

Lake Cities Community Church
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Book of Daniel, 1-6

Be Faithful...No Matter What!
(Daniel 6:1-15)

Sometimes it is hard to be a Christian. Remember what Jesus said: **Matthew 24:9.**
“You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” Ignatius (a student of the apostle John) became the leader of the church in 68 A.D. When Ignatius was 75 years old the persecution of Christians began but he would not renounce Jesus and so was sent to Rome to be devoured by lions. It is reported that he said - even as the lions tore into his flesh: “I am the wheat of Christ: I am to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found to be pure bread.”

In grad school in 1991 - I met Rajendra (Raj), a 25-year old from India getting a PhD degree in Chemistry. I advertised an investigated Bible study in the dorm where I was Hall Director (and where he lived). He said he wanted to come, but he never did. But at his initiative we got together at his office in the Science Building. I shared Christ with him – I remember drawing out the bridge illustration. He said to me that he believed the gospel message and desired to become a Christian, but was afraid. His Uncle was a wealthy influential Hindu man and he was praying the bills. Raj said to me: “Craig, understand that if I become a Christian my Uncle will cut me off financially, I will have to drop out of school and may be sent back to India where I will likely spend my life in an unskilled position and will be cut off from our family.” Can you feel the weight of his burden as he considered the gospel? *Sometimes it is hard to be a Christian.*

Whether a young man like Raj or an old saint like Ignatius – over the past 200 centuries it has become clear that *there is a cost to Christianity*. Today Christianity is mocked by many of the power brokers of our culture as little more than superstition. *Christianity may cost you ridicule*. In the workplace there are daily ethical and moral challenges to the Christian worldview. *Christianity may cost you position and influence*. Jesus said, take up your cross daily, and follow me - *sometimes it is hard to be a Christian*.

And when it is hard – what do you do? That is the subject of our text this morning – turn with me to Daniel chapter 6. Today we look at the first part of one of the most well-known Bible stories – Daniel and the lion’s den. Daniel 6:1-15.

All is Good (6:1-3)

The introduction to the story is in verses 1-3 *and all is good* in these verses. “**It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom.**” We learned at the end of chapter five that after the fall of Babylon Darius came into power. From history we know that the King the Medo-Persia Empire at this time was Cyrus. Most likely Darius is the acting king at this time – while Cyrus is fighting battles. He is the one put in charge of the newly conquered Babylon. So, he establishes 120 satraps – rulers over each of the provinces (like a governor) - verse 2, “**and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them and that the king might not suffer loss.**” In the setting up of the new kingdom – he values delegation, accountability and integrity. And with those goals, Daniel is a very wise choice - verse three “**Then Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.**” This is an

important verse, because it sets up the rest of the story. Daniel was always an over achiever – remember chapter one – he was endowed by God with intelligence, wisdom and discernment. He displays the mysterious reality that there is a cooperation between human ability and supernatural strengthening in the walk of faith – and Daniel excels at whatever he does.

READY -- The Plot Conceived (6:4-5)

It all starts good – transition of power – new administration – promoting the right man – but the problem comes in now in 4-5 and the good turns bad as a plot is conceived. The two other commissioners seek evidence against Daniel, in order to destroy him – but they fail to do so – Daniel is above reproach – he is honest and no corruption is found. So they decide on a plan “B” – which is to get at him through his faith – verse five, “We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.”

“Why?” why depose the highly successful person? The answer is envy. They are jealous of his success. Let’s take a moment to talk about envy. It is a terrible, private sin that takes root in the heart. When we get an envious thought we turn it over and over in our heads until like a rock-polishing machine they are smooth and shiny. And a particularly evil form of envy is when we become upset at another person’s success. Kids – I bet you have seen this – maybe at a birthday party where a child gets a cool toy and rather than being happy for them – it causes another child to become angry and upset that they don’t have it. Have you seen that? Maybe it has happened to you? For all of us - if someone has more success, more money, more prestige, a better position than us – the sin of envy will always take a good thing (verses 1-3) and turn it into a bad thing – and a self-destructive thing.

There is the story of an eagle who was envious that another eagle that could fly faster and higher than he could. One day the bird saw a hunter with a bow and arrow and said to him, "I wish you would bring down that eagle up there." The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrows. So the jealous eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The first eagle pulled out another feather, but that arrow didn't hit because the bird was flying too fast. He pulled out another then another--until he had lost so many that he himself couldn't fly. The archer took advantage of the situation, turned around, and killed the helpless bird. The application is this - If you are envious of others, the one you will hurt the most by your actions will be yourself.

SET -- The Arrangements are Made-- 6:6-9

Now that the plan has been proposed – the arrangements need to be made - verses 6-9. The plan is to appeal to the King's pride - verses 6-8: **“King Darius, live forever! All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, be cast into the lion's den...according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which may not be revoked.”** They are truly as crafty as snakes with this plan. Not only does this appeal to his pride –but they present the plan as having consensus (even though Daniel didn't agree to it). “Everyone has gotten together and agreed on this” they say – and leaders love consensus – “We all agree on something? Give me the pen – I'll sign. I'm not saying leading by consensus is wrong – but it is not always the right way to go. When Abraham Lincoln brought in the Emancipation Proclamation, he polled his Cabinet to assess their support of the document. The Secretary of State stood and uttered his "Nay" unmistakably. The Secretary of the Interior followed suit. The

Treasury Secretary and so forth: all against. Lincoln heard them each in turn. Then Lincoln raised his hand and said... "The Ayes have it." Sometime as a leader you have to pull rank and do what is right – even when it appears that everyone else is against you.

The second crafty thing they do to make it palatable is that it is temporary – 30 days. How much harm can come in 30 days? It is only a month. In case you didn't know this month - is National Catfish. You don't like catfish? Don't worry - it is only one month and then we move on. This injunction seems so harmless, because it is temporary. So, verse 9, **“Therefore, King Darius signed the document.”**

GO! – The Plan Perfectly Executed (10-13)

Ready – the plan has been conceived. Set – the arrangement have been made. Now it is time to go and execute the plan. Look carefully at verse 10 – **“Daniel knew that the document was signed.”** That is an important thing to know. Daniel knows all about this plot. He knows what they are up to – He knows the command has been signed – that it cannot be revoked. He knows they are out to get him. He knows the penalty. But Daniel is going to be *faithful...no matter what!* **“He entered into his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.”**

Have you heard the phrase, “he is a sitting duck.” It means that if you are hunting duck – it is a lot harder to shoot a flying duck, than one that is just sitting in front of you. Last year Taylor, Hudson and I were at a local park and saw a mother duck and her chicks just wandering in the road – they were sitting ducks and could have been easily killed by a car – and Daniel who knows what is going on - by opening his window and praying becomes a sitting duck. Why

Daniel – don't you pray inside for a month? Trade your prayer window in for a prayer closet! It is as if he wants to be caught! Or, to ask the question another way – would it have been wrong to lay low for a few weeks? Didn't the Jews lay low during Nazi occupation? Don't churches in hostile countries meet in secret? They don't open the window and pray! Have you ever thought about the story this way?

Let me suggest a few answers. First – Daniel represents wisdom in the book of Daniel – from chapter one until now he has shown discernment in knowing when to take a stand and when to sidestep a fight. I do not believe there would not have been anything wrong for him to dodge this bullet – but *He knew this was a battle the Lord wanted Him to fight*. Did you know that sometime God gives you battles He wants you to fight? Another reason Daniel does what he does, is that he is now 80 years old, and in his journey of faith – he has developed deep and regular spiritual disciplines. The text tells us that he acted “as he had been doing previously.” Listen to this - most of us have such inconsistent spiritual disciplines – we would never have faced the dilemma of Daniel. He had regular spiritual disciplines that he was not about to change for a prideful king – not after everything he had been through in his life. Norman Rockwell captured the picture so well in this 1951 painting called “Saying Grace.” It shows an older woman and a young boy – pausing for praying in a restaurant. You have the feeling the old woman has been praying like this for all her life and the little boy is her pupil. In the full painting there are four people watching her with surprised curious expressions. She doesn't care – this is who she is and what she's does - even in 1951 – there was a sense that public prayer was no longer a normal activity. Interestingly readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* voted this their favorite Rockwell painting of all time.

And so they go to the King remind him of his law and say, verse 13: “Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O King, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making petition three times a day.” This was not what Darius intended. The text stresses the earnest, yet ultimately futile attempt of the king to rescue his friend, verse 14: “He was deeply distressed and set his mind on rescuing him and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him.” But the conspirators tell him with a smirk on their face, “Recognize, O King, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the King establishes may be changed.” Darius has done something that cannot now be undone. Do you, like me, value the “undo” button on your computer – on in your software? Just hit this button and your error is gone and you start afresh. Darius has no “undo” button – sometimes our actions have consequences that must be faced, even when with sorrow we regret our choices.

That is where we will pick up the story next week – with Daniel arrested and taken out to a pit filled with hungry angry lions.

Application

There are many lessons from this story – we talked about the danger of envy, to be careful of always leading by consensus, knowing what battles to fight, the spiritual discipline of prayer. But the main lesson of this passage is what I really want you to remember this week and it is this: “Be Faithful... No Matter What.” No matter what you face, no matter how impossible or scary it seems – be faithful to God and what He is calling you to.

Remember my friend Raj? About a month later Raj came down to my office in the dorm to ask me about a Paul and Barnabas and their disagreement about John Mark. Raj was talking differently – like perhaps a brother in Christ would talk. So I asked him, “Raj,

Are you a Christian.” He replied in the way only he could “Yes, of course.” I asked him when he made the decision and he said a couple weeks before. Raj joined our Bible study there in the dorm – He decided that he was going to be faithful to God, no matter the cost.

What is your “no matter what?” What is the situation in your life that pressures you to abandon, or set aside or compromise the faith?

If you lose everything – your home, your family your land are taken to a foreign land and it appears the enemy has won...

Be faithful no matter what

If you must risk offending hostile powers and authorities in order to remain pure

Be faithful no matter what

If you are asked to do the impossible – and everyone else has failed...

Be faithful no matter what

If you are betrayed by those you have sought to help

Be faithful no matter what

If you are told to bow to a false god – even under the threat of death

Be faithful no matter what

If you are the target of jealous charges and everyone is against you

Be faithful no matter what

If foolish decisions made by those above you mess up your life

Be faithful no matter what

If the very teeth of lions piece your flesh and the breath of Satan himself in on your neck

Be faithful no matter what

So that together we may hear Jesus say to us:

‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’