

Daniel 6.1–28

Committed or complacent?

Amington (Online)

Sunday 18 April 2021

Daniel: Faithful in Exile [8]

Recap

I'm sure none of you needs it, but just in case, we'll do a recap. Daniel was taken into exile in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter 6, Neb is long gone and the Babylonian empire has fallen, conquered by the empire of the Medes and Persians. Babylon is now ruled by Darius, and the Persian empire was the largest in history to that point, stretching from Eastern Europe to India.

Daniel in Charge (1-3)

Very sensibly, Darius found **120 satraps** – or governors – to oversee the region (1). Daniel was one of **three chief ministers** (2) whose job was to keep those satraps in line. In fact, he was so good at it that **the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom** (3)!

Now, I can't decide here if this is good delegation by Darius, or simply laziness: wanting someone else to do his job for him so he could eat drink and be merry...

Daniel in Trouble (4-9)

Whichever it was, the other ministers and even the satraps under them **tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel** (4) – they wanted to bring him down. We don't know why. They could have been jealous of his success, envious of his abilities, or even simply racists who didn't like a foreigner having so much power.

Whatever their motives, they tried *really* hard to find something wrong in Daniel's conduct – but couldn't: **he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent** (4). If only the same could be said of *all* politicians! Perhaps those three words: trustworthy, honest, and diligent should be what we pray for our leaders.

What their investigation *did* find out was how committed Daniel was to God. They realised it was his weakness – at least, from *their* point of view it was his weakness (5).

So they hatched a plot. They would:

- butter the king up (6);
- lie to him (7 – they had *not* **all agreed**, because Daniel hadn't!);
- appeal to the king's pride – whereas Nebuchadnezzar had built a statue to his gods and forced everyone to worship it, this time they would make Darius *himself* a 'god' and force everyone to pray to *him* (7);
- throw anyone who refused to worship Darius into a den of lions (7).

Daniel was in trouble. Either he would have to compromise his faith and worship the king instead of God, or he would face a grizzly fate, being ripped apart by hungry lions. He was in trouble.

Speaking of being in trouble...

I switched all the labels on our spice rack this week. Jess hasn't noticed yet so I'm not in trouble, but the thyme is cumin.

When I was a student I got in a trouble for keeping two crows in my room as pets. The police arrested me for attempted murder.

Daniel in Prayer (10)

When we looked at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, I asked where the greatest miracle happened. Was it when they were rescued from death in the fiery furnace? No: the greatest miracle was in their faithfulness and obedience.

The same is true here. Spoiler alert (!): Daniel didn't get eaten by lions: God shut the mouths of the lions so Daniel was unharmed (22). But that's not the greatest miracle here. The *greatest* miracle happens in verse 10, which I'll read in full:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Daniel 6.10 (NIV)

The greatest miracle was that Daniel stayed faithful: he refused to pray to Darius, and instead kept praying to God, as he had always done. There are four important things that I think we can learn from this.

First: Daniel prayed **just as he had done before**. He didn't turn to God in prayer because he was in trouble. He prayed because *that's what he did*. It was a discipline, a habit. Whatever was happening, good or bad, Daniel prayed.

Second, Daniel prayed **giving thanks to God**. This is so much more than 'counting your blessings'. When we give thanks to God *in all circumstances*, we do three things:

1. We focus our attention on God instead of ourselves
2. We acknowledge that though our situation may change and we may face difficulty, God stands firm and secure
3. We speak the truth what we have from God in Jesus far outweighs even the worst this world can do

So, Daniel prayed (1) **just as he had done before**, (2) **giving thanks to God**.

Third, Daniel prayed **three times a day**. This shows that 'not having enough time' or 'being too busy' are excuses. This man was running an empire 2.5 million square miles large, and *he* had time to pray **three times a day**. He didn't *find* the time, he *made* the time: **he fit his day around prayer, not the other way round**. Repeat

Fourth, Daniel prayed in an **upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem**. Given his position of authority, I don't think we can write this off as a coincidence: Daniel had deliberately created a space to help him pray and focus his prayers.

Friends, we are not spiritual beings trapped in a body – God made us as we are, so physical space *matters*. The wise person realises how much our physicality can help or hinder us as we pray.

This might be the time of day – do you pray just as you're about to fall asleep so you never really pray? Do you pray five minutes before you have to do something else, so your mind is always on that rather than your prayer? Do you pray with your phone in hand, or surrounded by other distractions?

Or do you deliberately make a space and find a time that *helps* you to pray, recognising that like the rest of us you'll always be able to find excuses not to? I'll be honest: this has really challenged me!

Committed or complacent?

Daniel was committed to prayer – it's all too easy for us to become complacent. But this was the most important thing he did, which is why he did it three times a day, it was his greatest strength, which is why his enemies decided to use it to attack him.

So let's follow Daniel's model of prayer:

1. Daniel prayed every day, no matter what
2. Daniel gave thanks to God, whatever his circumstances
3. Daniel built his day around prayer, not the other way round
4. Daniel made a space to help him pray and stay focused

May we do the same and be as committed to prayer as he was!