

## When Authorities Clash

### Daniel 6:10-18

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*

*<sup>11</sup> Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. <sup>12</sup> 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."*

*<sup>13</sup> 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."*

*<sup>14</sup> And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. <sup>15</sup> Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."*

*<sup>16</sup> So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." <sup>17</sup> Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.*

*<sup>18</sup> Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.*

Last week we saw Daniel under a new king. This king was Darius the Mede, or as I mentioned earlier, Cyrus, the one whom God said in Isaiah would be His anointed. I mentioned two weeks ago that I would talk about that and so I am going to do it now. The difficulty that many have with interpreting Darius as Cyrus comes from their reading of Daniel 6:28. Daniel 6 is near the end of the narrative account in Daniel, and it closes with these words:

Let me quote Daniel 6:28 for you: *So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

In English it seems very much like we are speaking about two different kings, but in the Aramaic, the original language this passage is written in it can be translated this way: “*So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*”

The question I want to answer is why it matters? In a real sense it does not. The difficulties one runs into, however when interpreting the passage do seem to go away when we identify Darius the Mede as a throne name for Cyrus. Darius the Mede, according to certain liberal or secular scholars never existed. Another interpretation that people have taken in regard to Darius is that he is an under king who rules in the place of the emperor in his absence. The problem with this is that it seems to undermine the text that speaks of Daniel being the first among the three under-rulers. Another name that Cyrus is known by is Xerxes. Of course we see this name very frequently in the accounts of world history.

The reason I think it is of interest to us is one cannot help but notice the respect, or friendship that Darius had toward Daniel. When this chapter is read there is a tendency by the reader to almost feel sorry for Darius as his law or decree, which initially sounded really good to him, is being used as an anchor around his neck. Because of the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be altered, Darius, who realizes he has been tricked, cannot do anything about it.

Last week we saw Daniel, this man of impeccable integrity, being considered for exaltation to the #1 of the top 3 by this very same Darius, and today we see Darius ensnared into throwing him into the Lions Den. Darius is not happy about it, but he must follow through. This law of the Medes and the Persians is something that we are going to have to look at. But the question of the friendship between Darius the Mede and Daniel is of great interest to the overall story of redemption.

Remember Cyrus, whom the Lord calls his anointed, is the one who issues the decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In Ezra 1 we read “*In the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the Spirit of Cyrus King of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it in writing.*” Clearly the Lord can stir up hearts in anyway he chooses, but to me as I read this, I see the heart of this king being stirred up because of something that he saw. Someone that he knew.

And one of the things that is very clear from the reading of this account is Darius had an encounter not only with Daniel, but with the living God. It changed him.

I developed a pretty deep interest in this period of history some years ago when I was assigned to write a paper in one of my seminary classes. My paper was on the Magi from Matthew the second chapter. In that paper I had to trace the origin of the Magi, where they were from and what their interest in the Messiah might have been, and I found that the Magi were the Persian counterpart to the people who we have been reading about in Babylon as the “wise men of Babylon.” They were the people who looked to the stars and to the signs to determine future events.

I know there are some who will get upset by this and claim that this is nothing but astrology, and I am sure much of the garbage they practiced was shaped by soothsaying and astrology, but remember, even in Genesis 1 when God creates the sun, the moon, and the stars, he tells us the purpose for them. In verse 14 and 15 of Genesis 1 we read: <sup>14</sup> *Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; <sup>15</sup> and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”*; and it was so. I am not saying that we should be reading horoscopes and looking for the future in our stars, but as we read through the Bible we often see nations and events represented with different heavenly bodies.

We know that the Magi in Matthew 2 saw “his star in the East” and that is what compelled them to travel to the house that Jesus was in to see this new king. The question is, where did the ancient eastern Magi from Persia learn of this king. Why did the Persians care about the King of the Jews? My contention is that they were descendants, not biological, but students of Daniel. Daniel the captive who was raised to rule in the Kingdoms of Babylon, and Medo-Persia. Daniel was a man who had an impact on those around him. Not only was Daniel full of integrity. Not only was he faithful to God, Daniel was wise and even though he was captive, he changed the course of history with his wisdom and his faithfulness and his integrity. I believe the Spirit of the Lord stirred up Cyrus, because of perhaps the event we read about in this chapter. If not this event, than others very similar to it.

But this chapter is so interesting because Daniel this man in whom there was no flaw found is being put to the test in a very difficult area. He has always been a faithful man, but now he has a choice to make and this choice comes down as to what authority he will listen to. Will he pray to God, or will he pray to man. Philippians 4:19 tells us that “My God will provide all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” And we know this passage and we know the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, which begins, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” But when it comes to actually trusting the Lord, to take care of our needs, we often find it easier to go to other places.

It is funny that the temptation being thrown at Daniel here in Daniel 6 is will he place his trust in the state or will he place his trust in God. The normal response to this chapter when read by modern Christians is to say well of course we should not pray to anyone but God, clearly Darius is overstepping his authority in this passage. This would be an easy choice, however, when a people or a nation is accustomed to having needs met and solutions provided by their government this line of what is acceptable and what is not is not quite as clear.

I find it funny that Darius did not sense the trap that was being laid by his administrators. But then again, there is a tendency by many people to think that whatever the king says is right because of the fact that he is the king. This decree was clearly an example of an unjust decree but very often we see unjust decrees today and sadly the response of many in the church is “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...” But the question that is almost never asked is what is it that belongs to Caesar? I think we are all clear that praying to the state is idolatry. But one thing we learn from the study of the Bible and the study of history is the state always tends towards totalitarianism, which means they aim to control the total of the sum of all of life.

The state desires to control the economy, the state thinks it has the function of directing our health care, the state even thinks that our children belong to them. Sadly, very often the Christian Church has lined up with the rest of society and sought the blessing and the benefits of the State by looking to the state to provide their needs. I mentioned this before, but last year during the COVID 19 crisis, which seems like a never-ending crisis. Remember the statement by Barack Obama’s chief of staff Rahm Emmanuel, “*Never let a good crisis go to waste,*” The churches in the United States took over 10 billion dollars of money from the US government so they could stay afloat. This was not loans, this was money given to them so they could stay

a float after following a government mandate to close their churches. All across the country churches closed and switched to YouTube services or to Facebook service and the expressed reason was because they loved the brethren. I think more often than not, the reason the churches were closed was because they feared the State more than they feared God. I think they also forgot that government benefits are always a baited hook.

Maybe their fear was not the State. Maybe their fear was the way their neighbors would look at them, or the rest of the country would look at them as though they did not care. Hear me, I think the COVID crisis is real. I know that people have died, and I believe it is wise to take precautions to protect people, but the thing that truly bothers me is we have Christians who tell us not to put our trust anything but God, but when the time of testing arrived we see exactly where their trust was.

This last week, I have observed several different online services of different denominations. Many of them were denominations that I would say I am in general agreement with. Many of them were not. I did this because I wanted to see if I could learn their reasoning for their actions. What I found compelling is the services that I watched that were, how shall I put it, pagan, were almost identical to some of the more conservative churches. There is a prevailing attitude in our culture that if the government says something we have to do it. And here is the big caveat...unless to follow it would cause us to sin. I guess I should be happy about that part, because in many cases, when churches say this, it is the only time they mention sin.

Yet, the Bible spells out to a large degree what the responsibilities and the duties of the State are. I know Daniel, was under captivity by first the Babylonians and then the Medo-Persians, and because of this his liberties were to a certain degree hampered but Daniel has now twice had to stand against laws and or edicts which the king made which were unlawful decrees. They were unlawful because the king or the state had overstepped its God given authority.

We live in a country where we are often told that the highest law is the U.S. Constitution. I do not of course believe this. The highest law in our country as well as in any other country is the law of God. But going back to my earlier statement that the highest law is the U.S. Constitution, the vast majority of Americans may say this, but very few of them believe that. The reason I say

this, is because a governor, a court, or a president does not have the authority to violate the U.S. Constitution, but we allow them to do it all the time. And we do this when we submit to totalitarian and tyrannical decrees that they do not have the authority to give.

I have heard people say something things like, “well in this country was have to protect a woman’s right to choose, because the Supreme Court in Roe v. Wade declared that it was a violation of a woman’s right to privacy to put any restrictions on abortion.” The Supreme Court is spoken of with the same awe and reverence as the law of the Medes and the Persians. It cannot be changed.

Yes we must render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar. We must also remember that Caesar is not the one who determines what it is that belongs to him. The Bible tells us in Romans 13 that the government has a legitimate function of punishing the evil doer. The authorities in this passage are actually called God’s minister for justice and this is why you pay taxes. As Christians, I believe we should pay every tax that we are required to pay. Of course. I am also not going to volunteer to pay those taxes that I am not required to pay. And I am also not going to submit to every wicked and perverse commandment given because I also am bought with a price. I am called to submit to the governing authorities but I am also called to obey God rather than man.

Francis Schaffer in “A Christian Manifesto” said the following: “If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the Living God.”

Listen to verse 10 of today’s text:

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*

When the decree was passed Daniel went home and just like every other day, he opened his windows toward Jerusalem and he prayed. This was his custom since his early days. Since his childhood. He knew full well the consequence of his action. He did not even attempt to get the

law changed. But Daniel knew that to petition anyone but God was an exercise in idolatry and he would not participate.

I understand that if one takes a stand against a law or a decree as stringent as the Law of the Medes and the Persians they are risking life, property and freedom, but Daniel understood this as well and he did it anyway.

Something else we can learn from this, and we should. Daniel did not begin his spiritual disciplines when the trial came, Daniel was a man with a lifetime of communion and fellowship with God. When things are tough, we often go to God. Then, the issue or the problem we are having is dealt with and we fall back into our old pattern of trusting ourselves or trusting others and we never get to that point of constant communion with God.

But notice this was a pattern in the life of Daniel from his childhood or as it says his early days. Prayer is not an easy task, and yet it is through prayer that we are built up, we are strengthened, and we are prepared to weather the storms that are ahead of us. It is said that hard times build prayer warriors. I would contend to you that it is in the good times where prayer warriors are built, because it is there that they learn how to go through the times of trial.

After Daniel was entrapped because of his faithfulness by these enemies of his, I want you to notice the reaction of Darius.

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

Remember an important part of this account is the reaction of Darius to Daniel's faithfulness. His initial reaction when he was approached by the entrappers was that he was greatly displeased with himself. I think we see in this verse a touch of humility by Darius. He recognizes quickly that he has been set up. The men who have conspired to pass this evil law have revealed their cards if you will and Darius realizes that this was all an attempt to entrap the man that Darius was preparing to appoint as the head of his Presidents. He begins earnestly trying to find a way out and then we see the scheme in its fulness.

Verse 15 reads: <sup>15</sup> *Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”*

I remember reading this when I was younger and just being out of my mind with fury at such a stupid rule. What do you mean, the law can't be changed. This law of the Medes and the Persians is ridiculous. What is the point of being the King if you can't change the law, but as I began to look and to understand why this was it began to make sense to me. In the ancient world the pagan nations often exalted their rulers, their emperors, and or their kings to the level of a deity. We know the Pharaoh was one of the many gods of Egypt, and likewise the Medo-Persians had exalted their king to this status as well, and thus the law of the Medes and Persians was such as a measure of protection against a fickle king.

As a god, he could not be perceived as changing his mind with every changing circumstance and these men who had decided to trap Daniel reminded him of this:

*“Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”*

My sense of rage at this when I was younger is I feel very much justified because we moderns would never instill within our kings this divine prerogative, and yet we often do. The quote that I know most from George Frederick Hegel is this: *“The State is as God walking on Earth”*. I read the quote from him in its full context and here is what Hegel said. *“The state in and by itself is the ethical whole, the actualisation of freedom; and it is an absolute end of reason that freedom should be actual. The state is mind on earth and consciously realising itself there. In nature, on the other hand, mind actualises itself only as its own other, as mind asleep. Only when it is present in consciousness, when it knows itself as a really existent object, is it the state. In considering freedom, the starting-point must be not individuality, the single self-consciousness, but only the essence of self-consciousness; for whether man knows it or not, this essence is externally realised as a self-subsistent power in which single individuals are only moments. The march of God in the world, that is what the state is.”*

The law of the Medes and Persians indeed.



In verse 16 and 17 we read <sup>16</sup> *So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."* <sup>17</sup> *Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.*

Daniel had placed his trust in God not man and Daniel was being cast into the Den of Lions. But notice who was changed by this. Darius, who had made this wicked decree. His hands were tied by the very same law that he had made. He could not deliver Daniel and he recognized that, but he also recognized who could save him. *"Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."*

We see even more evidence of who Daniel is in these words, but we also learn a great deal about what is happening with Darius. Daniel knew the law had been passed and he prayed to God. It seems to me in the text that Daniel knew why the law had been passed and he still openly prayed. Daniel, knew that he was being watched, and Daniel still trusted in God. But now we learn that Daniel had been being watched long before he realized it because Darius knew Daniel as a man who served God continually.

The last verse in today's text shows us that Darius spent a sleepless night and he fasted in prayer for Daniel.

The story of Daniel in the Lions Den is often thought of as a children's story. For some it is one of the earliest Bible stories that they learned as children. But I also think there are many who have heard this story that have never really learned the lesson. Daniel was a man who had learned to trust in God. And as we see God will deliver his people who trust in him. The other thing we need to learn is that the world is watching. Not all of them are our friends, but the world is certainly watching. Who is it that we trust? Who is it that we fear? Our actions not our words are the determining factor of these questions.