



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 20, 2008
Released on Wednesday, April 16, 2008**

“Faith Without Compromise”

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:57–64.

Background Scripture: Daniel 6.

Lesson Text: Daniel 6:4–7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26.

Daniel 6:4–7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26

4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

.....
10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

.....
16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

.....
19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

.....
21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

.....
25 Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

26 I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show how God took care of Daniel despite Darius's decree that only he, the king, could be prayed to for a month.

Principle: to realize that a believer should never set aside the right and the responsibility to pray to the Lord.

Application: to encourage believers to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17).

Introduction

Dream Job?

"Thank you for applying at Dream Job, Inc. I'm sure you've read our literature and are familiar with our six-figure salary and deluxe benefits package. Having reviewed your application, we believe you are the one best qualified for this job. There are only a few minor wrinkles to iron out.

"In your application you expressed a strong desire not to work on Sundays. Unfortunately that is one of our busiest and most profitable days, so we've put you down to work Sunday every other week. You also expressed a desire to be home on Wednesdays by 7:00 PM to attend Bible study. Typically we knock off work by 5:30 PM, so that should not be a problem—but your desire does raise a red flag for us. We want to be sure you are not one of those people who hang crosses in the office, give Bibles to coworkers, and starts prayer groups over lunch.

"Now don't get us wrong, we have no problem with people who are Christians privately; we simply ask all our workers to check their faiths at the door. You can worship whomever you wish before and after work, but in our facilities we do not say words like *Jesus, church, grace, and salvation*. I am sure you understand. Did I mention we provide free child care?"

Should a Christian accept an offer like this? Is it appropriate to suspend one's faith temporarily for "the greater good" of one's family or country? "Compromise" has become the catchword of our day, but there are times when compromise is sin. The familiar story of Daniel and the lions' den can help form answers to such questions.

Lesson Background

In Daniel 5 we learn that there has been a regime change. The Babylonian Empire, which carried many Jews into exile, has come to an end. The famous handwriting on the wall of Daniel 5:25–28 predicted that collapse. The year was about 539 BC.

With this change in regime came a new foreign policy. The Persians believed in sending exiled people home and helping them reestablish their old ways of life. That included religious practices and local governance. As long as those being resettled maintained the peace and paid regular tribute to the Persians, they could govern themselves somewhat independently.

Not all Jews accepted this invitation to go home. Daniel apparently was among these. In fact, Daniel seemed to be prospering even more under Persian rule. We learn in Daniel 6:1–3 that Daniel proved superior to all others as Darius the Mede began appointing local rulers. Daniel was on the verge of becoming second-in-command.

Daniel's status as an exile from a distant land probably strengthened his position. As the new regime settled in, the leaders probably wanted to avoid having Babylonian sympathizers occupying positions of power that could be used as a

launching pad for revolt. Perhaps Darius sought to appoint Daniel over such rulers because Daniel could be trusted to keep them in line and would not be swayed by bribes. In any case, the local rulers felt threatened by the prospect of Daniel's promotion (Daniel 6:1-3). So they sought to do away with him.

Officials Trap Daniel (Daniel 6:4-7)

1. Who was involved in King Darius's administration, and who was in the top position (Daniel 6:4)?

The administration of King Darius consisted of 120 princes who served under three presidents (vs. 1-2). Daniel became the chief president because "an excellent spirit was in him" (v. 3). He evidently was known for his integrity and honesty, as well as the special gifts that had become known in earlier administrations.

When the other leaders saw that Daniel was preferred over them, they developed a spirit of jealousy that caused them to determine to find a way to discredit him in the eyes of the king. Since these leaders were in place to ensure that the king would suffer no loss or injury, we know that they were involved in economic issues. When efforts were made to find a flaw in Daniel's work, it was soon discovered that there were no weaknesses there. He was completely honest and aboveboard in his handling of the king's affairs.

2. What means did Daniel's enemies decide they would have to use in order to get him removed (v. 5)?

Daniel's reputation was so good that his enemies could find no fault in his faithful service to the king. What a compliment! However, *these men* know that Daniel will not compromise when it comes to faith. His weak spot (to their way of thinking) is not pride, power, or prosperity, but devotion to God's laws (v. 5). This chapter offers a picture of laws at battle. Whose law is final, God's or Persia's?

An important question for us to ask is how Daniel earned such a reputation to this point. What personal practices send such a clear message about his priorities? What patterns of speech communicate his single-minded commitment? Could people say the same thing about us that Daniel's enemies say about him? If not, why not?

3. What petition did they present to the king, and what did they suggest in case of disobedience (vs. 6,7)?

Notice that these men do not appoint a representative to advocate their case before *the king*. Instead, they join *together* to flex their numerical muscle.

After the obligatory salute to the king's health and immortality, they told Darius that all the presidents, princes, counselors, and captains of the nation had consulted together and come up with a proposal that they deemed should be a royal statute. This, of course, was not a true statement, because Daniel had not been included in the decision. The decree they requested was that no person in the kingdom should ask any petition of any god or man for thirty days—only the king was to be petitioned (or prayed to).

Notice that the proposed decree does not ask the citizens to deny their faith outright or to change their way of life permanently. It merely will instruct people to modify temporarily one practice—that of making requests—and to do this only for a brief period of time. Even so, it will be a symbolic reminder that whatever human or divine being the king's subjects normally petition for daily sustenance, the king is their ultimate source of well-being. This one-month hiatus is designed to affirm the priority of the king over all other benefactors.

The accompanying punishment to this decree was that if anyone ignored it, that person would be thrown to the lions. If Darius established this decree and signed it

into law, it would be unchangeable (Dan. 6:8), because the Medo-Persian kings did not have the same arbitrary authority that the Babylonian kings had enjoyed. Once Darius put his signature on the decree, even he himself could not rescind any aspect of it. Surely as he signed the decree (v. 9), Daniel's enemies traded gleeful glances with one another.

John MacArthur has explained, "A deceptive stroke of the king's ego secured his injunction, which was designed to benefit Daniel's peers. Ancient kings were frequently worshiped as gods. Pagans had such inferior views of their gods that such homage was no problem" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, Word). Darius was no doubt greatly flattered to think that all his rulers and wise men considered him worthy of such exaltation and worship. He was duped by flattery into believing that his advisers had no malicious motives.

Daniel Remains Faithful (Daniel 6:10)

4. What was Daniel's response to the king's decree (Daniel 6:10)?

It was not long before Daniel heard of the new decree. Being the man of faith that he was, however, he did not change anything about his daily prayers.

Daniel can protect himself in various ways. One possible strategy is secrecy. He can shut his *windows* and pray privately. Or he can leave his windows open but alter his posture so others will not be able to tell he is praying (example: praying silently in bed at night).

A third potential strategy is simple abstinence from prayer for the 30 days. Daniel can merely acknowledge Darius's divine appointment as governor and submit to his authority (compare Romans 13:1-7). After all, Daniel is not being asked to deny God out-and-out. The Law of Moses does not require Jews to pray *three times a day*. So Daniel can take the month off and make up for it next month. As wise as Daniel is, he easily can find some kind of "faith loophole" to keep the king's decree without technically violating God's decrees.

Yet another potential strategy is political change. Daniel can use his favor with Darius to expose the agenda of the officials and undermine the law (as in Esther 8:5-8) they have forced into effect. Daniel resists this temptation as well. Instead of viewing persecution as an ill to be avoided, he sees it as an opportunity for witness. How will the Persian world ever learn that there is a God in Heaven worth serving wholeheartedly if His followers do not publicly live out His claim on their lives?

So Daniel goes home, and as was his custom, he knelt down before the open windows and prayed three times. As he always did, he offered praise to God, giving Him thanks. This reveals to us the perfect peace Daniel had in his heart, in spite of the fact that his life might now be in danger. He remained deeply grateful to God.

The King's Dilemma

Daniel 6:11-15 (not in today's text) shows us Daniel's conspirators. Once again his enemies assembled, this time to spy on Daniel to catch him disobeying the decree—which they knew he would (Dan. 6:11). Back into the presence of the king they quickly went, and after forcing him to acknowledge what he had signed into law (v. 12), they told him Daniel was ignoring the decree (v. 13). They made certain to point out that he was showing no respect for the king in doing so. This, of course, was no more true than their original declaration that everyone was in on formulating the decree.

5. When did the king realize what had been done by Daniel's enemies, and how did he feel about it (v. 16)?

Now the king was in a terrible dilemma, because he knew Daniel was a man of integrity and could be fully trusted with the affairs of his kingdom. He was

exceedingly unhappy with himself when he realized he had been tricked. He determined that he must find some way to save Daniel from being thrown to the lions. But although Darius spent the rest of the day seeking some way, he found none. Upon the renewed insistence of Daniel's enemies, he was forced to have him arrested and thrown to the lions.

6. How do we know that Darius was had some hope about Daniel's survival?

Showing an unusual degree of faith for a pagan, Darius voiced his hope that Daniel's God would deliver him. Note also the king's address to Daniel. He acknowledges that Daniel serves his God *continually*. In other words, the king knows that Daniel is unwilling to put his faith on hold temporarily.

Perhaps he has heard about Daniel's miracle diet (chapter 1), the fiery furnace involving Daniel's friends (chapter 3), and/or Daniel's ability to interpret revelations from God (chapters 4 and 5).

After a night of sleeplessness and fasting (v. 18, not in today's text), the king heads straight to the lions' *den* to see how Daniel has fared. This seems to indicate a certain level of faith on Darius's part. He does not send a cleanup crew to deal with Daniel's remains; rather, he has a glimmer of hope that Daniel has survived.

This is evident from the "lamentable voice" (Dan. 6:20) with which he cried out toward the den. Had Daniel's God been able to deliver him from the hungry beasts?

7. What did Daniel's deliverance prove about him to the king (v. 21)?

We can only imagine the relief Darius felt when he heard Daniel reply, "O king, live for ever" (v. 21). Once again *God* is the source of deliverance. Previously, God had sent an *angel* to protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:25). Now we see that God also sent an angel to protect Daniel by shutting *the lions' mouths* (compare Psalm 91:9-13; Hebrews 1:14). In so doing, God affirms Daniel's innocence. And in his innocence, Daniel can truly claim to have done the king no harm.

It can never be said of God's people that they are doing what is wrong toward others when they remain faithful to Him. Others may perceive it as wrong, and we may suffer because we refuse to defy God. But it is always in the long-term interest of all parties for God's people to remain faithful to Him. This does not mean that the innocent will always survive. According to Hebrews 11:32-40, Israel's hall of fame includes both those who escaped death at the hands of enemies and others who died courageously.

8. What did Darius do after having Daniel released (not in today's text)?

Immediately after having Daniel released from the pit, Darius commanded that the men who had accused Daniel be thrown into the same pit, along with their entire families (v. 24). The miraculous deliverance of Daniel is made even more compelling by the fact that these people were overpowered and torn to pieces before they even hit the den floor! Daniel's God, who had protected him from these ravenous beasts, now released them to obey their natural instincts.

Darius Honors God (Daniel 6:25, 26)

9. What was Darius's proclamation about, and what did he say in it (vs. 25, 26)?

God uses Daniel's witness to make a believer out of *Darius*. Thus Darius sets forth a new *decree*, this one legislating *fear* of Daniel's God. This proclamation was written flamboyantly to people of every nation, race, and language throughout the world, thus ensuring that everyone in his en-tire kingdom would get the message. He apparently

viewed his kingdom as a worldwide one, as had Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:1)! The basic statement of the decree was that all people were to fear the God of Daniel. This is followed by a detailed explanation about who God is and why He is to be honored by everyone.

In describing God, Darius stated that He is the living and enduring God, implying that other gods are merely unresponsive and passing fashions. God's kingdom would never be destroyed, as earthly kingdoms were (Darius might have been thinking of the Babylonians, whom he had defeated). The dominion of Daniel's God would never end. This was a great statement of the sovereignty and greatness of God. Everything is fleeting, but God eternal. His dominion is an everlasting one. No power will ever overcome it (see Dan. 6:26).

CONCLUSION

Faith on Hold

Christianity once met with widespread appreciation in the Western world. That time, however, is over. Christians are being asked daily to choose between their faith and their jobs, social standing, etc. We began this lesson by asking whether Daniel could teach us anything about whether it is ever appropriate to suspend our faith temporarily. To put faith on hold at the king's request is to fear the king more than God.

However, while thinking about how to honor Christ in the secular workplace, we should recall that Daniel went home before he offered his prayer for all to see. Daniel didn't take some kind of "in your face" stance while at work in the king's palace. Your boss has the right to tell you, "Please take that picture of Jesus off your cubicle wall." The boss has the right to say what can and cannot happen on company property, within the bounds of law and decency. Few, if any, companies have a policy against bowing one's head in prayer over a meal eaten in the company cafeteria! Openly witnessing for Christ is still possible in many situations in Western democracies.

May we continue to demonstrate by the choices we make that we worship the same God whom Daniel worshiped.

PRAYER

Living God, thank You for giving us Your laws and showing us abundant life through Christ. Thank You for making us a people whose spiritual prosperity does not depend on the ebbs and flows of the nations among which You have scattered us. Make us, like Daniel, a people who never hide our faith nor justify retreat with clever arguments. Instead, may we shine like stars in the universe. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Followers of Christ should never compromise their faith. Seek God's Face. Seek God's Word.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON –Study Daniel 9 "Intercession in Crisis" in anticipation of next week's lesson.

Lesson Summarized By

Willie Ferrell

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