

What the Example of Godly Devotion Can Do

Series: The Book of Daniel

Daniel 6

July 18, 2021

Welcome again to worship.

We are in our next to last week in our study of the Book of Daniel. We have been surprised by how relevant this story from 2,500 years ago is for us in the 21st century as we face an ever increasing evil and persecution. Let me briefly tell you what has happened this week.

On Monday, the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, released a letter stating that Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson had authorized the Conference Trustees to seize the building and assets of the Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, a very large, conservative church, who made it clear they would join the new conservative Global Methodist Church when the denomination splits.

Then, this week, one of our own West Ohio clergy, shared the following meme from Progressive Christianity.org: “God is not a Christian. God is not a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist. All of those are human systems which human beings have created to try to help us walk into the mystery of God. I honor my tradition. I walk through my tradition, but I don’t think my tradition defines God. I think it only points to God.”

Finally, I was talked with a conservative pastor in our district who met a person who is on staff of a United Methodist Church in our Conference who self-claims to be a pagan. I checked out her Facebook page, and yes, indeed, a United Methodist Church staff person is a pagan.

I’m here to tell you, we are in the Last Days. We are facing evil just as Daniel did, and we will see that quite clearly today. I invite you to turn in your bulletins to page 6, and if you are online, open your spiritual notebook, Bible, and turn to Daniel 6, and the story of Daniel and the Lion’s Den.

Now, let’s back up a bit. In chapter 5, the Babylonia co-regent Belshazzar threw a massive party. Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the wall these words: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. Daniel was brought in to interpret their meaning. He told Belshazzar:

This is what these words mean: Mene means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. Tekel means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. Parsin means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”¹

Belshazzar made Daniel the third highest ruler in the kingdom. But that night, Medo-Persian army swept into the city of Babylon, killed Belshazzar, making Darius the Mede ruler.

Now, let’s look at Daniel 6:1-4:

Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king’s interests. Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high

¹ Daniel 5:26-28 (NLT2)

officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire. Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy.²

By this time, Daniel was over 80 years old and one of Darius's top three administrators. Daniel was working with those who did not believe in his God, but he worked more efficiently and capably than all the rest. Thus, he attracted the attention of the pagan king and earned a place of respect.³

Here's our first point: **Honor God and Let Him Exalt You.**

Daniel had ruled with "insight, intelligence, and wisdom" under Nebuchadnezzar⁴. He had a reputation as a man with "an extraordinary spirit"⁵, as one who had within him "a spirit of the gods."⁶ Insight, intelligence, and extraordinary wisdom were words associated with him, something it appears Darius saw as well and appointed Daniel to a position of significant leadership.

One other thing the pagan kings he served came to realize was his unwavering faithfulness to his God. Thus, God exalted him. He was the most capable supervisor of Darius' administrators and provincial rulers. So much so that the others became jealous. Let's keep reading. Verses 5-15:

So they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion." So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." So King Darius signed the law. But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. Then the officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law. "Did you not sign a law that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions?" "Yes," the king replied, "that decision stands; it is an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day." Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament. In the evening the men went together to the king and said, "Your Majesty,

² Daniel 6:1-4 (NLT2)

³ Life Application Study Bible, Daniel 6:1-3

⁴ See Daniel 5:11

⁵ See Daniel 5:12

⁶ or "Spirit of God"; see Daniel 5:14

you know that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed.”⁷

Here’s our second point: **Be True to God Even When It May Cost You.**

We should expect the world and the evil one to target us as God’s people. Genesis 3:15 predicted there would be continuous hostility between God’s people and Satan’s. We see this play out all through the Old Testament. We are seeing it play out right here in Daniel. Satan and his worldly kingdoms are in conflict with God and will remain so until the end of the age, according to Revelation.

Jesus warned his disciples about persecution. Before He went to the cross—where the ultimate persecution took place, where the serpent struck the heel of the Seed—Jesus said the world will hate His followers and persecute us. This is because it hated Him.⁸ He said in John 16:33, “You will have suffering in this world.” Paul told Timothy, “All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”⁹ Peter, addressing Christian exiles in 1 Peter 4:12-14, wrote:

Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.¹⁰

Evil people will try to entrap the godly. We must remain faithful to God no matter what.

Third, **Trust that God Is Able to Deliver You.**

Verses 16-24:

So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, “May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.” A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn’t sleep at all that night. Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions’ den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, “Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?” Daniel answered, “Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty.” The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God. Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.¹¹

Of all the exciting stories in the book of Daniel, none is more famous than this one. It provokes our imagination, causes our hearts to skip a beat. We immediately

⁷ Daniel 6:5-15 (NLT2)

⁸ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 6:5-15

⁹ See 2 Timothy 3:12

¹⁰ 1 Peter 4:12-14 (NLT2)

¹¹ Daniel 6:16-24 (NLT2)

sense similarities with the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace of chapter 3. And the thought of a faithful 80 year old man being thrown into a pit with ravenous lions simply for praying grabs us in an almost inexplicable manner. It seems completely unfair because it is.

With a heavy heart Darius was obliged to warrant this murderous conspiracy. But when passing sentence his last words were affecting:

*“May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.”*¹²

We don't know what Daniel may have prayed in the lion's den, but it might have been Psalm 57. Close your eyes, imagine you are Daniel. Listen to how it fits Daniel's situation:

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me. My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness. I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey— whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the earth. My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress. They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it. My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises! Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song. I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth.*¹³

The Lord is our God. We will serve him, not occasionally, but continually; not just when it is easy, but when it is hard to do so. Daniel, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter 3, had the same kind of opportunity of showing his faithfulness to God. The lions were not less terrible than the fiery furnace.

When we face our lion's den, be it criticism at school or in the workplace or in the media; when our faith is challenge to face what seems like certain death, we can rest in God's plan. We can be certain of God's power.

Finally, **Recognize God Will Use You to Make His Name Famous among the Nations.**

Verses 25-28:

*Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: “Peace and prosperity to you! “I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*¹⁴

¹² Daniel 6:16 (NLT2)

¹³ Psalm 57:1-11 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Daniel 6:25-28 (NLT2)

God can cause unbelievers to acknowledge His greatness. We have seen this over and over in the Book of Daniel. God can even use unbelievers to proclaim His glory.

Throughout Daniel, we have learned this: though following God faithfully may be costly, He is Lord over all and is able to deliver His people. His final victory is assured, accomplished in Jesus.