

Daniel 6:1-28, Part 10 12-11-16

Life Lessons from Dan the Man

This Fall we have been learning from the Lord in the book of Daniel and today we're in the sixth chapter, the most famous chapter from this great book. We pick up the story again in chapter 6 where we read about King Darius, the kind of the Medo-Persian empire which had conquered Babylon. **6:1-2** *It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, 2 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.* Even though Babylon had been overtaken by the Medes and Persians, the conquering nation kept in place most of the Babylonian leadership. **3** *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.* Daniel was in line to become head commissioner in the land. **4-9** *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. 5 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." 6 Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! 7 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. 8 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." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.* Why would a king do that? Huh? What would motivate a king to decree that nothing is to be worshipped in his land for thirty days except himself? This is a very common governmental practice that is rooted in the beliefs of statism. Statism is the belief that government is the ultimate authority, that the government holds the key to solving our problems and that government deserves our deepest devotion. All the king is doing here is proposing a test to determine if, in fact, everyone in his

kingdom puts government first. Remarkably, whenever this test is taken almost everyone chooses government as their highest loyalty and they bow down to the king in the adoration of cowardice. William Freemantle puts in words what many governmental leaders put in policy. He writes, "*Government has the power of life and death over our persons. Hence it calls for worship more complete than any other.*" This is why governments so typically restrain or even oppose Biblical faith. This is why Daniel and Mordecai and Paul and Peter and even Jesus ran into conflict with the civil authority. Kings don't want any opposing ultimate loyalties. They are threatened by those within their realm who live by the dictates of another king. They don't mind religion, as long as it consists in rituals and ceremonies and doesn't actually engage the mind and heart to the service of God. Be alert to the dangers of statism. Notice when political leaders speak of *freedom of worship* instead of *freedom of religion*. There is a big difference. And, as we observe the establishment of a new federal administration watch for those who speak as if they hold all the answers, as if government can solve all our problems. Any government big enough to meet all your needs is big enough to demand all you have. And - it eventually will.

Let's move on **10-14** *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. 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. 12 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." 13 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." 14 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.* We read constantly in the Bible of wimpy rulers who let themselves be dominated by their advisors or by public opinion. There was Rehoboam and Artaxerxes and Pontius Pilate and King Agrippa. We get the impression that Pilate didn't want to see Jesus killed, even as Darius didn't want to see Daniel killed, but they fell prey to

doing the popular thing, rather than the right thing. I am sure I have fallen prey to the same temptation in the course of my leadership at home and at church. Have you? **15-16** *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."* 16 *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."* And Daniel was probably thinking, "Yes, but thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." **17-18** *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. 18 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.* Fascinating, isn't it? This king has enough conscience to be miserable over what he did, but not enough to undo it. Lots of people are that way aren't they? Maybe you are that way? Your conscience bothers you enough to make you miserable but not enough to make you change? Can you at least pray that God would make you willing? **19-28** *Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. 20 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?" 21 Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 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." 23 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. 24 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. 25 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! 26 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. 27 "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.” 28 So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This wonderful story affords us another clear sight of the man of God we call *Daniel*. He is clearly one of the superstars of Biblical history, someone to be emulated. And we want to concentrate today on four characteristics of his life that become evident from our story. We see, first of all, that Daniel led a blameless life. Daniel became the object of intense scrutiny by those who, out of envy, would have him brought down from his high position. In their old-tech, Babylonian way, they put him under surveillance in hope of catching him in some corrupt act. I enjoy John Grisham novels, and in some of his early books everybody in the story is being followed, every room, every phone, even the cars are bugged. His books create a haunting suspicion that you may, at any time, be watched. That is not a bad thing to consider, by the way. From a Christian standpoint it is certainly true. It was for Daniel. His enemies were out to find some dirt on him, and this is one of the dangers of public life isn't it? When people enter the political arena they risk a degree of exposure that others aren't likely to face. Many don't want to subject themselves to the kind of scrutiny that a run for office may involve. We are told by some that everybody has skeletons in the closet. Oh really? Explain Daniel. Daniel had led a blameless life. What a beautiful thing that is! What a valuable gift he can offer to his God and those he serves! The investigation by his enemies led to the conclusion that this man is clean, he is faithful. What would they have found if they had looked at your life? What would a study of your life read like? If a private investigator were assigned to find out what you are all about how would the report read? Daniel was found faithful and pure.

Well, you can imagine the impression this had on his enemies. They were so amazed by this that their hearts were convicted over their own wickedness. They repented and relented. Is that what happened? Not. They found no evidence of corruption, but they did find evidence of devotion and it was not devotion to King Darius but to this invisible God of the Hebrews. Would an investigation of your life turn up information that would incriminate you as a believer in Christ? If it were illegal to be a Christian could they get enough evidence to convict you? Or, are you one of those Clairol Christians - only your hairdresser knows for sure? The study of Daniel revealed that this was an extraordinary man with an extraordinary devotion to His God. But rather than feeling embarrassed and convicted by that the bad guys in our story developed an alternative strategy. “Rather than get him in trouble for doing bad we'll get him in trouble

doing good.” 5 *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.”* This is how they decided to go after Daniel. They would see if they could get his religion outlawed. And here is the interesting thing. Their study of his life convinced them that if worshipping God were outlawed Daniel would go down. They knew him well enough to know that he would not, could not, obey an injunction against prayer. They saw him as a man of conviction and could tell from his normal conduct how he would react in a crisis. And they were right, in the wrongest of ways.

If it was illegal in our land to be a Christian, could they find enough evidence to convict you? What’s more, do you live a blameless life, a life that is beyond any reasonable attack and accusation? Is that a goal of yours? When describing the followers of the lamb of God we read these things. Revelation 15:5 *No lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.* II Peter 3:14 *Beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.* Colossians 1 says this is the very end for which Christ gave his blood for you Colossians 1:22 *He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.* Ephesians 1:4 *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.* So, the apostle who wrote those things said of himself in Acts. 24:16 *I do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.* This, which should be the goal of our lives, was a reality in Daniel’s life. He lived a blameless life.

Secondly, this morning we see that Daniel lived a disciplined life. Daniel’s was a life that had been ordered by the priorities of God. It was a life built around certain unalterable convictions and habits. In chapter 1 his dietary habits take center stage and in chapter 6 it is his habits of personal prayer. Look at verse 10 *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.* You know, there are some people, few as they are, who, if prayer were outlawed would actually start praying. Prayer would be exciting for them for the first time. And the reality is those folks are more anti-government than pro-God. But Daniel is totally different. Daniel did not have to go out of his way to disobey the king. Daniel just did what had been his habit for years. He was a man who had set times for

prayer thrice each day. Isn't that terrible! What a legalist this Daniel must have been! He must have really failed to appreciate grace. Of course, I speak in jest, but I also speak with sincere distress that there are some who actually think that way about spiritual disciplines. Some years ago, I interviewed a seminarian for a staff position in our church. I inquired about his prayer life, what his devotional disciplines were like, and he told me he had no set time in his schedule to pray and, in fact, he thought it was unimportant to do so and usually led to a legalistic attitude. He said people should be encouraged to pray when they felt like it, not as part of some routine. To him, this was a key distinction between living by law and living by grace. This perspective of his is part of a disturbing distortion of the doctrines of grace and sanctification. When some correctly argue that our whole relationship with God is grace-based they sometimes take an additional step into the realm of error by denigrating any personal striving and any personal exertion in the way of spiritual disciplines like fasting and prayer and meditating on Scripture. They fail to see that these are means of grace. They fail to see that Biblical men of God, Jesus included, had spiritual disciplines. They fail to see that every great saint known to church history was a person of deep abiding spiritual habits and disciplines. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes this, *"I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God. Read about Henry Martyn, David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards, the brothers Wesley, and Whitefield - read their journals. It does not matter what branch of the church they belonged to, they have all disciplined their lives and have insisted upon the need for this; and obviously it is something thoroughly Scriptural and absolutely essential."* We think of Daniel as one able to stand before kings and that is true. But notice the connection between his standing before kings and his kneeling before God which he did three times daily. Daniel led a disciplined life. Will you dare to be a Daniel?

Thirdly, I hope you can see that Daniel led a principled life. That is not an easy thing to do because it opposes often the desire of our flesh and it opposes often the currents of our society. For Daniel that current got very strong, very fast when this decree came down forbidding prayer to God. For him, this was not a matter of preference but of principle. It was an issue of right and wrong and, as a man of principle and conviction, the lion's den could not sway him. Spurgeon writes this about Daniel. *"He does not change his habits for kings, but goes upstairs, though he*

might have known that it was like climbing the gallows; he drops upon his knees, with his windows open toward Jerusalem in the sight of all his adversaries, and there he prays. He prays openly, not ostentatiously, in the spirit of a protestant not a Pharisee. He sought no honor but shunned no danger. To encounter shame or endure reproach, if needful, for the cause of righteousness, had long been his fixed habit, and now that it threatens to bring on him swift death he swerves not.” When you are a person of principle, facing an issue of right or wrong does not require much thinking. You don’t need to ponder the consequences; you ponder the principles and leave the consequences to God. In reading Spurgeon on Daniel, I also picked up this interesting story. Do you know where the term bigot comes from? *Bigot* is a word we Christians get applied to us today because we follow the one who opposes adultery and homosexuality and heresy. Spurgeon tells where the word came from. He says, a protestant preparing to be knighted was required to bow down before a crucifix, that is a cross with the figure of Jesus on it, used by Catholics as an object of worship in violation of the second commandment. Early protestants opposed the crucifix as idolatrous. Many protestants would bow before it anyway. “It is only a form” they said. But said the one in our story, “By God, I will not.” And they called him “By God” and others who stood out boldly in the same way were given the title “By-Gods” or, as it comes down to us -- *bigots*. Hmm. Maybe a title we should not shun so quickly.

Let’s think about what it means to live by principle by contrasting that with living by strategy. You know what strategy is. It is the process of planning what to do that involves speculation about the results of your options. A political strategist decides what positions should be taken, what tactics used that will enable a candidate to get elected. Many games and sports involve strategy, don’t they? Checkers for example requires that you think through the possible ramifications of each move that you make. I remember trying to teach our kids how to play checkers, how you have to think ahead to decide. But I also taught them that there is at least one occasion in checkers when strategy is not in force, but principle. When you are in a position to jump your opponent, you have no option. The rules of the game require you to do so. There is no reason to contemplate the result, that move is a matter of principle not strategy. Get it? Strategy asks, “What is the result?” Principle asks, “What is right?” Some decisions in life are strategic. When you are doing your taxes, the choice of itemizing your deductions or taking the standard deduction is a matter of strategy. Whether to tell the truth on your return is a

matter of principle. Do you see the difference? What kind of problem did Daniel face? Well, he could have seen it as a matter of strategy. He could have looked at the possible results and realized that he could do more good for God as a living commissioner than as a lunch for lions. He could have argued that his high position made him too important to risk, but he didn't. When God has given commands and directions concerning a matter there is no strategy needed. Can you simply obey and leave the consequences to God because you are one with Daniel in living a principled life?

Fourthly, this morning let's see that Daniel lived a God-fearing life. Fearing God is a desire to gain His favor and avoid His displeasure. It is caring more about what God thinks than you do about what men think. It is weighing men and God in the balance and choosing God. Many there are who are happy to follow God when that is popular. Many there are who will sing the Lord's song when their friends and family will join them. But few are willing to go it alone. Few are willing to sing it in the face of lions. Few there are who are dominated by a fear of God. But Daniel was. Daniel served men as he should but he preeminently served God. Darius referred in verse 16 to the God Daniel served continually. Daniel knew that he was accountable to the king which he was, but he also knew he was accountable to the king's boss. You serve the kingdom that you see and Daniel could see the kingdom of God and in his own eyes he would stand or fall before the heavenly Judge. Look at what he said in verse 22 *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.* Daniel tells Darius that even though he was found guilty before the court of men he knew he was innocent before God. My friend, do you know how critical it is for personal mental health to be able to distinguish the opinions of men from the opinions of God? There are some of you in family situations or work situations in which you find no affirmation. Whatever you do for your spouse or your parents or your children or your boss does not seem good enough to win their approval. It is critical that you become free of their opinions by getting to know God and learning to find solace in His smile and His favor. Most of us see ourselves before the court of family opinion, company opinion, church opinion, popular opinion, Daniel saw himself before the court of God. That is where we learn who we truly are. And ultimately, only His opinion matters.

My favorite passage on fearing God is in Matthew 10:28 *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* Remember the quote I read earlier about how government has the power of life and death and so calls for our complete worship. Jesus here reminds us that there is someone else we must not forget, someone who holds eternal life and death in his hands. You leave God out of the equation and you are a slave to powerful people. Remember God and you are free. Daniel had a lot to lose by his obedience. Daniel was a big man in Babylon. But he was willing to forsake his powers and his pleasures and his position, even his life, in order to please God and to remain blameless in the sight of God. What is obedience to the Lord, what is faithfulness to Jesus likely to cost you this week? Some dollars? Some minutes? A few stares? Maybe it will cost you a friendship. Maybe it will cost you a job. Are you, am I, prepared to fear God more than anything and anybody? Don't forget what happened to Daniel. In the end. In the end, the God-fearer always wins. The God-fearer always wins. God will make sure of it.

Will you bow your heads with me in prayer? I don't usually say that but today I really would like you to bow your heads, as I'm going to ask you a question. Imagine yourself standing in the coliseum of Rome accused of loyalty to a supposed traitor-king by the name of Jesus. The roar of lions can be heard as you consider how to plea. And the question comes to you, not from men but from Jesus, as He asks you this, "Am I your True Master, the One you will obey no matter what? How do you answer that question today? If you can say, if you will say yes to Jesus, if you will commit yourself, either for the first time or the millionth time to obey Him no matter what that means for your life, then raise your hand as a testimony to that commitment and also as a prayer, a cry for grace to be like Daniel as he was like Jesus.