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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**June 26, 2016**

**Daniel's Decision**

**Daniel 6:1-16**

**Prayer:** *Father, once again, I just, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the blessing that this church is, the fact that we can still gather corporately to worship you. Father, I don't know how long that blessing is going to be here and while it's here we just want to cherish it and thank you for it. And so this morning, Lord, as we do gather for corporate worship, we just want to again pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that your Spirit would accompany us as we again open up your book, guide us into your truth, it is your Spirit alone who can make it understandable to us and of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, last week we were speaking about Daniel and the multiple crises that he went through, and we spoke of them all as having this specific goal and direction and that was to produce in Daniel a faith and trust that was built not on God's predictability but on his character. And I spoke of the solution that Daniel had to walking through the many different crises that he had in his life,

he just simply did the next thing. And this is what I mentioned last week and I spoke last week about doing the next thing and I said it was a philosophy that is both simple and profound and the next thing might be changing a baby's diaper if you're a mom, it might be grading a test if you're a teacher, defending a client if you're a lawyer, or flipping a burger if you're a cook. And what I meant by that, it's recognizing the sacred in living your life for the kingdom of God. And as Daniel certainly can attest, it means facing each and every crisis by trusting implicitly in God's sovereignty, wisdom, and grace and then just doing the next thing.

So with that in mind, we're looking at Daniel's latest crisis and this might be called his greatest one, this is the one where he's thrown into a lions' den. And he gets thrown there because the satraps, those are the local governors, the governors that he was slated to become the head of, well they grew jealous and they devised a plan to rid themselves of Daniel. And the first attempt was for all 120 of these governors to come together over his record and see if they can come up with a single flaw in his character or in his performance. And when they couldn't, they all fell back on a tried and true formula that we read about in *Daniel 6:5*, it says: *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."* They couldn't find a weak spot in Daniel's life, they

couldn't find a weak spot in his record, so they decided to go for the only weak spot that they thought they could capitalize on. It was his relationship with God. You see, Daniel is not a mainstream Babylonian believer. Daniel believes in one God; they believed in many. In fact at this point in Daniel's life, he's up against this belief that Darius the king is the only person that you can appeal to, he's the only person that you can pray to. And so Daniel's faith becomes a lightning rod that divides him and the government that he served even though he served it far better than all the other leaders that he served with. Daniel trusted in God's word, and he took his marching orders from what he had read in the prophet Jeremiah. There Jeremiah in *Jeremiah 29* says this about the conduct that you should have while you're in Babylon, he says: *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."*

Now Daniel no doubt sought the welfare of Babylon. He was known

for that and his reputation was so unassailable that in frustration the governors decided to attack his religious convictions because they knew there they would strike gold. They knew that Daniel worshiped only one God and that their phony setup would be able to set him at odds with his government. But there's far more here though than meets the eye. You see, it didn't matter how wonderful, how wise, and how blessed Daniel's performance was, there was still a subconscious anger that drove the satraps to seek Daniel's harm. I mean they may not even have known the reasons why but they wanted him gone. Something more than mere jealousy was driving them. And it goes back to the big picture that governs this world that we all live in. I've said this many, many times, this is a world at war. And the history of this war goes back before Adam and Eve. *Revelation 12:7* describes the original war, it says: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

We look at this and say what does this ancient text, it reads like something out of a video game, what does this text mean to us?

Well, if you look hard enough, you'll be able to see just what it was that drove the governors to want Daniel dead. And if you're wise enough to see it, you'll see that really this war defines the default drives that permeate every single aspect of life on this planet. You see, according to scripture Satan literally hit the ground running after his defeat in heaven but then he took up residence there, and there is here. If you want a simple answer to the misery that so much of this world is caught up in, look no further than the one who Jesus himself referred to in John 14 as "*the ruler of this world.*" I mean if this world seems crazy and evil to you, understand that it's run by the architect of crazy and evil, Satan himself. And on planet earth there is a war going on between two great spiritual superpowers, the forces of light on the one hand and the forces of darkness on the other, and every single person on planet earth is in either of those two camps whether they know it or not. And if you are one of his sheep, it's only because you have been called out of the darkness of this world into his marvelous light. Just listen to how Peter describes believers in *1 Peter 2:9*, he says: *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* And God is very clear that the battle on earth has always been between light and darkness, from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden to the return of Christ at the very end, God

describes us as being in a battle. And he describes the battle this way in *John 1:5*, he says: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* And so if you look at the big picture, you understand that Daniel, he's not just up against some jealous co-workers. No, there's something far, far deeper working on an unconscious level that is driving the animus toward him. The answer is simple, Daniel represented the light and the satraps represented the darkness. And again, God illustrates this in *John 3:19*, he says: *"And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."* Well, Daniel's works put him at the center of bitter opposition even though all of the governors admitted that Daniel's performance and his character were flawless. Because like I said, there was something going on driving those accusations. It was a light versus darkness thing and Daniel was its latest victim. It's what drives anti-Semitism today.

I pointed out last week that Daniel's plight is not that far removed from ours, particularly with the events that took place in Orlando. You see, they, too, exposed a hidden animus. And like I

said last week, I mean we look at the incident, what actually took place, a highly disturbed, monstrously evil man shouting "Allahu Akbar" breaks into a nightclub and systematically starts mowing down patrons. And in the hours that he spends methodically murdering as many people as he can, he repeatedly tweets out his loyalty to ISIS, his locality to al-Baghdadi, along with his hatred and disgust for everything decadent in the West. And a significant segment of the press responds to his crime by saying, well, this is the Christian's fault. There's something else driving this. What you have here is the same kind of light and darkness clash of spiritual superpowers. And much of the reaction to Orlando I believe takes place on an unconscious level. You see, Christians, we stand for something that this dominant culture finds highly threatening. And on a spiritual level, I don't even think they understand, but they're quite willing to scapegoat Christians in the light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Derryck Green writing in the *Institute on Religion & Democracy* put into words what is driving this response. This is what he said. He said:

In the midst of grieving -- and attempting to make sense of the stark reality of real evil, Christianity has been scapegoated and criticized for this ISIS-inspired mass murder. The argument is

that since Christians, specifically evangelicals, have refused to redefine marriage to mean something it's not, and steadfastly refuse to be coerced into participating in or providing services for ceremonies and activities that contradict their religious principles and beliefs, Christians are guilty of creating and nurturing a "climate of hate." It's claimed by an increasing cacophony of voices that Christian-based hatred motivated a Muslim to murder 49 people while claiming allegiance to ISIS, in the name of Allah, absolving his culpability in a gross demonstration of what evil looks like. So not only is transgender real, so is transtheology. Rather than directly confronting this religious bigotry and moral absurdity by defending their religious reputation -- the foundation of which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ -- some Christians have joined the "blame Christians" chorus.

And he goes on to conclude: Christians can accept, love and pray for the LGBTQ community (Orlando and elsewhere) and should do so. But Christians are under no cultural, moral, religious or theological obligation to approve of a lifestyle that contradicts a life lived in communion with Christian teachings. They also shouldn't be compelled to accept the inversion of human sexuality. And they shouldn't be liable for what another person from another religion did of his own volition.



Christians shouldn't be liable for what another person from another religion does, but there's no doubt that we are. So what does Daniel have to do with the climate that we find ourselves in today? Well, Daniel faced bitter foes. Certainly so do we. I mean he faced people willing to bend the truth to suit their ends. As Christians we face the exact same thing. He also faced a political system highly subject to manipulation with laws bent to suit one group's ideological enemy. We're seeing this happen every single day. But you know, none of those was as great a threat to Daniel as the circumstances that surrounded his great crisis. I want to compare the crisis that took place with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and this crisis that Daniel is facing in the lions' den because I think you'll see some very significant differences.

Now the very first one, this is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. I mean that literally was a wholesale event that was roughly equivalent to somebody putting a gun to your head and demanding that you deny Christ. Now in a sense, Nebuchadnezzar clearly had a gun to the heads of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and that fiery furnace, it's already fired up, it's already ready to go. And all they had to do to lose their lives was to refuse to bow down to the idol. I mean, you could argue that for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they had it easy. In fact they had a binary choice. I mean there was only two options: Bow down to the idol

and live; refuse, and die a horrible death. Daniel faced an entirely different challenge with the lions' den, one that I would suggest was far, far more difficult and one that much more closely mirrors our situation. See, nobody was holding a gun to Daniel's head and he wasn't staring into a furnace. In fact he had lots of reasons where common sense seemed to dictate that all he needed to do was temporarily put a lid on his external expression of faith and all of his troubles would just go away. I mean Daniel had studiously studied the prophet Jeremiah and he knew a lot from understanding that, he knew that this 70-year period of Israel's banishment was soon coming to a close, and he also realized that at age 90 he did not have a long life that was stretching out in front of him. He had spent his life in service to his God and now at the end of his life and career, he's facing what could have been construed as a minor administrative restriction that was at best temporary. I mean after all, this king's edict was only for thirty days. Nobody would have blinked an eye if Daniel had simply decided that it was wiser to lay low for a month and then renew his activities knowing that soon enough all of this is going to come to an end. But Daniel had learned a great deal in his time in Babylon. And he understood that every single crisis that he had weathered over his years there had been an opportunity to grow his faith and trust in the sovereignty of God. So this crisis is going to be the biggest one of all if not just for its consequences, then

for the ease with which it could have been avoided. There's no one putting a gun to Daniel's head and saying, "Deny God or you're going to die."

And here's why this incident matters to you and me. You see, the choice that Daniel had to make in this crisis is much more like the kind of choices you and I are going to have to make. Here's what Daniel did and here's why he did it. This is *Daniel 6:9-13*, it says this, says: *Therefore King Darius signed the written decree. 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. Well, this is what he did. I mean once Daniel knows the decree has been signed, he simply goes about his business. Like we said last week, he did the next thing and the next thing for him was to kneel before his open window in the sight of his enemies. Daniel knew that his response would be entirely predictable. We pick up on it at verse 11, it says: *Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. 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." 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."*

Now, don't you love it, the suck-ups, that's what this is, Oh, great king. Only Daniel is defying you and he's defying you three times a day. And so we ask the question why would Daniel take such a seemingly insignificant risk, a risk he could have avoided by simply laying low for thirty days? And actually for Daniel it's not really a risk, it was a certainty, severe punishment for this was going to be certain. And significance has everything to do with his decision because Daniel had decided that when it came to the things of the kingdom, no decision is ever insignificant. And so we ask the question was Daniel's decision significant? I can answer that by saying it's thousands of years later and we're still talking about it. So I guess it absolutely was. And so what enabled Daniel to make so significant a decision when it would have been remarkably easy to just lay low until the crisis passed? Well, first of all, Daniel understood something. He understood that this was a battle between light and darkness. And he was wise enough to realize that a cultural mindset that was dead set against him and his God is not ever going to be appeased. Sure, he could

pass the thirty-day test but there was bound to be another one and then another one and then another one until eventually everything would come to a head. And so it is with us. And we can hope that the conflicts that we see cropping up day to day about faith and sexuality, we can hope that they're just going to go away in time, but you and I both know that that's not the way this is going to go and this is not the direction the culture is going in. So Daniel wisely met his enemies head-on and he did the next thing which was worship and then he prepared for the next thing which was his arrest. It says this in *Daniel 6:14*, it says: *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 the law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed." 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.*

Well so much for due process, I mean, so much for even the power of the king. Now for all practical purposes Daniel and all of the

satraps, they are now -- Daniel is now seen as a dead man walking. So you tell me, was Daniel, was he wise? Was Daniel courageous in making this decision to take on his government? Or was he foolish and petulant making trouble that could have been easily avoided? You know, if our inquiry stopped right here we'd be left to wonder what did God think of this decision? I mean, should he have kept silent and just waited for this temporary ban to be halted or should he have risked everything by defying his government? Well, we don't have to guess because God makes comment on this. He tells us next what happened. Verse 18 says: *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?" 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."*

So God made it crystal clear that he was delighted pleased with Daniel's significant decision even though it appeared insignificant and avoidable. And even though it appeared insignificant and

avoidable, both Daniel and Daniel's God knew it was hugely consequential. And again, so how do we relate this to our own lives? Well, first let me look at the issue of significance. Okay. I mean, how do we decide whether or not a decision we are going to make for God, how do we decide if it's significant?

I once had a conversation many, many years ago with Steve, Steve Weingartner -- he's going to remember this -- it was a conversation about the difference between watching football and hunting turkeys. And Steve had this observation, he said, he suggested that there was nothing stupider than sitting in front of a television watching grown men push a piece of leather back and forth across a field. I suggested to Steve that there was nothing stupider than sitting in the freezing cold in the woods hoping that a turkey would stroll by you so that you can shoot it when there were perfectly good turkeys already butchered, already de-feathered, already flash frozen, sitting waiting for him at Shop Rite. And I said and besides, the ones at Shop Rite were cheaper when you consider the cost of what it cost to outfit a turkey hunter, they were fatter because they don't run around all day, and they tasted better because they don't spend all day eating worms and grubs. So we went back and forth arguing about the silliness of putting so much time and effort into something so insignificant. When I made the point that in the end, neither of them is significant because ultimately nothing is

significant. I made the point that time takes everything, everything, from watching football to hunting turkeys to being president of the United States and it reduces them all to the same level of nothingness. I mean, last year's Super Bowl winner and last Thanksgiving's turkey, they both entered the realm of insignificance and it took less than a year. As for presidents, I mean, Clinton and Trump, that's all that people talk about today, but I guarantee you that time itself is going to render these people insignificant as well. So let me ask you, how much do you care about a race between Democrat James Buchanan and Republican John C. Fremont with Millard Fillmore as a third party candidate? Well, in 1856, that's all people were talking about. What does that mean to you today? See, time has rendered those politicians insignificant. And it's not just politicians. I don't care who you are, time is going to eventually render you of no consequence.

You don't get a more consequential existence than that of Albert Schweitzer. I mentioned him before, he was a doctor, a missionary, a musician and a Nobel Peace Prize winner. I've spoken before how Schweitzer took his Nobel Peace Prize winnings and how he opened up a clinic in Africa that treated thousands who were suffering from horrible diseases. But Schweitzer won his Nobel Prize in 1952 and he died in 1965. And how much more significance could you possibly have in dedicating your life to healing those who are sick and



unable to heal themselves, but understand that time respects no one and nothing, and every single person who Schweitzer and his aides helped in Africa is now just as dead as he is. And all the wonderful work that he did in the 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's has been swallowed up and captured by time. That's why God says in *James 4:14*, he says: *What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* You take the most significant task you and I have ever, ever undertaken, that's the raising of our kids. And as much as you and I care for our children and grandchildren right now, there's going to come a time -- I've said this before -- when our offspring is not even going to know our names. I mean, many times in the past I've asked folks if they could even name their great great great great grandparents, and nobody can. Time has swallowed up all of their significance and it will swallow up yours as well. Solomon said it best in *Ecclesiastes 1:14*, he says: *I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

So you can look at all that time is going to do and get very depressed by it all, or you can turn to the one place that time can never touch, and that's the kingdom of God. See, the kingdom of God makes everything significant. It never ceases to amaze me how great a gift we have received and how little people are interested

in it. You see, when you give your life to Christ, the vanity that this whole world revolves around, it becomes a specific purposeful march towards its appointed end and that's our good and God's glory. But understand also, there's only one way to enter into this kingdom of God and the heaven that it contains, and it's by placing our faith not in our own good works but in the ultimate work of perfection that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished by living his life perfectly and then offering it up as a substitute sacrifice in return for our lives of sin. We inherit the kingdom of God because we place our trust in his merit and not our own. Here's what Jesus said in *John 10:27*, he said: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*" You see, many folks, even Christians don't realize that when Christ offers us eternal life, he is also offering us eternal significance as well. That's something that everybody longs for but only his sheep receive. *Psalm 37: The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever. But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish -- like smoke they vanish away. 1 John 2:17: And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Galatians 6:9: And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

So we see Daniel sowing with his life and reaping with eternal life. And one measure of the significance of Daniel's actions is the fact that we're still talking about it thousands of years after it took place. And if it's still significant here on earth for Daniel to stake his life on the kingdom, I guarantee you that it is far more significant in the kingdom of God. And Jesus tells us explicitly that what we do here on earth has ramifications eternally in heaven. He says this in *Matthew 6:19*, he says: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Now you know what that means for us? You know what that means in terms of our significance? I mean, think of this, if Albert Schweitzer lived his life for the kingdom of God, then every single thing he did lives on for eternity. And what he reaps, he sows eternally forever. And Schweitzer did great and mighty deeds but you might be thinking, well, I'm not Albert Schweitzer. I don't have any great and mighty deeds to look forward to. This is the amazing part. The amazing part is this: Jesus finds vast significance in the tiniest of things done for his sake. That's the beauty and the wonder of simply doing the next thing, whether

it's changing a diaper or flipping a burger or running a country, you see, in all of this, God is only looking for faithfulness with what he's entrusted us with. I mean, if you've been given great gifts, then God's going to expect great things. But if you've been given humble gifts, then God will delight in the expression of those humble gifts. Listen to the significance that Jesus attaches to a widow's gift of two cents. This is *Luke 21*, it says: *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow as put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* And Jesus goes on to say: *"For truly, I say to you"* -- this is *Mark 9:41*, he says: *"I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward."* You see, the bottom line is this, what you do for the here and now, it lives and dies in the here and now. What you do for the kingdom of God no matter how insignificant it may seem down to a cup of water, it will never, never lose its reward. So Daniel's simple insignificant act of praying in front of an open window is something that's going to live on for all eternity.

Now the second thing about Daniel's response is that it was avoidable. I mean the vast majority of the opportunities that you

and I are going to get to advance the kingdom of God, they're going to be avoidable opportunities. I mean you can decide to speak up and defend the gospel to your friends or neighbors, or not. You could make the difficult decision about something that is ethically questionable, or not. You can decide to take the risk of telling your co-workers that there's only one way to be eternally significant and that's in Christ, or not. See, the conflicts of light and darkness that engage us today are almost exclusively of our own choosing. We get to decide. See, we're in a culture, we're in a country that is collapsing but we still have the protections that our forefathers fought and died for years ago. We are not like the other areas of the world where simply identifying with Christ can get you imprisoned or killed. So almost all of the conflict between light and darkness that we confront in this culture will largely be like Daniel's conflict, avoidable. So the next time you find yourself in one of those situations and you hear that little voice in your head saying, "Hey, this is no big deal, I mean, this is not something to make a fuss about, this is not even significant," consider that in the kingdom of God nothing, nothing is insignificant.

Consider also the principle of faithfulness that Jesus spoke of in Luke 16, he says: *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also*

*dishonest in much.*" So you may view your conflicts as insignificant, and they may be, but there's another purpose for them as well, I mean, every insignificant conflict is a training ground that's preparing you for more and more significant conflicts that may be on their way. Daniel faced three separate issues in his conflict with light and darkness. The first was significance. I mean, it was only a thirty-day restriction. No big deal. The second was avoidance. Just lay low for a month and this is all going to blow over. The third was consequence. Daniel knew exactly what it would cost him to go forward, and he didn't hesitate even though the consequence was death.

I want to give you a 21st century version of what it means to understand the consequence of acting and pushing forward even when the consequence may be death. And I want to talk to you about a man, I've mentioned this man before -- if you have that video, Matt, you can stick that up there -- because I want you to be seeing who he is. This is from Voice of the Martyrs. I mentioned him, Matthew Ayairga before, but let me just read about him. It says:

Following the martyrdom of Coptic Christian men by Libyan Islamic State Militants in February 2015, the names of 21 martyrs of the were widely shared. The martyrs were kidnapped from Sirte, Libya,

where they were working. Initially, it was believed that all of the men killed for their faith were from small villages in Egypt. However, the name and background of one of those killed, a black man, was unknown. Matthew Ayairga was soon identified by friends after being recognized in video footage of the killings released by IS. According to Ahram-Canadian News, Matthew was from Chad. Matthew had gone missing in January 2015, captured by one of the radical groups in Libya who have kidnapped hundreds, both Muslim and Christian. The video made public on February 15 shows each of the men dressed in orange jumpsuits, kneeling on a beach, with their black-clothed attackers standing behind them. Each one is systematically beheaded, and the video clearly shows many of the men praying "Lord Jesus Christ" in their final moments. According to reports, Matthew Ayairga was not a Christian. However, when moments before his death the IS extremists demanded that he follow Islam, Matthew turned them down after reportedly witnessing the "immense faith" of the Egyptian believers, he decided to become a follower of Christ. On camera, one of the terrorists asked Matthew, "Do you reject Christ?" "Their God is my God," he responded, and he became one of the 21 men laying down their lives for their faith in Christ.

You want to talk about insignificant? Matthew Ayairga was a nobody, I mean, a real nobody. He was so desperately poor that he

left his village in Africa in order to seek work in another country. He was uneducated, unskilled, and unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of monstrous murderers like ISIS. You don't get more insignificant than Matthew Ayaairga. And yet here are we celebrating his courage and his wisdom and in making the most significant decision in his short life. And I can tell you all of heaven and all of eternity will shout forever the significance of Matthew Ayaairga because he made an avoidable choice of great consequence, to acknowledge Christ when he knew it would cost him everything. I mean the gun was literally to his head and he wholesale at great price accepted Christ.

We face almost the polar opposite. You know, it's extremely unlikely that a gun is ever going to be put to our head. What is likely though is that we will experience dozens of little avoidable opportunities to acknowledge Christ or not and we will be forced to consider the consequences right there and right then and decide. And there's going to be one part of you pointing out what must have been obvious to Daniel, it's going to be that little part in your brain that's telling you this is insignificant, this is avoidable. It's probably not even consequential. The darkness is going to tell you it's no big deal, just take a pass, discretion is the better part of valor. That's what the world is going to be telling you. It's going to tell you it's okay to bail to protect yourself.



God will forgive you and God will forgive you if you repent, I mean we know that. We know that Peter bailed on Jesus and we know that after much tears he was forgiven by Jesus. But Peter wept great tears of regret and betrayal and opportunity lost. I want no opportunity lost even though I recognize I'm just as capable of the cowardice of Peter. But I want the courage of Daniel and Matthew Ayairga. And so I fix my eyes on the one place that is eternally significant and that's the kingdom of God and its king, the Lord Jesus Christ. So the next time you're facing one of these opportunities, remember there's a battle going on, it's a battle between light and darkness and consider what Daniel did, consider what Matthew did. Look at the big picture. Consider this great cloud of witnesses above us all watching, all waiting to see what kind of decision you and I are going to make for Christ, and consider Peter's words: *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* Let's pray.

*Father, again, I thank you for Daniel, I thank you for giving us the example that he was of absolute courage, absolute determination to just simply do the next thing. If that meant kneeling down in front of his open window, in front of the witness of those who would seek him harm, so be it. I thank you that Daniel understood*

*exactly what the significance of that was, that he didn't avoid the avoidable and that he was willing to pay the consequences. Father, I pray for each of the tiny little versions of Daniel's circumstance that we get, that when we hear that little voice inside us telling us no big deal, let it slide, that we would realize that nothing in the kingdom is insignificant, and that we would trust you for the outcome and not avoid the avoidable. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*