

# Daniel and the Lions' Den

## DANIEL 6

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Madison, Wisconsin  
February 15, 2015



A number of years ago, someone compiled a list of the 40 most prominent characters in the Bible. These are people we might refer to as being some of the great heroes of faith, men like Abraham, Moses, Noah, and so on. He narrowed it down to the top 40, and as he compiled that list he realized that of the 40 most significant leaders in the Bible, 3 out of 4 (or 75% never had a religious job). In other words, 75% were never full-time priests, or prophets, or missionaries. 75% of them never left what we might call the “secular world” to enter the full time ministry.

And this morning, I would like to study one of these characters as we honor a request that was turned in by one of the young men of this congregation. One of our young men has asked for a lesson on “Daniel and the Lions’ Den.” Well, when I started digging into it this earlier this week, I discovered that we actually studied this account back on May 29, 2005. Some of you know that I number every sermon. The number on that sermon was number 832. Well, this morning’s lesson is number 1300. I hate to repeat anything if I don’t need to, but then I realized: On May 29, 2005, the young man who requested this lesson had not yet been born! He was actually born just over one month later. So I concluded, then, that we do need to study this again. It is a rich passage with some very practical applications, not only for our young people, but especially for those of us who are just trying to make it through another week, especially for those who are employed in what we might refer to as the “secular world,” and especially here in Madison.

Daniel had a government job. He worked for the king of a powerful nation. He was basically a bureaucrat, a life-long employee of the federal government. And over a lifetime, Daniel had worked his way up through the ranks. We might say today that Daniel had seniority, and by the time we get to Daniel 6 (where this account is found), Daniel is basically at the top. Well, over time, Daniel writes a book about his experience in government (as politicians sometimes do), and the book of Daniel is that book, an inspired record of what happened during Daniel’s government career.

We know that God’s people were being punished for drifting away from the truth of God’s word. They had drifted to the point where they were even sacrificing their own children to pagan idols. And so in the late 600’s BC, at God’s direction, the Babylonians came in and started tormenting the Southern Kingdom of Israel. The Babylonians made several raids where they basically kidnapped the best and the brightest young men. Daniel (perhaps around 12 or 13 years old at that time) was captured during one of those raids and was taken away

to serve the king of Babylon. In Chapter 2, Daniel interprets the king's dream and is promoted. In Chapter 3, three of Daniel's friends refuse to bow down to the huge golden statue, they are thrown in the fiery furnace, but they are rescued by the Lord. Decades pass, and in Chapter 5 we have the handwriting on the wall. Later that night the Babylonian kingdom falls to the Persians. And almost immediately, the new king, King Darius, also sees something in Daniel and promotes him to one of the highest positions in the land.

In Daniel 6, we find that as the new king rules the land, is he assisted by three administrators, who in turn are responsible for overseeing a subgroup of 120 others, men we might describe almost as governors in our society today. Well, Daniel was one of those three administrators who answered directly to the king. And as we are about to find, the king starts noticing that Daniel is actually a much better leader than the other two commissioners, even to the point where the king was starting to make plans to just put Daniel in charge of everything. We start to see, then, some tension, some terrible friction in the kingdom as the other commissioners and governors start to feel threatened.

Have you ever done so well at your job that those around you get upset that you are making them look bad? Have you ever done so well in a class at school that your fellow students start to get irritated that you are making life difficult for them? Have you ever been out with friends when you make a moral decision and they get mad that you won't go along? If so, then Daniel understands! With this in mind, I want us to look very carefully at Daniel 6 (p. 1397). And here at the beginning, I want to point out that I had a hard time finding accurate artwork for this morning's lesson. A lot of artwork shows Daniel in the lions' den as a young man, as a little boy. However, at this point, Daniel is not a young man anymore! In fact, at this point Daniel is most likely in his mid to late 80's! So, I just want us to keep this in mind as we study. Notice, please, Daniel 6,

***<sup>1</sup> It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, <sup>2</sup> and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss. <sup>3</sup> Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. <sup>4</sup> Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. <sup>5</sup> Then these men said, "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God."***

***<sup>6</sup> Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup> All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." <sup>9</sup> Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.***

***<sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing***

previously. <sup>11</sup> Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. <sup>12</sup> Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction, "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." <sup>13</sup> Then they answered and spoke before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day."

<sup>14</sup> Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. <sup>15</sup> Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

<sup>16</sup> Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." <sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. <sup>18</sup> Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

<sup>19</sup> Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup> When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent His angel and shut the lions' 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." <sup>23</sup> Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. <sup>24</sup> The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

<sup>25</sup> Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! <sup>26</sup> I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. <sup>27</sup> "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

<sup>28</sup> So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

What an awesome story! We certainly understand why this account is a favorite. But the question for us this morning is: What does this passage mean for us? What does this passage mean for those of us who are living more than 2500 years after it happened? What does this passage mean for our young men and women

growing up in the Madison area? What does it mean for the young man who requested this lesson? As we try to look at this passage in a way that it makes sense in a practical way for those of us living today, I would like to make several observations that will hopefully mean something to those of us here in the Madison area.

- I. **And one of the first things I'd like for us to notice in this chapter is that DANIEL FACED OPPOSITION (EVEN PERSECUTION) FOR DOING NOTHING MORE THAN LIVING AN UPRIGHT, FAITHFUL, GODLY LIFE.**

In other words, the world is watching! Do we really understand how often we are being watched? Just from a technical point of view, think for a moment about all of the cameras out there. Years ago, they installed cameras all along the beltline and the interstate for monitoring traffic. Most law enforcement cars continually video what goes on in front of those cars. Now we're talking body cameras for police. Every time we use the ATM, our image is captured. Every time we walk in the bank, in the grocery store, every time we pump our gas. Several weeks ago I went through a car wash, and through the foam and the spray, I looked up, and there was a camera. Several years ago we took a wrong turn leaving Denver, and in the process of being lost, I missed a toll. Sure enough, several months later we got a bill for \$3.15. Our license plate had been caught in the act! We have cameras on busses, in airports, in parking lots, in daycares, even in private homes. Of all people, we as a society know something of what it means to be constantly watched.

Daniel's fellow bureaucrats, though, took this to an entirely new level. They were threatened, and so they took a fine tooth comb to this man's life looking for dirt, and in the end they could find not so much as the slightest smudge! Daniel was squeaky clean. Can you imagine having your entire life analyzed like that? I think of what people go through to run for higher office these days. People even think you might do it, and what do they do? They go looking for mud. They are suddenly interested in what you did 20, 30, 40 years ago. But with Daniel, nothing! No bribes, no mistresses, no accounting errors, no lies about getting shot down by an RPG while covering a story in Iraq, no interns in the Oval Office, no personal indiscretions, no cocaine use in college, no DUI arrests from 30 years ago, no dirt, absolutely nothing improper in any way! According to verse 4, ***"...they could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."*** Daniel was clean in every possible way, because Daniel was a man of integrity.

Now, as we live, work, and go to school here in the Madison area, Daniel serves as an example. This is something Peter understood in our scripture reading this morning from 1 Peter 2:11-12, ***"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."*** Peter, then, is basically saying: Make good choices, because the world is watching! And we have seen an example of this in Daniel. Daniel did what was right, and the world was, in fact, watching. As it turns out, Daniel's enemies finally concluded that Daniel being good was Daniel's only real weakness. Do you remember what the Lord said in John 15:18-19? ***"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."*** And that is exactly what happened with Daniel. They passed a law to make what Daniel was already doing illegal. And here we are in modern times! What is old is now new again! Positions that at one time were right, and true, and even popular, are now ridiculed openly.

We remember the outcry not too long ago when the founder of Chick-fil-a made a passing comment in support of the traditional definition of marriage. The man was practically crucified in the media. We think of what happened with our own governor just a few days ago on a trade mission in England. What was it that

made the news? What were people talking about? Someone over there asked the question whether he believes in evolution? And again, that is all the world has talked about this week. I personally have no idea what the governor believes about evolution. What in the world does evolution have to do with a trade mission to England? But we understand why they were asking, right? They want him to make a statement that can be ridiculed. Imagine George Washington being asked whether marriage should be between a man and a woman? Imagine Abraham Lincoln being asked about creation and ridiculed for his beliefs. Our nation was built on this, the firm belief that all men were “created equal,” the firm belief that all men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” We can hardly imagine our founding fathers being harassed by the media for believing in God. However, the same thing is true of us as was true of Daniel. Even if we just do our work and mind our own business, we understand that the world is watching and that we will face manufactured opposition just for holding to ideas that at one time were in the mainstream. We go to school and work, people notice what we do, and in response, the world will try to make our lives difficult. So the first real-world application is this: When we live the Christian life, we need to just go ahead and expect some kind of push-back by the world. This is what this passage means for the young man who requested this lesson: When you make good choices in school, expect people to get mad at you for that. When you speak up for your Christian faith, you will be ridiculed. I know you, though, and you are tougher than they are – make those good choices, and do not back down. Let us not get discouraged, but let us remember that we are in good company with Daniel.

**II. As we go back to our text, we find another great reminder that applies to us today, and the reminder is: Even when threatened, DANIEL STAYED FAITHFUL IN PRAYER.**

Verse 10 is so important. Once this document was signed, Daniel went home and continued kneeling in prayer three times a day, praying and giving thanks to God, ***“as he had been doing previously.”*** In other words, when it came to his prayer life, nothing changed! This prayer was not some kind of emergency flare, sent up to God in any kind of panic over this new law. Instead, Daniel went home and prayed ***“as he had been doing previously,”*** just as he had done before. For Daniel, prayer was kind of like eating, something he did on a regular basis, on a schedule, three times every day.

At this point, some of us might be wondering: Well, why didn’t Daniel just pray to himself? Why didn’t Daniel just switch to praying in secret? After all, we look at this passage, and we might come away with the impression that Daniel might have been showing off a little bit, that Daniel was violating the advice Jesus would go on to give later, that we are to pray in our closets in a way that nobody else can see us.

What we need to remember, though, is that Daniel was praying for a reason. In fact, he is praying in response to a statement made by King Solomon hundreds of years before this. I would encourage you to keep a finger in Daniel 6 as we turn back very briefly to 1 Kings 8. When the temple was first completed, at the strongest point in Israel’s history, on “opening day” (so to speak), King Solomon addressed the entire nation, and I want us to notice how Solomon looked ahead into the future and made a special request on behalf of the people. Notice, please, 1 Kings 8:46-53 (p. 558). As the temple is being dedicated, Solomon has a special request in his prayer to God on behalf of the people of Israel. Solomon looks into the future, and says this (starting in verse 46),

***<sup>46</sup> “When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; <sup>47</sup> if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly’; <sup>48</sup> if they***

***return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to You toward their land which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name;<sup>49</sup> then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause,<sup>50</sup> and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them<sup>51</sup> (for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace),<sup>52</sup> that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You.<sup>53</sup> For You have separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Your inheritance, as You spoke through Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers forth from Egypt, O Lord God.***

Daniel was praying toward Jerusalem for a reason. Yes, when he prayed, people could see in, but his windows were open, not so that others could see in; instead, Daniel's windows were open so that he could see out! Notice: He was not out there praying on the street corner; instead, the text tells us (in verse 10) that Daniel ***“entered his house,”*** but once he got inside, the text also tells us (in verse 10) that his windows were ***“open toward Jerusalem.”*** That is an odd statement, especially knowing that Jerusalem was about 500 miles away. But when Daniel prayed, he directed his attention toward a city of ruins that is about the same distance as we are from Cleveland. He looked in that direction, though, because of what Solomon had said so many years earlier. God wanted his people to know, no matter what might happen in the future, that he would not abandon them in any far off land. We think of what happened with Jonah. As he was sinking in the Mediterranean Sea, even before he was swallowed by the fish, Jonah cried out to God, ***“I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.”*** In the same way, Daniel was also praying toward the temple in Jerusalem.

What do you think Daniel was praying for? Do you think he was asking for God's mercy on the nation as Solomon had suggested? I believe so. Do you think Daniel might have been praying for the peace of the city where they were living? The prophet Jeremiah, if you remember, told the captives to pray for the peace and welfare of the city where they had been taken captive (Jeremiah 29:7). Do you think Daniel might have also been asking for God's help with his situation at work? Do you think he might have been crying out to God concerning this new policy? Again, I believe so as well. Do we pray about work on a regular basis? Earlier this week I was talking to a faithful Christian woman in another state who is going through some tough times at work right now. She's had to fire some people for incompetence and immoral behavior. It's a tough situation. She walks about two miles to work, and she says that when she walks up to work every morning, she actually puts her hand on the building and prays to God for the people who are there, interceding to God on their behalf. She prays for those issues at work.

But as we think about Daniel's willingness to keep on praying, even when it was against the law, and even when the penalty was death, we need to ask ourselves a question: If prayer were to suddenly become illegal here in Madison, would the DA have enough evidence to convict us of that crime? Just imagine that. The authorities show up on our front porch, ***“You are under arrest for praying to God.”*** What evidence would they bring up at trial? If they interviewed our friends and neighbors, would our friends and co-workers and fellow students testify under oath, ***“Yes, I solemnly swear that so-and-so is a person who prays”?*** Like Daniel, if we were arrested for praying, would there be evidence to support a guilty verdict? Would the people who know us best describe us as people of prayer?

Daniel faced a choice: Either stop praying or face the death penalty. Is prayer important enough to us that we would rather pray than live? This passage reminds us of the importance of prayer. Prayer is not just a bonus activity, prayer is not just extra credit, but prayer is who we are. In fact, it is a sin not to pray. Have we ever thought about it like that? Over and over again, the Bible tells us to pray, and if we refuse to pray, we are breaking that commandment. This morning, some of us might need to repent. Perhaps we need to recommit to prayer, even putting it on the calendar, however we want to do it, but making a decision right now to pray as we should. This passage is a reminder, then, that we need to pray just as Daniel prayed. Some of us may need to recommit this morning to taking our concerns to God. This applies to the young man who requested this lesson. You are now old enough to pray on your own. When we are little, our parents remind us to pray, but as we grow up, we take that responsibility as our own. Prayer is important!

III. **As we look back at the end of this chapter, we find another big idea here as we find that DANIEL IS DELIVERED BY THE LORD.**

And I will tell you: I had many choices for the artwork on this one, but this was the obvious choice – I mean, look at that beard! That is one of the most glorious beards I have ever seen. This is almost like the artwork on Obed-Edom a month or two ago. You might remember: Obed-Edom actually had birds nesting in his beard! No birds here, but the beard is impressive!

Going back to the text, the king realizes there are no loopholes, so he orders Daniel to be thrown to his death into the den of lions. Verse 16 is so interesting as we have this pagan king expressing confidence in God. The king's last words to Daniel, ***"Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you."*** And for the rest of the night, the king is miserable. He can't eat, he can't sleep, he cancels the entertainment for the night. He gets up the next morning and calls for Daniel. And what I love about this is that Daniel and the king have this conversation AS DANIEL IS STILL STANDING IN THE DEN OF LIONS! I'm thinking my first words might have been, "Throw me a ladder! Get me out of here!" Daniel and the king, though, have this conversation. By the way, I would also point out that Daniel's first words in this entire chapter don't come until verse 21! I love that! This is a story about Daniel that's not really about Daniel! Daniel and the king, then, have this conversation, Daniel is brought out of the lion's den, and almost as a grand finale, to prove that this was miraculous, to prove that the lion's weren't just sick or too full or something, the king has the accusers and their families tossed into the same den of lions. Verse 24 tells us that their bodies are caught in mid-air and that all of their bones were crushed before they even hit the bottom of the den. As we noted last Lord's Day, it is truly a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). The king then sends out a decree ordering that everyone in his kingdom should honor the God of Daniel.

Just a note here before we close: God did not prevent Daniel from being thrown into the den of lions. God did not give the king an easy way out. Instead, God ministered to Daniel in the middle of his very difficult situation. This was out of Daniel's hands, but God stepped in and used this situation in a very powerful way. And this applies to us today. We might have an issue at work where there is no good answer. Something bad is going to happen. Or maybe we have family trouble. You might have been born into one of the most dysfunctional families known to mankind. Or maybe it's marriage trouble, or financial trouble, or health trouble, or maybe it's dealing with an ongoing sin or addiction. God has never promised that he will keep us from these things, but God is faithful and can use some of these challenges to build our faith in the process. And that's the lesson here for us: Daniel was faithful. As bad as it got, Daniel was faithful. I can't help but think of that passage from the Hall of Fame of God's faithful in Hebrews 11:33 as the Bible speaks of ***"the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions."***

**Conclusion:**

As we look back over what we've learned this morning, we find that Daniel made people mad simply by being faithful to God. Do people around us know that we are faithful to God? The Bible promises in 2 Timothy 3:12 that **"...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** Let us, then, be ready for it. Let us come to expect it. Secondly, we've learned that Daniel was faithful in prayer. He was regular in prayer and took his concerns to God, just as we should today. And finally, Daniel was ultimately delivered by the Lord – he was still thrown into the lion's den (God did not protect him from that), but God was faithful and ended up using this unfortunate situation for good in the end.

I am so thankful to the young man who requested today's lesson. As we close, I would just briefly ask if you noticed any parallels between Daniel and the Lord Jesus. Both were falsely accused by their friends, both were faithful in prayer, both were innocent men sentenced to a horrible death by government leaders who seemed almost powerless to stop it, both were sealed underground with a stone, both graves were eagerly approached by those who were hoping for a miracle. But unlike Daniel, the Lord Jesus actually died. He died as a sacrifice for our sins. He died in our place, and after three days he came back from the dead.

We respond to that sacrifice by putting our faith in God. We repent of sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, we allow ourselves to be dipped under water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into God's family. If you have any questions, let us know, but if you are ready to obey the good news about Jesus right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)