

Christianity . . . From 9 to 5

Daniel 6:1-16

Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Daniel chapter 6. Today, we will continue our study in the series from this book that is filled with practical implications and applications.

I once heard a pastor quizzing his audience and I want to do the same before we begin this discussion. It seems that there are stories in the Bible that are so familiar that we have given them titles. In fact, the longer we go to church, the more familiar we become with these particular stories. I thought I would give a quiz to see if you have been awake! I will give the first part of a story title and you fill in the blank. I have the answers, so I can look!

- Noah and . . . the Ark
- The Destruction of Sodom and . . . Gomorrah
- Moses Crossing . . . the Red Sea
- Jonah and . . . the Whale
- Daniel in . . . the Lions' Den

It is interesting that the entire book of Daniel is filled with tremendous stories of faith and courage, yet when we think of Daniel, we think of Daniel in the lions' den. This is the story we have been taught; this is the story we have heard.

However, as we study chapter 6 of Daniel, it is interesting that the important fact is not that Daniel is in the lions' den, but what he did to get there in the first place. It is not as much that he was thrown into a den of carnivorous beasts, as it was the character that he exemplified to get thrown into the den in the first place. We are going to take two sessions to study the character of Daniel in this chapter.

Now I do not know what you have been taught, but I know what I have learned by example. I am under the impression that when we do what is right, we are rewarded. On the other hand, when we do what is wrong, we are punished. If you are like me, when you are doing what is right and you end up being punished for it, it kind of rattles your cage. We think, "Now wait a second, Lord, I've been godly, I've been living for you, and yet *this* happens!"

It is fascinating that Daniel, as chapter 6 begins to detail this story, ultimately ends up in the lions' den, not because he has done anything wrong, but because he has done what is right; not because he has been faulty in his testimony or even in his work, but because he has done what is right.

Daniel's Excellent Attitude

Let us begin by looking at Daniel 6:1-2.

It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom,

and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.

Now you may remember from our previous discussion that the king was Belshazzar and that he had a blasphemous feast. You may also remember the fact that the Medes and the Persians came in as a united kingdom and took the power away, so that Babylon no longer existed. It is now the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians.

We are not given the details of what happens in this transition, but we pick it up with this new king, whose name is Darius. This king forms a different kind of government. Under Belshazzar, it was one king, one rule, one dictator. Darius, however, sets up a representative type of government. He has 120 princes who are over the whole kingdom. Then, over these 120 men, Darius places three counselors or three presidents. Daniel is among these three.

The reason that we are given for this is in the last phrase of Daniel 6:2,

. . . that the king might not suffer loss.

Darius sets up a check and balance system in the kingdom.

It is fascinating that he had understood – probably had heard – the reputation of Daniel. Daniel had been loyal to the kingdom under Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar, so Darius immediately gives him the top rank. Daniel is one of the three.

However, we will notice, in Daniel 6:3, that Daniel is preferred above the other presidents and the princes. In other words, Daniel immediately begins to distinguish himself in this new kingdom. Darius has literally set up 123 men and Daniel, sort of like the cream, rises to the top. Note, in this verse, that the reason is very clear.

Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.

Now, in our day, you may have the impression at your work that the most important thing is who you know. Sometimes you are promoted on the basis of who you know. If you have the right kind of friends, then the promotion might come. However, it is fascinating, as we study the life of Daniel, that it is not who he knows, but who he is. We are told he had “an extraordinary spirit” or “an excellent spirit,” as your translation may read.

I began to do a word study and found that the appearance of the word “excellent” is rather rare in the Old and New Testaments. Paul, however, in Philippians 1:10, exhorts us to live according to and to approve,

. . . the things that are excellent . . .

What is excellence? A best selling book in recent years has been *The Pursuit of Excellence*. Everyone is talking about excellence. Everyone is talking about talent; about sharpness. What do they mean?

I am afraid and I submit that people are talking about something entirely different than what the word of God submits as excellence. They view it as the external. They talk about an excellent building, an excellent company, an excellent staff. They talk about an excellent program, an excellent curriculum.

However, God says that excellence is internal. It is an attitude.

Let me give a couple of things about excellence before going any further in our discussion. We will take a moment to discuss this because this man, Daniel, had it.

- The definition of excellence is doing what God created us to do; being what God created us to be.

Do you know why you are on planet earth? Have you ever stopped to think about this? You are on planet earth to glorify God. When you, in your life, in

your work, and in your home, glorify God as the ruler in heaven, as Daniel chapters 2 and 4 tells us that He is; when you glorify Him with everything you do; that is, you do everything in an excellent way so that He is glorified, then you fall into rank with a man like Daniel.

- The focus of excellence is character, not talent.
- The model of excellence is Christ Himself.
- The enablement of excellence is the grace of God.

for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

Apart from the grace of God, we can never measure up. However, when we are in a relationship with God that pleases Him, then we can mirror His character. We are then, mirroring His excellence and His holiness.

- The motive for excellence is to glorify God.

Being excellent is simply being what God intended us to be.

I read the story of a man who, when walking down the street, looked through the window of a clock shop. One particular clock struck his attention. He moved a little closer to the window and peered through the glass and noticed that the clock pendulum was swinging back and forth, just as it should, the woodwork was beautiful, and the face had all of the numbers. However, this clock was missing one thing – the hands that indicated the time. He began to stare at this clock and the thought that came into his mind was that the clock was doing everything right, but it was not doing what it was made to do – it was not indicating the time.

As I evaluate my life and as you evaluate your life, I wonder if we are doing all of the things that we are supposed to do. We go to work and we come home. We go to church. We take care of our families. We do all of these things. However, we do not do what we were intended to do; that is, glorify God.

We should take stock and evaluate when we study the life of a man like Daniel. We are told in Daniel 6:3 that he had an “extraordinary spirit” or an excellent attitude. I could not go further without thinking of the question, “What is your attitude when you clock in at work in the morning? What is your

attitude throughout the week when the pressure comes?"

If anyone in the entire kingdom had a right to slough off; if anyone in Babylon, and now in this new Persian kingdom, had a right to go in half-hearted, it would have been Daniel. Think of where he was – away from his Jerusalem home and away from all of his friends. He has been living for God for 75 years and now, there is another kingdom, another rebellious king, another ungodly situation. It would have been easy for him to think, "Who cares?" We can just see him going to work, thinking, "Big deal."

If I had been Daniel, I think I would have wanted the kingdom to crumble. I would have been doing everything that I could, thinking, "Lord, I'm going to serve You, so I'm going to make sure this thing falls."

Daniel never did this. He had an excellent attitude.

Daniel's Faithful Performance

Now look at Daniel 6:4a.

Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs . . .

Why were these leaders trying to find something against Daniel? Look at the last part of Daniel 6:3 again, where we are told,

. . . and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.

Daniel is in the wings for a tremendous promotion. He is going to be number two in the kingdom, so the other leaders had better take care of the problem. However, we are told, in Daniel 6:4b,

. . . but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

What did these leaders do? They started tailing him. They broke into his files at night. They sent out spies. They looked behind every corner, in every closet, and underneath every stone to try to find something about Daniel that indicated unfaithfulness toward the kingdom.

Now notice that these commissioners are not talking about Daniel's relationship with God. They are not interested in that, at least until now. They are evaluating him on the sole basis of his employment; on

whether he is faithful to the kingdom. Talk about a political probe! Every stone was turned. Every thought was, in a comprehensive way, studied. Yet, they came to the conclusion,

. . . he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

We have the idea that if a person comes to church on Sunday, they are on track. However, that represents only two or three hours of the 168 hours in a week. We are busy evaluating people on the basis of whether or not they are filling the church chair.

These leaders were not interested in this. They were interested in the way Daniel worked; what he did from 9 to 5 – was his Christianity at work? They found that Daniel was completely faithful; totally dedicated.

This is rare today. You know that you go into work and there is a guy down the hall who is there for the fast buck. He is there, he is going to put in his clock time, but he is going to shave every moment off that he can. He is going to lengthen the breaks, he is going to lengthen the lunch hour, he is going to do everything that he can to just get what he can and leave.

These commissioners, however, looked at the track record of Daniel's performance and found that he was perfectly dedicated. There was no fault in this man. Imagine!

How do you measure up? How do I?

I recently read of Giovanni, who was a sculptor. You probably do not even recognize his name. I did not, until I read this story. He is really only known in history because of others who are linked with him. Giovanni was a student of the greatest sculptor of his time and was the teacher of the greatest sculptor of all time, Michelangelo.

When Michelangelo came to Giovanni to begin his lessons, he was 14 years old and already immensely talented. Giovanni recognized, however, that he had one flaw, he was not dedicated to his work; he was not committed to developing his talent. All of the right stuff was there, but he just really did not get behind it.

One day, Giovanni walked into the room where Michelangelo was toying with a piece of sculpture that was way below his ability. Giovanni grabbed a hammer off the table, walked over, and with one swoop, smashed the thing to the floor. He then said the phrase that we know him for, "Michelangelo, talent is cheap, but dedication is priceless."

We think in terms of dedication to the Lord and to the ministry. However, I am talking about dedication to your company, dedication to your job, dedication wherever you work.

These commissioners probed Daniel in every way they could, and came to the conclusion, “This guy is the hardest worker we have ever seen. We’ll never get him out of here. He’s faithful to the kingdom and to the king.”

Daniel’s Commitment to God

As a result of the conclusion that nothing could be found wrong with Daniel’s performance in the kingdom, the commissioners had to change their plot. Notice Daniel 6:5.

Then these men said, “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.”

So these leaders change course. Notice Daniel 6:6-7a.

Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: “King Darius, live forever!

“All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together . . .”

Hold it! This is a lie. Daniel did not even know this was happening.

Continue to Daniel 6:7b.

“. . . that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den.”

Do you know what these leaders are doing? They are pandering to the pride of this king, Darius. They are saying, “King, we want to make you the god of the month. For thirty days, no one can worship anyone else but you.”

We can almost see this king kind of stick out his chest as he thinks, “What a guy! These guys are so loyal to me that they’re going to make me the man of the month.”

Without even thinking, Darius signs the decree. Notice Daniel 6:9.

Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

Are you familiar with the phrase, “the law of the Medes and Persians”? It is really a biblical fact that once the law was stated and the king signed it, it could not be changed.

Esther 1:19 talks of this, that if the king signed a decree, it could not be revoked. Esther 8:8 also talks about the king signing that which no man could overturn.

These leaders know that if they can just get the king to sign this, Daniel is dead. At least, this is what they thought. Darius signs the writing and the decree.

Let us stop at this point to take a look, in our imagination’s eye, at what is going on. Daniel is elsewhere just plodding away. He is probably working on some paper. All the other leaders are before the king, presenting this decree to him. Daniel has no clue that this is going on. Now the moment arrives when Daniel finds out. We are about to hear his response. Notice Daniel 6:10a.

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house . . .

He barred his windows and pulled out his shotgun – sorry, I was reading between the Hebrew lines! Continue to Daniel 6:10b.

. . . (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.

Let me answer the question of why Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem by reading the words of one commentator.

In Old Testament times, Jerusalem was the holy city and the proper place for Jews to worship. If they were ever away from this divinely appointed center of worship, they were to pray facing in that direction. Ever since Daniel had been taken captive to Babylon, some seventy years before, this had been his daily habit. He had done so by divine instruction.

Look at II Chronicles 6:38-39a and note the phrase concerning praying.

If they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been taken

captive, and pray toward their land which You have given to their fathers and the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name,

Then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayer and supplications, . . .

In the Old Testament economy, Jerusalem was the place for worship. They did not have the privilege that we have of being New Testament saints; of being part of the body that can at any time and at any place, pray to God. So Daniel, so far removed from Jerusalem; so far removed from the holy city where his people were to worship was, three times a day, praying toward the city.

What commitment Daniel had. If we miss a Sunday or two, we are out in left field. This was a man with no external motivation, who was worshipping God.

Notice the phrase in the last part of Daniel 6:10 again.

. . . [Daniel continued] praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

Daniel prayed just as he had done before.

His windows were already open, which implies that Daniel, like a good old independent Baptist, did not stomp into that room and bang the windows open and pray out loud, "Hey, you guys, listen. Lord, hear my humble prayer." He also did not go into his room and close the windows and lock the door and say, "Lord, I don't believe it's come to this." Daniel prayed in the same way he had before.

I wish we could have a tape recording of all our emergency prayers. They are different, are they not? We pull those prayers out, and they are intense and urgent. We say something like, "Lord, help me!"

Daniel never changed his prayer, as Daniel 6:10 tells us.

A death warrant has just been signed and Daniel knows that if he is on his knees, he is dead tomorrow, or at least he thinks he is. Yet, Daniel goes into his room, at the open window, kneels and prays and give thanks to his God. It is unbelievable.

Notice what happens next in Daniel 6:11.

Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God.

These scoundrels; these cowards peeked around the corner, saw that Daniel was kneeling and praying, and go running to the king. They say, in Daniel 6:12,

. . . "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked."

These leaders respond to this, in Daniel 6:13a, and we can almost hear the spit in their voices.

Then they answered and spoke before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, . . ."

Notice they do not call Daniel the "president," but they call him "one of the exiles from Judah". In other words, as they have been doing throughout this entire book, they are saying, "That Jew that has no part of this kingdom. You know him. Look at what he's done."

Continue to Daniel 6:13b.

“. . . pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day."

Then we read in Daniel 6:14a,

Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed . . .

With whom was the king displeased? Himself.

Do you remember what Nebuchadnezzar did when he heard the report that the three children had not bowed down? He was very angry with them. Do you remember how the tables turned then?

However, notice that Darius evidently respected Daniel immensely. Why would Darius respect Daniel so much?

Daniel had been his most faithful employee. Daniel had been so concerned about fulfilling his job that every jot and tittle was signed in just the right way. He was probably the best man in the kingdom. So Darius was displeased with himself.

Continue to Daniel 6:14b-16a.

. . . and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him.

Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and

Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”

Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions’ den....

We never hear Daniel say a word, do we? If this had been me, I would have gone into my room and given God five good reasons why I ought to live. I would have said something like, “Lord, You realize that I’m a testimony in this kingdom. Lord, You know that I have honored and glorified You in everything that I have done. Lord, if You take me out, You’re taking the salt out and the light out. You desperately need me to stay here.”

We never hear this. It is almost as if Daniel accepts the fact, goes into his room, and prays.

The next thing Daniel knows, he is handcuffed, brought before the king, and ordered by the king to be taken to the lions’ den. We will begin our next study at this point.

Application

Let me give three principles of application from these first verses of Daniel chapter 6. Let us measure ourselves; let us use Daniel and his character as a standard for a moment today.

1. First, circumstances beyond our control become classrooms in which we really learn to pray.

I like these words that Hudson Taylor wrote, *It does not matter, really, how great the pressure is; it only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord – then the greater the pressure, the more it presses you to His breast.*

Have you faced unbelievable pressure in the past week? Have you had a great difficulty?

Perhaps you have even had the temptation to slough off. Have you been lazy this past week?

Maybe there are those who are out to get you; maybe you are in their way.

Daniel stood in the way of these wicked men’s ambitions. They were going to embezzle; they were going to steal; they were going to line their pockets and there was only one man in the way – Daniel, who

stood true. They could not get past him, so they had to get rid of him.

I have heard people say that others at their secular jobs will come to them and say, “Hey, relax, you’re making us look bad.”

Have you ever heard this? Well, when the pressure is on and the circumstances are totally out of control, follow the example of this man, Daniel. Go into the classroom of prayer and approach the throne of God.

2. Secondly, God is as interested in your work as He is in your worship because your work is worship.

We are told,

... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31b)

There is no line drawn – it is not that this is church and it is sacred, but Monday through Friday, this is work and it is secular, God is not interested. God is extremely interested in your job relationship. The job that you hold is God’s plan for your life. It is your pulpit; it is your mission field; it is your ministry. Take it by the throat and determine that you are going to do the job for God.

Let me give one more and if you forget everything else in our entire study of Daniel, I want to blaze this into your mind. As we have studied the life of Daniel, we have seen him take this principle and apply it over and over and over again, so do not forget this final principle.

3. Thirdly, your place of employment is a closed mission field, except for you.

Your place of business is not going to let me bring in this pulpit. As a matter of fact, I cannot even get in some buildings without the right identification. I cannot even get in the parking lot. Yet, God has placed you in that school; He has placed you in that company, He has placed you in that sales force; He has placed you as that secretary. God has placed you in that job and it is a closed mission field, except for your testimony. By the grace of God, might you use that mission field for His glory.

If you ride the elevator to the top of the ladder and yet, your testimony is a secret, then in God’s eyes, you are a dismal failure. If you ride that elevator to the very top of the ladder and yet, in the cafeteria you are too embarrassed to bow your head to pray; if no one on your floor even knows that you are a Christian; if you are invited to go fishing on Sunday and you say,

“Well, I just don’t like to fish,” and you never let them know that you are really worshiping God, you have just slammed shut that particular mission field that no one else will ever get into. Use it wisely.