

DANIEL PRAYS, RISKING HIS LIFE

Daniel 6:1-28

Key Verse: 6:10

“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.”

Today we begin a series of six messages with the theme of prayer, following our direction to pray and raise disciples in this new year. Disciples of Jesus must learn to pray. Prayer is necessary for our own spiritual growth, and to help others grow. The Bible contains numerous examples of people who prayed and were used by God greatly. One of them is Daniel.

Daniel lived in a most difficult time in Israel's history; it was the time of exile which was due to Israel's sins. As a young teenager, Daniel was uprooted from his home in Judah, whose culture developed with the law of God, and transported to Babylon, a center of pagan idol worship. He was separated from parents, home and country and became a refugee. It was not easy for him to survive. However, from the beginning, he decided not to compromise with pagan culture, but to live by faith in God. Practically, he made a small decision to eat vegetables rather than palace foods, to honor God's law. God was pleased, blessed his faith, and gave him great victory. Daniel became chief adviser to kings, a man of influence, and a great prophetic voice in God's history. His life shines like a star in the universe. How could he live such a life? We can find the secret in this passage: it was through prayer.

Daniel's life of prayer has inspired and influenced people, past and present. It may speak to us today in a special way, since our culture is becoming increasingly ungodly and idolatrous, like Babylon's. Just a century ago, the dominant influence on America's worldview and cultural values was Christian faith. Modernism and postmodernism have reshaped our culture significantly. Christian educator, Dr. Jolene Erlacher, writes, “When I consider the trend in our culture toward self-determined truths—choosing to believe what feels good to us at the moment—it occurs to me that we might be practicing the highest form of idolatry...Today, we declare ourselves to be the creators of our own truth...we make ourselves gods subject to no higher principle, rule, or authority.”¹ What a tragedy! In this environment, the devil is working, and persecution is developing. Persecution comes in stages: first stereotyping, then vilifying, followed by marginalizing, then criminalizing, and finally outright persecution. Even now, many high school and college students, as well as

¹ Erlacher, Jolene, *Daniel Generation: Godly Leadership in an Ungodly Culture* (Southern Pines, VA: Vigil Press, 2018), Location 180.

professionals in the workplace, face dark powers of social persecution. No doubt, we face a spiritual battle every day. Moreover, the last two years of pandemic have had serious consequences: bereavement, isolation, loss of income, and fear, which are triggering mental health problems. In such times, how can we live by faith in Jesus? How can we raise disciples? We can learn from Daniel's prayer.

As we come to chapter 6 in the book of Daniel, the Babylonian Empire, in which Daniel had served for many years, had been overthrown by the Medes and Persians. A king named Darius assumed power and began to form his government. There are many explanations for who Darius is. Most likely, he had conquered Babylon and was appointed to rule by Cyrus—General of the Median and Persian army. A few weeks into his reign, Darius died at the age of 62 (5:31), and Cyrus took over as the first King of Persia (6:28). Darius' reign was short and transitional. He began by appointing 120 satraps to rule the kingdom, with three administrators over them to hold them accountable.

Daniel was one of these administrators. Usually a change in dynasty means the elimination of all former leaders. But Daniel survived. In fact, he so distinguished himself that Darius wanted to set him over the entire kingdom. On what basis could this happen to Daniel? In a word, it was his integrity. Babylon had not fallen because of outer enemies, but due to its inner corruption. It is said that the Persians had 3,000 Babylonian politicians killed to root out corruption. To reform the nation, Darius needed a man of integrity and administrative ability. Daniel was the right person; he was pure-hearted, trustworthy, and wise—full of the Spirit. Though the dynasty had changed, Daniel's faith had not changed. This faith was the basis of his integrity, and he was recognized by everyone, even kings.

However, Darius' favor aroused the jealousy of other administrators and satraps. If Daniel became the top administrator, they could not continue their corrupt practices. So they tried to find grounds for charges against him in his conduct of government affairs. There is a saying, "Everyone has a skeleton in their closet." It means that everyone has a shameful secret that would destroy them if exposed. But Daniel had no skeleton in his closet. His enemies could not find corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent (4). He was not greedy, nor self-glory seeking. He did not work before people, but before God. He worked hard for the glory of God. He was loyal, sincere, responsible, and just.

We can learn from Daniel how to live in a fallen world. We must see our given situation as the opportunity to serve God and do our best before him. Colossians 3:23-24 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." Students should study to please God, not just their teachers; professionals should do their best to glorify God, not just their bosses;

homemakers should glorify God, and not just satisfy the demands of the family. In brief, we must serve and please God first, not people.

The enemies gave up trying to find charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs. So they turned their attention to his religious life (5). Daniel's prayer life was known to everyone; he prayed three times a day, without fail, whatever the situation. His enemies tried to take advantage of this, disguising their motives in a plot to deceive the king. They went as a group to the king and said, "May 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 human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 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" (6-8). This decree would institute emperor worship. It must have appealed to Darius because it would unite the newly forming kingdom under his leadership. The penalty for disobedience was severe: to be thrown into a lions' den. Darius did not know that this law was intended to eliminate Daniel. So he consented and issued a decree in writing (9).

What did Daniel do? Let's read verse 10 together. "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." Here we learn Daniel's prayer.

First of all, Daniel valued prayer to God more than his life. Daniel knew that the decree resulted from an evil plot, was unreasonable, and was aimed directly at him. And to violate the decree would cost his position, even his life. What could he do? He could have used his experience, skill, and network of relationships to counterattack politically or legally. Or he could have prayed secretly for 30 days until the law expired. Then again, he could have asked the king to send him as an ambassador to another country. In short, if he wanted, he could have avoided this crisis to spare his life. However, he continued to pray, just as he had done before. He prayed at the risk of his life.

Why? His prayer was the expression of his faith, and his love for God. Prayer was his lifeline to God. Through prayer, he received God's love in his heart. Through prayer, God's power strengthened him. Through prayer, he could overcome his weaknesses, the awful circumstances, and the idol worshiping culture. Through prayer, he found God's wisdom and all the spiritual resources he needed to live a joyful and victorious life. If his prayer was stopped, even temporarily, it would be like cutting the oxygen line of a deep-sea diver—his spirit would suffocate. This is why Daniel prayed, risking his life.

This kind of prayer life did not develop suddenly. It was the fruit of God's love and Daniel's responses of trust. We can see how Daniel's relationship with God developed in

chapters 1-5. For example, in chapter 2, Daniel faced a death penalty as King Nebuchadnezzar demanded the interpretation of his dream without telling anyone what the dream was. In response, Daniel and his three friends prayed overnight, asking God for mercy. Then God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel. Before going to the king, Daniel first composed a song of praise and thanksgiving to God and performed it. Then Daniel interpreted the dream for the king. Daniel's life was spared, and he was highly promoted. Moreover, the contents of the dream revealed some clear truths that would shape Daniel's faith. First of all, it revealed that God is the Sovereign Ruler of nations, who controls their rise and fall, and he sets over them whoever he chooses. Secondly, it revealed God's everlasting kingdom which never diminishes, while kingdoms of the world all perish and fade away someday. This revelation became the basis of Daniel's hope in the kingdom of God. In brief, Daniel had experienced God's deep love and his rich and abundant spiritual blessings through prayer. Love for God sprouted in his heart. God and his blessings were so precious to Daniel that he was willing to risk his life to continue sweet communion with God in prayer. To pray like Daniel, we need to grow in our love relationship with God, trusting our lives to God in times of difficulty and trial. As I review my life, I confess that God has been so faithful to me. He has used all the trials and difficulties in my life to draw me to him and helped me have faith in Jesus. Through Jesus' cross he has given the grace of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and an inheritance in his glorious kingdom. As this new year begins, I want to practice prayer like Daniel, even at the risk of my life. Let's trust our lives to God in prayer!

Secondly, Daniel's practice of prayer marked his lifestyle. When Daniel highly valued prayer to God, it came to define his lifestyle. We can see several characteristics of his life marked by prayer. Daniel prayed in his upstairs room—a place where his fellowship with God was undisturbed. No doubt, he would have checked his electronic devices at the door to give his full attention to the Lord. Daniel's prayer was personal devotion to God. Daniel prayed three times a day. Daniel did not pray only when he felt like it. Nor did he pray only in times of great need or some kind of crisis. He prayed three times a day, every day. Psalm 55:17 says, "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice." Daniel prayed on his knees. He expressed humble reverence for God. Furthermore, the author notes that his windows opened toward Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 6:21 explains why this mattered: "Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive." Daniel prayed with a repentant heart for his own sins and for the sins of his people. He prayed for God's restoration of his people through the forgiveness of sins. To sum up, we can say that Daniel's prayer was personal, consistent, humble, and repentant.

Thirdly, Daniel prayed with thanksgiving. The end of verse 10 says, "giving thanks to his God." This is striking. It might have been tempting to complain to God about the injustice. It would have been easy to doubt God's love and power. But Daniel gave thanks to his God. Thanksgiving arises as we remember God's grace. When Daniel remembered

God's grace, he was not overwhelmed by the present crisis. He was free in his inner being to thank God. Once he began to thank God, a fountain of joy bubbled up within him.

How could he remember God's grace? The words "his God" are significant. We find endearing personal pronouns throughout the passage: "His God" (5,10,23), "Your God" (16,20), "My God" (22), and the phrase, "The God of Daniel" (26). This means that Daniel had a very personal relationship with God. Daniel experienced God's presence, love, power and saving grace in very personal ways. For example, when he decided to keep his faith pure in chapter 1, God favored him. God gave him knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and enabled him to understand visions and dreams of all kinds (1:9,17). In his time of trial, Daniel remembered how God had answered his prayers by giving him victories in times of challenge. On this basis, Daniel trusted God as his personal and living God. This is why he could give thanks to God in any circumstances. Probably, he concluded his prayer by thanking God with great joy and a sense of victory and singing praises to God.

Daniel's enemies observed his life very carefully by sending secret agents to monitor him—like the FBI. They found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and accused Daniel of violating his decree. The king realized that an evil plot had formed against Daniel. He was greatly distressed and made every effort to rescue Daniel. But he was forced to obey his own law. So he gave the order that Daniel be thrown into the lions' den. He said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" (16b) Daniel's prayer and faith were so influential that even the king prayed to Daniel's God. Then a stone was brought and placed over the den and was sealed with the king's own signet ring and the rings of his nobles (17). Then the king returned to his palace and spent a sleepless night.

In the morning, the king hurried to the lion's den. He hoped against hope and 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?" (20) Surprisingly, Daniel answered, "May the 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, Your Majesty" (21-22). Here we see how God answered Daniel's prayer for help. God's mighty angel had restrained the lions. God could have answered in many other ways. But he chose to let Daniel go through the ordeal of being thrown into the lions' den. God did not take away the trial but was with Daniel through the trial. Daniel was not only rescued, but he was proven innocent before God and man. God has a purpose in allowing us to go through all kinds of trials. It is to purify our faith in God and love for God. It is to prove us trustworthy of the great blessings that he wants to give us.

The king was overjoyed and had Daniel lifted from the den. No wound was found on Daniel because he had trusted in his God (23). On the other hand, the king ordered the

enemies and their family members to be thrown into the den. Hungry lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones (24). In this way, corruption was rooted out of the new empire. An atmosphere was formed in which justice could be practiced.

After the ordeal, the king issued a decree to be proclaimed in every part of his 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. 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'" (25-27). Here we see that through Daniel's prayer, at the risk of his life, God revealed his glory throughout the kingdom. Through the king's communication network, which had the capability for translation into every language, the God of Daniel was made known as the living God, the eternal God, the King of the everlasting kingdom of God, and the God who rescues and saves. Though Daniel had come to Babylon as a helpless refugee, through his prayer, the message and glory of God was proclaimed to the whole world. And as for Daniel, after his time of trial, he prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian (28). Even more than that, Daniel became God's prophetic voice for Israel, guiding them back to the promised land. He became one of the greatest visionary prophets, planting hope in the emergence of the Messiah.

In this passage we can learn that dark and difficult times are not a problem for God. God is living, almighty and eternal. He is the Sovereign Ruler over every person and every nation. He works mightily through those who trust in him and pray. We want to begin this new year with prayer. We have a prayer topic to raise 120 disciples of Jesus among college students in the Chicago area as spiritual leaders for America and missionaries for the world, and for all of our children to grow as Jesus' disciples. God can do this—and much more—as we pray. Let's learn Daniel's prayer and experience the power of God and his great victory in this new year.