

Being on the Mane Menu

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Thank you, worship team, for leading us this morning. If you have Bibles, you can go ahead and open those up.

We're going to be reading in Daniel chapter 6. And Kara is going to read out verses 1 through 13. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom, one hundred twenty 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 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.

[1 : 19] 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 the 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.

[2 : 48] Thank you. Let's pray. Father, what a privilege it is, what a gift it is to have your word. We thank you that we have it readily available in our language and that we can read it daily.

We also thank you that we can gather here together as brothers and sisters to encourage each other and to remind each other of the gospel that is found in Jesus.

Father, we thank you for Daniel's life. We thank you for his faithfulness. And as we turn to your word, Lord, we pray that you guide us by your Holy Spirit to learn well and to do what is pleasing in your eyes.

And we ask this in the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen. Amen. A couple weeks ago, our two youngest daughters went on a dandelion picking adventure.

By the way, I didn't realize until Friday night that telling a story about dandelions in a sermon on Daniel in the lion's den could be confusing.

[4 : 09] Don't try to connect any dots. I did not connect any dots like that. My dandelion story is about plants, not animals. That was a happy accident.

So they gathered as many as they could, and then they brought them home. And over the next couple days, I discovered multiple jars of water filled with dandelion bouquets placed all around the house.

What a treat that was. To some extent, I do appreciate the value that my girls see in these little yellow plants. And yes, there was a part of me that thought, we are not going to make it a habit of adorning our home with dandelion bouquets.

But why not? Well, let me tell you. Because they are not particularly special. They take no effort to grow. They take no effort to find.

But just for research purposes, no joke, I did go online and I shopped at every plant store and flower shop website in the area. And to no one's surprise, my search for dandelions for sale came up empty.

[5 : 30] Apparently, people don't see a lot of value in a plant that shows up everywhere with absolutely no effort. But it reminded me of something that I read years ago by an American entrepreneur who once said this, if dandelions were hard to grow, they would be most welcome on any lawn.

We're in Daniel 6. And Daniel, who has lived for 80 plus years now, has established himself as a man who has been both faithful to God and faithful to his earthly kings.

And this is no small task. And it's at this point in Daniel's life that he experiences a life-defining event. Children all around the world with any hint of Bible teaching whatsoever will be familiar with Daniel and the lion's den.

But today, I invite you to approach this miraculous event with fresh eyes so that we can have a renewed appreciation for God's goodness and so that we may avoid some dangerous, false lessons from this story.

Let's read verses 4 and 5 again. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they couldn't find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him.

[7 : 01] Then these men said, We shall not find any ground for complaint against Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. The high officials and the satraps knew that tempting Daniel to sin or to betray the king would be a waste of time.

So instead, they exploited Daniel's faith. In other words, they attacked him based on his faithfulness since they couldn't attack him based on any unfaithfulness.

Verses 6 and 7. 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, did you catch that?

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 30 days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

The officials have just lied to the king. They told King Darius that there was agreement among all the officials. No, there was not.

[8 : 22] Daniel was missing from this brainstorming group and that was intentional. This injunction was a scheme that these men specifically fashioned to incriminate Daniel.

But since Darius believed that all of his trusted officials without exception agreed that this was a good idea, then he signed it.

And unbeknownst to King Darius, he has just signed Daniel's death warrant. Let's read 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.

It may surprise us that Daniel's first response to this ridiculous, blasphemous law was to pray and to give thanks to God as he had done previously.

[9 : 28] Even after such bad news, Daniel's trust in the Lord has not changed because the Lord in whom Daniel trusts has not changed.

Even though he knows he is about to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will fear no evil because the Lord was with him. So Daniel prays and gives thanks to God as he had done previously.

Now this was not an act of defiance, this was an act of consistency. Daniel's love for God and his faithfulness to God was not weakened by his peers, by his job, by his circumstances, or even by the threat of harm.

Facing certain death in the lion's den did not shake his firm faith. And if Daniel was here today, I am certain that he would have sung out with us. Whether in life or death, whether in joy or pain, I know this truth remains, this is the day you made.

Daniel prayed and gave thanks to God as he had done previously. But it's interesting to think what other reactions could there have been to this decree of Darius.

[10 : 46] and we're going to explore two other possible reactions that one might have to this law of his. One is, I will honor the king's law.

After all, it's only 30 days, right? Or, now that I'm told I can't pray, praying to God seems more important than it did before.

Now, there is in part some logic to each of these options. So let's take the first one. I will honor the king's law. After all, it's only 30 days.

Well, of course, obedience to human authority is instructed by God in his word. There's no question about that. But, Daniel's human authority is commanding him to violate God's law.

Directing prayers to a man when prayer is for God alone is idolatry. So in this moment, to obey man's law is to disobey God's law.

[11 : 53] You might think, well, couldn't Daniel have just kept a low profile for 30 days? Maybe he could still pray, but, you know, in secret. Maybe he could, you know, maybe his friends might say, just shut your windows, man.

Keep praying, but don't let anybody know. Show outward obedience to Darius, but inward obedience to God. Can you hear that? Just do that.

Outward obedience to Darius, but inward obedience to God. Interestingly enough, this is the exact same tactic that was used by the Roman Empire to persecute followers of Jesus in the first century. Caesar had declared himself to be a god, God. And he made a law. He decreed that everyone go to the public square and to burn a pinch of incense before an image of Caesar and to say the words, Caesar is Lord.

And when the Christians hesitated to do this, they were told, you don't even have to mean it. Just do it.

[13 : 03] Just say it. Just say it out loud. Outward obedience to Caesar, but inward obedience to God. But just like Daniel, the faithful Christians also refused to compromise.

They would not say the words, Caesar is Lord, even in order to save their own lives. Instead, they proclaimed, Jesus is Lord.

Honoring the Savior who gives them eternal life. And many died for their refusal to compromise. All they had to do to stay alive was just to say, Caesar is Lord, even if they had their fingers crossed. Young folks, have you heard that before? To have your fingers crossed, you know what that means? What does that mean, to do something when you have your fingers crossed? You don't actually mean it.

You say it, but I know secretly with my fingers crossed, I don't really mean what I say or I don't really mean what I'm doing. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[14 : 20] They weren't willing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue, even with their fingers crossed. They were not willing to show outward obedience to Nebuchadnezzar, but inward obedience to God.

Those three great men would rather die than to give to another the glory that belongs to God alone. And Daniel would rather be cast into the lion's den than to give to another glory that belongs to God alone.

this is the faith of God's people. Being known and loved by God is worth the loss of everything else. If we live, we live for God. And if we die, we die firmly in the hand of God. God's people and even though this is a well-known story, we don't know what's going to happen in our own lives in the future.

So should we ever be forced, like Daniel, to choose between death and idolatry, to choose between death and disobedience to God, let us boldly say, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[15 : 37] Hear the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 10. Here's what he says, and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Our ultimate authority is God. And it's no coincidence in the very next breath, Jesus also says this, verse 32, so everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Jesus apparently is concerned with outward obedience to one and inward obedience to another. And the first century Christians under Caesar took this very seriously. So it doesn't work to say, well, I'll honor the king's law just for 30 days or even just in secret or just outwardly but not really inwardly.

I'll have my fingers crossed. Another response to Darius' decree to only pray to him could have been this, well, now that I'm told I can't pray, praying to God seems more important than it did before.

[17 : 01] And in part we could probably recognize the truth in that. Now listen carefully and consider this. If a law restricting prayer were enacted today, perhaps it would be a blessing.

Sort of a wake-up call. Prayer, which may be taken for granted right now, could, under the threat of restriction, be rediscovered as a precious gift.

It's just like those dandelions that the girls picked. They're available, they're free, they're all over the place, and therefore they are assigned little value.

But remember, if dandelions were hard to grow, they would be most welcome on any lawn. And I can learn from my daughters in this. The easy access to something doesn't need to diminish its value, and so it is with prayer.

God graciously invites us to pray without ceasing, to draw near to his throne daily. What a gift that he makes himself so available to us.

[18 : 18] So should we wait until prayer becomes illegal before we cherish this gift? must we wait until owning a Bible becomes illegal before we long to read it?

But note that Daniel prayed and thanked God as he had done previously. Daniel had cherished his time before the throne of God in prayer daily, when it was legal and when it was illegal.

and it was this faith that resulted in him being sentenced to death. Verse 13 down through 16.

Then they, that's the high officials and the satraps, then they answered and said before the king, Daniel, who's 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.

He continues to pray to God. 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.

[19 : 29] Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, you 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.

He was trapped. 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. How ironic that King Darius, who has just declared himself the only God for the people, finds out immediately what a pitiful God he is.

Darius proves himself to be completely powerless, absolutely helpless to save his dear friend Daniel. Try as he might, Darius is not capable of saving Daniel.

Verse 18 through verse 22. The king went to his palace and spent the night fasting.

[20 : 45] 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?

I don't know how much silence there was after that question. But then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever.

My God sent his angel to 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.

Darius knew that he was unable to save Daniel, and Daniel knew in whom he should trust, and it was not Darius. God graciously preserved Daniel's life.

[22 : 05] Praise God who alone is able. And yet, herein lies a danger or a threat to our thinking.

The story of Daniel should not cause us to think that a firm faith guarantees physical rescue. Protection from harm is not the foundation of our faith.

I'll say that again. Protection from harm is not the foundation of our faith. God is the foundation of our faith. I'll put it this way. Faith is not an insurance policy against suffering.

Faith is not an insurance policy against suffering, but this is a common and dangerous misunderstanding of faith. Let me show you what I mean.

Have you ever played Jenga? How many of you have played that game? Jenga? Jenga? Okay. Okay.

[23 : 21] Here's Jenga. Okay, so let's say that Daniel's faith was not founded or built on God but built on the idea that God will keep him from all harm.

Let's say that that was the foundation of his faith. Do you hear the problem there? Because protection from harm is not the foundation of our faith. But let's say that that's how Daniel saw it. He did not, obviously. But let's say that he did. If the foundation of Daniel's faith would be his own safety, how would that look? It would look kind of like this. I have a little guy here that's going to represent Daniel.

He's actually like a SWAT team army man. But here's how that would sound if the foundation of his faith was the idea that God would always keep him from physical harm.

When Daniel hears about the decree of King Darius, he knows that he is being the target of his peers. He is being targeted by his peers.

[24 : 24] So what would Daniel think if this was the foundation of his faith? Well, God, I serve you continually. You should protect! me! And his faith would weaken. When Daniel is discovered by the high officials to be in violation of God's law, and he's busted, he would say, God, I serve you continually.

You should be protecting me from these others who are seeking to destroy me. And his faith would weaken.

As Daniel is being carried to the lion's den, imagine his thoughts. Come on, God, where are you? His fragile faith would continue to weaken. And then when Daniel lands at the bottom of the pit, surrounded by lions, imagine his thoughts.

God, I thought that you would protect me. I thought that you would reward my faith, but you haven't. And Daniel's faith would crumble.

[26 : 00] Does this describe how you view faith? Hear me again. Faith is not an insurance policy against suffering. So how should we understand faith?

Well, we should understand faith according to the Bible, according to his word. Hebrews 11, 1 says this, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

God, who is unseen, guarantees that we who hope in him through faith in Jesus will be saved. And what does Jesus say? In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart because I, Jesus, have overcome the world.

So what hope does Jesus offer those who hope in him? Well, hear Jesus' own words in John 10, verse 28.

[27 : 08] This is what he says to those who hope in him. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

We do not trust that serving God will keep us from trouble. That would be ignoring what Jesus himself said. Rather, we trust that in life or death, in joy or pain, we are firmly held by Christ.

This is faith. And so it should look like this. Biblical faith would look like this.

We are in the hand of Christ. So when dark days come, we are still held firm.

When persecutions come, we are still held by Christ. the world around us may give way, but our faith will not crumble because that's not where our faith is.

[28 : 26] Our faith is in Christ. We are in his hand, no matter what. That's biblical faith.

Now the entire chapter of Hebrews 11, which just defined faith, includes the author tracing the faith of God's children throughout the centuries.

He discusses Abel, and Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses. And then he includes this.

I want to go through Hebrews 11. We're going to go from 32 down to 38. After tracing the faith of God's children through the centuries, he says this, and what more shall I say?

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Who, through faith, conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped

the mouths of lions, sounds like Daniel, quenched the power of fire, sounds like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight, women received back their dead by resurrection. [30 : 13] Friends, this is a lot of wonderful deliverance by God to his faithful children, but keep reading. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life.

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.

Verse 34 says that servants of the Lord escaped the edge of the sword. In verse 37 said that servants of the Lord were killed with the sword, and both of them are held up side by side as symbols of faith.

Protection from harm was not their foundation. God is the foundation of their faith. And according to God's word, when his faithful children suffer or are persecuted or even killed, it is not a judgment on their lack of faith.

did you catch that? All of these terrible things that are happening to God's people, that was not mentioned as somehow a lack of faith on their part.

[32 : 01] What did it say? Their mistreatment is a judgment on the world, who was not worthy of them. The world doesn't get to keep them. Wonderful examples of pointing to Jesus.

when they're persecuted or they're placed in danger, their faith did not crumble like an unstable Jenga tower. They stood firm, not on any false promise of safety, they stood firm in the hand of the Lord.

Now as for Daniel, we rejoice together that God in his sovereignty delivered Daniel from the lion's den. And we see that his deliverance brought God glory.

listen to the effect that it had on Darius. Verses 25 through 27, then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you.

I, Darius, 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.

[33 : 10] 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.

God received glory through Daniel's deliverance. And as great of a miracle as Daniel's deliverance from the lions was, we who are in Christ are guaranteed an even greater deliverance.

Through Christ's death in our place, we are delivered from the evil one, the devil himself. It is the devil who continues to prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

But Jesus is a capable savior. When you are in him, there is no safer place to be. So place your faith in Jesus.

It is Jesus Christ who has won our victory over the roaring lion, the devil. And because of that, we can confidently sing, no power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand.

[34 : 37] Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ. I'll stand. Let's pray. Father, we praise you for what you did with Daniel.

We praise you for his faith, that you revealed yourself to him, that he placed his faith in you, and that you delivered him from certain death, being tossed into a den of lions.

You are the only true God. Salvation is found in no one else. God, we're humbled by reading the story of Daniel's faith.

We pray that you would increase our faith and that you would clarify in our minds that our faith is not placed in our circumstances and any false promise of safety.

Our faith is in you. Lord, I'm reminded of Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength.

[36 : 03] That's you, God. You are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear that the earth gives way, that the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, that its waters roar in foam, that the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Lord, you make it so clear in your word that in this world we will have trouble. so may our faith and our hope be in you alone.

Lord, as we move forward today and all this week, remind us of the wonderful gift that prayer is, that we get to come to you just like this, to approach your holy throne with confidence because Jesus is

our high priest, because he is our mediator, because through him we have the forgiveness of sins. Father, remind us of that this week and help us to cherish your word and help us to cherish the gift of prayer. It's in Jesus' name that we pray.
Amen.