



gracefellowship

Daniel: Thriving in Exile
November 8, 2020
God: The Divine Rescuer

Thank Clift and Andy for speaking during my Sabbatical and carrying on our study through the book of Daniel.
Thank Yulia for sharing about Operation Christmas Child last week and helping us kick off our ministry as a receiving center for OCC this month.

Pray

This morning we will be looking at one of the most well known stories in the Bible. However, just because you are probably familiar with this story, I think there are some specific things God wants to show us today to help us understand how to live for Him in perilous times. But it's also a story about God's power to rescue those who are faithful to Him no matter the circumstances we face.

Two weeks ago Clift walked us through Daniel chapter 5 and at the end of chapter we saw a major shift in power take place. King Belshazzar held a party and brought in gold and silver goblets his Father had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem to serve his guests. During the party a hand appeared in the room and began writing on the wall. The writing said this: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Daniel was brought in to interpret the words and told King Belshazzar the meaning: God has numbered your days, you have been found wanting and your kingdom is going to be divided. Then in Daniel 5:30 we read:

:: Daniel 5:30

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Belshazzar didn't have a say in the matter. God had divinely appointed a change in kingdoms, just as Daniel had predicted when he interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue. Kingdoms rise and fall and God has ordained every single event in His divine power to accomplish His eternal purposes.

:: Isaiah 46:9-10

9 Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'

This is why we don't have to fear changes in political leadership every 4 or 8 years. The sovereignty of God in the affairs of government should bring us peace even in the middle of our own election uncertainty. None of what takes place in our world catches God off guard. As Christians, we can have the perspective that God is unfolding His plan in a perfect way for His divine purposes with the end goal of His eternal Kingdom being brought to the earth where we will one day enjoy the perfect rule and reign of King Jesus forever!

As we look at Daniel this morning we will see a shift in power brings changes in the way the government in Babylon operates- and not everyone is happy about it! Imagine that!

:: Daniel 6:1-9

1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

5 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."

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever!"

7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers 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 thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

8 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 Persians, which cannot be repealed."

9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Even in a new administration Daniel is elevated to a place of incredible power- one of three administrators- over the whole land. But it doesn't stop there. Verse 3 says Daniel so distinguished himself by his exceptional qualities that the king

planned to set him over the whole kingdom! Daniel doesn't seek this opportunity or lobby for it, he just distinguishes himself by his character and values as he goes about his job in the king's service.

That's a good word for all of us today as well; whatever you do in your life, your character will carry you through. Your talent and abilities might land you a job, but your character will keep you there.

:: Proverbs 10:9

9 Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.

We are going to see this play out as we dive deeper into this chapter. We are going to see the integrity of Daniel and the wickedness of the satraps under his authority. They do not approve of Daniel being given the kingdom- not because he isn't deserving, or that he wouldn't lead well- but because it means one of them would not be given that position!

4 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.

5 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."

Daniel is in his late 70s to mid 80s by this time. He has been in public office under the reign of multiple kings for 50+ years. But when these men want to accuse him before Darius there is no charge they can bring against him! It's pretty difficult to find someone in politics who has no skeletons in their closet after that many years of public service. But Daniel has lived under the authority of many different regimes with different strategies and governmental structures, yet he has thrived under them all. How is that? Because following the ways of God and living with integrity works no matter where you live or what you do professionally.

Finally these men give up looking for personal issues that can bury Daniel politically and determine "We will never find any basis for charges against this man unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

They knew Daniel had a love for God that went above his allegiance to the king and the kingdom, so that's where they decided to attack Daniel.

:: Daniel 6:6-9

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! *

7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers 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 thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

8 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 Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Commentary on these verses:

6. The Aramaic language is stronger than “went as a group.” It should better read, “They went as an angry, conspiring throng.”

7. This is a lie; Daniel had no knowledge of this plan, therefore 1/3 of the administrators did not agree with what was being presented. Their lack of integrity is shown in contrast to Daniel's consistent integrity and faithfulness.

These men, in an attempt to destroy Daniel, play to the vanity of the King. They aren't trying to make him a god, they put a time limit on the decree, but to say that he would act as a mediator between the people and the gods. Darius had just gained power in this region and as a way to unify the kingdom under his leadership they suggested everyone pray to (or through) him to whatever gods they worshiped.

I wonder how many Christians, with the threat of death being a reality, might say, “You know what? It's only 30 days! I can put off praying that long and let this decree pass and then I'll resume my normal prayers.”

Or at the very least you would say, “I'll just pray behind closed doors where no one will see.”

Daniel doesn't take that approach. He steadfastly continues the practices of worship he has always done.

:: Daniel 6:10-13

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.

11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?” The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

13 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.”

The decree didn't change Daniel's worship of God. He had faithfully prayed three times a day before the decree, with his windows open, looking toward Jerusalem, and he continued that practice even with the threat of death on the table. Daniel didn't file and appeal; he didn't go and argue with the king that he wasn't part of the political process; he just went home and acted in faithfulness to his godly convictions.

In the face of religious persecution Daniel doesn't question, doubt or worry, he acts in obedience to God.

The apostle Peter wrote to the early church, who were undergoing severe persecution for their faith in Jesus within the Roman empire. He wrote to encourage them to stand firm in their trials.

:: 1 Peter 4:12-17

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Peter was familiar with suffering for the name of Jesus in direct defiance of the rules of the religious leaders. After Jesus' resurrection the disciples were told not to teach in the name of Jesus or they would be beaten. But they were compelled to share the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Peter told the religious leaders, you determine what is better, for us to obey you, or obey God! So, they were beaten and went right back out into the city telling people about the gift of salvation that is found in Jesus!

In Daniel's case, the administrators and satraps observe Daniel praying- because he wasn't trying to hide his faithfulness to God- and they went to the king and told on Daniel: "he still prays three times a day."

We stand out when we bow to God and not men.

You can never go wrong when going against man's authority in order to submit to divine authority.

Now the king knows he has been duped! His vanity has gotten the best of him and it's going to cost the life of his most trusted administrator.

:: Daniel 6:14-17

14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

15 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 Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

17 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.

The king thought he had all the power in the world, even the power to have other people pray to him! But in the end, he couldn't stop Daniel from being thrown into the lion's den. In the end the king has to say to Daniel, "May your God, who you serve continually, rescue you!" The king was powerless to save Daniel, but we are about to see that God does not have these same limitations to His power!

Before we move forward, though, let me make a couple observations about Daniel that I hope help each of us when we face potentially difficult or even life-threatening situations because of our faith.

First...

Daniel stood up for what was right even though he stood alone.

In the story of the fiery furnace, when King Nebuchadnezzar commanded everyone to bow and worship the image he set up or be burned alive, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood up together and supported one another. Daniel didn't have any backup as he went through this religious persecution.

As a disciple of Jesus you must be willing to obey God's commands even if no one else stands with you!

Second...

Daniel understood that the power to obey God and stand for Him comes from a settled understanding that God is in sovereign control.

You'll notice that Daniel doesn't make an appeal for his life. He doesn't say anything at all. There isn't a word from Daniel from the time he is arrested until

the king seeks him out the next day to see if he survived the ordeal. Danile didn't have to say anything because he trusted God was in control. If his life was required of him, that was completely fine with Daniel. If God spared his life, that was great as well! There was nothing Daniel could do to change his course, but he had learned long ago to put his life in the hands of God and trust Him with the outcome.

“Christians do not fight for their beliefs by assaulting or killing but by dying!” – Tremper Longman III

Being willing to die for Jesus speaks louder than anything else you could possibly say or do!

:: Daniel 6:17-23

17 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.

18 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.

19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.

20 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?”

21 Daniel answered, “May the king live forever!

22 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.”

23 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.

What the king was powerless to do, God had no problem doing: Daniel was rescued from the lions! We are told that the king couldn't eat or sleep that night hoping Daniel would survive the lions. I like to read between the lines a little here- it's not in the story, so don't take this as gospel truth- but I like to imagine that while the king was sleepless and distraught in his comfortable palace, Daniel was getting a great night's sleep cuddle up with lions to keep him warm in that pit!

God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the beasts. That should be encouraging to you and me today. In our hardships and difficulties it is good to know that God has no limitations in His ability to rescue us! The king couldn't keep Daniel out of the lion's den. But the stone couldn't keep God's angel out of the den to protect Daniel!

Looking forward to the NT, this is true of Jesus going to the grave. When they placed a rock over the front of Jesus's tomb to keep his followers from stealing the body of Jesus that wasn't enough to keep God's angels from moving the stone and letting Jesus walk back out, alive in the power of the Holy Spirit, after three days! God is not limited in His power to rescue us from our trials and circumstances- even when death is a real possibility!

Now, there are some who say that this wasn't a miracle, the lions just weren't hungry, or maybe they had been fed earlier that day. When Daniel is taken out of the pit the king gets another idea. He couldn't change his law about prayer, but he could punish the people who purposefully tricked him.

:: Daniel 6:24

24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' 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.

This is just me...but I would say those were some hungry lions!

:: Proverbs 28:10

10 Whoever leads the upright along an evil path will fall into their own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.

Daniel's faith and obedience to God now leads the king to write a letter to his entire kingdom. This is the third time we have seen this in the book of Daniel. Look at the confession of King Darius:

:: Daniel 6:25-28

25 Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly!

26 "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. 27 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."

28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

I don't know what you are facing right now in your life, but I want to offer you a final word of encouragement today: Remain faithful to God!

It may not look like it from your vantage point, but God is in control!

- God preserved Daniel from his rivals and He can preserve you!
- God empowered Daniel through political injustice and he can hold you!

- God saved Daniel from the mouths of the lions and He can save you!
Remain faithful to God! In life or death He will take care of you!

Pray