

“DANIEL DEFIES DARIUS’ DECREE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 6:1-13

Introduction.

Remember the great image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream back in chapter two and how Daniel interpreted it to mean Babylon was on the thin ice of history. At the end of chapter five it finally fell through and was no more. Everything God said through His prophet came true.

Kingdoms rise and fall. We are in our third reign as we come to chapter six. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar are gone, and Darius the Mede is on the throne.

The only constant in all of this is God and His people. Through it all Daniel is still serving the King of kings. Governments come and go. The constant is God and His witness to His Gospel through His Church.

A new role in a new regime:

“The king planned to set Daniel over the whole kingdom.” Vss. 1-3.

The Persian Empire was the largest empire the world had ever seen up to that time, stretching from Libya and Egypt all the way east to India. The need for efficient administration of such a vast empire was critical.

Daniel was held in high regard by King Darius and entrusted with administrative oversight of one-third of the provincial satraps. Interesting that Daniel still gets one-third of the kingdom which Belshazzar offered, even though Belshazzar is now dead. Furthermore, it appeared Darius was about to promote Daniel to prime minister.

“That the king suffer no loss” implies a key part of Daniel’s role was to make sure taxes were collected. From the beginning of governments there have been problems with fraud and corruption, with deceit and graft, payoffs and bribes.

A friend of mine was the store manager of a Best Buy in OKC. He had a full time employee whose sole job was to stop retail shrinkage of inventory, due to employee theft and shoplifting. In the retail world almost half of the theft is from employees. The very people you pay and should be loyal to you are the ones taking from you.

It is really hard to find good, honest, loyal help. Daniel stood out. This Jewish captive from exiled Judah could be trusted more than his own people in Babylon. He was different from everyone else in that godless culture. He was uncompromising.

Again and again Daniel distinguished himself as a capable, competent, loyal, faithful man of integrity. Even in ordinary tasks, he had a reputation for excellence.

This may indicate why Daniel was not liked, he was especially skilled in seeing that those under him were accountable and he himself was a man of integrity who could not be bought, bribed or bamboozled. He may have been a whistle-blower.

This kind of work ethic is almost always rewarded in one of two ways. Either with increased trust and responsibility, or with an irrational hatred.

The hatred of the intolerant: “Seeking a ground of complaint against Daniel.” Vss. 4-9.

The political leaders sought incriminating evidence against Daniel, they watched his every move, they had secretaries and janitors and subordinates bribed to give them any dirt they could use against him. They examined his financial records, and the minutes of all his meetings. They hired detectives. They tapped his cell phone. They watched his house.

Why? There are several possibilities or combinations of possibilities.

There may have been envy because of his coming promotion, made worse by the fact he was a holdover from the previous Babylonian rule. Or even worse than that, he was a foreigner, a Jew.

And/or Daniel was a godly man of impeccable character and couldn't be bought and was a threat to their own sinful activity. Holiness convicts bad consciences and arouses hatred. Daniel's goodness and piety gained him powerful enemies. And it was the worst kind of hate, cool and calculating. It was hidden and determined. They were out to destroy him.

But they didn't want the blood on their hands. Nor did they want to do what that man here in Whatcom country did and hire an assassin. It soon became clear that the only way to get him was in some sort of religious ploy. Their plan was brilliant, using guile they would have him killed by the innocent king who actually liked Daniel.

They made a law that would create a conflict between the law of Daniel's God and the law of their land. In other words, they came up with a law that would require Daniel to sin. They would exploit his morality.

No religious request could be made for 30 days without going through Darius the Mede and any violation carried a death penalty.

They started with a lie, implying there was unanimous consent behind this decree from all the overseers, prefects, satraps, counsellors and governors. Then they stirred in some flattery elevating the king to such a position of importance and prominence even if for only 30 days. Perhaps this would help cement his newly established power over once powerful Babylon.

The law may not have been religiously motivated, but politically motivated, to strengthen Darius' rule and reign over such a diverse people. So it was like Nebuchadnezzar's edict that everyone must come and bow before his shiny statue.

They played Darius like a puppet. The trap was set.

These sorts of laws are still being written, laws aimed at a few people that hurt others. People who should be protected are no longer protected like babies in their mother's wombs and

elderly and those terminally ill. Our welfare laws instead of helping families have the effect of tearing down poor families and making them more dependent. Laws for higher wages raise costs of goods and services, reduce employment and drive out business.

This is very similar to what is happening today as godless people are targeting and shutting down Christians who because of their convictions of conscience do not wish to participate in ceremonies that are against God and His Word.

Secular man hates God and hates the people of God and all they stand for and do. It doesn't matter if they are doing good and helping others and making the world a better place. Their presence and their character interfere with the bad consciences of other and they can't stand the turmoil in their own souls.

The bad conscience of our culture will increasingly hate the very presence of Christians. It won't be enough to pass the laws making good evil and evil good, but they will not rest until we must approve and give our blessing and consent.

John 15:19-20 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

It's unfair, it's unjust, it doesn't make sense, it's contrary to all reason, but that's the way it is. The Bible gives a long litany of such stories to drive the truth home.

Cain hated his brother Abel and killed him.

Joseph's brothers hated him and intended to kill him.

Saul hated David and tried multiple times to kill him.

Countless kings hated God's prophets and stoned them.

All the religious leaders hated Jesus and succeeded in killing Him.

Don't be surprised when it happens. It happened to Jesus, and His followers are not above him.

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

II Timothy 3:12-13 All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Daniel's unswerving faithfulness: "Just as he had done before." Vss. 10-11.

Daniel 6:10-11 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.* 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel *making petition and plea before his God.*

What a powerful two verse lesson in prayer. This is a whole sermon by itself. Notice four points.

First, notice the direction of Daniel's prayer.

Daniel prayed according to King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8:46-51). Solomon had prayed that if Israel ever sinned so greatly that they would be made captive in a foreign land, that God would turn their hearts back to the Lord and to His Temple, that they would repent and pray toward God's city and God's house, that then God would hear and answer their prayer.

It wasn't superstition or magic or habit.

Calvin says it was just an aid to prayer, one means to keep consistent and faithful. Jerusalem represented God and the power and promises of God, it gave his prayers focus.

It may also have been a reminder that he was a stranger in a foreign land, that Babylon was not his home and he ought not get too comfortable or complacent here. His citizenship and loyalties were elsewhere.

Daniel kept his focus in all the years of captivity to remember to pray for Jerusalem and God's people and God's land. What great faith and confidence to pray toward a city your captors had destroyed. He trusted was not in geography but the God of Israel.

This is a good reminder to focus our prayers beyond ourselves and our own concerns to the concerns of others, of God's people and God's church. To pray for those facing tough trials and those being persecuted for their faithfulness to God. To pray for those who are being hated by Christ-haters.

Second, we see the steadfast devotion of Daniel to prayer.

Why not stop for a month? "It's only for 30 days and it's not idolatry like King Nebuchadnezzar tried to force his three friends to do, bowing down to that shiny image." If he won't stop that then why not just pray in silence? Or if not in silence then at least pray in secret?

What would it say if he did any of those things? Since everyone knew his witness and his practice, to change it now would bring the charge of hypocrisy, his testimony would be damaged. It would say he feared man more than he feared God.

He would not betray His God who had provided and protected and blessed him all this time. How many countless thousands of prayers had God answered? How much of his wisdom and discernment and courage and boldness had come from these very times of prayer? This was his lifeblood, this was his hope and help? Why would he turn away from this now?

Daniel prayed anyway as he had always done.

Notice his spirit. No anxiety, no fear, no wringing his hands, no despair. He was not a victim, he was not a slave or a captive, he was not at the mercy of fate. Utter peace and tranquility.

This is amazing. People really are out to get Daniel and he isn't paranoid about it. The lions are real, but he knows who controls the lions.

Dare we say that is the greater miracle in this story. Shutting the mouths of the lions is big, but bending his knees in the face of such pressure is huge.

Daniel saw what was at stake, worshipping and honoring His God or falling into fear and disbelief. His life was not his own, he left it to God what to do with his life.

Safety and security are huge idols in our lives, they drive many of our choices and decisions. To leave that to God and take this risk is an idol-breaking decision on Daniel's part.

Satan may not use these kinds of tactics in our land, because he doesn't have to, he has easier means at his disposal, easier distractions to keep us from our spiritual disciplines and devotions.

How many things come up that hinder us from worship or cause us to neglect some spiritual priority? How quickly do we bend or compromise?

The temptations to compromise may seem small and temporary and isolated, but they never are. They are always a battle in Satan's larger war he is waging against our souls. And one victory doesn't mean we have won the war and can let our guard down.

Third, we see Daniel's dependability/constancy in prayer.

Mind you Daniel wasn't a pastor or a monk. He was a busy politician and administrator in a huge kingdom. He had a demanding secular job yet he lived by daily prayer.

Three times a day every day for seventy years he paused to offer prayer to the one true living God as he had always done. Nothing strange or unusual here. His enemies were counting on him doing as he had always done.

It is easy to dismiss spiritual disciplines as habit, but the consistent, faithful, daily practice of them bears fruit over the years and decades.

I have done a lot of funerals here of people who have maintained a daily discipline of prayer and Scripture and devotional reading not just for years but decades upon decades.

Yes, habit can become lifeless and dull and dead. But habit can also lead to growth, maturity, wisdom and much fruit. What is the Christian life after all but a long obedience in the same direction?

Everyone loves a mountain top experience or some great revival, some spontaneous outbreak of God's power and presence. But that is not what sustains our spiritual lives over the long haul. God means for us to cultivate regular, routine habits of prayer, worship, Scripture reading. It is in the constant sowing of the spiritual life that we reap the best harvests.

Actually spontaneous outbreaks of revival are often the fruit of long seasons of disciplined regular pray, seeking the face of God.

We need the disciplines of holiness to carry us through the difficult and dry times. This means pulling away from easier and more entertaining pursuits. This requires persistence and perseverance and patience and all that is hard work.

Galatians 6:8-9 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Psalms 55:17-18 Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. 18 He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.

Fourth and finally, notice Daniel's posture/deportment in prayer.

Daniel got down on his knees. What does that show? It is an external act of an inward attitude, an attitude of submission and humility. Kneeling says I know who I am and who God is, that I am a humble servant, that I am praying to the sovereign God of the universe who is my king, not just someone who meets my needs and fulfills my demands.

Kneeling is not the only posture for prayer. Sometimes we sit or stand, sometime even move about. Sometimes with eyes open, sometimes with eyes closed. Sometimes lifting up our arms like Moses, or as Paul commends (I Timothy 5:8).

There is no requirement in Scripture of one way to pray or one direction to pray like the Muslims have. One day every knee will bow before Jesus Christ, so it doesn't hurt to get some practice.

Some will say that the attitude of the heart is all that matters, but they forget that outward or external actions show the heart.

Try loving your spouse only by an attitude of your heart and see how far that gets you. There better be some demonstrative, outward, observable displays.

Implications and applications.

After 70 years in exile, living in a decadent foreign culture, Daniel is still faithful, still known for his loyalty to his God, still strong and courageous, still faithful in prayer.

He lived his faith openly, without reservation or hesitation or apology. The window of his life was just as open as the window of his prayer chamber.

If we want Daniel's peace, we need Daniel's prayer life. May we all dare to be Daniels, men and women who in our later years of life finish well when so few do.

Psalms 92:12-15 The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, 15 to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.