

August 13 2017

## **Reading from the Bible Daniel 6**

### **Sermon A Good Habit: Prayer**

Daniel was 83 or 84 when he was thrown into the lion's den. We know that he was healthy. Remember the story how he and the other young men refused to eat the rich food that was served to the king and choose to be vegetarians. He was part of the group which had been exiled from Judah. We are about 600 years before Jesus' birth. The Babylonians had overrun Judah the southern Kingdom. The northern kingdom is gone. They were scattered all over the world. But the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin were still somewhat intact. They had a terrible, terrible king and the kingdom has gone downhill. The Babylonians are at the "gate." The first deportation of people to Babylon was in 597BC. And in 586 BC they took a second group. The estimates are that there were over 10,000 people that were taken from Judah to Babylon. They took the brightest and best. They liked the farmers, the worker bees, the labors those who worked the land. They took anybody that could be help to them or might be threats to them if they remained. They were the exiles. We see in Psalm 138 or 139 "By the waters of Babylon we knelt down and wept." It talks about hanging their harps on the bushes. The Babylonians taunted them and said, "Sing us another song in Zion. Do a little dance for us." The Babylonians were very oppressive. And the Jewish prophets figured they would be there for a while. Daniel was in the first exile. Remember the story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace. We'll save that for another sermon for another time. They were given Babylonian names and they ended being government helpers. They were bright, they were articulate, they were young, and probably cute. They were in their late teens or early twenties. That was part of the story when they choose not to eat the rich foods that were against the Jewish laws and they choose foods that were Ok. In everything they did they prospered and then comes the fiery furnace. The young men insisted they would not worship the statue of the pagan god and so they ended up in the fiery furnace. So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, "If God saves us or if God doesn't save us that is OK." Of course you remember there was a fourth person perhaps an angel in the furnace and he saved them. And from then on life went well for them. Well Daniel becomes a leader and in chapter 6 after he has interpreted some dreams via prayer and God's wisdom he becomes a leader in the government. It was not necessarily a good thing. It will turn out better than how it starts. Darius the ruler in chapter 6 has 120 satraps (sub-rulers) over the people and 200 presidents including Daniel. They all gave accounts to the King. Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because he had an

excellent spirit within him. The king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom. He liked Daniel. God was with him somewhat like the story of Joseph. The king planned for Daniel to be above everybody else but unfortunately that did not go over very well with the 200 presidents and the 120 satraps. So they come to Darius with a plan (they colluded) they had a plot to get rid of Daniel but he was so good that there was nothing that they could do to him. He didn't break any laws did not do anything illegal so what could they do to get him? They hatched a plan. The only way that they could get rid of him was through his religion and the worship of his God. So they came to King Darius vs 7 and they said "O King Darius live forever.-We are all agreed that the king should establish an ordinance that whoever prayed to anyone divine or human for 30 days except to you O King shall be thrown into a den of lions." Now we wonder how stupid Darius was that he didn't notice that Daniel wasn't with them. Then they said, "O king sign a document so that it can't be changed according to the laws of Medes and Persians and cannot be revoked. So King Darius signed the document. The King was considered in some ways to be connected with one of the gods. So when he made an announcement he couldn't change it. It was something but not quite like a proclamation of the pope. In Verse 10, although Daniel knew the document had been signed he continued to go to his house up stairs which had windows toward Jerusalem and go down on his knees three times a day and prayed to God just as he had done previously. His enemies found Daniel praying and seeking help from his God .They approached the king and said, " O King didn't you sign the interdict that anyone praying to either human or divine for 30 days except to you, they would be thrown into a den of lions." The king answered yes the laws stands fast according to Medes and Persians and cannot be revoked. Then they said, Daniel one of the exiles from Judah paid no attention to you or the interdict which you have signed for he is still saying his prayers three times a day. (I missed one point along the way. We sort of shifted from Babylon to Persia because Persia had taken over Babylon. Daniel served both governments and he found a way to balance everything) He determined not to change his practices of praying even though he knew the consequences. He made public statement of his faith. He always prayed through the open widow which faced toward Jerusalem. He was praying to God. It was a private prayer. He wasn't flaunting his prayers like the religious man in the story that Jesus told. Daniel had a quiet private place, he had a time, and he had a purpose for his prayer. He had been in the government for a long time, he was honored, he was respected, but jealousy was about to undo him. His enemies could only get to him through his religious observance. It hadn't been a problem before but his enemies didn't want him over them.

The royal degree would the king into a bind. The king was really trapped. It appeared that Darius the king was sad and unhappy and he didn't want this to

happen. Vs 14 when the king heard the charge he was very much distressed; he was determined to save Daniel and he made every effort to rescue him. Then the enemies came into the king and said it is the law of the kingdom that any interdict or ordinance that the king establishes cannot be changed.

Then the king gave the command and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel may your God that you faithfully serve, save you. A stone was brought in and laid at the mouth of the lion's den and the king sealed it with his own signature, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. And then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting, no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him. What a mess! Darius trusted Daniel. Daniel was a living witness to his God even if Darius didn't respect that God. He had a lot of other gods.

We know the rest of the story, at the break of day the king got up and hurried to the den where Daniel was and he cried out anxiously, "Oh Daniel has your God safely delivered you from the den of lions? "Daniel said to him, "O King-live forever. An angel shut the month of the lions and they did not hurt me. I was found blameless before God and before you, O King. I have done no wrong" The king was exceedingly glad and demanded that Daniel be taken out of the den. He was taken out of the den and no harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God.

"Then King Darius wrote to all peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world: 'May you have abundant prosperity! I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, enduring for ever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel for he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.' So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

Eventually the Israelites go back home but in the short haul the King commanded that all the enemies of Daniel be thrown into the den of lions. All their families, children, were thrown into the den and the lion's over powered them. So the lions won. Daniel won. Darius is really the miracle because his heart listened to Daniel and the one true living God. He was starting to understand it but whether he really understood, we will never know. We know that Daniel lived a long life and he prospered. There would be more leaders in the rest of the book of Daniel. The second part of the book becomes more complex with dreams and symbolic language. But these stories remind us that no matter what kind of situations we might find ourselves, God is with us. And Jesus reminds us that God is with us and he said he is with us until the end of the age, He said, "I will never leave or forsake us:

So now then question is for us is--what is your prayer life like? Is it intentional? Daniel didn't just squeeze it in. He set time to talk to God. Daniel didn't care what others thought. He prayed in his own place and in plain view and he was in a pagan hostile environment. We are reminded of Polycarp, he was martyred in Turkey. He was 86, about the same age as Daniel, was asked and was arrested and was asked to deny Jesus. He said I have found Jesus and served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my king who saved me? And he was burned at the stake. How can I disavow my Lord? I think sometimes, we are shy when we are around non-church people. I am becoming bold in my old age if someone has a concern and would you would like me to pray for you right now. You don't have to eloquent or use churchy language. You can say, Lord bless this person and be with her/him. Will we? --we can do it? I used to not want to do that but now I wouldn't miss it for the world. Daniel just didn't do it just once in a while but he prayed three times a day, like regular clockwork. His enemies knew when he would be praying. He stopped what he was doing and would pray. We see can see that that in other religions. I recently watched a strange and funny show about a man who ran a restaurant. His workers decided they all wanted to be very faithful and they would stop and pray right in the middle of the dinner hour. The chef said they should to be cooking the food for the customers. The workers all refused and got down on their prayer mats. I am not sure if that is what God calls us to do. But I think God calls us to be regular in our prayer life. Daniel didn't do it just when he was in trouble; however he did ask for help and for mercy. He praised God when he prayed to God. He was able to be of service to the king and his country while he found a way to be faithful to God. He found a way to be faithful and ethical at the same time. Translated today, we are called to do great things for God. Work, daily life, and seminary are a challenge to get your prayer time in. While I was in seminary, every Thursday I worked a full day on Greek. There are all kinds of pressure in our busy lives.

So how does your prayer life compare to Daniel's? Put a list on your refrigerator. If I want to do more walking, I will put a note on the refrigerator and start walking. I might walk 10 minutes one day and 20 minutes the next and it is all counted. I am keeping myself accountable. I am told that it takes four weeks to establish a habit. I am thinking that having a regular prayer life is a good habit to start. Think of the five things from the story of Daniel's prayer life. He was intentional, had a public prayer life, it was regular, not just when he was in trouble, and balanced with real world life and was faithful. The song Don DeChenne and Nancy Thompson sang for us this morning , How Long Has It Been? is a good prayer reminder. How long has it been since you prayed to the Lord?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you that you love us. You are so anxious to hear us. You are always ready. You are always waiting. Lord quicken our hearts that we might dare to be a Daniel not just that we would face a lion's den but that we would spend time in prayer with you. And we would give the best of our time and the best of our heart Amen