, feeling the wind rush in your face.

that's what it would have been like for us creatures to live by our creator's perfect law. The law of liberty as the New Testament often describes it.

[33 : 53] But instead of loving God and living in the rightness and the freedom of his good laws, have we not broken them again and again? Have we not chosen our own laws and our own ways and our own paths?

And now instead of enjoying freedom and life, we stand under the just sentence of death. And so how will God save the people who have broken his law?

How will he remain true to his holiness and justice and utter goodness? a goodness that can't countenance evil and still extend his mercy and his grace?

You know, Darius was caught off guard by his dilemma, wasn't he? Surprised, the conspirators say. We caught Daniel praying, time for the lion's den.

And how does Darius respond? He's panicked. He labors all day. He fasts all night. And still, he can't find a solution.

[35 : 16] He has no plan. But friends, God was not surprised in any way. from all eternity, God had a perfect plan.

And when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters.

Jesus Christ united himself to our humanity in the incarnation. God took on flesh and he lived a totally blameless life as our representative, fulfilling God's law for us to give us a perfect record with the Father.

But then one night while Jesus was praying, much like Daniel, an envious mob arrested him and came before him with malicious accusations.

And they dragged him before a weak political ruler who cowered in fear. And Jesus was crucified, thrown to the lions.

[36 : 42] But unlike Daniel, Jesus didn't come out unscathed. The claws and the fangs of sin and death ripped down and he died.

And his body was buried in a tomb. And that tomb, too, was sealed with a stone. But that wasn't the end.

On the third day, Christ rose from the dead to prove that his death was the perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins. You see, when Daniel came up out of the lion's den, everyone standing around got to see that this man was innocent.

How else would he come out? But friends, when Christ emerged from the tomb, it was a demonstration not just of his innocence, but of the fact that he now had paid for the sins of all who would repent and believe.

That his righteousness could now be given as a gift to those who would come to him. How does God save those who have broken his law? Through Jesus Christ, who went down into the lion's den in our place and emerged victorious in the resurrection to reconcile us to God.

[38 : 02] Friends, that's our confidence. That this God has rescued us. this is the message that Daniel wants ringing in our ears in this carefully constructed book before we launch out into chapters that might scare us.

He wants us to know that God rescues. And that gives us great courage to stand. This chapter begins and ends with a royal decree, does it not?

Darius begins by demanding prayer to himself alone as God. What a foolish thing. And yet Darius ends by commending praise to God alone as God.

And this is the reason why. 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 saved Daniel from the power of the lions and who through Christ will rescue us as well.

[39 : 19] Friends, let's pray. our Lord, we confess that often we are so afraid.

Lord, we ask that you would meet us this morning in our fears and in our doubts with the great confidence that comes from knowing Christ our Savior. Savior. And Lord, would you grant us persevering faith?

Would you help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of you, God our Father, and who promises to blaze that trail and to bring us with him in his train.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.