

ABOVE THE LAW

DANIEL 6:1-17 DECEMBER 12, 2018

We're all familiar with the old movie trope where the villain comes looking for the good guys and the good guys try to turn out their lights so as not to be seen. It never works in those scenes, but it *especially* wouldn't work for the good guys to keep the lights *on*. Or, knowing that the killer was closing in, to just go about their regular activities. As viewers, we would think of that as irrational.

But in Daniel 6, that's *exactly* what we see our hero doing. With full awareness of the very real threats coming for him, Daniel doesn't draw the shades, doesn't dim the lights. He goes right on living the way he's always lived. And the result is one of the most famous stories in the Old Testament. Now, as we've been noting, at this point Daniel is in his 80s. He's toward the end of his life. The book is broken up into two halves: The narrative portion in chapters 1 through 6 and the prophetic portion in chapters 7 through 12. I find it interesting that Daniel's greatest story is found in the very last chapter of his narrative. His life is proof positive that God can do great things through young people, through old people, through people in middle-age. It's not about a particular demographic, it's about the inclination of a heart.

At the end of chapter 5, the kingdom of Babylon had fallen and, in its place, the Medo-Persian empire had immediately risen to power. It was a fairly smooth transition, with almost no loss of life. In fact, here's a part of the account taken from an artifact discovered by archaeologists:

"Marduk...ordered [Cyrus] to march against his city Babylon...His widespread troops...strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter...Babylon...sparing Babylon any calamity. [Marduk] delivered into [Cyrus'] hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him."¹

As our chapter opens, King Darius is in charge and he is figuring out how to establish his new administration of the empire.

Daniel 6:1 - It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom;

We'll hear the word 'satrap' a bunch tonight. These guys were like governors over states. It seems they would've been guys who were *already* part of the leadership of Babylon prior to the Persian takeover. In our text tonight there are 3 different characters we can learn from, each will become living examples of principles we are given in Scripture. We have, of course, Daniel, who is a wonderful example for us as believers who want to honor God and be used by him. Daniel, in this story, demonstrates for us a variety of Biblical truths. For example, John 15:19.

John 15:19 - If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Another principle Daniel will live out for us is found in verses like Jeremiah 29:12-13.

**Jeremiah 29:12-13 - Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.
¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**

¹ John Walvoord, Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation

We also see this group of satraps as a character. They are wicked men who are the enemies of Daniel. By the end of the story they become a real life demonstration of what we read about in Proverbs 1: Sinners who lie in wait to shed innocent blood, who live for greed and set traps, only to fall in them themselves.

And then there's Darius, the king who becomes a living example of what we read in Galatians 6:8 - that those who sow to their flesh will reap corruption. And he demonstrates for us how unbelievers are held captive by the devil, taken advantage of, and blind to their own powerlessness.

As the text opens we're told that "it pleased Darius" to install these guys into these positions of power. When our fallen, human mind is at the wheel of our lives, terrible consequences inevitably follow. What "pleased" Darius today was going to great *dis*please him tomorrow. More than that, because he was following a self-serving, self-pleasing heart, he was going to find himself guilty of some truly heinous injustice. It's not what he *planned* to do, but that's what the human heart apart from the Lord does. It deceives, it distracts, it debases and it destroys.

Now, as Christians we read those three opening words "It pleased *Darius*" and we're reminded that we are called to a much *higher* way of living. Pleasing self is the low road that ends in ruin. The high road of heaven is the one we're supposed to be walking on, and, on that road, we're not out to please *ourselves*, but to please the *Lord*.

Ephesians 5:10 (NLT) - ¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NLT) - ⁹ So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.

That was definitely Daniel's goal. Yet another Bible truth he lives out for us.

Daniel 6:2 - ² and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss.

Over the governor there were 3 presidents. Their main function, stated here, was to keep the other government officials from constantly ripping off the palace.

Remember: These satraps weren't necessarily loyal to Darius or Persia. And, like every human government, theft and corruption were all too easily used to benefit officials in these positions.

Luckily for Darius, he had Daniel. A guy who had the knowhow and the courage to lead circumspectly. Everyone knew Daniel would run a tight ship and that he wouldn't tolerate embezzlement or corruption. But, as readers we also know Daniel to be fair and thoughtful, even *generous* to those around him. And to me that was an encouragement. Godly people in the Bible are *well-rounded people*. They, of course, have their flaws, but if they were a tree they wouldn't only have fruit on one side or coming off of one branch. God develops the whole person.

While there is no indication that Daniel *asked for* this job, it was all too obvious that he was *made* for the job. He was gifted and equipped and positioned by God to do it. And the same is true for you and me. God doesn't see Christians as drone ants. Have you ever disturbed a line of drone ants? They're carrying the food back to the colony. If you smash one of those ants, none of the rest care. The queen doesn't care. They fill in the line as if nothing at all had happened. That's not how God

organizes the Church. Rather the New Testament describes you as being *specifically* gifted. Your life is made for *specific* work in a specific place and time that we are to discover as we walk with God.

Daniel 6:3 - ³ Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.

As always, Daniel's relationship with God made a real, tangible difference in his regular life. The spirit within him made him a great man. Notice: It wasn't the number of followers he had. In fact, Daniel had very few fans or even friends at this point. The secret to Daniel's greatness has been given to us again and again throughout the Book: It was the spirit that filled him.

It's easy for us to get cheated by the culture around us, which is trying to convince us that "greatness" is measured in likes or material wealth or worldly success. The great men and women of the Bible are those who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Some were kings, some were slaves, the status didn't matter. It's the *Spirit* that matters. We see it in Daniel. Because of the spirit in him, his life made real impact, even when he wasn't really *trying* to make an impact. Daniel didn't vie for this job. He lived a quiet life, but it was a quiet life *full* of God's dynamite power. And because of that, Daniel was not only spiritual, but incredibly capable.

Daniel 6:4-5 - ⁴ So the governors and satraps sought to find *some* charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God."

We see that these guys had been set over the whole kingdom, but that wasn't enough for them. There's a quick lesson there: The sinful heart of man is insatiable. It *always* wants more. It's never going to settle. *God* gives contentment, sin cannot.

I'm also guessing that these guys had a nice little scam going until Daniel got in the way. He was like their Serpico. If you want to be a crooked official, you simply can't have a guy like Daniel around.

So, these guys get together. They start having meetings, gathering data, orchestrating a conspiracy. What they discovered was that Daniel was unimpeachable when it came to his behavior. But, they also figured out something pretty remarkable: They realized that if they could get Daniel into a corner where he would either have to choose between his life and his God, he would undoubtedly choose God. That's pretty amazing. Daniel's faith was so consistent and real and public that these lying, cheating sinners understood that he would forfeit his own life rather than dishonor his God.

We're told that he was *faithful*. Daniel proves that you can be faithful in a hostile work environment. You can be faithful in a government job. You can be faithful among unbelieving co-workers. You can be faithful when your life's plan doesn't work out the way you thought it was going to. Daniel was and the results were spectacular.

Daniel 6:6 - ⁶ So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever!"

These guys act like a pack of hyenas. They gather in a frenzy here, rushing to do evil.

Daniel 6:7-9 - ⁷ All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

It’s hard to get a good read on what’s going on with Darius. On the one hand, it seems pretty obvious that these guys were trying to pull a fast one on him. Daniel was *conspicuously* absent from this meeting, though they *did* imply that he had signed off on this legislation. I had to wonder, though, how Darius thought this could be a good idea? Ancient kings were much more comfortable with being called divine than leaders are today, but as a pagan idolator, what would *Marduk* or their other gods think about this kind of behavior? Wouldn’t this anger them?

It’s possible that the satraps sold this law more as a move to consolidate power and establish the throne. “Hey, do this so we can be sure everyone pledges themselves to you, O king.” We don’t get their whole conversation. But what I find most interesting about Darius’ part in the story is seeing how quickly a person outside the protection of God gets taken advantage of by sin. He may wear the crown, but he’s bound in the devil’s prison. He’s making decisions to please himself, and in no time flat he’s dishonoring his own gods, oppressing his entire kingdom and being completely bamboozled by his own officials *so that they can rob him!*

But, he signs the law, and (it seems) Daniel’s fate with it.

Daniel 6:10 - ¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Daniel did the same thing he always did. He didn’t do less and he didn’t do more. He didn’t compromise and say, “Well, I can just pray silently and have a *private* faith.” That would’ve been sin. But Daniel *also* didn’t say, “Oh, you passed this law? Well then I’m going to throw my windows open and make a big show of my civil disobedience.” Notice how it’s written: The windows were already open. Why take time to point this out? Well, on the one hand, it’s very popular to be a loud, angry *resister* in our culture right now. And then, even in the Church, there are some who suggest we need to seek out suffering in order to *truly* be Christians. That’s simply not Biblical. We see Daniel living out his convictions the exact same way he always had. Now, that *included* a public faith and a regular communion with God. But we don’t see him moving toward compromise or showboating. He’s not worrying but he’s also not scheming. He’s just being the same Daniel he had always been.

In this verse, his prayer is characterized by “thanks.” Thankful in Babylon, while murderers are on their way to your house. That’s the kind of faith I want! The description in verse 10 also brings out Daniel’s trust and belief in God and his familiarity with the Scripture. In the tradition of Solomon he prayed toward Jerusalem. In the tradition of David he prayed 3 times a day. And, we know he had a copy of Jeremiah, and he believed what the Lord promised in chapter 29: That if God’s people pray, He will hear them and respond. So, in this little verse we see again that Daniel was a man who loved the Word of God, and had a great trust that God would move in his life and that he was faithful to the Lord, despite what his circumstances were.

Daniel 6:11 - ¹¹ Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

This must've been pretty funny. I mean, imagine right now there were 120 people gathered outside these windows right here, watching and taking notes so that they could get us arrested. And, they report that he did this 3 times that day, which indicates they waited around all day. I'm guessing Daniel gave them a friendly wave, maybe even said "Hey, I'll see you at the office later!"

Daniel 6:12-13 - ¹² And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."¹³ So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

The satraps weren't just springing their trap on Daniel, but also on Darius, who was becoming an accomplice in their sin without even knowing it. They knew Darius wouldn't be on board, but outside the protection of God, he was easy to pick off and use like a pawn for their evil plot.

Daniel 6:14 - ¹⁴ And the king, when he heard *these* words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set *his* heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

The king was not upset with *Daniel*, he was upset with *himself*. He had done a stupid, selfish thing, and now was guilty of sending an innocent man to a gruesome death. *He* was responsible, and he knew it. He worked hard to find a legal loophole, but it was no good. Unlike *our* legal system which can take decades to execute someone on death row, the Persian custom was to visit the sentence on someone the day it was handed out.²

Here we get a little picture of the human condition. Man is condemned to death. Whether a person thinks it's deserved or not, it's true. There's *nothing* any man can do to deliver even one condemned individual. Not even the king of Persia. Only *God* can deliver man from his coming doom.

At the end of the day, the satraps show up again to confront Darius.

Daniel 6:15 - ¹⁵ Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that *it is* the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

So, at this point, they're *dictating to him!* It's right up to the verge of blackmail. I wonder, how do these guys think this going to turn out? But, again, we see how sin blinds and deceives and ruins. They're deep into Proverbs 1 right now.

Daniel 6:16-17 - ¹⁶ So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast *him* into the den of lions. *But* the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually,

² Charles Feinberg A Commentary On Daniel: The Kingdom Of The Lord

He will deliver you.”¹⁷ Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

I imagine Darius must've heard about Daniel's God either from Daniel himself or from the stories told to him. Either way, he must've heard that this God had power. That He was a deliverer. That He defends the innocent and will, if necessary, depose kings and topple kingdoms.

Now imagine you're Darius. You know these things about Daniel's God, and you have to put your seal on the stone, next to these 122 other guys. There's a line in the sand and you are *most definitely* on the wrong side. No wonder the next time we see him, he's unable to eat or sleep.

As we close, notice the king's description of Daniel: He says, "You serve your God continually." Interesting. Darius knew Daniel's allegiance was not to Persia or to Babylon, but to the Lord. And *still* he was the best man to run the kingdom. Because he wasn't a hypocrite. He wasn't useless. He wasn't selfish. He was capable and spiritual and full of wisdom. Daniel was full of dynamic power and so his life was *dynamic*. He lives out these promises and principles we read about throughout the Bible. Remember: Daniel isn't meant to be an *exaggeration* to us, he's meant to be an *example*. An example we follow by living like he did. Being faithful. Trusting God. Loving His word. Being in prayer. Not giving in to selfishness or worry or scheming. Just living as believers, discovering what God wants to do through the ways He has gifted us in whatever time and place we find ourselves in.