

DANIEL 6 CBC 22.11.2020

Welcome back to the book of Daniel, where we've reached ch.6. Every chapter so far has illustrated the clash between this world's kingdoms and the kingdom of God, and ch.6 is no different. Daniel is about to be thrown into a den of lions for his loyalty to God. You probably know the story and no doubt you've admired Daniel's courage and thought, *"I'm not sure I could be as brave as that!"* But we're going to see that though Daniel was brave, the main point is that he was BLESSED – and we can be as blessed as he was. Because Da 6 isn't chiefly moral exhortation – it's a gospel message: good news for the weak and the needy.

The setting of ch.6 is still the city of Babylon, but there's a new empire (Medo-Persian) and a new ruler called Darius (which may be another name for Cyrus, or someone appointed by Cyrus, but I'll leave that debate to the commentaries).

Whoever he was, Darius wasn't guilty of ageism, because he appointed Daniel to a top government job, and Daniel must have been in his mid-eighties! But he still excelled and the king made plans to put Daniel in charge of the entire civil service. That should be a great encouragement to all of you who spend most of your week in the workplace. Daniel stood firm in an unbelieving culture yet was honoured in his career. God rules everywhere, and He makes it possible for us to serve well in all sorts of careers even in a fallen world.

1. OPPOSITION

But don't be surprised when there's opposition. Jesus said we'd face it (John 15:18-19) and Daniel did. Don't imagine dirty tricks in politics started with Richard Nixon. Daniel's colleagues were determined to get rid of him – but how? They couldn't fault the way he did his job; and no amount of telephone tapping or e-mail hacking or rummaging in his dustbin was going to turn up evidence of corruption. *That's impressive, isn't it? The secret police investigated him and couldn't find a fault. If we were investigated, I wonder what they'd find?*

But the most obvious thing about Daniel was his faith in God, so they looked for a way to turn that against him – to show that his loyalty to God compromised his loyalty to the empire. So they came to Darius and said, *"O great king, we got a wonderful idea and it's all about YOU! Let's strengthen your great empire with a gesture of unity. Everyone must show their loyalty to you by praying only to YOU for 30 days. No exceptions! Any dissenters will be dinner for the lions!"* And because Darius liked the idea of being a god for a month, he signed this hasty law without much thought. *"And remember, O king, our tradition of legal inflexibility!"* (v.8). For this was a society where even the king was governed by the law.

Do you see what they've done? They've deliberately engineered a clash between the law of the state and the law of God, so as to crush Daniel under the pretext of legality. Does that sound familiar? It should, because it's happening in Britain today. People are lobbying for laws to be put in place which may look innocent enough to those who frame them – but those laws are then used to target Christians and to engineer a clash. And often we hardly know these laws have slipped through parliament until they're used against us (e.g. *the Ashers Bakery case; Christians accused of hate speech etc.*). That's how Daniel was attacked: by manipulating the law.

2. DANIEL'S RESPONSE

Daniel had been in politics long enough to know a stitch-up when he saw it. But he refused to play safe. He just decided to commit everything to God in prayer (v.10). This is the real highpoint of the chapter. The great miracle of grace in Da 6 is that Da prayed *anyway*. At that point his greatest danger had been overcome – the danger of denying God.

His open windows aren't about showing off – he prayed that way, towards Jerusalem, because he remembered God's words at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem – that if God's people in exile would remember the Lord and turn towards Jerusalem and pray, God would hear them. This was Daniel's normal prayer life – he'd never kept his faith a secret, and it would have been wrong to start doing so now.

We might think: *Surely Daniel could have let his devotions slide for a month* – after all, probably some of us have done that, and we don't feel too bad about it. Or couldn't he just pray in bed at night? But Daniel lived in the public arena and was known as a believer, and if he hid his faith God would be publicly dishonoured. Is that a serious issue? It was to Daniel.

It can't have been easy. But he was strengthened by good habits. Three times a day he prayed – *“just as he had done before”* – His praying wasn't a desperate last resort but a daily discipline. It's this patient commitment to meet with the Lord that produces strength.

There's nothing magic about three times a day – Daniel had simply devised his own discipline to maintain his relationship with God – and we need to find a pattern that works for us. And he also read his Bible (Da 9:2) – i.e., the secret of his strength was doing two things that are open to us every day.

“But we're too busy – overwhelmed with life!” But that's WHY we're overwhelmed. We're dominated by the moment because we don't keep our eyes on the bigger picture. Remember what I described as the two screens back in Da 1:1-2? Screen one is what we see around us – including things like the lions' den. Screen two is God's revelation of what it all means and where life is heading – God's people at home with Him, enjoying the Kingdom that lasts forever. Daniel made sure that what he learned from screen two determined how he lived in screen one. He wasn't living by knee-jerk reaction, but by calm, steady progress toward the future God has revealed.

Getting on his knees and thanking God and praying towards Jerusalem – this is how he kept his eyes on the second screen. It reminded him of centuries of revelation of who God is; of who the real King is, even in Babylon (and Daniel had a lifetime of experience of God's sovereignty in Babylon!); of God's promises of life and hope beyond Babylon – even of a new heaven and earth to come (Isa 65:17). That's how Daniel escaped the trap of feeling overwhelmed by life's battles.

And as he prayed, God kept this isolated and elderly man true to the Faith, even as his enemies hauled him off to the lions.

3. GOD'S RESCUE

King Darius was miserable. He liked and valued Daniel, but just like Daniel, the king was the victim of entrapment. His law is being used for something he hadn't intended. And he looks stupid. He's

allowed himself to be treated like a god, but he *isn't* a god and he has no power to deliver. He can't save Daniel, and he can't save himself.

So Daniel is thrown into the lions' den which is then sealed. And nothing will cheer the king up – no food, no entertainment, no sleep. Isn't it striking: Daniel is thrown to the lions and we hear only about what a rotten night *the king* had! We're not told anything about Daniel's experience during the night. The focus is on the question mark against Daniel's God: does He have the power to save His people from death? That's the king's question as he rushes to the lions' den the next morning (v.20).

Well you know the answer. In Da 1, Daniel refused to eat – and in Da 6, the lions refused to eat! Because God had closed their mouths. Contrast the helplessness of the earthly king who can't deliver Daniel and the power of the heavenly King who controls the wild beasts (and that's very significant, as we'll see in the next chapter).

But what should we make of v.22: "*God saved me because I was innocent*"? That doesn't seem to fit with other scriptures that tell us every person is a sinner. But Daniel doesn't say, "I was saved because I was PERFECT" – and in ch.9 we'll find Daniel confessing himself a sinner like everyone else.

So what was he innocent of in ch.6? Innocent of deserting God. People were saying he should stop praying to God, and he wouldn't. And now he's drawing attention to the God who rescued him. To stay with God is to stay with the only King who can save us from death. So it's a wise choice.

And at the end of the story, Daniel's faithful witness once again leads an unbelieving king to see a measure of truth. King Darius publicly proclaims the greatness of God. But the people who despised Daniel and his God aren't given the protection of Daniel's God (v.24) – because if we reject this God, there's no hope of salvation.

CONCLUSION: So what's the great lesson of this chapter? We don't have to work it out because it's spelled out in vv.26-27, and it's all about why we should put our trust in Daniel's God:

- He's the LIVING God (v.26) in contrast to people like Darius who try to act like gods but fail.
- He's the SOVEREIGN God (v.26) whose Kingdom won't be destroyed – that's very telling in a book which is so largely concerned with the transience of human empires.
- He's the God who RESCUES and SAVES (v.27) – who delivers those who trust in Him as Daniel did.

But is that really true? Christians haven't always been delivered from lions, have they? No, indeed – and the Bible is well aware that God doesn't always rescue his servants in this fashion (e.g., John the Baptist). SO we mustn't use Da 6 to teach that we can escape from all our problems.

What, then, do we mean when we say God rescues and saves? Commentators down the centuries have seen in Da 6 a foreshadowing of the resurrection of Christ. They point out the parallels: Both Daniel and Jesus faced trumped up charges ... had leaders who tried to save them but couldn't (Darius / Pilate) ... were placed in tombs with a stone to shut them in ... both tombs were sealed ... both have supporters hurrying to the tomb at the earliest opportunity ... both emerge from the tomb. Remarkable parallels!

But there are also differences, and the differences are even more important.

- Daniel was only innocent in one area. If his whole life was laid bare before God, he couldn't call out "I'm innocent" - and neither could we. But Jesus was innocent in everything. Jesus always said YES to obedience and NO to disobedience, and that's great news because that's what qualifies Him to be our Saviour.
- Unlike Daniel, Jesus really died. Daniel came out without a single wound (v.23) - and that was a wonderful miracle. But Jesus was wounded for our transgressions - and that was a greater miracle. He was torn and beaten and spat upon, and He died in pain, mocked, shamed and condemned - just how we don't want to die. But He died for our sins, the innocent for the guilty, so that we, like Daniel, might emerge from the tomb without any wounds.
- And Jesus really rose. Daniel didn't - he was probably lifted out by soldiers with ropes. But God lifted Jesus out of the tomb and out of death itself, and the New Testament points out that in this way God was saying some hugely important things about Jesus: that He's qualified to be our King and our Saviour, to take away our sin, to carry us through death and into the life of His eternal kingdom.

Do you see? The book of Daniel, in the end, like all Scripture, leads us to Jesus, the fullest expression of the living, sovereign, rescuing God. Daniel escaped the Lions' Den, and so unbelievers in Babylon were given a revelation of the God who rescues and saves - and Daniel was wise to trust Him. And the revelation they received has been wonderfully expanded for us in Jesus - and the lesson is that now we need to make the wise choice to trust Him, whatever roaring lions we may be called to face.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we thank you that Christ is our hope in life and death. On this solid rock we stand, and we pray that by Your Spirit we may be Your faithful witnesses at all times, in all places, in all situations; for your glory's sake. AMEN.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- What difference would it make to you or to our church if we were banned from praying for 30 days? *Perhaps the honest answer would be embarrassing. If our government tried this, we'd doubtless protest - but are we praying at the moment, while we're allowed? Do we value prayer?*
- Daniel survived because his steady habits of devotion had become a part of him. How are you building these disciplines into your life? *It's no use lamenting that you're not like Daniel when the means lie at hand if only you'd discipline yourself to use them.*
- Your God is able to save you! How will this truth give you confidence to live for Him today, even when it's costly?