

“Almost a Christian”
Daniel 6:25-28
(Preached at Trinity, July 13, 2014)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. I had planned to move on to **Chapter 7** tonight but a question was asked of me last Sunday night that was thought provoking. Here’s the question: “Was Darius a believer?”
 2. It raises the question of what it means to be a Christian. What does a Christian look like? When does a person have the right to call himself a Christian? This is of great importance since almost everyone we meet presumes they are going to heaven. And in our ever-increasing secular society it is a question that few people can answer correctly.
 3. I hear statements like, “Well, they are just immature. They just have to be given a chance to grow.”
We shouldn’t deny the reality of new believers who are babes in Christ who will grow into mature believers who are strong and established. But we must ask if there are certain elements of Christianity that are essential across the spectrum of maturity.
 4. Tonight I want us to consider this text and determine if the words of Darius were sufficient to prove his conversion. I’ve already insinuated that they were not. Why do I come to this conclusion? What was lacking? I title this sermon tonight, “Almost a Christian.”
- I. The first thing I want to do tonight is examine the testimony of Darius
- A. He had been stirred by observing the life of Daniel
 1. Daniel had demonstrated excellence in all that he did – **Verses 3-4**
 2. He was unmoving in his commitment to God his entire life going back to his teenage years when he maintained his purity in a pagan land
Daniel 1:8 NAU - " But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank"
 3. He was known as a man of unwavering commitment to the Law of God.
Daniel 6:5 NAU - "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him with regard to the law of his God."
In other words, they knew Daniel would not waver in his commitment.
 4. Even when threatened with death Daniel continued his commitment to God.
Daniel 6:10 NAU - "when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."

5. This had not gone unnoticed by King Darius. He had witnessed Daniel's commitment to his God.
Daniel 6:16 NAU - " Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you."
6. As I pointed out last week, our lives of faithfulness before this world has a powerful effect. We stand forth as light in this world of darkness. We are salt to act as both seasoning and preserving.
1 Peter 2:12 NAU - " Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation."

B. Look at the powerful response of King Darius

1. First, he passed judgment upon those who falsely accused Daniel – **V.24**
2. He ordered by royal decree that all men give reverence to the God of Daniel.

Daniel 6:26 NAU - "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel"

3. Then he spoke high praise for Daniel's God
 - a. That He is a living God compared with many of the dead idols of his day.
 - b. That He is an enduring God, transcending the lives of ordinary men. In other words, He was a true God.
 - c. He rules with great authority and power. After all, He was able to overrule the wicked scheme of Daniel's enemies. He was able to shut the mouths of the lions and deliver Daniel. He is a powerful God.
Daniel 6:26 NAU - "And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion *will be* forever."
 - d. Darius further elaborated God's mighty power.
Daniel 6:27 NAU - "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has *also* delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

II. Everything seems like a powerful testimony in favor of King Darius' conversion. But he is most likely in hell tonight. Where did he go wrong?

A. His noble words about God were insufficient. They were not words of praise directed at *his* but at *Daniel's* God

1. Darius spoke high words
He ordered that God be honored by all men
He gave high praise to God
2. The problem is he was singing the praises of Daniel's God. He was not owning God as his own

Daniel 6:26 NAU - "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel"

3. There are many people who speak highly of God. They speak of the virtues of Christianity. They speak highly of the church. They may even join the church. But God isn't their God. They are not interested in following Him.
 4. Darius was not declaring God to be the *only* God
- B. Some background regarding Darius is helpful at this point
1. Identifying Darius is difficult. There were several kings by this name.
 - a. Some identify him with Darius the Great. But the dating is off. That would put his reign after Cyrus.
 - b. He is referred to here as "Darius the Mede"
Darius the Great or Darius I was the King of Persia. But Persia and Media were closely related. Both were part of modern day Iran.
 2. Regarding religious practices however, I think it is safe to assume similarity. Most agree that Darius was an adherent of Zoroastrianism. Ancient Persia worshipped multiple gods. Zoroaster simplified the religion into one primary god – Ahura Mazda. Darius believed that Ahura Mazda appointed him to rule—that he had the divine right to rule the world. Like Cyrus, Darius supported the adherents of other faiths and religions as long as they remained peaceable and submissive. Besides showing favor to the Israelites in funding the restoration of the Temple, he also showed favor towards the Greek cults, and built several temples for the Egyptian gods.
 3. The point is, Darius had a high view of God but did not recognize God's sovereign right to rule over *his* life. Darius merely saw God as one of many Gods.
- C. You might say Darius was close
1. He recognized God's greatness and ordered all to give Him reverence.
 2. But he wasn't prepared to submit himself to God alone. He lacked saving faith and true repentance.
 3. Like King Agrippa many years in the future he was almost persuaded but almost isn't close enough.
Acts 26:28 KJV - "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."
Almost isn't close enough.
Almost saved is to be totally lost.
 - An airplane that makes it almost to the runway will not safely land
 - The mother in labor that makes it almost to the hospital still delivers in the backseat.
 - The student who almost makes a passing grade still fails the class.
 - A man who almost receives Christ still goes to hell.
 4. Matthew Henry – "Many are almost persuaded to be religious who are not quite persuaded; they are under strong convictions of their duty, and of the excellency of the ways of God, but yet are overruled by some external inducements, and do not pursue their convictions."

III. So what does a Christian look like?

- A. A Christian has come to an understanding of his own sin and trusts Christ alone
1. Granted our text tonight has a focus on Daniel's great deliverance, not on the spiritual life of Darius.
But while Darius was amazed at God's great power there is no indication he sees any degree of any personal accountability before God. While he punishes Daniel's accusers there is nothing that suggests any recognition of personal guilt before God.
 2. Compare this with Nebuchadnezzar who acknowledged his sin of pride and God's justness in punishing him.
Daniel 4:37 NAU - "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."
 3. Many professing Christians today fail to understand the full measure of their sinfulness and personal accountability before God. If you ask them to explain the meaning of the cross they give you a blank stare.
Salvation demands owning your personal guilt before God.
Saving faith is trusting in the merits of Christ as our substitute. It demands seeing the importance of the cross of Christ. You cannot have a crossless Gospel.
1 Corinthians 1:22-23 NAU - "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified"
1 Corinthians 2:2 NAU - "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."
 4. What does it mean that you have sinned against God?
 - a. It demands recognizing God's infinite holiness and His absolute sovereign dominion. He has the right to demand holiness from you. He has the right to demand obedience to His law.
Darius recognized God's dominion but not in an absolute sense.
 - b. Sin is high treason against the King of kings. You can't understand the nature of sin if you don't recognize God's absolute right to rule over you.
 - c. People trifle with sin because they don't truly see themselves under God. It's easy to dismiss God's Law if you dismiss God.
- B. A Christian is one who has repented of his sin
1. The heart of the Gospel is "repent and believe"
Mark 1:14-15 NAU - "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
 2. Repentance is forsaking our treasonous life
 3. There is a reason a sinner is willing to forsake his sin. Not only does he see God's sovereign reign, he also recognizes God's infinite worth. He finds God excellent in His being and lovely in His persons. Simply speaking, he begins to love God.
It is this love that leads to obedience. It is this love that draws the Christian to follow Christ.
Mature or a babe in Christ, every Christian loves Christ.

- C. A Christian is a follower of Christ. This is the basic teaching of the NT.
The ultimate charge of the Gospel is, "Follow Me"
1. Read where Jesus calls His apostles
Peter and Andrew
Matthew 4:18-20 NAU - "Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him."
James and John
Mark 1:19-20 NAU - "Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him."
Matthew
Luke 5:27-28 NAU - "After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." ²⁸ And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him."
 2. This wasn't the charge to only His Apostles. It was His charge to all.
The Rich Young Ruler
Luke 18:22 NAU - "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
 3. To all men
Matthew 16:24-25 NAU - "f anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
- D. So what does it look like to follow Christ?
1. It means Christ takes priority over everything else.
Listen to the words of our Lord again.
Matthew 16:24-25 NAU - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
Luke 14:26-27 NAU - "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."
Luke 14:33 ESV - "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

2. Following Christ means having Christ in the lead. He is Lord and Master
Salvation demands claiming Christ as Lord
Romans 10:9-10 NAU - "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."
3. Darius wasn't about to submit his life and the power of his throne to the God of Daniel.
4. There are many who profess to be Christians who have not submitted their lives to the rule of Christ. They are willing to follow Him as long as it is agreeable and convenient. But when it isn't convenient they go their own way. You see it in their church attendance. You see it in the things they truly see as valuable.

Conclusion:

1. Darius did not bear the marks of a man transformed by the glory of God. He had great things to say about God but He was Daniel's God. He did great things for Daniel and proved Himself to be a powerful God. But Darius didn't see Him as the ONLY God who deserved his undivided allegiance, service, and love. Darius didn't see any personal accountability before this God.
2. What place does God have in your life? Your theology may convince you of the majesty of His divine essence. You may understand Him to be the mighty, eternal, sovereign Creator.
But do you know Him as your Lord and King?
3. Is Jesus the all-consuming passion of your life? Christianity is a call to discipleship. It is a call to follow Christ.
4. There are new Christians—babes in Christ. There are mature Christians—seasoned warriors. But both groups love Christ. Both groups follow Him as Lord. This is the fruit of regeneration.
5. Darius did not declare Jehovah God as the one true God before whom all will give account.
Matthew Henry: "*Though the decree of Darius goes far, it does not go far enough; had he done right, and come up to his present convictions, he would have commanded all men not only to tremble and fear before this God, but to love him and trust in him, to forsake the service of their idols, and to worship him only, and call upon him as Daniel did.*"
E. J. Young: "Darius does not rise above his polytheistic background. He does not confess Daniel's God to be the only true God, but merely raises Him above other gods. Thus he does not condemn the worship of these other gods."
6. Is Jesus supreme in your life? Jesus told the rich young ruler:
Luke 18:22 NAU - "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
If He asked it of you would you be willing?