

Message #8
Daniel

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THE LIONS AND DANIEL'S DEN
DANIEL 5:31-6:28

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

By almost anyone's standard of measure, Daniel was a successful man. He held a position of great power for many decades. He was a high official in government in several different administrations and in two different empires. He used his great influence to help his fellow Jews who were living in captivity. He maintained his integrity. He was faithful to God.

As human beings we, too, want to be successful. As Christians, which most of us would claim to be, we want that success to somehow be related to God. Commenting on Daniel, seminary professor Howard Hendricks says, **"The number one hassle confronting many contemporary Christians is finding an answer to the thorny question, 'Are spirituality and success compatible?' We're studying the life of a very successful individual, but remember, Daniel was in the lions' den in the will of God. Success is always related to the will of God. To the Christian, there is no success outside the will of God, and there is nothing but success in the will of God."**

True success for a Christian means accomplishing God's will or purpose for our lives, whatever that might be. One of the two basic questions that the Book of Daniel answers for us is: How should we live in an often godless society? The world in which Daniel lived was a stressful, often ungodly world, not unlike our own. He was a Jewish captive living in a pagan country. Yet in this environment Daniel succeeded in the art of daily living, even in the difficult world of politics. Today as we consider Daniel #6, we are going to discover the primary ingredient of his success in living in an often godless society. In so doing we will discover what is perhaps the biggest key as to how we may live successfully in an often godless society.

Last week in our continuing study of the Book of Daniel we came to chapter 5, and we considered the events that took place in Babylon, the capital of the Babylonian Empire (PROJECTOR ON--- BABYLONIAN EMPIRE 1), on October 12, 539 BC. King Belshazzar defied the God of Israel by drinking from the cups taken many years earlier from the temple in Jerusalem. The drunken feast in the king's banquet hall was interrupted that day when the fingers of a man's hand suddenly appeared and began writing on the plaster wall. Eventually Daniel, then in his eighties, was called in to interpret that writing. He said that it meant that Belshazzar's Babylonian kingdom was about to be ended and given to the Persians.

At the same time we know from secular history that the army of the Medes and the Persians was surrounding the fortress city of Babylon. (BABYLON AND MOAT) The Babylonians were confident that nobody was ever going to be able to get into their city.

But that day the Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates River upstream, and at night they waded into the city and captured Babylon without a fight.

The ancient historian Xenophon says that a man named Ugbaru served as a governor of one of the provinces of Babylon. During a royal hunt Ugbaru's son was killed in a fit of jealousy by the son of King Nabonidus. Xenophon doesn't name that son. But we know that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and a central character in #5. Partly because of this incident Ugbaru defected to the Persians. He later led the attack under Persian King Cyrus against Babylon. He got revenge that fateful October night when he captured the city and killed Belshazzar.

I.

The events of chapter 6 take place soon after this. Verse 31 of chapter 5 fits at the beginning of chapter 6 and is the first verse of chapter 6 in the Hebrew Bible. From this verse through v. 9 of chapter 6 we are going to consider THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL PLANNED. (I. THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL PLANNED)

According to v. 31 of #5, **“And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty -two years old.”** Critics have argued, as they did in regard to Belshazzar in #5, that there is no evidence of such a person in history. There was a later emperor of the Persian Empire who was Darius I. But this point in Persian history is too early for Darius I to have been in power.

The truth is that there are two brief references from early sources outside of the Bible who did not get their information from the Bible that there was an earlier Darius in Persian history. A guy named Berossus and guy named Velarius Harpocraton made reference to him. (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, #691, pp. 315 ff.)

The suspicion of some evangelical scholars is that “Darius” is a title. There are two possibilities for identifying the individual who held this title. One is Gubaru, or Ugbaru, who was governor and lieutenant under the Persian emperor Cyrus for many years and whose son was killed years earlier by Belshazzar. We know that he became governor of the province of Babylon in 539. Chapter 5 v. 31 says that Darius “received” the kingdom. Perhaps that means that he was appointed to be governor of the province of Babylon.

The other possibility is that Darius is a title for King Cyrus. Nabonidus and Herodotus call him “King of the Medes.” The Latin writer Cicero says that Cyrus was about 70 when he died. That would fit with the age reference to Darius in chapter 5 v. 31.

Whoever this Darius was, he began to appoint other officials over what was previously the Babylonian Empire. Daniel was a natural choice to be one of the three commissioners of this kingdom. Belshazzar had promised Daniel that he would be one of the three rulers of the Babylonian Empire because of his successful translation and interpretation of the writing on the wall. That promise was of little value, because the

kingdom came to an end that night. But now, ironically, Daniel becomes one of three commissioners under Darius.

Daniel had many years of experience in Babylonian government. He had an excellent record. Perhaps he was seen as being too old to pose a threat to Darius. Thus Daniel was chosen as one of these three commissioners.

He again proved to be an excellent choice. Verse 3 says that he had an excellent, or extraordinary, spirit. He was a hard worker, displayed a positive attitude, and, above all, exhibited wisdom and insight. That is the kind of person that any sane leader wants to have working for him or her. The king, in fact, was planning to make him prime minister. But this aroused jealousy among the other commissioners and some of the satraps. Daniel was Jewish, a foreigner. He didn't worship the Persian or Babylonian gods. Also in his diligence, integrity, and skill he may have made some of these others look bad. Some of these officials decided to do their best to get rid of him.

They began doing opposition research. Perhaps they tried to develop a fake dossier and set out to accuse Daniel of being guilty of collusion with the Babylonians. Then also Daniel had been in government for so long that there had to be skeletons in his closet. Surely at some point he must have accepted kickbacks from government contractors. I can imagine these commissioners going to his secretaries and asking, "Who did Daniel mess around with in his younger years?" "Nobody that I know about." "Certainly he must have brought some of the prettier secretaries along on his business trips." "No, not to my knowledge."

I can imagine these politicians going to a building contractor and asking, "How much does Daniel require to get a government building contract through him?" "Doesn't happen. I offered him a kickback once, and he put me on the government blacklist for five years."

I can imagine them going to the Babylonian IRS and asking, "When is the last time that you did an audit on Daniel?" "We used to do audits on him all the time, but we gave it up. His charitable giving was always too high--- Jewish Relief Society, you know. But he was always clean."

According to v. 4, **"...but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him."** In the midst of an often godless society Daniel lived a life of integrity. That is the kind of evaluation toward which all of us should aspire.

So the conspirators began to realize that the only way that they were going to get him was to trap Daniel in regard to his religion. If we believers are going to be persecuted or attacked, that's the thing for which we want to be criticized. The other commissioners and satraps went to the king and said, "We have all come to an agreement." That was a lie. Daniel didn't agree. "We want a law that requires everyone in the kingdom to bring religious petitions to you only for thirty days."

The meaning of this request is a bit obscure. There is no evidence that these early Persian kings regarded themselves as gods. So many Biblical scholars have suggested that the request was that Darius was to be the only priestly mediator during this period. All divine requests were to go through him rather than through other priests. Perhaps this was also a kind of loyalty test, as we saw happen back in chapter 2. According to v. 8 these conspirators were very careful to make sure that this decree was made into law in the proper way so that it could not be changed. Darius went along with the plot.

II.

In vv. 10-18 we encounter THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL SPRUNG. (II. THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL SPRUNG) Notice that the commissioners and satraps have such awareness and confidence in Daniel's commitment to his faith that they fully expect him to violate the law despite the threat of execution. They are right. Verse 10 says, **"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."**

There is no place in the Bible that says that a follower of God needs to pray on his knees three times a day with his windows open. But that was part of the regular devotional practice which Daniel had apparently followed for most of his life. There was a Biblical basis for praying toward Jerusalem. In 1 Kings #8 (1 KINGS 8:35-36) Solomon in his prayer of dedication for the Jerusalem temple prayed that when Israel's enemies had defeated the Israelites or when there was a drought due to sin, **"...if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel..."** (1 Kings 8:35-36)

I might have encouraged Daniel to pray in private for a month--- or at least to keep his windows closed. But Daniel would not alter his program of daily devotions. (PROJECTOR OFF) The conspirators knew just where to find Daniel praying. When they found him on his knees, they went and told the king. According to v. 13 the conspirators said, **"Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king..."** This Daniel who has served in Babylonian and Persian governments for sixty or seventy years is still a foreigner. He is one of those nasty Jews. He is disrespecting the king.

Immediately it became clear to Darius that he had been tricked. Obviously the king regarded Daniel as a valuable man, and he probably realized that his own vanity might now result in Daniel's death. Verse 14 says, **"Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel."** I imagine that he called in his top lawyers to figure out a way to get around his own edict. But it was to no avail.

Finally Daniel was brought in, and in v. 16 Darius said, **“May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you.”** Daniel is put into the den, which was probably a cave. The lions there were kept underfed so that they would be better executioners. But Daniel evidently had a restful night--- perhaps more restful than the night that Darius had.

III.

Thus in vv. 19-28 we find THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL BACKFIRED. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL BACKFIRED) The next morning, hoping against hope, the king goes to the cavern and discovers that Daniel is alive and uninjured. The reason, the text says in v. 23, is **“because he had trusted in his God.”** This faith in God earns Daniel a place in God’s hall of faith. For in Hebrews #11 v. 33 this is cited as one of the great displays of faith by God’s people.

In v. 24 the king makes another edict. This time the law says that Daniel’s accusers and their families should be thrown into the den. The lions in that Babylonian government who had been lurking about, waiting to pounce on Daniel were instead thrown into the den which Daniel had just occupied. The end of v. 24 notes that **“...before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.”**

Then Darius writes an edict to all of the people of his realm. Perhaps he had Daniel do the specific wording. In this decree, which becomes law, Darius commands respect for the God of Daniel and the God of Israel. He acknowledges three basic things about this God: **First**, he acknowledges that this God is alive and active in history. **Second**, He acknowledges that His kingdom is eternal. **Third**, he recognizes that this God delivers His worshipers.

Verse 28 concludes, **“So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”** This translation assumes that Darius and Cyrus are separate individuals. The verse could also legitimately be translated, **“So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”**

What an encouragement this must have been for those Jewish captives, most of whom were still living in exile in Babylon, to see their God recognized and glorified. God used a faithful man to sovereignly work out events so that His name would be glorified. Daniel was a success because he accomplished God’s purpose for His life.

IV.A.

What are THE APPLICATIONS (IV. THE APPLICATIONS A. IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST?) here then for us? First, IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST? Chapter 6 shows that He is. He is a just God who punishes evil people. He is a faithful God who delivers His servants who are faithful to Him. But I especially want you to notice that God fulfills His Word. (JEREMIAH 25:11)

At the time of the first Babylonian invasion of Judah in 605 BC the prophet Jeremiah made this prediction concerning the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. (JEREMIAH 25:11) He wrote, **“This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”**

About 100 years before that Isaiah prophesied that the specific king who would return the Jews to their homeland would be named Cyrus. (ISAIAH 44:28) According to v. 28 of Isaiah #44, **“[The Lord] says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”** The events of chapter 6 could have been an encouragement to Cyrus to return these Jews to their homeland.

Chapter 1 of the Book of Ezra speaks about a time perhaps just after the events of #6 in Daniel, seventy years after the first Jews were taken into captivity. (EZRA 1:1) Ezra #1 v. 1 says, **“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: (EZRA 1:2) ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah..””**

The year in which Cyrus became king of the whole land after the capture of Babylon was known as the accession year. The first year of his reign was the year that followed that. So the events of #6 could have preceded this decree and could have been a motivation for the giving of this decree. We don't know for sure.

The findings of archaeology verify that the decree was given. The Jews and other captive peoples were returned to their homelands. An inscription of a decree by Cyrus was found on an ancient clay barrel. (CYRUS CYLINDER) At one point the inscription says this: **“I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which [used] to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I [also] gathered all their [former] inhabitants and returned [to them] their habitations.”** Apparently other people besides the Jews were allowed to return to their homelands.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

Is God worthy of our trust? He is, because He keeps His promises to His people. Our responsibility as Christians is to know and believe the promises that God has given to us in the New Testament. These include such things as the promise of Jesus to always be with us (Matthew 28:18-20), the promise of God that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13), the assurance that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39), and the promise the Jesus is coming back to earth to get us (Acts 1:11).

B.

The second question that the Book of Daniel and #6 answers is this: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN AN OFTEN GODLESS SOCIETY? (IV. THE APPLICATIONS A. B. HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN...) As believers we often face a difficult tension in this world. The Bible encourages us to be separate from the world, yet to minister to it. Sometimes it is hard to know the right balance. But in Daniel we find a believer who had everything in the right perspective.

First of all we see that he was very much involved with the world in which he lived. In fact he spent perhaps 65 years of his life in what is often the messy world of politics. He had to deal with power games and anti-Semitism and pagan ethics. But he kept his nose clean. In the process he had a tremendous impact for the Lord on his generation.

Perhaps you find your world to be a similar kind of challenge in which to live. You may find yourself in business or education or tourism or entertainment or government. Living out your Christian faith may be challenging in that environment. It certainly was for Daniel. But that may well be just where the Lord wants you to be. That may be your field of ministry.

As Daniel discovered, even the messy world of politics can be just where God wants some of His followers to be. One historian says that a major cause of the fall of the Roman Empire was the failure of Christians to be involved in government. Dr. Richard Todd writes, **“For many it was thought difficult to live a Christian life in the secular world. The Christian magistrate, for example, might have to order torture or execution. Thus Christians were often advised ... to leave public office. This attitude of the Church probably contributed to the decline of public morality in the late Empire.... The Church, while it preached against [corruption and brutality], contributed to the decline by discouraging good Christians from holding public office.”** (*Introduction to the History of Christianity*, Dowley et al)

The broader challenge for Christians is to figure out how to live in the culture in which we find ourselves. There was a famous theologian of the last century by the name of Richard Niebuhr who said that there are five possible approaches which Christians can take toward the world in which we live. I can only mention them briefly. Christians may find that they are using more than one approach. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The first approach is “Christ against culture.” This is where Christians try to separate themselves as much as possible from the world around them. The second approach Niebuhr labels as “Christ of culture.” This is where Christians seek to find common ground between Christian virtues and the values of the society in which they live. The third is “Christ above culture.” This is an approach that seeks to find good things in the culture and recognize them as gifts from God. The fourth is “Christ transforming culture.” This is where Christians make it a high priority to convert the culture to Christianity. The fifth approach Niebuhr labels as “Christ and culture in paradox.” This is where Christians live in difficult cultures with ungodly values. They try to live out Christian values as best they can without compromise.

The other part of the equation for Daniel's success in living in a godless society was the priority that he put on his relationship with the Lord. If there was one practical, specific thing that was a key to Daniel's life of significance, I think that it was his practice of regular devotions. Daniel must have been an extremely busy man. For much of his life he was the #2 man in the Babylonian government. By the time of #6 he was in his 80s. I would suspect that he had a little less energy than when he was younger. I doubt, however, that the demands on his time were any less.

But at the top of his priority list was his practice of daily devotions. Daniel was a very talented individual, but long before he reached his 80s, he realized that he was a totally dependent person. In order to live a life that had any eternal significance, he had to rely upon a regular time of communion with God.

If you would like to get a handle on the lions in your world, if you would like to be successful in the skill of living in an often godless society, I would encourage you to have a regular program of devotions. If you have never tried it, I would suggest that you find a time and place where you can have some privacy each day. Start out small---take maybe 15 minutes and read the Bible and pray. There are some helpful guides available that can get you started in your Bible reading.

There are two thoughts that often come into people's minds that keep them from getting involved in such a discipline. One is that they just don't have time. My response is that the problem is one of priorities. We have and we make time for the things that are important to us. We find time to watch TV or read the paper or talk on the telephone or do text messaging. Martin Luther once remarked, **"I have so much to do that I cannot get on without three hours a day of praying."**

Maybe we would do better to start with five or ten minutes, so it at least happens.

The second objection that some people raise is that they just don't seem to get much out of their devotions. Listen to this admonition from George Mueller, a famous British believer from the eighteenth century: **"It is a common temptation of Satan to make us give up the reading of the Word and prayer when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use to read the Scriptures when we do not enjoy them, and as if it were no use to pray when we have no spirit of prayer. The truth is that, in order to enjoy the Word, we ought to continue to read it, and the way to obtain a spirit of prayer is to continue praying. The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, and the less we pray, the less we desire to pray."**

Eric Lund was a star of the soccer team at the University of Connecticut. It was expected that he would become an All-American in his last year of school. In his senior year his teammates selected him captain of the team. But Eric could not play that year. (ERIC LUND) He had leukemia. He had been battling it for several years. Six times it went into remission. But the last time it did not. One day when he was in the hospital again, and nearing death, he said to his mother. (LUND QUOTATION) **"Do something for me. Leave a little early. Walk a few blocks and look at the sky. Walk in the**

world for me.” After his death at age 22 the people of his hometown erected a monument with those words inscribed upon it.

It strikes me that Daniel was a man who walked in the world for God's people in his generation. In doing that he accomplished God's will for his life and thus was a success. In accomplishing that will and in accomplishing that success he became an example to God's people in all generations to come. The issue is not our fame or outward success. It is our faithfulness to God.

Like to be a success in God's eyes? Like to walk in the world for this generation? Take it from Daniel--- be involved with people and maintain a regular time of devotions with the Lord.