

Daniel 6:1-28

Introduction

Last week, we came to probably the most famous of the six narratives (or stories) in Daniel – Daniel and the Lion’s Den. What we really focused on in the first ten verses was how Daniel is presented to us as a model of what true wisdom really looks like. We saw last week that true wisdom navigates between caring deeply about the reputation we have in the world and yet at the same time caring nothing for the world’s “approval” or “acceptance.” We saw that true wisdom means getting down on your knees and praying three times a day in front of an open window facing toward Jerusalem even when the decree has been signed saying that if you’re caught doing this you’ll be cast into a den of lions. When Daniel prayed with his face toward Jerusalem, he was showing not that his longing was for an earthly, corruptible city, but rather that his longing was for that heavenly, eternal city of which the earthly Jerusalem was just a copy and a shadow (cf. Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16). Daniel knew the truth—and the *wisdom*—of these words of Jesus: “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Now we know that this wisdom didn’t come from Daniel. It was freely given to Him by God. But it’s still legitimate to ask: How is it that we “receive” this gift of wisdom? What is it, on our side, that’s required not only to *receive* this gift, but even to be *willing* to ask for such a gift – a gift that could potentially lead us in this life to a literal or a figurative “den of lions”?

I. Daniel 6:1–6 — It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him...

That’s an interesting thing to tell us isn’t it? – that they “came by agreement”? That phrase “came by agreement” is actually the translation of just one word in Aramaic. The simple verb form of this word means “to be in a tumult” so the New King James says that the high officials and the satraps “thronged” before the king (cf. ESV translation note). But what’s the point of a picture like this? It seems hard to imagine that these men literally came tumultuously thronging into the king’s presence. That’s why the ESV translates more tamely, “they came by agreement to the king” (cf. NASB). The NIV even says simply that they “went *as a group*” to the king (cf. HCSB). But we already know that “*all*” the high officials and satraps came to the king. Why emphasize the fact that they came “as a group”?

Some translations see in this word an emphasis on the fact that they “came by collusion” and conspiracy to the king (cf. NET; NRSV). I think that’s a better translation, but it still doesn’t quite capture completely what Daniel’s saying here. Along with this collusion and conspiracy, there’s still the fact that this word naturally conjures up images of a tumultuous, thronging mob. We find the related Hebrew word in Psalm 64:

□ Psalm 64:2–6 — Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the **throng** (tumult; uproar) of evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear. They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly.”

Isn’t that a perfect description of what’s happening here in Daniel six? The wicked are in a tumult and an uproar, the whole mob of them feverishly and secretly plotting against Daniel. We see the same word in Psalm chapter two:

□ Psalm 2:1 — Why do the nations **rage** [Why do the nations tumultuously assemble?; YLT] and [why do] the peoples plot...?

Here again is a vivid picture of the nations thronging together in a tumult and conspiring and plotting against the righteous. So on the one hand it’s almost like there’s a hint of mockery – especially here in Daniel: “Then these high officials and satraps tumultuously thronged into the king’s presence.” And yet we remember that the meaning of this tumult isn’t funny at all – it’s a secret plotting and conspiring against God’s servant Daniel. It’s with this vivid picture in our mind – the picture of a tumultuous, thronging mob feverishly and secretly plotting and conspiring against Daniel, that we go on to read in verses 6-9:

II. Daniel 6:6–9 — Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

First of all, we know that “all the high officials of the kingdom” were *not* “agreed.” That was a lie. Daniel obviously wasn’t consulted and he was one of the three highest officials and even the one the king planned to set over the whole kingdom. Second of all, it’s clear that these high officials and satraps are just using the king. They could really care less if Darius himself was cast into a den of lions. And yet for all this the king is still completely taken in by their flattery.

We have lies and flattery on the one hand and a king’s ego on the other; we have a tumultuous mob plotting and conspiring on the one hand and a gullible king duped by a bunch of insincere fawning on the other hand. And then there’s Daniel. Where’s Daniel in the midst of all this “chaos” at the court? And how should we imagine Daniel will respond when he hears of the nations’ raging and the king’s incompetence and that horrific death sentence that’s just been

passed on him? We know he's still going to pray, but should we imagine him praying as one who's frantic and terrified? Would that have been us? Should we imagine him praying as one all in a tumult and an uproar himself? Would that have been me? Should we imagine all his prayer now being given over to begging and pleading with God for his life to be spared? Will the tumult and chaos at the court now be matched or even outdone by the tumult and the chaos inside Daniel?

III. Daniel 6:10 — When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

What's being modeled for us here is not just *what* Daniel did, but *how* he did it and *the way* that he did it. Just as important as *what* Daniel did is the whole *manner* in which he did it. Did you get a really strong feel for what that manner was in the verse we just read? I think one commentator sums everything up really well:

“There is no speech or inner turmoil recorded in the narrative. The impression the narrative intends to impart is Daniel's *unflinching* obedience. He does not question, doubt, or worry; he [simply] acts” (Longman).

So, ironically, while the officials and satraps plotting against Daniel's life are all in a tumult and an uproar (a thronging mob), it's Daniel who's the only one truly and wholly at peace. That's the picture that's really being emphasized here and so vividly portrayed. While the officials and satraps plotting against Daniel's life are all in a tumult and an uproar, it's Daniel who's the only one truly and wholly at peace.

But how can this be? Is Daniel a machine with no feelings who just doesn't care about being eaten by lions? Or is he so “extra-super-spiritual” that he's just elevated far above the plane where all the rest of us exist? Think about it. If that was true then this passage would have no relevance at all to any of us. But the fact is that Daniel was just as human as every one of us here today. He was no more special or superhuman than any one of us here today. But if that's so, how could Daniel not be questioning or doubting or worrying? How could Daniel be characterized by such an “unflinching obedience”? I think the clear answer is that any true unflinching obedience is *always* the result of an implicit trust. Merriam-Webster gives as a definition of implicit, “being without doubt or reserve: unquestioning,” and then even gives this example of the use of the word: “an implicit trust.” “Implicit” doesn't mean that we're mindless or that we never struggle or wonder why. It doesn't even mean that we never ask “why” in our prayers. The psalmist does this many times. What it does mean is that there's never anything in us that even for one moment doubts or questions God's perfect wisdom and infinite goodness and absolute sovereignty over all – not even for a single moment. It's true we may, at times, doubt these things even if only by our attitudes and thoughts, but then we need to recognize that this kind of doubt and questioning is a grievous sin to be confessed and repented of not only for the sake of God's name, but also for our own true freedom and peace. In fact, the only way to never be doubting God's perfect wisdom and infinite goodness and absolute sovereignty is to be

always actively believing and proclaiming these truths to ourselves – maybe even in the midst of still asking “why.”

It’s in this light that we can see how in Daniel’s case—and therefore also in ours—to doubt and worry and question, to be in a constant inner turmoil and uproar, is in the end a failure to *trust implicitly*. The point here is not to “condemn” us for our failure to “just trust God.” The point is to encourage us that true, biblical trusting is not just an oversimplified, trite answer to complex, real life problems. Biblical trusting in God—trusting *implicitly*—is something so wonderfully efficacious that it actually enables Daniel to face the prospect of a den of lions as one who is truly and wholly at peace. “When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” While the officials and satraps plotting against Daniel’s life are all in a tumult and an uproar, it’s Daniel who’s the only one truly and wholly at peace. His obedience is unflinching even with the prospect of a den of lions – because why? Because he trusts implicitly. It’s as “simple” as that.

IV. Daniel 6:11 — Then these men **came by agreement** [came plotting and conspiring all in a tumult and an uproar] and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God.

What a beautiful, wonderful, encouraging contrast this is! While the world rages, are we quietly and steadfastly trusting? While the world plots and conspires are we simply making petition and supplication before our God? When it feels that all around us is in a tumult and an uproar, are we daily being kept “in perfect peace” (cf. Isa. 26:3-4)? And is it this perfect peace, arising as it does from this implicit trust that enables us to obey *unflinchingly* – *even* given the prospect of a den of lions?

V. Daniel 6:12–15 — Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men **came by agreement** to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

For the third time now we have this word used that evokes images of men all in a tumult and an uproar plotting and conspiring together, and once again we see this picture set in stark contrast with the quiet peace and calm of Daniel. But now, added to this, we also have the distress of the king himself who labors till the sun goes down to rescue Daniel but finds himself helpless in the end, trapped by his own words. The point, here, isn’t to make us all love Darius and feel sorry for him (though it’s fine if we do). The real point is—once again—for us to see how the picture we have of Daniel contrasts so sharply with the picture we have of the king. While the king is in physical and mental distress—totally consumed by inner turmoil and anguish—it’s Daniel, of all

people, who's not distressed; it's Daniel, of all people, who's the only one truly and really at peace.

Is Daniel not human? Surely, he is! He's no less human than any one of us here today. So how do we explain this unflinching obedience even given the prospect of a den of lions? The answer is still simple and still the same as it was before – he trusted implicitly, without question or doubt or reserve. Listen to this! Biblical trusting isn't the trite, simplistic answer to the challenges and trials of living in the real world. Biblical trusting is so powerfully effectual that it enabled Daniel who was no less human than any one of us to face the prospect of a den of lions and still be the *only one* in this story truly and wholly at peace.

Now, we've had a whole lot to say about Daniel and about Daniel's trust, but what is it that makes this biblical trusting so powerfully effectual? Isn't it the nature of the God in whom our trust rests? Trust isn't something we artificially conjure up inside ourselves. Trust isn't just a nice sounding word that inspires us and comforts us. Trust is simply our wholehearted response to the self-revelation of God – to the God who has revealed *Himself* to us not distantly and abstractly with only facts and propositions about Himself, but intimately and relationally within the context of His covenant with us. Trust is only possible in the context of relationship. *Implicit* trust is only possible in relationship with the God who *we know* to be *perfectly* wise, *infinitely* good, and *absolutely* sovereign over all. So we go on to read in verses 16-20:

VI. Daniel 6:16–20 — Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

The drama and suspense of the story is powerful. It draws us all in as we find ourselves running with the king to the den of lions first thing in the morning and then find ourselves standing with the king at the opening as he's calling out to Daniel. And yet the point of these verses isn't just to increase the suspense with good story telling.

Notice what the king says before Daniel is thrown into the den of lions: “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And then he says, again, after Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, “Has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” What is it that impresses the king about Daniel? It's the fact that *Daniel* serves *his* God *continually*. No doubt the king also served his gods, but he sees that there's a difference between his service and Daniel's. The king served his gods only to the extent that he felt it necessary and in his own best interests – always within certain limits. Daniel, however, served his God continually – unreservedly and wholeheartedly, with no strings attached. And so, really, what most impressed the king was not Daniel and his continual service, but what kind of a God Daniel

must be serving. Notice again what he says: “May your *God, whom* you serve continually... Has your *God, whom* you serve continually...” Can you see now for yourself that the real emphasis in the king’s words isn’t Daniel’s continual service (as important as that is), but what kind of a God this must be whom Daniel serves *continually* – even when faced with the threat of a den of lions? And so we, too, are called to ask ourselves the same question: What kind of a God is this who elicits from Daniel this unflinching obedience and this implicit trust?

So far in this chapter, Daniel hasn’t spoken a single word. Out of all twenty-eight verses, only really in one of them does Daniel say anything at all (6:21-22). But in light of what the king says to Daniel, it’s not hard for us to guess what Daniel has said to the king. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God...” That expression (“the living God”) appears only fifteen times in the entire Old Testament. And nowhere else but here in Daniel six does this expression ever appear on the lips of a pagan idolater. Can you see the obvious reason for this? The “living God” everywhere else in the Bible is the exact opposite of the nations’ lifeless idols (cf. Jer. 10:1-10; 2 Kings 19:16-19). Whenever God’s people spoke of the “living God” they were assuming the total worthlessness and helplessness of all other so-called “gods.” So when the pagan, idol-worshiping Darius calls Daniel “servant of the *living* God” are you hearing in these words Daniel’s own *testimony* to Darius? Darius wondered what kind of God this was whom Daniel served *continually*. And Daniel must have answered: “He is the *living* God.” Not just the God who’s alive and not dead, but the living God who is powerfully active and able to save (Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:36-37; 2 Kings 19:16-19; 1 Tim. 4:10), and so therefore the God who calls me to trust Him implicitly.

□ Psalm 84:2, 8, 11–12 — My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; **my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God...** O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! ... No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. **O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!**

What is it that makes Daniel’s trust so powerfully efficacious? It’s the nature of that God in whom his trust rests. And if we ask, “What kind of God is this in whom Daniel’s trust rests?” then Daniel answers us simply. He is the *living* God. He is the God who works *salvation* for His people. Not the God who guarantees that He will save Daniel from the lions (cf. Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:24; 12:7; 11:33; Heb. 11:32-40), but the God who works salvation for His people and who *will save and deliver* Daniel in the end (cf. Dan. 12:1-3, 13). *That’s who He is.* And that’s why we trust him implicitly. While the officials and satraps plotting against Daniel’s life are all in a tumult and an uproar, it’s Daniel who’s the only one truly and wholly at peace. While the king is in physical and mental distress—totally consumed by inner turmoil and anguish in an attempt to save Daniel’s life—it’s Daniel who’s the only one truly and wholly at peace.

“At break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, ‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?’”

VII. Daniel 6:21–23 — Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Daniel’s not saying that his blameless conduct guaranteed his deliverance from the lions, but only that God’s deliverance from the lions was evidence and proof of his blameless conduct. In the same way, the point isn’t that Daniel’s trust in God guaranteed his deliverance from the lions, but only that his deliverance from the lions was evidence and proof positive of His trust in God. In other words, the point here isn’t to give us false hope that we, too, will be miraculously saved in this life, but rather to fill us—along with all of God’s people who’ve ever read this story—with the absolute certainty that the God who delivered Daniel from the lion’s den will just as surely—and just as miraculously!—save and deliver all of us on that final day. And why is this? How can we know this? Because He is the living God who promises to deliver all who trust in Him. But then we go on to read this:

VIII. Daniel 6:24 —And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Right away we start asking questions: “Why does the king do this? Where was Daniel? Why didn’t he intercede on behalf of his enemies, or at least on behalf of their wives and children? And if he did intercede, why didn’t the king listen? Why would God let this happen?” The text doesn’t answer these questions and we’re not meant to be distracted with asking them. So what’s the point of telling us that this happened? Couldn’t it have been just as easily left out?

If Daniel’s deliverance from the lions is pointing us to the final and greater deliverance that God will work for all those who trust in Him, then this destruction of the men who maliciously accused Daniel, along with their children and wives, is also just a picture of something far more terrible – it’s a reminder of that final “shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2) that will be the lot of all those who rebel against the living God and who refuse to put their trust in Him. It’s a reminder of the certainty and the truth of these words:

□ Matthew 16:25 — For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And so now we come not only to the conclusion of chapter six, but to the conclusion of the whole first half of Daniel:

IX. Daniel 6:25–28 — Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before **the God of Daniel**, for **he** is the **living** God, enduring forever; **his** kingdom shall never be destroyed, and **his** dominion shall be to the end. **He delivers**

and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and [or “even”] the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

When all around us is in a tumult and an uproar, are we daily being kept “in perfect peace”? And is it this perfect peace, arising as it does from this implicit trust, that enables us to obey *unflinchingly* – *even* given the prospect of a den of lions? Trust isn’t something we conjure up inside ourselves so we can feel better. Trust isn’t just a nice sounding word that inspires us and comforts us. Trust is our wholehearted response to the self-revelation of God – to the God who has revealed *Himself* to us not distantly and abstractly with only facts and propositions about Himself, but intimately and relationally within the context of His covenant with us. Trust is only possible in the context of relationship. *Implicit* trust is only possible in relationship with the God who *we* know to be the *living* God who works salvation for His people. *That’s who our God is.* That’s why we trust him implicitly.

Isaiah tells us that the Lord’s redeemed people are those who have learned to sing with these words:

- Isaiah 26:3–4 (cf. 26:1) — You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.