

Life With the Lion

Daniel 6

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you would join us, and you're joining us in the midst of a sermon series in the book of Daniel. We're in the Old Testament book of Daniel, so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Daniel chapter 6. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you. You can find our passage there, or you can follow along on the screens as we project the passage. And if you did come here this morning and you don't have a Bible, or maybe, you know, it's, like, boxed away somewhere in some, like, back closet, you're not sure where it is, and you would like a Bible, please take that one. We would love for you to have it. It is our gift to you.

But as we're looking at Daniel 6 this morning, the people of God are still in exile, right? Israel, Daniel, his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they're still in exile, though if you were with us last week, you may remember we read that a new kingdom has come, right? That the Babylonian kingdom has fallen, and instead in its place is now the Medo-Persian empire, and Darius the king is now ruling. And so we might think that with this new kingdom, this new empire, this new ruler, that maybe some things would change for Daniel and the other Israelites. Maybe they would have opportunity to return home. Maybe they wouldn't have to live in exile any longer. But actually, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Daniel and his friends are still in exile, and they're still confronted by the problems of exile and the difficulties of being in exile, and they're still needing to live, not by assimilating to the around them, nor by separating from it, but by living faithfully in its midst.

That's what we are going to see this morning in Daniel 6. Daniel 6, it's probably the most famous passage in the book of Daniel. It's one of the most famous passages in all of scripture. You don't have to have grown up in the church to know it. It's Daniel and the lion's den. So let's go ahead and read Daniel 6.

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.

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.

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.

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. 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.” So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word and ask that you would now meet with us. Father, that you would help us to beat back the distractions of this world, that we would resist the pressures of this world, and instead we would cling to you. We ask that you would open our eyes and soften our hearts, that we would behold you, love you, and follow you. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Pressure

Well, I know that many of you know that I have a mild appreciation and affection for the St. Louis Cardinals. I've tried to be very subtle about it, but you know, from time to time it just seems to come out. But my love for the Cardinals, well, it hasn't always been there. In fact, when my family and I, actually it was just Kat Lane and I, roughly about 20 years ago or so, moved to St. Louis, I wasn't a Cardinals fan at all. In fact, I pulled for the Los Angeles Dodgers. And that's because in 1988, when I was in the fifth grade, Kirk Gibson hit his game-winning, game one home run off Dennis Eckersley. And after that home run, I was hooked. I was going to be a Dodgers fan for life. I got the blue LA hat. I never saw them play live, but I was going to be a fan of the Dodgers. And so I read biographies, and I learned about the history of their club, and I was going to pull for them. Even when we moved to St. Louis, I was resolute. I wasn't going to become a Cardinals fan. I wasn't going to turn my allegiance away from the Dodgers. But then, slowly, over time, the Cardinals wooed my heart. I mean, we'd go to the stadium, and we'd see the statues of these wonderful players who played in years gone by. And in the playoffs, they dyed the downtown fountains red. And the statues around the city don Cardinals caps, and bakeries had Cardinals cookies. Everywhere we turned, it was the Cardinals. And they slowly won me over. I tried to resist. I tried to hold out. But they pulled at my heart. And they turned my loyalty from one to another.

Now, I know in the grand scheme of things who your loyalty is and with it changing with regard to a sports team, it really doesn't have much significance, right? And it doesn't have that much consequence, and it has absolutely no eternal significance, right? Whether you are loyal to the Cardinals, the Dodgers, please, though, please, do not turn to the Cubs, okay? Just resist everything you can. But apart from that, I mean, really, it has no significance, no consequence. But as I think about how quickly my heart turned and how my loyalty changed, it showed how easy affections and desires and loyalties can be pulled and pressured to conform to those things around us, right? We feel this in our world. We don't just feel it with athletics, with baseball teams. We feel it in our world. We feel these pressures to conform. There are social pressures that maybe we feel from our peers. There are political pressures from the pundits. There are moral pressures from the various narratives that inhabit our world. But regardless of where these pressures come from or what they are, as we live as exiles, and remember, that's who we are. Remember, we've said that every single week, that we are inhabitants. We are citizens of heaven, inhabiting an exilic community. That's who we are. We are living as exiles. And as we live as exiles, we are going to feel pressure to conform, to give our loyalty to the things of this world. And Daniel's still facing that pressure. We might think that it would change with a new kingdom, a new empire.

But though there is a new kingdom, there is a new empire, there is a new ruler, though Daniel is still in the place of influence and authority, there is still the pressure to conform to the world around him. We see in verse three that Daniel's still in power. Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set over him the whole kingdom. So just as under Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel continues to serve faithfully and fully in this kingdom. He's going to

put, in fact, he's so faithful that he's going to be put over the entire kingdom. And that doesn't sit well with the other officials, with the satraps. Satraps are just provincial governors, so they're kind of like high-level bureaucrats. It doesn't sit well with them that Daniel, this exile, will be placed in this place of authority because they wanted the prominence, they wanted the influence, they wanted the authority. And so what do they do? They scheme and they plot to bring Daniel down. But in verse four, we're told that Daniel was upright and faithful. There was no error or fault in him. In other words, Daniel was above reproach. He was a politician who was honest, who was beautiful, who was good. And so the officials, the satraps, they tricked Darius to make a law. 30 days if you pray, for 30 days you have to pray to the king. And so the pressure is mounting for Daniel to conform to the Babylonian world, to pray not to God but to the king.

But I want you to notice something about this edict, this law. Did you notice in verse 7, the law doesn't say you must pray to Darius. What it says is that if you pray, then you must pray for Darius. So you see, there's a way out. There's actually a loophole. For 30 days, just don't pray. Like that's an option, right? For 30 days, you don't want to pray to Darius because that's idolatry. And if you pray to God, then you're breaking the law. So just don't pray for 30 days. There's the loophole. But Daniel's not looking for a loophole, is he? He knows that to pray to Darius would be a sin of commission. It would be idolatry. But he also knows not to pray to the Lord would be a sin of omission. He would not be worshiping. So how does Daniel resist the pressure to conform? Well, by doing the thing he's always done, praying. That's what we see in verse 10. "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."

So you see what he does? He prays, but he doesn't flaunt his behavior. He doesn't make a spectacle of it. He did what he always did. He prayed and worshiped. He devoted himself to the Lord as he had before. So you see, the way to resist the pressure of Babylon, the way to resist the pressure of Persia, of the United States of America, of the world, is by continuing to devote ourselves to the Lord. That's how we resist the pressure. I mean, I've said this before from the pulpit, oftentimes before sermons. I'll say that one of the reasons why we gather in this very place every week, one of the reasons we come and we sing and we sit under God's Word and we dine at his table, one of the reasons why we have Sunday school classes for our children and our youth and our adults. By the way, did you hear new classes started today? You know, one of the reasons why we have Bible studies in small groups and we meet at 6:30 in the morning on Wednesday's to pray. One of the reasons we do these things is because we want to remember the truth of the gospel because we are constantly bombarded and pressured to conform to things contrary to the gospel. We go out from this place and we hear all sorts of other narratives, all sorts of other things that are pulling and vying for our affections and our desires, and so we need to come back again and again and again to remember, to be recalibrated around the beauty of Christ, to hear the truth of God. You see, in these places, Bible study, worship, Sunday school, we are reminded of what is true and good and beautiful, of devoting ourselves to the Lord and resisting the things of the world. That's how we resist. That's how we don't give in to pressure. But Daniel, he didn't give in either. Right?

Persecution

He resisted the world's pressure, and for Daniel, resisting the world's pressure led to persecution. That's what we see. Daniel did exactly what the officials and the satraps expected him to do. He continued in devotion to the Lord. And so they go to the king. "King, didn't you sign a law like yesterday? And isn't that still in effect?" And now look, king, verse 13, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, oh king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." And so now the king knows what has to happen. He's dismayed, he's distressed, but he's bound by his law. And so he has to sentence Daniel to death. Now, I know we all know the end of the story, right? We all know how this is going to play out. But before we rush to the end, I want us to sit with something. I want us to realize something. The thing I want us to realize is that Daniel did everything he was supposed to do. He had been faithful in his role in the government. He had been faithful as a prophet, right? He interpreted those dreams in the chapters that came before. He had been faithful in all his ways to the Lord. And what did his faithfulness get him? Hatred. He was maligned. His life was in jeopardy.

Now y'all, this pushes against everything we think should happen, right? I mean, we think and we expect and we want that for the world to work like this, for it to work like, if you are faithful and honorable and above reproach, if you're these things and you're calling and your labor is before the Lord, then maybe you'll have a life of ease, a life of comfort, maybe a little bit of prosperity, not a lot of prosperity, but a little. I mean, that's how we think it should work, right? And that's how it would work if we were living in the kingdom of heaven. But where do we live? Remember, our citizenship is in heaven, but where do we live now? We're in Babylon. Not the New Jerusalem. We are exiles. And we live in Babylon, a place where faithfulness to God is not honored and obedience to the Lord may lead to persecution. And so we actually shouldn't be surprised when honor and dignity and truth is met with hatred and disdain. We shouldn't be surprised by it because actually that's what Jesus said would happen. I mean, just think about Jesus, right? Think about his life. He was faithful to his father, faithful in ways that none of us ever had been because he was faithful without ever sinning, right? And he came with a message of grace and truth. He showed the will of God to all those who could see. He called others to repentance. He declared the beauty and goodness of the kingdom of God, and he was hated for it, persecuted, crucified, and killed.

Like David, Jesus went into the pit, the grave. Like David, the stone was rolled over the mouth of it and it was sealed by the authorities. Like Daniel, excuse me, Jesus also was left for death. He brought love and truth and grace and he was hated. He said in John 15, we heard in our scripture reading this morning, "if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And then in John 16, he says "in the world, you will have tribulation." It happened to Daniel, it happened to Jesus, and so we shouldn't be surprised if it happens to us. So maybe now we're wondering, we're asking the question, well, why not just give in to the pressure then? Like, if this is what we're signing up for, why not just succumb to the pressure and avoid the pain and avoid the hurt? And y'all, that is an option. It's just not an option for the people of God. No, you see, what we're called to do is to resist the pressure and to pursue faithfulness, even if it means being hated, even if it means being maligned, even if it means being dishonored and losing career or putting our lives in jeopardy. We live faithfully to God because he ultimately has been faithful to us. And he has been faithful in preserving us.

Preservation

That's actually what we see with Daniel. We know the end. Darius, after a night of fasting and of sleeplessness, he comes to the mouth of the lion's den and he cries out, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Now, in our Bibles, we get Daniel's response immediately, but maybe it was a minute before he responded, maybe seconds, we're not sure. But I could imagine that silence was deafening. I could imagine that those moments felt like an eternity. And finally, Daniel's voice rings out, "O King, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lion's 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." God preserved his people. God preserved Daniel. It reminds me of that depiction in the Jesus Storybook Bible. I know some of you are familiar with this. You've maybe used it with your children. Maybe you use it yourselves, right? It's really beautiful. And there's this picture of Daniel in the lion's den. And of course, it's imaginative, but it's this drawing of Daniel, and he's sitting on the ground, and there's a lion's head in his lap. And he's stroking its mane. And it's sitting in his lap as though it was simply a kitten. There's no fear, no concern, right? Again, I know this is just the artist's rendition, right? His or her understanding or imagination at play, but it's this beautiful scene. A ferocious lion who is made docile, who is no threat because of the work of God. God shut the lion's mouth through his angel. He preserved Daniel.

And in doing this, now Darius, this pagan king, sings praise to God. Just like Nebuchadnezzar had before, now Darius, seeing that there is no God like the God of Daniel. There is no God in Persia or Babylon or all the world who could do this, but Daniel's God. And so he sings about him. He exalts him. We don't know if this is true repentance or not, but he sees something true about who God is. That he is the God who preserves his people. That this ferocious lion is nothing in comparison to him. You know, as I was thinking about this passage this week, I was reminded of that old food lion commercial from a number of years ago. Some of you maybe remember this. I think it was on the Super Bowl, actually, a number of years ago. But it was this, it begins with this little boy who wakes in the morning, it's a school day, and he sits up in bed, and there's a lion in his room. And the lion is at the foot of his bed, and the lion in all its terror, right, its fangs, its mane, its massive body, but the boy's not afraid. Gets out of bed, and he goes to breakfast, and he gets on the bus, and the lion goes with him. And the lion's there as he makes a presentation at school, and as he's in PE class, and he returns on the bus back home. And the little boy gets out the bus, and he's standing, and the lion's looking at him, and he says, "best day ever." And then the tagline comes across the screen, "life is better with the lion."

And that's what Daniel can say. Daniel can say that because this lion in the den who was a threat, who was meant to bring death, nah, nah, for Daniel, this is the best day ever. Because in this day, God took what was a threat and brought life. Out of the pit, Daniel came, alive with no harm to him. And that's exactly what happened to Jesus. He was dead and put in the grave. The tomb was sealed with the stone, but from the grave, he arose with resurrection body, because death and the grave couldn't contain the lion of the tribe of Judah. And that's who Jesus is. He is the lion of the tribe of Judah, who is risen, who has defeated death, and by his life, and death, and resurrection, he gives us life. That's what he does for us. He preserves us for eternal life. It doesn't mean that we are free from harm in this life. No, it means that though he lives, because he lives, so too will we. That's why when the pressure is to conform to this world, why the, when the threat of persecution rings out, we continue to pursue faithfulness to the Lord, because Jesus has been faithful to us. Because we know that life is better with the lion. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that you have preserved your people. You have delivered them out of danger, and you have rescued us from our sin. And so we pray, Father, that you would help us to resist the pressures of this world, the pressures of the devil, the pressures of our flesh. That we would resist them by the power of your Spirit, and that we would fix our eyes on Jesus, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the one who has gone to the grave and has defeated it on our behalf. So turn our gaze to him. Fix our affections on Jesus. Allow our loyalties to rest with him, now and forever. And we pray all this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.