

When God Is With You  
Daniel 6—Selected  
6<sup>th</sup> in Series from Daniel  
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We return to Daniel for our 6<sup>th</sup> in the Series of Sermons on this late voice of the prophets (605BC-530BC) in the Old Testament. As we shall hear today, Daniel had been in captivity for a long time. He was taken to Babylon in the early 600 BC time frame as a captive when Babylon destroyed Judah. He was about 15 at the time. He survived Nebuchadnezzar and his son and actually saw and prophesied the fall of Babylon to Cyrus (also Darius) of the Medes and Persians from the writings of a moving hand. In today's text, Daniel is now about 80, and at this august age he will be called on by the Medes and Persians to help administer the newly conquered empire of Babylon. Cyrus likes him, keeps him in power and appoints him to be one of his top bureaucrats in the enlarged Persian Empire. But there are some who don't want Daniel as a boss—they wanted the job -- so they set upon a course to trap Daniel and have him removed and destroyed. The story of Daniel in the Lion's Den is that story and we will hear it now from Daniel 6.

Daniel 6

- 1 It pleased Darius to appoint 123 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom,
- 2 With three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the King might not suffer loss.
- 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.
- 4 At this the other administrators and satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in the conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so.. They could find no corruption in him as he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.
- 5 Finally, these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against ... Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.
- 6 So these men ..... went to the King and told him ...all of his advisers had agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days , except through you, shall be thrown into the lion's den.
- 9 Darius put the decree in writing.
- 10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before (the decree).
- 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.....
- 12 so, they went to the king and (reported what they had seen and they asked the king if he was going to enforce his decree to which the King answered, "The Decree stands.")
- 16 So the King gave the order, and they brought Daniel and they threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you."

- A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it...so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.
- 18 Then the King returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.
- 19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and went to the lions' den.
- 20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel. Servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually been able to rescue you from the lions?"
- Daniel answered, .....
- 23 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight.
- Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."
- 23 The King was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den, and when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found upon him, because he has trusted in God.
- 24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the lion's den, along with their wives and children. Before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

None of us, to my knowledge, has ever had to make the kind of decision Daniel made that day. We live in a country and within a culture which proclaim religious freedom, and, at least on paper, accepts differences in worship and beliefs. I say on paper because, unfortunately, our practice as a culture and as a country has not always met the high ideals of this freedom. Jewish Temples have been bombed and attacked in Pittsburgh and New York. People in a Bible study in a church in Charleston were attacked. Birmingham experienced the bombing of three African American Churches over the issue of desegregation. Even with these exceptions, we rarely see occasions where we have to consciously decide we will worship the one true God or possibly face death. Others have. And, it is a continuing possibility in many places in the world.

In the city of Smyrna, on Turkey's west coast today, the Bishop there in 155 AD was asked to renounce Christ. Polycarp refused. When Polycarp was a young man, he had met the Apostle John and heard him preach. He had accepted Christ completely and told the Roman authorities—no-- he would not renounce Jesus. Within hours he was burned at the stake, and even when asked when there was still time for a rescue, he said no. Polycarp has not been the only one to face death for his faith. Many who came to the Colony of Maryland in the 1640s- 1670s came because they were Catholic in a Protestant England and did not want to renounce their faith. In Maryland they could be whatever they wanted to be and live.

Endo, in his book "Silence," wrote of Portuguese Priests in Japan in the 1500's who would not renounce their faith. They faced death for this decision as did any who followed God. At the end of World War II the allies found many practicing Catholics, still trying, still worshipping, because of these priests who would not renounce their Savior and were put to death for not compromising or renouncing their God..

Daniel faced the same fate. He was caught up in a political mess by a royal decree which prevented him from praying directly to the east, to God, without first praying through the king of Persia.

It was just another ruse set him to trap him and cause him to be at odds with the king, as if he had deliberately disobeyed the king's rule. This kind of conduit praying to get to God is still with us today. The Roman Catholic Church prays through Mary to reach Christ: "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women.... and so on." The belief is their prayers should be submitted to Mary who will then share them with Jesus. Daniel didn't believe this; and the Bible doesn't teach this. In fact, from Christ onward, Jesus taught us to pray directly to "Our Father,..." without having to go through an intermediary, like a priest. This was what God intended from Mt. Sinai onward, 1200 years before Christ, when God said: you will be my priestly kingdom. So, Daniel prayed daily in the direction of Jerusalem, even though he knew it could mean his life. His faith—our faith required and ours requires the constant practice of talking with God, praying, we call it, where we include God as an active part of our everyday life. Daniel was doing what God commanded. So did Jesus, when he prayed directly to his father. And, we are supposed to also. Jesus even gave us a form we could use:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, ...."

It is how we pray.

Daniel kept his faith. He turned to Jerusalem and prayed three times a day directly to God. He didn't use the intermediary of King Darius as ordered. He was true to his God and in his commitment to God. He was courageous, because he knew the risk. He chose to follow God and refused to compromise and pray to another god. Daniel was confident God would support and protect him for this act of courage.

Here we are again, with a bunch of C words: Committed, courageous, not compromising—all three would make a good sermon, especially the one about not-compromising our faith, for anything.

For Daniel, the decree presented a choice: compromise and live in this world; stand fast and die, but live eternally with God. He chose God. God had never failed him, not once in the 65 years of his exile.

Daniel was

committed to His God,

confident God would stand with him,

convinced his decision to stand with his God was the right thing to do.

Soon, he was turned in and

charged

and convicted of deliberately disobeying his King..

Death in the lions' den was ordered. Darius didn't want to do it, but his decree had to be followed. It was the law of the land. So, Daniel was thrown in with the lions.....and nothing happened. The text says an angel was there with him. Whatever the angel did, God acted to be sure the lions neither roared nor ate his servant Daniel. Daniel lived and was released the next morning, because he stood by his Lord, even with death imminently before him.

Daniel was Committed to his lord. Daniel was Convinced his Lord would be with him, even with Lions ready to eat him. Daniel refused to Compromise his faith, and he was rescued.

So, where are we?

Are we committed in what we believe,

committed to God no matter what?

Are we convinced God will stand with us?—no matter what?

Are we willing to say no to compromise? No matter what?

Daniel says we should be, Daniel shows us how? The rest is up to us? We can choose to pray to God. Directly, daily or we can worship the sunrise or sunsets or the rivers of our own choosing. We can give homage to the government and its leaders or we can say no when they are wrong and affirm that our allegiance is to God. We can blend in and just be one of the crowd, or we can be seen in prayer in open windows. It is so easy to compromise, to cast doubt on our commitments, to say it's not that important what we include in our beliefs, as long as somewhere in there is God and some allegiance to God. Daniel says no to this, that the model. The ideal has to be different.

God has called us. If we answer yes, it is a life long yes, it is an in everything yes, it is an every minute yes. If we begin worshipping regularly as Daniel did in praying, then we must keep it up. One of my sons says he doesn't come to church on Christmas or Easter ---too crowded, too many "Chreasters," too many hypocrites. Daniel worshipped daily all his life; so should we. The bromide that missing one little day won't hurt, is just a bromide, and it's not true. Even a little compromise hurts.

Then, there is the rest of this story. What happens when God is with you!

In Daniel's life, God was there. The Lions' den came, but Daniel lived. God heard and sent his angel. God was not through with Daniel, and Daniel had not abandoned his God, not even a little. God will be with you too, if you will just let your faith follow the model of Daniel's episode with the Lions.

Think about this: No matter what we have to go through, no matter how dire it is. God will always be with us. God is here. God is watching, and when we need help, God will send his angel, that we might come through the difficult time. God will not let us go. Doesn't mean we all will live or be healed, but it does mean we will not be alone or have any eternal worries.

As we close this story from 568BC, we hear Daniel testifying that God is with us and will be with us, whenever and whatever, if we do what Daniel did: He trusted his Lord.

Will you?

Join me in prayer: God of the second chance, you have rescued me from the certainty of eternal death. Let me live each day, listening to your voice and walking in your way. Let me never compromise my faith in you, but trust you in everything, everyday. Amen.

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