

## Daniel in the Lion's Den

Daniel 6:1-28

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If you have your Bibles I would invite you to turn with me to Daniel, chapter 6, as we continue our study in this great book of the Old Testament. Daniel, chapter 6. Let us hear God's holy and inspired and inerrant word.

### Daniel 6

We have noted all along the theme of God's sovereignty in the first half of the book of Daniel. Daniel 1 through 6 constitutes the first half of the book. Daniel 7 through 12 turns its focus elsewhere. Not unlike the book of Revelation, we find a focus on the battle between God's people and the dominions of Satan in the world in the first half of the book. Whereas in the second half of the book we pull back and see the bigger picture of the battle between Christ and Satan himself which forms the backdrop for the battle between God's people and their enemies in this world.

So far, God's sovereignty has been set forth in these chapters in various ways. His sovereignty was seen in His protection of the young men in chapter 1. His sovereignty was seen in giving Daniel the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. His sovereignty was seen in sparing the friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace in chapter 3. His sovereignty was seen in reducing Nebuchadnezzar to nothing in chapter 4. His sovereignty was seen in His destruction of Belshazzar in chapter 5. And here in chapter 6, His sovereignty is shown over Darius, over those who oppose Daniel, and His sovereignty is shown in sparing Daniel in the lion's den.

In fact this theme of God's sovereignty is reiterated in the very final confession of the first half of the book of Daniel. It comes from the lips of the pagan king, Darius, and it is basically the confession that Daniel's God is the living God whose kingdom will never be destroyed. That theme we've said all along is the great theme of the book of Daniel. If Daniel intends to comfort us, and it does, it comforts us with the truth that we serve the God of whose kingdom there will never be an end. And if Daniel intends to encourage us to obedience even

against persecution, it intends to do it by convincing us that we serve the God of whose kingdom there will be no end. And if Daniel calls us to sell sacrificial action in the face of persecution and in being a minority in a pagan culture, it does it by calling us to remember that we serve the God of whose kingdom there is no end.

The story of Daniel, chapter 6, takes place in the reign of yet another king, King Darius. That is in itself an indication of the theme of the book. Daniel is still around. First there was Nebuchadnezzar, then there was Belshazzar, now there's Darius. Kings of Babylon come and go, but God's kingdom persists and Daniel is the living embodiment. He's the picture of the durability of God's kingdom. Who would have thought that a court here could have survived the tumultuous successions from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar and now to Darius. This kingdom has experienced a total takeover by the Median-Persian Empire and yet Daniel is still around. Daniel's God is indeed the living God of whose kingdom there will never be an end. And as God's kingdom continues, so Daniel continues serving in the court in Babylon.

Now there's a historical problem here with the identity of Darius. Scholars disagree exactly on who this Darius is and the Bible passages that we have at our disposal don't give us a lot of help. There are basically three choices on the market as for who this Darius is. First of all, some have suggested that we just don't have a clue who this Darius is. There's a gap in our historical knowledge. There's no way to confirm exactly who he is and we just don't know who he is. Perhaps he's one of the governors of Babylon under the Median-Persian Empire. Perhaps it's another name for a king that we just don't know about. They simply argue we don't know who Darius is.

Others, like D. J. Wiseman, argue that 'Darius' is 'Cyrus the Persian'. Now there are various arguments for that. Some would argue since Darius II was explicitly called the Persian, he was called that because everyone knew that Darius I was a Mede. And so it was suggested that this person that is called in the kingship records of this land 'Cyrus' was actually the same person that Daniel refers to as 'Darius the Mede'. This would mean that when we get to chapter 6, verse 28, and you may want to look there, that instead of translating the word after the name Darius 'and', we would translate that word 'that is'. And that does happen in other places in the Bible, for instance in I Chronicles. So the verse would read this way: "So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius, that is, in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." I don't know. That may be a solution to the problem.

The other suggestion has been that Darius is actually the son of Ahasuerus who was the king of Babylon and who appointed him to be a governor over Babylon in the time of Cyrus. At any rate, these are all suggestions as to the person of Darius. The important thing, though, is to understand that Darius is the connecting point between chapters 5 and 6, and he's brought in at the very end of chapter 5.

We're told then at the very last of chapter 5 that Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of 62. So we have this 62-year old ruler of what is now the largest kingdom in the world ever known in history to that point in time. The Median-Persian Empire stretched all the way to the Atlantic Ocean past modern-day Libya, east towards India and north towards Turkey. It was a massive kingdom and, of course, because of that it had a tremendous need for efficient organization. So it's not surprising that the words of Daniel, chapter 6 reflect the fact that all sorts of bureaucratic officials were being appointed. In the ancient world where there were no cars or planes, no telegrams, telegraphs, computers, E-mail or anything else a massive administration would need to keep together an organization so far flung as the Median-Persian Empire and that's precisely what's reflected for us here in Daniel, chapter 6.

You will notice also that there are similarities between Daniel, chapter 3 and Daniel, chapter 6. It's not just similarity of language. You notice there's a repetition again. Just like in Daniel, chapter 3, there's a repetition of the various members of the Babylonian government who fell down and worshiped the golden image. So also in Daniel, chapter 6 there's a continual repetition of the fact that the laws of the Medes and the Persians cannot be revoked. It's almost mocking that. It's almost like saying, "Yeah, so what that your laws can't be revoked. Our God can overrule. We don't care that your laws can't be revoked. Watch what our God does." And so there's a use of repetition again and a certain irony, but the difference is whereas Daniel's friends were asked to commit a positive sin, a transgression, all that Daniel is asked to do is omit a duty for thirty days.

But as our *Catechism* says, based on the words of I John, "Sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God." That is, sin can happen both by omission or commission. It can happen by positively breaking the law. That's what we call a transgression. Or it can happen by refraining from doing what God has told us to do. This is the temptation that is put before Daniel.

One last thing, you may be wondering why there would be pits of lions around in the days of the Babylonians. Lion hunting was the sport of kings and those lions were kept not unlike foxes would have been kept until the Parliament of Great Britain just got rid of fox hunting. Lions would have been kept handy for the king to go hunting. It was also a nice way of disposing of undesirable members of your court, both in Persian times and in Roman times. And so this is not something that is undocumented in history.

### **I. Daniel is a picture of God's sovereignty in spiritual warfare.**

Now having given that as background, I want to first focus on the first nine verses of Daniel because here we see a picture of spiritual warfare. As the Lord Jesus himself faced the last great temptation in the Garden of Eden stretching into the hours of the cross where everything that He knew and loved was brought into

question. So also Daniel faces this last great temptation. We're never given a list of the great temptations of Daniel. There are no more listed for us in Daniel. This is the culmination of the temptations brought against him and it gives us a picture of spiritual warfare. I want you to notice the two themes that are spoken of clearly here in the first nine verses of the chapter.

First of all, what comes through very clearly is the insecurity of human government. Human government and political power, no matter how awesome it is, is basically insecure. Here we have, and we're told in verse 2, that these commissioners are appointed in order that the king would not suffer loss. Basically, we're being told that there was tremendous graft and corruption in the government in Babylon. Surprise, surprise! Sound familiar? And so the king has attempted to set up a government organization to prevent people from undercutting his rule and taking advantage of their power. You can imagine in an empire that spread as far as the empire of the Medes and Persians, and an empire as wealthy and as powerful, there would be plenty of room for people trying to line their own pockets. And it was precisely because of that fear that the king is appointing these commissioners. He is appointing commissioners to keep an eye on their own bureaucratic assistants. The insecurity of human government is seen there. But in the midst of this graft and corruption, there stood out one man. Daniel, a captive of Judea, and he was a man that Darius knew that he could trust. One thing comes through very clearly in this passage. Darius trusted Daniel from beginning to end, and even when Darius was caught in the trap of his own satraps, he never questioned the integrity of Daniel, and he always put his mind to how he could deliver Daniel, even though it would not be Darius in the end who would be Daniel's Savior.

The other theme that I want to point your attention to is the theme of the conflict of the kingdoms of darkness and light. The great theme of this chapter as of all the chapters of Daniel is the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. In this case, the conflict occurs between the law of God and the law of the Medes and Persians. That is the form of the conflict in this particular passage. Devious men attempt here to use the law of man to overcome God's kingdom, but they fail. And so we have a conflict between God and man, between His kingdom and the kingdom of this world.

Now I want you to note also several things about Daniel himself. Daniel is aged. You remember in the last chapter we've already said Daniel was well advanced in years. In fact, he was old enough to have been forgotten in the court of Belshazzar. But now, probably somewhere between 70 and 80 years old, he is described as a man with an extraordinary spirit. What a blessing it would have been for Daniel who had been left in relative obscurity to know that he was going to be brought out again to serve his God and not only to serve his God, but to serve Him in a climatic way towards the end of his life. Daniel is of the same generation as Darius. Darius is only ten years or so younger than Daniel. But throughout this passage, Daniel's integrity is constantly contrasted to Darius'

gullibility. He may be the king, but it is Daniel who has composure and grace in the midst of fire.

Notice also that this temptation that Daniel faces is part of a larger Satanic strategy. The satraps, yes, were tempting Daniel because they wanted to get him out of the way. But the satraps were just dupes for Satan. Satan himself was simultaneously working in the designs of these petty officials. Satan was simultaneously attempting to vex Daniel's soul and to use his own integrity as leverage against God's kingdom in the time of Darius. Satan had been attempting to wear out and wear down Daniel since the first day of the captivity and this is just yet another expression of Satan's assaults on Daniel. As Sinclair Ferguson has said, "Temptation to compromise is never an isolated incident in our spiritual life, but it is part of the larger strategy of Satan against us." And that reminds us, my friend, that temptation is not a battle, it's a war. Satan doesn't tempt you once and leave you alone, or twice and leave you alone. He is always looking for an opportunity to undo you. And so our victories in temptation are not victories so that we might immediately enter into rest. They are victories in order to prepare us for the next and the greater temptations which we will face. In fact, that is precisely how God in His gracious sovereignty uses the wilds of Satan in our lives. For God uses temptation to prepare us for the next assaults of Satan, to make us more faithful and more able to endure the slanders and attacks of the evil one. Listen to what Sinclair Ferguson says about this. "Many Christians mistaking one battle for the whole war have shielded from one attack but then, assuming the enemy has permanently retreated, they let their guard down and they have been defeated when the enemy comes in like a flood." In Daniel's life his greatest test did not come first. It came last. All the previous temptations of Daniel were simply to prepare him for his last great conflict.

Notice in this passage, particularly in verses 4 and 7, the guile and the cunning and the deception of these court officials. You get a picture of precisely what King Darius was trying to protect himself from as you see these men deal with Daniel. This, in and of itself, reminds us in contrast with the integrity of Daniel, that these men in their attempt to bring about their own desires operated with deceit. Notice that all opposition to God is inherently deceptive. Look at verse 7. Notice first of all in their opposition to Daniel they lied. Their words in verse 7 read as follows: "All the commissioners, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together." Daniel had consulted with them, Daniel had agreed with this? The greatest commissioner in the land had consulted with them on this and agreed? The first words out of their mouth to the king are a lie. They lie because you cannot oppose God without deception or without self-deception.

Again, note that they concocted a scheme which seemed to serve Darius' interest but it was really designed to serve their own interest. They were not looking out for their Lord and Master. They were looking out for themselves. And again, this incident is just a part of the greater conflict between darkness and

light and that conflict is going to become more apparent in Daniel, chapters 7 through 12. And so this chapter forms a beautiful segue and preface in prelude to that battle between the forces of darkness and light which Daniel displays for us in chapters 7 through 12. It has been said that few great serve their own interest. They were not looking out for their Lord and Master. They were looking out for themselves. And again, this incident is just a part of the greater conflict between darkness and light and that conflict is going to become more apparent in Daniel, chapters 7 through 12.

And so this chapter forms a beautiful segue and preface and prelude to that battle between the forces of darkness and light which Daniel displays for us in chapters 7-12. It has been said that few great men finish well, not so for Daniel. In this, the hour of his temptation, we can see Daniel savoring the opportunity to die for his Lord if necessary. I would have been wringing my hands, if this were me, but Daniel immediately senses that his whole life leads up to this moment. This is the moment that he can stand for his God. This is the moment that he can testify of his loyalty to his God, and this is the moment that God, the God of Israel, can display His glory, and Daniel cannot wait. Is that where our hearts are? Are we focusing the whole of our lives on that moment where we have the chance to stand for God? Daniel is preparing himself to die well. Are we? That's an issue for us, isn't it? Not simply to live for God today, but to be prepared for that tomorrow, whatever it is, where we will have the choice between faith and doubt, between loyalty to God and self protection. Which will be our choice?

Let me remind you, as we begin this passage, of a few of the things we've seen so far. We've seen that the book of Daniel, from the very first chapter, stresses God's sovereignty. In fact, the theme of the very first half of the book can be summarized in the words of the pagan King, Darius, "Daniel's God is the living God whose kingdom will never be destroyed." That truth is driven home in all its practical implications over and over in the book of Daniel, because God knows how difficult it is to believe in that sovereignty when you are being pressed against by a culture that hates you. And so He continues to repeat that so that we will be able to embrace that truth and all the comfort that comes with it. We've said before that as you come to chapter 6, you have yet another king on the scene. Daniel's still around, but he's on the third round of kings of Babylon. A great nation, a great empire, a great culture, and yet Daniel remains. Kings come and kings go, but Daniel remains. We also said that Persia, in the time of Daniel, was the greatest empire in the world, and was in great need for efficient organization, and that would have been one of the reasons why all of these satraps and administrators would have been appointed by Darius. Its boundaries were far flung to the east toward India, to the west toward what is modern day Libya, to the north toward Turkey, and so there was a great need for men to administrate that kingdom. And apparently, we learn in the very first verse of chapter 6, there were a lot of bureaucrats in those days who didn't have the best of character. So, the king needed people to overlook these bureaucrats to make sure they didn't undercut his power or steal from him. As we studied the first nine

verses of Daniel last week, we saw there a picture of spiritual warfare. It's the last great temptation that Daniel experienced, or at least that is recorded in this book about Daniel. His life had been a series of tests. The Lord had put him through many, many circumstances in which his allegiance to the Lord was proven, and in Daniel 6 we come to the final, the culminating point in that series of tests. And we learn by that fact alone that temptation is not a battle, it's a war.

In Daniel verses 10-17, Daniel's response to the trap of his bureaucratic colleagues is revealed. Daniel's trustworthiness was impeccable, and so his colleagues had not been able to find anything with regard to his conduct in the court to use as an accusation against him. So, they devise this plan. They knew that only if they could find something in the law of Daniel's law that would conflict with the law of the Medes and Persians would they have some means of entrapping Daniel. So, they persuaded Darius to sign this ban on prayer to anyone else but himself, and to put it in the form of an injunction for a period of 30 days. Then, they went to Daniel's house to wait. Daniel was faced in this context with the specific temptation to compromise. You remember we said that Daniel's friends had been asked to do something positively against God's law. They had been asked to worship an idol. In this case, Daniel's temptation is not to do something which is positively against God's law, but to just refrain from something that God calls on us to do in the word. Daniel's temptation is to a sin of omission. Their temptation was to commit a sin of commission. In that sense, Daniel's temptation was much more gut wrenching, because it would have been so easy for Daniel to have foregone prayer for 30 days, and no one would have known, except, of course, those officials who had laid the trap for him. And, more importantly, Daniel's God.

In this passage, in verses 10-17, we see a picture of spiritual resolution and growth. If the first verses of this chapter lay before us the scene of spiritual warfare, here we see a picture of Daniel's own spiritual resolution, and the grace of God works out in Daniel's life as he steadily perseveres in the face of death. I want you to look, in particular, at verse 10. Here, we see Daniel's response to the injunction. When Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

## **II. Daniel's decisiveness.**

The first thing I want you to note there is Daniel's decisiveness. The minute Daniel heard about the injunction, He kept on doing exactly what he had been doing. There was not the slightest hesitation in Daniel's heart or mind or conduct as to what he ought to do not that this injunction had been made against prayer. Daniel knows his God, and he shows it in his decisiveness in this circumstance of crisis.

The second thing I would like you to note comes in the very last phrase of verse 10, and that is that Daniel continued the practice he had been doing previously. We are told that he continued to pray three times a day as was his custom. Daniel did not go out and plaquards and billboards and spread his prayer mat out in the middle of the street in Babylon. Daniel just continued to do exactly what he was doing. He was not trying to make a publicity statement. Daniel was simply continuing the godly pattern of devotion that he had carried on his entire life. And that's a witness to us as well. Sometimes we feel like, when our faith is challenged, that we need to make some sort of public display in response. But Daniel simply continued to do precisely what he had been doing before. This tells us, first of all, that Daniel's heart was really right. He wasn't praying simply so that people would think that he was a godly man, nor was he praying simply to make a point. Sometimes I worry about that, in our culture which battles against us, sometimes we are tempted to do certain acts of piety in a ritual way in public in order to make a statement, rather than to commune with the living God. Such has been the case, I think, in the battle for school prayer. Oftentimes we are tempted simply to make a public expression of prayer in the context of the public school in order to make a statement, and Daniel does not do that here. Daniel simply keeps on exactly what he had done before.

I want you to think for a few moments, "How might we have rationalized this situation away?" Think of it. God has put us in a situation of power, as one of the greatest administrators in the greatest empire in the world, and we could be thinking, "Lord, surely You didn't put me in this position so that I would straightway lose my life? I mean, Lord, maybe if I just go underground a bit with my praying for the next few days, and don't follow my normal pattern, then there would be no way anyone would find out what I've been doing. And that way, I would be able to continue to have influence for You in the kingdom. That's it Lord, I would have influence for You in the kingdom." Think also, of the limited duration of this ban. If the President of the United States banned prayer for 30 days, how many times would we miss? For Daniel, that meant at least 90 long prayers. What would it mean for us? Daniel, furthermore, knew that the end of the exile was near. He tells us that in Daniel 9:2. Daniel had read the prophet Jeremiah. He knew that the end of the exile was only years away. Think of this temptation. "Lord, I have been praying my whole life in exile that I would see the land of Israel again as a free man. And if I've read my book of Jeremiah right, this exile is about to come to an end. Surely, surely You're not going to bring me this far and have me lose my life because of a silly injunction by a king that will only last for 30 days." Think of all the rationalization that could have run through Daniel's mind in this circumstance, and yet, there is not the slightest hesitation in this man. Sinclair Ferguson says this, "With equal degrees of wisdom and courage, Daniel saw through the wiles of his adversaries. Protected by the whole armor of God, he stood firm on the evil day for which all his previous tests had been a preparation. He understood that across the years, God had graciously prepared him for moments such as this. Rather than view the situation as one in which he could excusably opt out of faithfulness, he saw it as a climax of his



faithfulness. Past faithfulness was not meant to be a compensation for present unfaithfulness. Past faithfulness was simply a preparation for more faithfulness.” As we said last week, Daniel could not wait to put his life on the line for his Lord.

### **III. The king's response.**

Now, notice the contrast between Daniel's response in verse 10, and the king's response in verse 14. “Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel, even until the sun set, he kept exerting himself to rescue him.” Here is Daniel in perfect calmness, continuing in his pattern of devotion to the Lord, and here is the king of the greatest empire on earth, fretting over what he can do. Powerless before the human situation that he even he has fallen prey to. It is a picture of the power that a man who is weak, but strong in Christ has, and the weakness of a man who is strong in the world, but weak in the things of God. It is an utter contrast. The mighty monarch reduced to fretting, but Daniel, under the condemnation of death, calm, composed, faithful to the Lord. And it's a picture of the difference between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of our Lord.

And there are several lessons to be learned from Daniel's practice of prayer in response to the attack of these men. First of all, I'd like you to note inverse 10 that Daniel prayed according to God's promises. We're told that Daniel prayed with his window open to Jerusalem. This apparently had been Daniel's practice, and was apparently the practice of a number of the exiles. There was nothing superstitious about this practice, as when some members of some churches turn east toward Jerusalem to pray. This was simply a reminder to Daniel of the fact that Jerusalem stood for the place where God had drawn near to His people. The presence of God was symbolized in Jerusalem. It was a reminder of God's promises to Israel, a reminder of the prophecies of Jeremiah, and a reminder of the presence of God. Sinclair Ferguson says, “By praying toward Jerusalem, Daniel was focusing his mind, his emotion, and his will on the power and promises of God that were symbolized by that city.” Daniel was reminding himself of the words of Scripture, of the promises of God, the power of God, the presence of God, and so he prayed in accordance with God's promises.

Notice also in verses 10 and 16, it is made clear that Daniel's prayer life was characterized by regularity. We're told in verse 10 that he prayed three times a day. When the king addresses him, in verse 16, we're told that he prayed continually. That was Daniel's pattern. His prayer life was a life of regularity. May I say, that the kind of spontaneity that Daniel manifested in his prayer, only comes about with discipline. There is no freedom and spontaneity in prayer without discipline in prayer. In fact, it is not unlike a great athlete. Oftentimes athletes do things, and they make those things look so easy, and we go out ourselves on the field and it somehow doesn't work that way. Michael Jordan makes basketball look easy. When you get my little dumpy body out on the

basketball court, however, it doesn't look so easy. But Michael Jordan's native talents are not the answer alone as to why he makes it look easy. Hundreds of hours, thousands of hours of practice have gone in to this. Discipline has led him to be able to do the things that he does spontaneously on the court. It's the same thing in music. Those musicians who make those incredible violin and piano solos look so easy, with their perfect intonation and flow of melody and rhythm, when it's all so perfect and looks like they just walked up and did it for the first time. That's the result of thousands of hours of preparation. There is no spontaneity in prayer without discipline. And Daniel's spontaneity in prayer is borne of much discipline.

Let me point to one other thing that we see about Daniel's prayer life in verse 10. Notice that Daniel not only prays, he not only offers up petitions, he offers up thanksgiving. Daniel's supplication, even though he's in a crunch, is not without thanksgiving. His cries for help are prefaced by worship and adoration and praise and thanksgiving. Again, this is a man who is conscious of what God has given him, and he offers up thanksgiving with his prayers for God to rescue him.

Now, in verse 17, there is a very interesting experience. Here, the king's signet ring, and the signet rings of his nobles, are used to seal the stone that is placed over the lion's den. I am told by archaeologists that these lion's dens usually had two entrances. A ramp below for the lions to go in, and the hole above for the victims to be cast through. And this stone is being rolled over the hole above so that there would be no way for Daniel to crawl up the wall of the steep den and get out. And the stone is sealed after he's in there so that the nobles know that the king has not come to his rescue, and so that everyone knows that there has been no human intervention to let him out.

Of course, this passage bears an uncanny resemblance to Matthew 26:65-66, where we read, "Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard, go, make it as secure as you know how,' and they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard, they set a seal on the stone." Just as Daniel was sealed in the Lion's den, so also Christ was sealed in the tomb, and this was the petty human ruler's way to seal the fate of both of these great servants of the Lord. And in both cases, that human sealing led to greater glory for God, when He brought Daniel up out of the pit and He raised Christ up out of the tomb.

It's not surprising that the early Church saw in Daniel in the lion's den, a prefiguring of the resurrection of the Lord, for as Daniel was brought out of a den that had been sealed by the official rings of those in power, so was the Lord Jesus Christ raised from a tomb which had been sealed by those officials with their rings of power.

Now, let me make points that we learned from this passage. Daniel's temptation here was not to pray. But as far as Daniel was concerned, to not pray would to have been to lose fellowship with God which was the whole point of life. It would

have been to forego God. And so it wasn't worth it to Daniel. Daniel understood precisely the nature of the temptation that had been put before him by these officials. The question was, save your life, or fellowship with God, and for Daniel that was no question. Fellowship with God was the clear choice.

Let me also say, secondly, that only a man steeped in the word of God and prayer, only a man who had availed himself of all the means by which God fellowships with us, would be able to have this kind of decisiveness in crisis, and I must say, had I been in Daniel's situation, I would have been very much tempted to think long and hard to find a way out of that circumstance. Daniel, however, doesn't think at all. He responds distinctively. And those kinds of instincts in a time of crisis, don't come when you're making up your mind at that moment where your allegiances are. Daniel's allegiances had been set long before this crisis ever came, and so when the crisis finally came, his decision was already made. That is one reason why it is so important for ourselves to prepare ourselves in allegiance by God's grace beforehand, because when the hour of crisis comes, who knows what direction our fickle heart will lead us if we have not set our hearts toward love for God before the crisis comes, we may be led in disastrous directions in the midst of the final test. God was Daniel's priority long before this test came, and what Daniel did in the midst of that test was not something Daniel grew to at that point, it was something that he had grown to long before.

#### **IV. God's response.**

Now, in verses 18 through 28, we see God's verdict revealed in this great passage. A picture of God's sovereignty is set before us. Verses 1-9 give us a picture of spiritual warfare, verses 10-17 give us a picture of spiritual resolution and grace, and verses 18-28 give us a picture of God's sovereignty.

Notice in verses 19-21 the contrast between King Darius and Daniel. "Then the king raised with the dawn, and at the break of day he went in haste to the lion's den. And when he had come near to the den he cried out with a troubled voice, the king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you constantly serve been able to deliver you from the lions?" And Daniel's response is, "O King, live forever." This is the normal response of a courtier who has just entered the palace of the king. "O King, live forever." Here is the king fretting, and here is Daniel in perfect composure, as if he were an ambassador getting ready to walk in to the United Nations. Daniel's composure is in stark contrast to Darius' anxiety. And again, it's a contrast between the peace of the kingdom of God and the lack of peace of the kingdom of this world.

Now look, I understand that Darius really liked Daniel, and I understand that it's often harder to watch someone you love suffer, than it is to be the one to suffer, yourself. And I understand what kind of anxiety there is for someone you loved,

when you're the guy who goofed up and brought about this suffering. I don't want to be unfair to him. I'm sure that if my friend had been in the lion's den I would have been fretting just like him, but the picture that sets side by side there, is designed to show us again the powerlessness of the king of the this world, and the calmness of the child of God in the same crisis. And it's in stark contrast, isn't it? The negro spiritual says, "The king in his sleep was troubled, and early in the morning he rose, to find God had sent an angel down, and locked the lion's jaws." And that's precisely what happened. Daniel's innocence was set forth before God, and Darius, in the verdict that had been rendered by God in sending an angel.

Notice two things in verses 22 and 23. Daniel, when he responds to Darius, says, "My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths, and they have not harmed me inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him, and also toward you, O King, I have committed no crime." Daniel says the reason why God has delivered me is because I was innocent before Him and I was innocent before you. Had I been unfaithful to my God, He would have had reason to strike me down, but I was faithful to my God. He's teaching Darius a lesson. He's saying, "I was faithful, even though your henchmen wanted me to be unfaithful to my God." Daniel is not claiming to be sinless, Daniel is not claiming to never have done anything wrong, but Daniel is saying, in the heat of the moment, I chose God, and I'm innocent before Him. I didn't do anything wrong in this circumstance before God. And furthermore, O King, I didn't do anything wrong to you. Your henchmen, these bureaucrats, have accused me of not having respect for you. That couldn't be further from the truth, but no one has precedent or priority over my God, and therefore I have done nothing wrong to You and I've done nothing wrong to Him.

But the next verse tells us something else. It's adds something else. It says, and the narrator tells us this, "Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. And Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found upon him because he had trusted in his God." On the one hand, Daniel says, "The Lord spared me because I was innocent before Him and before you," and on the other hand, the narrator tells us Daniel was spared because of his faith in God. No wonder the early church took this story to be a story that teaches us what it means to have faith in God. Daniel's faith saves him here, Daniel's trust in God was the instrument by which he received the blessings of God, in this passage.

Now I want to say, it's going to be the same for us on the last day. You know, when the Lord Jesus stands you before the throne of God on the last day, and the finger of the accuser comes, you are going to be vindicated on two fronts. First of all, you are going to be declared and found to be actually innocent of all charges brought against you. Because you will have been glorified, and there will be no evil thing in you, and you will have been justified by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And at the same time, the basis of your redemption will be the work that Christ has done on your behalf that you have received by faith. And on that

double ground, you will have a vindication at the last day, and so Daniel's words in verses 22 and 23 are a picture of all those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Satan assails you and accuses you of wickedness, you will be found innocent because of your trust in Christ, and because of the finished work of glorification in you.

In verse 24, we see the dark side of Daniel's deliverance. The king is furious with those who had maliciously gone after Daniel, and not only the officials, but their wives and children, are thrown into the pit. This is not something that Daniel asks for. This pagan king surely is not filled with the mercy manifested in a godly king like David, but even in this horrible act of retribution and vengeance and violence, we see a picture of evil recoiling on those who attempted to use evil for their own ends. And that, of course, in the end, is what is going to happen to all those who oppose the kingdom of God. The evil that they have manifested and reflected and used will recoil against them, and they will be destroyed.

Finally, in verses 25-27, there is Darius' confession of God's sovereignty. Darius basically says here, "A mighty fortress is Daniel's God, He is sovereign over all." And so again, we have, for the third time, a king of Babylon confessing the sovereignty of the God of Israel. There are so many lessons we can learn from this passage, and let me just share a few of them with you before we close.

This passage is an encouragement to persecuted believers to stand firm, no question about that. But it's also a call to integrity, to those of us who are hard pressed by the culture around us. It's a reminder that God is in complete control of our situation. Because He is sovereign in our lives, in our callings, and in our ministries, we can serve Him without fear of the consequences. A servant of God is immortal until his work is done, and if we understand the sovereignty of God in that sense, then we can go about doing His work. Instead of fearing our enemy, we ought to fear for our enemy, because we have seen in the picture of the pit what will happen to all those who oppose God. Because God is sovereign, we ought to trust Him, and believe Him, and put our faith in Him. Sinclair Ferguson says, "It is not surprising that the early church saw in this event of Daniel in the lion's den, a foretaste of the resurrection of Christ. Daniel's life is intended to illustrate in Old Testament terms, the meaning of faith in the promised Messiah." Put your faith in the God of Daniel, there to stand on His principles, and the Lord's blessings will come, both here and here after. Let us look to Him in prayer.

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