

## DARE TO STAND ALONE



Daniel 6:1-28

Sixth Message

Bernard Bell

August 22, 2021

SERIES: ONE KING TO RULE THEM ALL

Last month I read of a French woman who found to her surprise that she had been declared dead. It seems that a disgruntled former employee persuaded a court to declare her dead even without a death certificate. She has spent several years now trying to get herself declared undead. But French bureaucracy seems unable to do so. Even the highest court in the land stated that it was beyond their competence to bring her back from the dead. She lives in legal limbo, caught in a bureaucratic nightmare. She is trapped by a declaration of death that cannot be revoked. It sounds like something from a comedy, designed to elicit laughter. But it is true, and causes her great inconvenience as she tries to live as a dead person in a bureaucratic society.

Today we come to Daniel 6, a chapter filled with the language of bureaucracy and a decree that cannot be revoked. Both the king and one of his most loyal subjects get trapped by this decree as disgruntled bureaucrats manipulate the legal system to their own advantage and engineer the downfall of a colleague.

Chapters 2–7 have a chiasmic structure. So chapter 6, Daniel in the Lions' Den, pairs with chapter 3, his three friends in the blazing fiery furnace. There are numerous parallels between the two chapters.

A. Vision of 4-part statue: 4 kings/kingdoms (2)

B. Three Jews in blazing fiery furnace (3)

C. Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (4)

C'. Belshazzar's humbling (5)

B'. Daniel in lions' den (6)

A'. Vision of 4 beasts: 4 kings/kingdoms (7)

At the end of the previous chapter the Medes and the Persians had captured Babylon and killed its last king, Belshazzar. The Babylonian Empire is over. Darius the Mede is the new ruler in Babylon. He is the king of chapter 6.

**It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 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. 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. (Dan 6:1-3 NIV)**

The Persian Empire was much larger than the Babylonian Empire. A large empire requires a large bureaucracy, so King Darius appointed these 120 satraps to govern in the various provinces. Over them he appointed three chief ministers, Daniel being one, to whom these satraps were accountable. This need for accountability lest the king suffer loss suggests that the satraps were not trustworthy, that they were likely to use their position for their own personal advantage rather than for the welfare of the king and his empire. But Daniel distinguished himself above all these officials because of his exceptional spirit. Therefore the king intended to appoint him over the entire kingdom. He would be the Chancellor, the Grand Poobah. Or, as *The Jesus StoryBook Bible* states, "his most important

helper of all." Daniel was flourishing in a foreign land. His star was continuing to rise.

Not surprisingly, this aroused the jealous hostility of the satraps and the two other chief ministers.

**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. 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." (6:4-5)**

Daniel's colleagues looked carefully to find any fault in how he served in office. But they could find neither corruption nor negligence, neither sins of commission nor sins of omission, fault neither in what he did nor in what he did not do. Daniel was above reproach: he was trustworthy and completely reliable—unlike them. He was faithful to the king and faithful to his job. Frustrated in their efforts to find anything against him the officials realized that their only avenue was to find something in connection with the law of his God, in his behavior as a faithful Jew. They hatched a plot to bring him down.

**So these administrators and satraps 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." So King Darius put the decree in writing. (6:6-9)**

The chief ministers and satraps went to the king. The verb translated "went as a group" implies collective assembly in rebellious turmoil. These officials were agitated, in a state of unrest. Desperate to orchestrate the downfall of Daniel they schemed and acted together. Three times in the chapter they gather as an agitated throng. Their first destination is the palace where they came before the king. They flattered him: "May King Darius live forever!...Your Majesty, Your Majesty." As *The Jesus StoryBook Bible* puts it so colorfully: "Your Most Glittering Highness...Majesterial Brightness." The entire imperial bureaucracy, all its many levels, has agreed that the king should issue an imperial edict. Of course here they were wrong, for Daniel his chief official was not party to this decision. What was this edict they wanted issued? That for the next thirty days people in the empire should pray only to the king, not to any god or any other person. The king should issue this decree in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians which cannot be revoked.

The king is easily won over by their flattery. He simply enacts their wish as a written decree. The penalty for non-compliance is to

be thrown to his lions.

So now the conflict is set. It's a conflict between two laws: the law of God and the law of the Medes and Persians which cannot be revoked. For the bureaucrats the irrevocable law of the Medes and Persians is just a tool to be used to their own advantage. They know that Daniel will be loyal to the law of his God. In their mind they have a foolproof plan. Like the agitated throng of evildoers in Psalm 64, they plot injustice and say, "We have devised a perfect plan!" (Ps 64:6).

Our attention now turns to Daniel:

**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. (6:10)**

Though Daniel was one of the three chief ministers, he was not privy to the "unanimous" agreement of all the bureaucrats. When he heard of the king's edict he did nothing different. He went home and prayed to his God, as he always did. Three times a day he knelt and prayed, facing Jerusalem. This was his daily custom. Even an irrevocable imperial decree was not going to stop him. Even the threat of death would not stop him.

At this point many sermons have an extended piece about the importance of being a prayer warrior, of petitioning God in fervent prayer. Such sermons make me feel very guilty about my inadequacy in prayer. But I don't think fervency in prayer is the point of this passage. I do have some comments to make about Daniel's prayer life, but they are not what I usually hear in sermons on this chapter.

Daniel prayed set prayers at set times in a set place in a set direction. He prayed three times a day. Thrice-daily prayer services are still the Jewish custom. The early church prayed three times a day. St Benedict expanded this into eight times of prayer as part of the regular daily life for monks. The central feature of Anglican liturgy is the daily office of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. These set times of prayer give a rhythm to the day.

Daniel prayed in a set direction, facing Jerusalem where the temple had been. The temple was a house of prayer. It was the axis linking earth and heaven. It was the conduit to the open eye, ear and heart of the Lord God. Solomon understood this in his great prayer of dedication for the temple he had just built:

**May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication 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. (1 Kgs 8:29-30)**

Solomon went on to say that even if God's people be in exile far from Jerusalem, they could pray towards this place, confess their sins, and know that God would hear them. This is what Daniel was doing in exile. He was in Babylon, far from Jerusalem. But he was praying towards that place, even though there was no longer a temple there. He was praying, knowing that his prayers would be conveyed to the one true God in heaven. The prayer life of the Jews could survive the loss of their house of prayer.

Jerusalem represented the past: it was where the temple had been. It was the homeland from which Daniel and many others had been exiled. But it also represented the future. God had promised that he would bring his people home. Jews today end the Passover meal by

saying, "Next year in Jerusalem." Praying towards the temple kept alive Daniel's hope of restoration. With hope, people can endure much; without hope we shrivel and die. Facing Jerusalem in prayer kept Daniel's hope alive as he remembered God's promises.

As Christians we don't pray in a set direction. Our prayers are not oriented towards a place but towards a person, our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray to and through him, knowing that he is our conduit to God. Seated at the Father's side, Jesus has the Father's eye, ear and heart, as he intercedes for us.

Thirdly, Daniel was praying and giving thanks (10); he was petitioning and seeking favor (11). He was doing so probably using set prayers. The psalter is the most important collection of set prayers: 150 of them. It contains praise and thanksgiving, confession and petitions for mercy. The monastic daily office, Anglican daily liturgy, Jewish daily liturgy, all use set prayers, with the Psalter as the primary source book. The monks pray through the psalter every single week. We tend to look down on set prayer, viewing it as rote, as empty ritual. That's the attitude that I had for a long time. But set prayers have the advantage that they are very well thought out. They are the collected wisdom of God's people. If they are not straight from Scripture, they are deeply formed by Scripture. We will see Daniel's facility in prayer in chapter 9 where he addresses a long prayer to God, a prayer shaped by earlier Scripture.

Set prayers at set times in a set direction. Some of you may think of Muslims, since this is what they do. Yes, but Muhammad was following the long-established pattern of Jews and Christians, whom he would have observed in his travels through Arabia and Syria. He also followed the custom of Christian monks who prostrated on their knees, as Daniel did and as was customary in the Ancient Near East.

Daniel prayed alone at home out of necessity. And Jesus does say to go into your own room and pray in private, but this is in contrast to hypocrites who pray in public to be seen and receive praise and accolades. But prayer is also corporate. Jesus also said, "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20).

Each Wednesday morning a group gathers here at PBCC for corporate prayer at a set time—though currently they meet on Zoom. Shawn started this prayer group after his sabbatical at Regent College a few years ago. He was so transformed by what he learnt there, including about formal prayer, that he wanted to continue it here. Each week the prayer time starts with a set prayer: the Anglican collect for the week. Each prayer time ends with a set prayer: saying the Lord's Prayer together. A second prayer group is starting on Tuesday evenings, following the same pattern. We also have a prayer team that meets here on Sunday mornings.

Daniel was a man of prayer, but I don't think he was what we would call a prayer warrior. I doubt that he was wrestling with God in prayer. He wasn't praying against the king or against the officials. Instead, three times a day he got on his knees, signifying his humble submission before God. He faced Jerusalem, knowing that his prayers would be heard in heaven. He paid full attention to God. Three times a day he reoriented himself onto God. Even when there was an irrevocable decree forbidding him to do so. Even when he was facing the penalty of being thrown to the lions. This was his daily pattern, day in and day out. Three times a day he heeded the psalm: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10).

Daniel was a man at rest. He was unlike the other officials who were worked up, frenetically orchestrating his downfall. They were rushing around as an agitated throng, to the palace, to Daniel's house, back to the palace. Daniel was not like the king who was

passively compliant in the hands of his officials, easily maneuvered into their conspiracy. Daniel was the calm at the center of the storm. He was simply being faithful to God. Three times a day he turned aside and stilled himself before God. He regularly reoriented himself onto God in stillness and quiet.

When I think about Daniel at prayer in this way, I don't feel so guilty that I don't spend five hours a day wrestling in prayer. Instead, I find this rhythm of prayer deeply attractive.

In his thrice-daily prayer, Daniel was not trying to be conspicuous. Yes, the window was open. Yes, he could be seen. But he was simply continuing his daily practice. The officials knew his daily practice, so they had no trouble finding him:

**Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. (6:11)**

For the second time the officials go as an agitated throng, this time to Daniel's house. Daniel at rest inside is juxtaposed with the restless throng outside. Earlier they had *sought* to *find* a charge against him but could *find* nothing. Now they *find* him and he is *seeking* God, as they knew he would. Now it's time to close in for the kill.

**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."**

**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." (6:12-13)**

The officials skillfully lead the king into their trap. First they asked the king to confirm the decree. Unaware of their devious purposes, he affirmed that the decree is irrevocable. Then the bureaucrats sprang their trap: Daniel the exile pays no attention to you or to your decree. Just like Belshazzar belittled Daniel for being one of the Jewish exiles (5:13), so do these conspirators. Their jealousy is clear: this Jewish exile, this refugee is too successful; he's intruding on our territory. He needs to be put in his place.

**When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. (6:14)**

The king immediately realizes he's been duped and is now trapped. He makes every effort the rest of the day to come up with a solution. But he's trapped by his own irrevocable decree. He's in a bureaucratic nightmare.

At the end of the day the officials return to the palace.

**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."**

**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!" (6:15-16)**

For the third time the officials go as an agitated throng, back to Darius, to remind him of his decree. Defeated, Darius sends Daniel to the lions. Heartbroken, he makes one final comment to Daniel:

"May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" In chapter 3, prior to sending Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the blazing fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar had gloated, "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (3:15). They had replied,

**"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (3:17-18)**

Nebuchadnezzar willingly sent them to the furnace, infuriated by their obstinance. But here Darius has tried to avoid sending Daniel to the lions' den. He sends him there unwillingly.

**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. 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. (6:17-18)**

The king spent the night alone in his palace. Alone without any of the usual diversions to keep him happy: wives, concubines, dancing girls, whatever. He was without these distractions; just him alone with his thoughts. Meanwhile, Daniel spent the night in the lions' den: the scary sleepover. Will he survive?

At first light the king hurried to the lions' pit.

**At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 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?"**

**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."**

**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. (6:19-23)**

The previous evening Darius had said, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Now he cries out in anguished distress, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Yes, replies Daniel. Finally we hear Daniel's voice! This is the only time in the chapter that he speaks. Yes, God sent his angel to be his presence with him there in the lion pit. Daniel had done no harm, either to God or to the king. Therefore the lions did him no harm. Daniel was raised from the pit, and no harm was found on him. Why? Because he trusted God. He was faithful to God, just as he had been faithful to the king and to his job at the beginning of the chapter.

At the king's command, those who plotted to destroy Daniel were themselves thrown into the lion pit, and devoured before even hitting the ground. Their "perfect plan" backfired in a most spectacular way.

King Darius wrote to the entire empire and issued a decree, "that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel." He backed this up with a glorious doxology, an expression of praise to the one true God:

**"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.” (6:26b-27)**

What endures forever? Not the Babylonian empire; that has already fallen. Not the Persian Empire; this too will fall. Not the laws of the Medes and Persians which supposedly cannot be revoked. But God and his eternal kingdom. This is what King Nebuchadnezzar had finally come to realize after four chapters, resulting in a doxology from his lips at the end of chapter 4:

**His dominion is an eternal dominion;  
his kingdom endures from generation to generation. (4:34)**

This is what King Darius has now come to learn. This is what King Belshazzar in between failed to learn.

The chapter ends with a brief conclusion:

**So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (6:28)**

The chapter begins with Daniel flourishing in a foreign land. It ends with him flourishing in a foreign land. But in the middle life has not been easy. Daniel had been faithful to his king and to his job. But the entire imperial bureaucracy was determined to bring him down. They thought they had succeeded as he was thrown to the lions. His situation seemed hopeless. But in prayer he kept orienting himself onto God. And God was present with him even in the lion pit, just as God had been present with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the blazing fiery furnace.

These two stories encouraged future generations of Jews living in the Diaspora under foreign empires to remain faithful both to God and to their position in those empires. Some of them would not be delivered from their trials. They would be killed, martyred for their faithfulness to God. We heard about some of these people in our Scripture reading from Hebrews 11. The first part of the chapter is of victory, of overcoming giants. The heroes of faith “conquered kingdoms...and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames” (11:33-34). But then the mood turns: there were also faithful people who were killed. “They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword” (11:37). In our next chapter, Daniel 7, we will see why God’s faithful people are killed for being faithful.

Throughout history and around the world today God’s faithful people are being killed for being faithful. We pray for the persecuted church. We are concerned today for the future of our Christian brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. This was the country highlighted in our e-news this week, as we follow the Open Doors World Watch

List of the countries where Christians are most persecuted.

These stories of Daniel encourage us today. We’re not facing the blazing fiery furnace or the lion pit. But we face various trials: ill health, death of family members, weariness from the ongoing pandemic, and many others. We just sang, “Be still and know that the Lord is in control. Be still my soul, stand and watch as giants fall.” Many of the giants that need to fall are not external threats, but internal ones: fear, anxiety, worry, agitation, desire for control. We can be fervent in prayer but still have all these giants in control of our life. We can wrestle with God in prayer but still be consumed with fear, anxiety and worry in a state of agitation. It is a much harder thing to still ourselves before God; to submit ourselves and be willing to live faithfully in whatever situation he has us; to accept his will, whether he deliver us from the difficult situation or leave us in the difficult situation. Some might object that this is an invitation to passivity or laziness. But learning to be faithful and obedient where God has us now, even when things are set against us, is anything but passive. It is a very challenging thing to do. But thereby we slay the giants of fear, anxiety, worry and agitation.

Daniel dared to stand alone not in opposing the king or the empire or the officials. He dared to stand alone by quietly going to his home, getting on his knees and praying to God. He stilled himself before God. He was not agitated like the officials. He was calm and faithful: faithful to the king and faithful to God. He could still himself before God even in the face of death, because stilling himself before God was his daily practice. He was a man oriented onto God. May this be true for us also. May we be able to still ourselves before God.

I close with two set prayers. The second is the Lord’s Prayer which we’ll say together. But first, the collect for today, the 12th Sunday after Trinity. This is a prayer that goes back 1400 years.

Almighty and everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we are to pray and who wants to give more than we desire or deserve, pour down upon us your abundant mercy, forgiving us those things in which our conscience is afraid and giving to us that which our prayer dare not presume to ask, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Lord God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you: Help us...so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Feast of Augustine of Hippo, August 28)*

© 2021 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino