

Delivered from Death

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Daniel 6:1-28

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Our passage this morning is Daniel 6, one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. It's the story of Daniel in the lion's den. It gives us a great example of a faithful man full of faith, but the main point is not about Daniel's faith. The main point is about Daniel's God—the one he put his faith in. I want you to see this main point before we move through the story. The clear message of the passage is found in verses 20-23.

The morning after Daniel is thrown in the lion's den, King Darius comes to the den and declares: "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"¹ To which Daniel replies: "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." The narrator then tells us: "Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

The point of the whole passage is that God is willing and able to deliver from death those who trust in him. We can't miss this point. This is a repeated promise in Scripture. God delivers from death those who trust in him.²

But God doesn't always deliver us from death in this life. In fact, everybody eventually dies. Even Daniel eventually died. So how does this promise of deliverance from death encourage us in the face of the discouraging reality of death? That's the question I want to answer this morning.

In order to answer that question, we have to look beyond Daniel 6. But what we learn in Daniel 6, will help us to see more clearly what lies beyond. We need to understand exactly what happened to Daniel before we can know what is true for us today.

Daniel 6 follows a basic plot narrative. There's a setting, a conflict, a climax, and a resolution. But the best way to see the plot development is through a repeated word in the story. The word "find" or "found" shows up eight times in the passage in three main clusters. So I want to walk through this story in three parts. And then look beyond this story to us today.

FAITHFUL: NO FAULT FOUND (1-9)

Let's begin with the first part in verses 1-9. Following the fall of the Babylonian kingdom, Darius the Mede received the kingdom (5:31). And verses 1-3 tell us what he did when he came to power. And this sets the stage for the conflict that will follow. "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

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons*

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.”

Daniel was like the top-level senior VP in the kingdom. And apparently the other senior vice presidents didn't like the way he was rising in the ranks. So, they try to find dirt on Daniel. Look at verse 4, which is where we find the first cluster of our word “find”: “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.”

Get the picture in your mind. They've broken into his office and apartment. Torn the place apart. They've tapped his phones. They've examined his expense accounts with a fine-tooth comb. But his books were in order. All his numbers added up. No bribes have been taken.³ Here's a diamond in the rough. Just think of it. A politician, a high-level executive, with no dirt. There's no mud to sling. He has complete integrity. He's unimpeachable. His life is consistent. Here is a man who is completely faithful.

So, what will the conspirators do? In verse 5, we see a light bulb come on. “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.’”

They do the only thing they can do to a faithful man. They pit his devotion to King Darius against his devotion to the King of heaven. They know that although he will serve Darius without fault, he won't worship him. He will remain faithful to God.

So, in verses 6-9 they go to Darius and ask him to make a law. The law is spelled out in verse 7: “Whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.”

In verse 9, Darius signs the bill into law. And so, the stage is set. What will Daniel do? Will he obey God or man? Will he put his safety first or worship of God first?

FULL OF FAITH: FOUND PRAYING (10-18)

Verses 10-11 give us the answer. And here we find our second use of the word “found”: “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.”

They couldn't find any fault in him because he was faithful. But they found him praying. And this highlights that he is full of faith in God. He's completely dependent on God. His conspirators think his faith in God will be his weakness, but here we see that it's his strength.

Some people think that because Daniel prays three times a day with his windows open that he's trying to pick a fight with Darius. But I don't think that's the case. It does show his courage, but I

³ Adapted from David Helm, *Daniel for You*

don't think he's trying to stir the pot. The text tells us that he's doing what he's always done. Praying toward Jerusalem.

Why is he praying toward Jerusalem? Probably because of Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8. In his prayer, Solomon anticipates God's people going into exile. And he makes a request of God: If the exiles pray toward their land, and toward their city, and toward the temple, and if they repent; then he asks God to maintain their cause, to forgive Israel, and to show them favor with their captors (vv. 46-51).

I think that's what Daniel's doing. And I think he's been doing it consistently for close to seventy years. There's nothing new here. Here's a man who puts his faith into practice over his whole life. He shows his dependence upon God through prayer.

He knows that the only hope for him and for Israel is found in his God. Whether it's deliverance from exile or deliverance from the lion's den. Only God can deliver! So, while he respects and serves Darius, he doesn't need to bow before the law of Darius. He certainly doesn't pray to Darius. He bows before God.

Interestingly, even Darius comes to see that only God can deliver. In verses 12-18, we see the tension build until Daniel is eventually thrown in the lion's den. The officials come to Darius and ask him to confirm that he made a law that nobody could pray to any god except for him (v. 12). They want him to say it with his own words before they put their evidence on the table, so that there's no way for him to waffle. And once he reiterates the law he made, they tell him that Daniel has broken his law (v. 13).

And from this moment on, we encounter a big surprise in the narrative. We see no evidence that Daniel is distressed over the situation. But Darius is deeply distressed. Look at verse 14: "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."

But the conspirators remind him that his law cannot be changed (v. 15). It's so clear, there's nothing Darius can do. He's powerless to deliver Daniel. And that causes him anguish. But he believes God's able to deliver him. Look at verses 16-18: "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."

Verse 16 is critical. But the English is a little misleading. This is not a prayer. This is not a wish. It's a declaration. It could read, "Your God, whom you serve, will deliver you." Daniel knows that only God can deliver him. And Darius knows it too.

That's why he stays up all night fasting (v. 18). He hopes God will shut the mouths of the lions—that the lions will also fast all night!⁴ And that's why, in verse 19, he goes to the den in the morning to see what happened.⁵

⁴ Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary

⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons*

GOD'S FAITHFUL: NO HARM FOUND (19-28)

You already know what he finds when he arrives at the den. We've already read verses 20-23. But I want you to look again at verse 22-23 to see our third cluster of the word "found": "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."

Here's the summary of the whole passage. Daniel was found faithful to God and to the king. And he was full of faith; he trusted his God. This is noteworthy for us. But the main emphasis here is on the faithfulness of God. God delivered Daniel from death. No kind of harm was found on him. This is the climax of the story.

The resolution comes out in verses 24-28 in three reversals.

First, there's a reversal with the conspirators. They plotted for Daniel's death. But in verse 24, we see that they meet the fate they hoped would come for Daniel.

Second, there's the reversal of the king's edict. Where he previously made an edict that people only pray to him on fear of death, now he calls all people to fear God. Look at verses 26-27: "I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel,

for he is the living God,
 enduring forever;
 his kingdom shall never be destroyed,
 and his dominion shall be to the end.
 He delivers and rescues;
 he works signs and wonders
 in heaven and on earth,
 he who has saved Daniel
 from the power of the lions."

The third reversal is found in verse 28. Whereas Daniel was supposed to die in the pit, instead he was lifted up and prospered. "So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

Again, God's faithfulness is highlighted here. Kingdoms rise and fall, but God's kingdom remains forever. Daniel was there at the beginning of the exile under Nebuchadnezzar. He was there under Belshazzar. He was there during Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. God not only delivers, but he preserves his people during their exile.

So, we've seen a picture of a faithful man, with courageous faith in a faithful God. A God who delivers from death those who trust in him. Let's return now to our original question.

HALL OF FAITH: CONNECTION WITH CHRIST AND US

God doesn't always deliver us from death in this life. In fact, everybody eventually dies. So how does this promise of deliverance from death encourage us in the face of the discouraging reality of death?

Like I said at the beginning, this passage points beyond itself. Specifically, it points to Christ. And Christ is the one who is able to deliver us from ultimate death.

Did you notice the parallels between Daniel's life and the life of Christ?⁶ The chief priests and elders in Jesus' day envied him, so they too plotted together to arrest and kill Jesus (Mt. 26:3-4). But they could find no fault in him (Mk. 14:55). Pilate found no fault in him either (Mt. 27:23), but he gave in to the crowd; he wouldn't release him (27:24). So he delivered Jesus over to be crucified (27:26). After Jesus was placed in the tomb, Pilate secured the tomb by sealing the stone (27:66), just like Darius had done. Then on the third day, at the break of dawn, the women went to the tomb (28:1). But an angel declared to them that he was not there, for he had risen (28:6). Following his resurrection he, like Daniel, was elevated. He was given all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18).

There are many similarities. But there are also differences. The big difference here is God didn't deliver Jesus *from* death. He delivered him *through* death in the resurrection. And why did he do that?

Jesus died so that we could be delivered from something much greater than the mouths of the lions. So that we could be delivered from something much greater than sickness and disease. Jesus died to save us from our sins (Mt. 1:21). So that we wouldn't have to face eternal death. Man is powerless to deliver from death! But the God-man is powerful to save.

But Jesus not only died. He also rose from the dead. He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though they die, yet shall they live, and everyone who lives and believes in him shall never die (Jn. 11:25-26).

If we trust in Christ, we are not promised deliverance from physical death. But we are promised deliverance from spiritual death and the judgment of God. The enemies of God will be thrown into the pit. But the people of God will be lifted up from the pit. And they will be raised with Christ.

This is very encouraging. And this is the main way that we need to respond to this passage this morning. We need to trust that God is able to deliver us from death through what he's done in Christ's death and resurrection. We need to trust in Jesus.

But there's more for us this morning. There is still something to be learned about how to live our lives as we look at the life of Daniel and the life of Christ.

Daniel's deliverance from the lion's den is mentioned in the great hall of faith in Hebrews 11. His life clearly points to Jesus. But his life is also meant to show us what it means to have enduring faith as we live our lives in exile in this world.

I see three main ways we can endure in our faith like Daniel.

First, we are called to be faithful in the face of opposition and even death. We are called to have integrity in this world. Daniel really shouldn't be an exceptional case of character. We should all live lives above reproach before a watching world.

Second, we are called to put our money where our mouth is when it comes to faith. The enduring faith we're called to in Hebrews 11 should drive us to our knees like Daniel. We are called to a

⁶ Helm

prayerful dependence upon God. This shouldn't only happen in times of trouble. It should be the consistent pattern of our life all the way to the end.

So, we endure through faithfulness in the world and through prayer that proves our faith. Finally, we endure through maintaining an eternal perspective.

I believe Daniel had an eternal perspective. We know he prayed toward Jerusalem. He prayed that the people of God would have favor in the eyes of their captors. And he prayed for the return from exile. But he was looking beyond the things of this earth.

Daniel himself never returned to Jerusalem. But the author of Hebrews tells us the people of faith were looking beyond an earthly Jerusalem. They were looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (11:10). They were looking to the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).

We're called to do the same. If we want to be faithful, if we want to be full of faith in our faithful God, then we have to look beyond this life. If we want to endure in exile, we have to look to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."