

Daniel 6 - The Lions' Den

January 20, 2012

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting through the Internet. This morning, we are back in our study of the book of Daniel. Today, we are in chapter six. Take your Bible and turn there. If you didn’t bring a Bible, open a pew Bible to page 743.

While you are turning, I want to share with you something that recently caught my eye. Whenever we talk about the government, the word corruption is almost always with it. In recent history, we have Watergate with Richard Nixon; Travelgate, Filegate and Whitewatergate with Bill Clinton; now we have BenghaziGate with President Obama. That is just scratching the surface. The words government and corruption sometimes seem synonymous.

While preparing of this message, I ran across some of the corruption records for the 100th congress that served our country 1987-89. The legal records of those congressmen and women revealed the following:¹

- 29 arrested for spousal abuse
- seven convicted of fraud
- 19 arrested for writing bad checks
- 117 bankrupted two or more businesses
- 14 arrested on drug charges
- eight arrested on shoplifting charges
- 21 with lawsuits pending against them

¹ Rodney Stortz, Daniel: The Triumph of God's Kingdom, Crossway Books, 2004.

- 84 charged with driving while intoxicated.

The words government and corruption are closely connected.

Government corruption isn't just a modern day occurrence, it was just as common in the ancient world. Daniel 6 is a story about government corruption, plans to eliminate a political opponent, the temptation to compromise on little things to fit in and a lion's den.

As we work our way through the story, we will look at it under three headings: The search for dirt, for God or country and the lion's den.

The search for dirt

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. Daniel 6:1–9 (ESV)

Who was Darius?

The first question we have is "Who is Darius?" This is Darius Cyaxares II. He ruled Babylon for two years after its capture. In chapter five we learned he was 62 when he conquered Babylon. He didn't have a pacemaker. As this

chapter shows, the stress of managing Babylon was almost worse than the effort to conquer it. I think that is why he only ruled for two years. After Darius came Cyrus. He freed the Jews to return to Jerusalem,. Cyrus obtained power because he was married to Darius' sister Mundane. That marriage is what united the Medes and the Persians.

Darius quickly realized that the existing governmental structure in Babylon was filled with corruption. I think the Babylonian government was especially corrupt under Belshazzar's leadership. One of the things you learn in leadership is *the speed of the leader is the speed of the team*. Most organizations become like their leaders. If Belshazzar was as irresponsible and corrupt as chapter five leads us to believe, I suspect the people working for him were not much better. This is why Darius set up satraps.

What are satraps?

The word satrap literally means, "protector of the kingdom." These are the governmental watchdogs looking out for corruption. Over the satraps were three additional whistle blowers of government corruption that watched the satraps to make sure they weren't taking payoffs, kickbacks and bribes. Daniel was one of the top three whistle blowers for Darius' anti-corruption task force.

The text also tells us the king noticed an excellent spirit in Daniel. It didn't take long for Daniel to develop a reputation. This was a reputation for his integrity. He was consistently true to his word. The history on his web browser was clean. He couldn't be bought off or bullied into keeping quiet. He wasn't arrested for drunk driving or check fraud. Darius realized the man with the

highest integrity in his government was Daniel. The best way to handle government corruption would be to put Daniel in charge of the entire anti-corruption program.

You can imagine the jealousy of the other satraps when they heard Daniel would be promoted. While this appears to be an issue of jealousy, I believe their concerns were much deeper. They were worried that with Daniel in charge, they couldn't get away with anything. He would expose the corruption in the other anti-government corruption leaders. They wouldn't be able to take even little bribes or pad their expense reports. With Daniel in charge, they would need to be content with a government salary that was not fluffed up with money from lobbyists.

In typical government fashion, when you want to keep your opponent from getting ahead, rather than improving your own game, you work on a smear campaign to destroy them. That is what the other satraps set out to do against Daniel.

Daniel was more than 86 years old when the satraps started digging for dirt. They had plenty of material to work with. They launched an exhaustive search of his cell phone records, his web history, his credit report and his text messages. They talked with college roommates all digging for something to smear him with. They came up with nothing. That is amazing. Today, I don't think any of us would consider running for office because we wouldn't want our poor choices of 20 years ago to become front page news.

Since they couldn't find corruption in Daniel's history, their only hope would be to manufacture a situation where he would be considered corrupt. They did this by writing an edict that Darius would sign saying that nobody could pray to anyone but Darius for the next 30 days.

Why did they propose an edict where only the king could be prayed to for a month?

This edict sounds strange. Why would Darius even consider signing it? After Babylon was conquered, it was in political and cultural turmoil. The idea of praying only to Darius would produce a measure of unity during a time of cultural upheaval. It would encourage people to look to the government to solve their problems, not their various gods.

The satraps used the typical techniques to get him to sign it. They wrote it for him so he wouldn't read the fine print. They used group pressure by saying everybody thought it was a good idea. They used flattery. As the new ruler of the Babylonian empire, Darius sucked up the flattery. With the exuberance of a teenager taking out a loan for his first car, he signed the papers without considering the fine print.

For God or country

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. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction

you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.” Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Daniel 6:10–18 (ESV)

When Daniel discovered the decree was signed and he was set up for failure, what did he do? He did what he always had done. He kept praying. One of my favorite parts of Daniel 6 is that we get an inside view of Daniel’s spiritual life. He prayed to God on his knees three times daily. We know from other portions of Daniel that he also regularly read the books of the Bible God gave his people at that point in history.

Daniel’s times with God were scheduled and disciplined.

What I love about Daniel is his relationship with God was characterized by schedule and discipline. Scheduling and discipline sounds so unspiritual. Many of us think we should only pray when we feel like it. Scheduling and discipline sounds like a business. Scheduled and disciplined times with God are not as unspiritual as they appear. *The secret to Daniel being a man of impact in the public and unpredictable moments of life was his private and scheduled times with God in his private life.*

In college, I tried to implement the Daniel plan by praying on my knees three times a day. I didn’t make it more than a week. Rather than seeing Daniel’s prayer life as a practice that is too hard to follow, we need to take the

principle he showed us and put it into practice. Daniel scheduled times of prayer and study. It was on his calendar with the same regularity as his meals.

For many of us, we don't have five minutes of uninterrupted scheduled time with God in prayer. That is my challenge for this week. Literally set a timer for five minutes of complete alone time each day and spend just five scheduled minutes with God in prayer. I know this sounds mechanical and boring but our private, scheduled times with God that nobody else sees are the building blocks of a high-impact public life for God like Daniel experienced.

The same is true with your Bible reading. I have a plan I use to read through the Bible in the year on my Logos Bible software. We also have Bibles you can acquire at the *Connection Center* just outside the main sanctuary door. Schedule those times in your life. Daniel treated those meals for his soul as essential as the meals for his body.

Why were Daniel's opponents so committed to breaking Daniel's time with God?

I think these men realized that Daniel's character in everyday life was a reflection of his personal time with God. If Daniel didn't cease his prayer times, he would go to the lion's den. If he gave up his prayer times for a month, they could get him disconnected from his God. They would soon find cracks in his integrity.

Can you see the rationalizations in his mind? "Why don't I just pray in my heart? It is only one month long. What difference will one month of missed prayer make? If they catch me praying and I go to the lion's den, I will lose my

position of power and influence in this culture. I served God faithfully for over 80 years. I am tired.”

Daniel refused to compromise. The other government leaders bring to the king’s attention Daniel’s continual prayer life. It was at that point that Darius realized the extent of his government’s corruption. His “satraps for honest government” were corrupt enough to not just frame Daniel and hopefully kill him but were willing to frame Darius into being the one who signed the edict to kill him! That is government corruption at its finest.

There was no way out. Daniel was sealed in the den with Darius’ hopes and a prayer, “Daniel, may the God you serve continually deliver you.”

In the lions’ den

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Daniel 6:19–24 (ESV)

Daniel was saved. The question is “Why?”

Why was Daniel saved?

1. **He was blameless before God and the king.** The easiest and most straightforward answer comes from the text. As Daniel said, “It is because I was blameless before God and before the king.” Clearly,

God often chooses to honor those who honor him. The story is clear about that and we shouldn't miss it. When we choose to honor God in our lives, that opens a door of opportunity for God to honor us. The danger is when we stop reading and thinking. Daniel 6 is not teaching us that if we just get our acts together God will save us from all the lions' dens in our lives. That simply isn't true.

2. **He placed his faith and trust in God.** A little later the text says, "no harm was found on him because he trusted in his God." If you peek behind this, you find that Daniel's life on the outside was a reflection of his faith on the inside. Daniel is given to us as an example of faith, not an example of a perfect life, in Hebrews 11. He is given to us as a hero of faith.

...who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Hebrews 11:33–34 (ESV)

Interestingly, in Hebrews 11, not everybody is given as a hero of faith. There are some who trusted in God and were not saved! In God's wisdom, he chose not to rescue them. Hebrews 11 calls those the superheroes of faith.

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better

for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:36–40 (ESV)

3. **Daniel's salvation was God's way of making God's name famous, not Daniel's.** Another reason I think God saved Daniel from the lions is because Darius was asking a question about Daniel's God: "Is Daniel's God, the one that he serves continually, able to intervene in everyday life and come to the rescue of his people?" The resounding answer is "Yes!" God is not just large and in charge of world history, he is large and in charge of our history. He loves us, and he is fully capable of stepping in to rescue us. God delights in those who, by faith, delight in him.

Daniel's life mission was to be God's missionary to those in world power. It began with Nebuchadnezzar, who through Daniel's life and God's power turned to the true God of heaven. It continued with the intervening kings like Evil-Marduk, Narglissar and also Belshezzar. Daniel was God's man to pronounce judgment on Belshazzar's life. Daniel continued as a missionary to Darius. Darius was new in town. He was wondering if Daniel's God was real. He wondered if Daniel's God could save. After the lions' den, the answer is a resounding "Yes!" Darius was so excited about the one true God of heaven and earth that this chapter closes with Darius making a decree to the entire kingdom, a decree that was very similar to Nebuchadnezzar's when he placed his faith in the one true God. Daniel was not saved for Daniel's glory. He was saved for God's glory. Saving Daniel was God's way of

reaching Darius' heart and of making God's name famous throughout his new empire.

Who saved Daniel in the den?

A straightforward reading of the text leads you to believe that Daniel was saved by an angel. There are hints we may be able to go a little deeper. The Hebrew text, that is the oldest text that our Bibles are based on, says God sent *his* angel. Daniel was not saved by a generic angel but by God's angel. If you were around Faith Church for the last few years, you will remember a study we did where we learned that in the Old Testament that when we see the phrase, "the angel of the Lord" not just "an angel of the Lord," it is a reference to Christ appearing before his incarnation in Bethlehem.

The Hebrew text here is not specific enough to definitively say this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, but it hints that Jesus is the one in the den with Daniel. Given the apocalyptic visions we are about to read about in the rest of the book, it wouldn't surprise me if it was Jesus in the den with Daniel.

I did some additional research on Daniel 6:22. One of the things I read was the way Daniel 6:22 was translated in the Septuagint. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament used by Jews and Christians in the days of Jesus. The Septuagint occasionally does some interpretation as it does translation. Sometimes translators slightly adjusted the words as they translated from Hebrew to Greek so the Greek better represented what they believed was happening in the Hebrew. The Septuagint translation, Daniel 6:22 reads, "God saved me from the lions." The early church believed the angelic

being that saved Daniel in the lions' den was God himself. They believed it was not just an angelic being but it was a divine being that saved Daniel.

While this is not something to argue over, there is strong evidence that leads us to believe that just like the fourth person in the fiery furnace that protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednago appears to be the preincarnate Jesus, the angel of God that shut the mouths of the lions may have been Christ himself.

Lessons from the chapter

God is large and in charge of world history and my history. We don't want to miss this. In a book that deals with the rising and falling of empires, we wonder if God cares about us. This chapter reminds us how intimately involved God is with our daily lives.

Spiritual disciplines make a difference. While it sounds regimented, boring and routine, Daniel's spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study were the unseen building blocks in his life that God used to make him a man of high impact in a foreign land.

Finish well. The end of your life will be more important than the beginning.

In the last chapter, it appeared Daniel was sidelined by retirement. At 86 he was God's chosen instrument to be God's man in Darius' life. It was his faithful walk with God in his early years that prepared him to walk faithfully in his senior years when it would have been so easy to compromise.

God honors those who honor him. While it is clear that Daniel was saved by his faith in God, it is also clear that the holiness of his life played into his

usefulness for God in his generation. Friends, if we want to be a man or woman of influence for Christ's kingdom, it begins by faith. Another part of that is choosing to honor God in our daily choices. He also loves you so much he sent his own son to die for you.



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