



Faithful in the little things * Daniel 6
May 30, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Here's a hypothetical situation for you. You run into the grocery store to pick up a few things and notice that the lines are a little long at the checkout so you decide to try out the self-scan machines they've got set up at the end. You think - if I can get online for church, I can figure out these self-scan things and so you head over and start your scanning. You put your stuff into a bag and then the machine asks you 'how many bags did you use?' It's on the honour system - it has no way of knowing. Here's the question - is it important for you as a Christian to pay the five cents for the bag? I mean, it's just five cents. Does it really matter in the long run? I would argue yes and believe or not, Daniel's life tells us why.

So join me in Daniel 6 today, one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. I would encourage you to have your Bible open with you because we are going to move around a little and it will be helpful for you to follow along as we go. So Daniel chapter 6, starting in verse 1.

Daniel chapter 6 starts right on the heels of Daniel chapter 5. If you think back to last week, the Babylonian kingdom under King Belshazzar was overthrown during a kegger and Darius, king of the Medes took over. Nebuchadnezzar's dream from chapter 2 was coming true - the Babylonian head of gold was now swallowed up by the silver chest of the statue, the empire of the Medes and the Persians.

And now the king of the empire has some governing to do and so he sets up administrators to rule his kingdom. Chapter 6 verse 1 says that Darius set up 120 satraps (provincial administrators) and then he appointed three administrators at the top to oversee them all. It would appear that Darius did not clean house when he set up his new government; if there were competent officials in place, he just brought them into his system. And there's no more competent official in Babylon than Daniel and so Daniel was made one of these three administrators.

And Daniel, wouldn't you know it, was so good at it, that Darius planned to give him a promotion and make him number one over the whole kingdom. You can see it in verse 3 there - 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 kingdom.

The other satraps though were not too happy about this and so they decided to launch a preemptive strike against Daniel. They tried to find ways to discredit Daniel in his government work but they just couldn't. Second part of verse 4 says - They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

(That's the kind of evaluation you want in your workplace, isn't it? Trustworthy, talented, neither corrupt nor negligent. The world tends to paint the people of God as being hypocritical and judgmental and intolerant; wouldn't it be nice if we were instead known for being trustworthy, talented, incorruptible and responsible? Aim for that).

Well, since his work was blameless, the other satraps decided that the only way they could get rid of Daniel was through his devotion to God.

So they went to King Darius with a devious plan and they said 6 "O King Darius, live forever. The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, o king, shall be thrown into the lion's den. 8 Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered - in accordance with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be repealed."

They are preying on the king's own ego and sense of self-importance, aren't they? Maybe he thinks 'I'm just getting started here; maybe it's a good idea to make everyone think that their new ruler is a god.' 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

But not all of the royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors were in agreement, were they? Daniel sure wasn't. And now he was in a tough spot. He is one of the most important men in the whole of the Persian empire. He has lived a long life as an exile in a foreign land, and here, yet again, Daniel is being challenged in his commitment to YHWH.

He knows that God has been with him through every twist and turn but he also knows that if he prays to God, he will be the guest of honour at a dinner in the lion's den. What's he going to do? Remain faithful to God and risk the lions? Or simply choose not to pray?

Verse 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 did before.

No king, no false god, no threat was going to shake his faithfulness to God. He knew that God was good and preferred to remain with Him than to bow to anything less. 'Better to die faithful to God than to live a lie serving a fraud.'

And what he's doing here is actually really fascinating. It says he 'prays towards Jerusalem' right? Well back in 1 Kings 8, when Solomon was dedicating the Temple, Solomon prayed (and I'll paraphrase here): when your people sin against you - and they will because there is no one who does not sin - and you send them into exile in a foreign land - and we come to our senses and repent and pray to You, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built - hear their prayer and uphold their cause.

46 "When they sin against you--for there is no one who does not sin--and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near;

47 and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their conquerors and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly';

48 and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name;

49 then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause."

Daniel is doing exactly that. He is humbly praying that God would intervene and uphold his cause. Daniel knows his Bible well. He knows the faith of the generations before him well.

But the other satraps, they spring the trap, just like they'd hoped. They watch Daniel getting down on his knees and praying to the Lord and they say 'aha! Got him!' and off they go to King Darius.

They say to the king 12 "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" and the king responds "The decree stands - in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

Well, the administrators say, delighting in this a little TOO much, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."

Not only is this devious, it's a little racist, especially considering that technically speaking, he's their boss! Everyone in the land (except for maybe three) is accountable to Daniel and yet they're going over his head to 'the big boss' to say 'hey, you know that foreigner in your administration, he's not following your rules.' They're playing dirty. But they're getting what they want.

And while they are quite pleased about this, Darius is not. He was about to make Daniel supreme leader of the whole land because he was so reliable and conscientious and capable and incorruptible and now Darius realizes that he's allowed himself to be duped. And so as the satraps and administrators file out, eagerly contemplating which of them will get promoted now that Daniel's out of the way, Darius is left trying to figure out a way to get Daniel back.

14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

Now there's an incredible irony here. Darius has agreed to this decree that people should pray to him as a god. Now, why do you pray to a god? Because you need help. Because you need someone bigger than you to intervene. Now this 'god' Darius needs help and he's helpless to

help himself. The 'god' to whom people are supposed to pray is powerless to help himself. He's stuck in with this rotten deal that he himself signed. Some god.

Try as he might, he could not find a way out of it and so he gave the order to throw Daniel into the lions' den. And verse 16, the king said to Daniel, "May your god, whom you serve continually, rescue you." He realizes his limitations as a 'god' but holds out hope that Daniel's God will do better.

And with that, a stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den and the king sealed it so that no one could interfere. Darius went back to his palace, and left his best administrator in the den with the lions.

Now, just in case you're wondering why he had a den of lions just sitting around, it's because ancient near eastern kings loved hunting lions. If you could take down a lion - the mighty king of beasts - then it showed what a mighty triumphant king YOU were - and so that's why there were lions on hand to throw Daniel to.

But even if Darius could conquer a lion, he couldn't conquer his conscience, because back in the palace, nothing could take his mind off of what he'd just done. He wouldn't eat, he couldn't sleep, he sent away all the entertainers sent to distract him; he was so shook up by the stupid thing he'd just done, falling into a trap and killing off very a capable and ultimately innocent administrator.

Sinclair Ferguson at this point writes "His helplessness suggests to us that it is better to be a child of faith in a den of lions than a king in a palace without faith" (Daniel, Mastering the OT Commentary, 140). As much power as Darius had, he was powerless to intervene to save Daniel. And so he hoped desperately that Daniel's God would.

And so the next morning broke, 19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near to the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice [he's clearly worked up about this], "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

From behind the stone, Daniel called back "O king, live forever! 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, o king."

Just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, God delivered Daniel from the mouths of the lions. Daniel was right to remain faithful to God.

23 The king was overjoyed and gave the order to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in His God. Through faith, Hebrews 11:33 says, the lions' mouths were shut. God had delivered Daniel from the mouths of the lions.

The people who had falsely accused Daniel however were not so fortunate. Darius was absolutely enraged after a sleepless night and the humiliation of being tricked by these dirty schemers and so he threw them and their whole families in to the lions who gobbled them up. And then Darius made a decree to override the earlier one - the passage that we used for our call to worship this morning - 25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly!

26 "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.

27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus [1] the Persian.

So that's the story of Daniel in the lions' den and when you get right down to it, the takeaway is exactly the same as it was for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. God alone can save, so honour God alone.

Daniel was faced with a choice - submit to the king's decree and pray to Darius instead of God or risk the king's wrath by trusting God alone.

Ultimately we see that Daniel made the right choice. Darius was powerless to save Daniel and that makes sense. God alone can save. God alone could shut the mouths of the lions. God alone could preserve Daniel in the midst of danger and so Daniel was right to refuse the king's demand in order to faithfully rely on God. God alone can save; honour God alone.

That's the big takeaway, but I want to explore one other idea with you, because I think that there's another message here that you only see when you approach the book of Daniel like we have a chapter at a time.

How did Daniel get to the point where he COULD honour God alone? I mean, what does it take to suddenly get up and say 'forget you Darius, throw me to the lions if you want; I'm never forsaking God?'

I'll give you a hint. It doesn't happen suddenly. It takes a lifetime of faithfulness in the little things.

And this is all of a sudden where the self-checkout bag becomes important.

Luke 16:10, Jesus says "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much."

Daniel was only able to stand up when the time was right to say “I will honour God alone” because he had practiced ‘honouring God in all of his life.’ His faithfulness in the small things prepared him for faithfulness in the big ones.

Think about it. Daniel has a track record of faithful consistency.

Chapter 1, verse 8 - Daniel resolves not to eat the king’s food. He was an exile in a foreign land; he could very well have said, ‘well, if this is the hand I’m dealt, I’ll do in Babylon as the Babylonians do’ but he resolved to honour God alone in the food that he ate. No life threatening situation. Just a willingness to be faithful in a little thing.

Chapter 2, verse 26-28 - Daniel comes before King Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar says to him “Can YOU interpret this dream for me?” Daniel could very well have taken credit for this supernatural insight and said “Yes, I CAN interpret the dream” and received all the honour and praise for it. But instead, he chose faithfulness in a little thing and gave God the glory.

Chapter 4, verse 19 - Daniel could very well have lied about the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s tree dream. He knew that it was NOT good news. And Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t great at handling bad news. He could have lied and told him what he wanted to hear, just to stay on the safe side, but instead, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar exactly what God put on his heart and he ultimately called the king to repentance.

You don’t just one day get up with the resolve to remain faithful to God when your life’s on the line. You get to be faithful in big things by being faithful in the little things. You live with a faithful consistency, honouring God in the little things, anticipating big things, knowing that God alone can save.

Sinclair Ferguson writes -

With equal degrees of wisdom and courage, Daniel saw through the wiles of his adversaries. Protected by the whole armour of God, he stood firm on the evil day for which all his previous tests had been a preparation. He understood that across the years, God had graciously prepared him for moments such as this. Rather than view the situation as one in which he could excusably opt out of faithfulness, he saw it as a climax of his faithfulness. Past faithfulness was not meant to be a compensation for present unfaithfulness; it was a preparation for more faithfulness” (Daniel, Mastering the OT, 134).

If you want to be faithful in the big things, be faithful in the little ones too, because God Himself is faithful.

You’re not going to run a marathon by showing up at the starting line in short shorts and a number bib. It takes discipline. It takes preparation. It takes little steps to prepare for the big ones.

That's why I think the five cent bag is important. It's a little test that says 'if I'm going to be faithful in big things, I need to be faithful in this.' I need to act with honesty and integrity in even the smallest of things.

I remember once coming out of No Frills and realizing that I had accidentally left a green pepper in my cart when I was checking out and I almost drove away with it, but this verse was on my mind. "Faithful with very little - faithful with much." I went back in to pay for the pepper. It was a little thing. But little things add up. It's all a part of training for the big things.

And it's not out of a sense of duty that I want to do it; I want to be faithful in the big things AND the little things because God Himself is faithful to me. He doesn't take shortcuts and say 'oh, well, this doesn't really matter in the long run' and leave me hanging. He will never fail me nor forsake me. He will never leave my side. Whether it's in a lions' den or a fiery furnace or a hospital bed or a court of law, God is faithful. He is capable. He is the living God, enduring forever, whose kingdom will not fail. He alone can answer prayer; he alone can save.

And so I say to you - Dare to be a Daniel - not just in the big things, but in the little things too. Continually serve God in your homes and in your workplaces. Act with honesty and integrity, being responsible and incorruptible. Giant acts of faith like staring down lions is one thing; faithful action in the minutiae of life is another.

If you want to be faithful in the big things, be faithful in the little ones too, because God Himself is faithful.