

This morning, as we come to Daniel 6, we come to the end of this teaching series. Next week we will begin a series that will lead us to Easter weekend, focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Following Easter, we are going to sink our teeth into the Book of Ephesians.

Seven weeks ago I began our series in Daniel suggesting that we're all living in exile. Webster defines exile as the "forced absence from one's country or home," but geographical displacement is only one form of exile. If you have ever felt pressure to conform to cultural values that are at odds with your faith, then you have experienced exile firsthand. What you are experiencing is the clash between kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

Seven weeks ago I began our series talking about two words: consecration and courage. **Consecration** is a word that has to do with **allegiance**—*who do I belong to, who am I living for?* Consecration means to be set apart for God. **Courage** is a word that has to do with **faith**—*will I trust God with my life no matter the results?* Daniel and his three friends faced the same question that each of us face every day—*will I blend in to the surrounding culture or will I stand out?* What will you do? How will you live?

Once again, in Daniel 6, the invitation to consecration and courage is front and centre. Let me encourage you to take your Bibles, paper or electronic, and turn with me to Daniel 6. I'm going to read our text in four parts this morning, beginning with vs. 1-9:

1. The Plot Against Daniel (vs. 1-9): *“It pleased Darius to appoint 120 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 administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! 7 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 human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.”

What we've just read is the kind of political drama that we might expect from a *West Wing* episode. King Darius came up with a strategy to decentralize decision-making and leadership, setting up 120 officials, who would be led by three chief administrators. But because of Daniel's "exceptional qualities," Darius intended to make him the 2nd most powerful person in the kingdom.

This decision shouldn't surprise us as readers. On the one hand, God had given Daniel supernatural wisdom that outshone the wisdom of

his contemporaries. But this decision even makes sense on the natural plane. Verse 4 tells us that there was *“no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.”* Every ruler or leader depends on people just like Daniel.

illus: when my brother first began his work as a machinist, he regularly received a “talking to” from older, union employees in his shop. They would say things like, *“stop working so hard, so fast, and so well—you’re making the rest of us look bad.”*

My brother graciously refused to conform to the culture, and as a result, he stood out. In time, the owner began to give Chris all of the challenging assignments, and, he was chosen to be the shop steward. The employees trusted Chris to represent their needs to the owner, and the owner trusted Chris to be truthful and fair. The way we work can draw attention to what we believe. My brother stood out for his competence, his work ethic, and his integrity—so did Daniel.

Daniel’s colleagues were master politicians—they knew how to manipulate the system in order to get what they wanted; what they wanted was the power that was about to be given to Daniel. And so, a group gathered together in a back room somewhere to scheme, plot, and manipulate. They began by trying to find some “dirt” on Daniel—a skeleton in the closet, a mishandling of funds, or some other negligence—but nothing turned up. Isn’t that remarkable? Daniel had served as a royal administrator under five different kings, over more than 6 decades, and they couldn’t find anything to hold over Daniel’s head.

But they weren’t done yet, they kept looking for a loophole and finally they found it—they would use the law and Daniel’s

“weakness” to their advantage. Daniel’s weakness, of course, was his loyalty to God. His adversaries knew that if they could back Daniel into a corner, and force him to choose between God or the law of the land, Daniel would choose God every time. And so they dreamed up a new prayer law, got the king to approve it, and the trap was set.

Let’s move on to the second section of the story, vs. 10-18.

2. The Trap and the Reluctant Punishment (10-18). *“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. 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 spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”*

“The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 13 Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” 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.

15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.” 16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel

and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, 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."

It's interesting to note what Daniel didn't do. With a new prayer law in effect, it was the perfect opportunity for Daniel to practice more silent, less visible, forms of prayer—there were many options available. He could have gone for a prayer walk, he could have closed his windows, he could even pray silently while working alongside his adversaries. But when Daniel heard the king's edict, he went home to his upstairs room—with wide open windows—got down on his knees and prayed.¹

¹ The text mentions that Daniel regularly prayed three times a day while facing Jerusalem. While there is no specific Old Testament instruction to pray in this manner, Psalm 55:17 mentions crying out to the Lord in the evening, morning, and noon, and Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:35-36 mentions praying while facing Jerusalem. We're not told why Daniel prayed while facing—it's not as though God stayed behind in Israel when His people were exiled. I wonder if Daniel was physically and symbolically orienting himself toward God, the true ruler of heaven and earth. Perhaps Daniel was reminding himself who holds the world and history in His hand. And perhaps he was reminding God of the promises He had made: (a) to sustain His people while in exile, and, (b) to ultimately lead His people from exile, back to Jerusalem.

² Kaj Munk, as quoted by Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally In A Post-Christian Culture*, 21.

³ Tremper Longman III, *NIV Application Commentary: Daniel*, 167.

⁴ Daniel's "seemingly innocuous act was more...revolutionary than outright rebellion would have been. Rebellion simply acknowledges the absoluteness and ultimacy of the emperor's power, and attempts to seize it. Prayer denies that ultimacy altogether by acknowledging a higher power". Walter Wink, *Naming*, 110-11, as quoted by John Goldingay, *Word Biblical Commentary: Daniel*, 131.

A Danish pastor, Kaj Munk, once wrote, "the signs of the Christian church have always been—the Lion, the Dove, and the Fish...but never the chameleon."² Daniel had no intention of blending in or going under cover. As one author puts it, "Daniel would rather be eaten by lions than stop praying to God."³

This was a defining moment. God sovereignly orchestrated events so that before the king of Persia, Daniel might reveal his fundamental loyalty, and, demonstrate God's ability to intervene in human history. If he had gone undercover, this moment would have been lost—Daniel's faithfulness created the environment for God to be seen, known, and heard. The same is true for us—our faithfulness creates environments for God to be seen, known, and heard.⁴

It's also worth noting that Daniel didn't take to the streets, rally support for his cause, or complain about his rights and freedoms. As Daniel kneeled to pray, we're told that he prayed with thanksgiving, asking God for help. I wonder, what did he say to God that day?

“God you have faithfully sustained me for decades, and You can protect me once more, but even if this is the end for me, I will not abandon You now.”

Application: Every so often, someone will come and ask me why commitment to Jesus in Canada seems to be weak, or, what can we do to fuel people’s commitment to prayer, to the church, or to mission? I must admit—with fear and trembling—that historically, the most effective path to passionate commitment to Jesus is strong persecution. When it doesn’t matter what we believe or whether we believe, we tend to believe weakly, noncommittally; but when our life is on the line, fence sitting becomes impossible—we are in or out with respect to Jesus.

In Canada we might thank God for the freedom to gather and worship as we do, but along with this “freedom” comes the freedom to see worship and prayer as optional. Think about it—here in Canada God is competing against Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter; He’s competing against Netflix, Sports Centre, and the nightly news; He’s competing against weekend trips to the Cottage, dance recitals, work, and family commitments. God’s competition is every other available use of our time. We live with divided hearts.

I often wonder where our current form of Christianity is going in light of the changing Canadian culture. With “tolerance” becoming our culture’s “demand,” it seems to me that it will become more and more difficult to publicly profess what we believe. I wonder, if the church in Canada lost its charity status, would it affect the way we give?

If, as in other countries, our religion was stamped in our passports—making it impossible for Christians to get good jobs or fair treatment—would we make it known that we were Christians. If it became illegal to attend church, what would we do? What would I do if pastors became the target of violent persecution? At present, for us, these questions prompt hypothetical answers, but in many places in the world, these questions require real answers.

When Daniel was caught praying, his adversaries went straight to the king to demand his life, and the king’s eyes were opened—both he and Daniel had been played. Daniel may have broken the king’s “law,” but he was the king’s most trusted advisor—that much was clear. And so we read that the king was “*greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.*” But there was nothing he could do. Let’s move on to the third section of the story, vs. 19-24.

3. Daniel’s Rescue and the Accuser’s Demise (19-24). *“19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried 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?” 21 Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 22 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 on him, because he had trusted in his God. 24 At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in

and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.”

Let me offer a few brief observations, followed by an application.

(a) First, the lion's den should be seen less as an execution and more as a “trial by ordeal.”⁵ If it were an execution, there would be no reason to let Daniel out in the morning. A trial by ordeal is attested to in the ancient world when the guilt of the accused was uncertain—if the accused survived the ordeal, they were declared “innocent”. In vs. 22, Daniel declares his “innocence”—yes, he broke the law, but he had been loyal (to God and king) while his adversaries had put their own ambitions above king and country.

(b) Second, there is a parallel between chapter 3 and 6—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved by a heavenly figure, so too an angel shut the mouths of the lions. The three friends came out of the furnace without a singed hair or the smell of fire, so too Daniel comes out of the lions' den without a scratch on his body.

(c) Third, this section concludes with Daniel's accusers being caught in their own trap—they had demanded the life of Daniel and in the end their own lives were demanded in return. You may wonder how we are supposed to respond to their punishment; are we to rejoice in their deaths?

⁵ Longman, 162.

⁶ Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11.

I am reminded of a vision in Revelation 6—in it God the Father and Christ the Son are at the centre of a heavenly court room. As the vision unfolds, the apostle John saw those who had been martyred for their faithful witness to Jesus. The martyrs cried out for justice and they were told that they must wait just a little longer.

I am reminded that in God's own being, mercy and justice are held in perfect tension. God is not merciful some of the time, and just some of the time—He is always both, all of the time. And so, while God is merciful, while He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, one day there will be justice.⁶ Let's move on the application.

Application: We need to be careful in how we apply Daniel 6 to our lives today. Daniel's story reminds us that loyalty to God doesn't come with a persecution-free guarantee. Daniel's story does not contain a promise that God will deliver every faithful follower from martyrdom. Sometimes God intervenes in a divine way—He did for Daniel, He has for others. At other times, like the recent martyrdom of Christians in Syria, God does not prevent death.

So what then can we say? We can say that despite appearances, God is in control—not the king, not the law, not culture, not evil, sin, or death. Though people plot to take Daniel out—God is in control. Though laws can be passed to punish those who pray—God is in control. Though Daniel is accused and sentenced to die—God is in control. God is sovereign over accusers, over laws, over kings, and even over lions.

We can also say that Jesus—God the Son—knows persecution and suffering firsthand. Like Daniel, Jesus was faithful to His Father in a foreign land. Like Daniel, Jesus was the target of jealousy—the religious leaders were threatened by Him. Like Daniel, Jesus was falsely accused. Like Daniel, Jesus was found praying before His arrest. Like Daniel, Jesus was silent during His trial. Like Darius and Daniel, Pilate saw the innocence of Jesus but could do nothing.

But unlike Daniel, Jesus wasn't rescued from death—He went to the cross, falsely accused, abandoned, and beaten. His innocence was proved only after He was raised from the dead. God does not rescue every person from persecution, but neither does He ask us to walk a path He has not willingly walked Himself.

And so, we can say with Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel, *“the God we serve is able to deliver us, but even if He does not, we will not abandon Him.”* When the Empire holds the threat of death over God's faithful followers, we hold on to the hope of eternity—our life may be taken today, but it will not be the end for us.

Let's turn our attention to the final section, vs. 25-28.

4. Darius' decree (25-28). *“25 Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: ‘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 the Persian.”

In his first decree, Darius called for all prayer to be directed towards him; his second decree calls for all people everywhere to recognize the greatness of Daniel's God. And so Daniel 1-6 concludes with a truth that has been woven through the story from start to finish. God has not abandoned His people in exile; He is present, loving, strong, and sovereign. He is living and active—He rescues, He saves, He performs signs and wonders in heaven and on the earth. This is why we can trust Him with our lives.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to bring you back to where I started 7 weeks ago. I've been suggesting that as followers of Jesus, we too are living in exile—by and large, God is neither known, nor honoured, in our West Coast culture. What that means is that the call to remain true to Jesus will set us apart—at numerous points, we will think, desire, speak, and act differently than the culture around us. Through us, Jesus intends to offer North Shore residents a radical alternative to the life they are living.

So the question is, *how are we to live, as the people of God in exile?* The Book of Daniel offers a twofold answer:

(a) First, we are invited to live **faithfully**. Daniel 1, 3, and 6 remind us that following God will mean standing out. Our faithfulness creates an environment where God can be seen, known, and heard. The apostle Paul tells us that we are meant to shine like stars in the universe. The Book of Daniel reminds us that the God who calls us to faithful living will be faithful to us—faithful to love, strengthen, direct, and save.

(b) Second, we are invited to live with **expectancy** and **courage**.

All human empires are destined to fall, but God's kingdom will stand firm forever. God has not left us on our own. He sees everything, He knows what's going on, and is therefore able to reveal his plans to his people. Nothing and no one exists apart from God's sovereign rule—His plans and purposes will come to pass; not even the gates of hell can stop His advance.

We live with expectancy and courage because we've read God's story and we know how it ends—the conclusion has already been written. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. It is as King Darius decreed, *“For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.”*

Now, more than ever, is the time for **consecration**—I ask you today, *is your life set apart for God?* Now, more than ever, is the time for **courage**—I ask you today, *will you dare to trust your life to God? Will you stand out for His glory and His purposes?*

Pray