

# FAITH THAT FINISHES STRONG

## *Lessons from the Den of Lions*

### A Study through Daniel

### Spring Series 2024

**Texts:** Daniel 6:19-28

*Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup> 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?**” <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> **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.**” <sup>23</sup> Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, **because he had trusted in his God.** <sup>24</sup> And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. <sup>25</sup> Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “**Peace be multiplied to you. <sup>26</sup> I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. <sup>27</sup> He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.**” <sup>28</sup> So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

### **Introduction:**

We have come to one of the most familiar stories in the life of Daniel and indeed in the whole of the Old Testament narrative – the story of how God delivered Daniel from the hand of his enemies and from the mouths of ravenous, raging lions in King Darius’ den.

As we come to this familiar story, it is easy to miss the important lesson God has for His people by going too quickly to the familiar lessons and applications we have heard from this story over the course of our Christian lives. So this morning, I want to challenge us to listen to Daniel as though we were hearing his account for the first time.

### **Where we are in the narrative of the book:**

- End of the first half of the book – God’s message to the nations
- End of the court stories – God rules over the kingdoms of men.
- End of Daniel’s long life and ministry – God positions His servants in the kingdoms of men, protects them while they are there, and advances His larger purposes through them.
  
- Daniel has been in Babylon for more than 70 years (the entire length of the exile predicted by Jeremiah).
- He is about 85 years of age and has spent his entire adult life and ministry as an exile in a foreign land faithfully serving pagan rulers who have burned his city and torn down the temple of his God.
- The Babylonian kingdom has fallen just as God said it would in the dream He sent Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 2 – the kingdom of gold). The events of this chapter happen in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Darius, the new king of a new empire (the kingdom of silver) in about 539 BC.

### **What we have discovered:**

- God rules (both in Heaven and over the kingdom of men)!
- His kingdom matters more!
- God is able to accomplish His purposes and preserve His people (the same God who delivered His faithful servants from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace is still on His throne and is still protecting and delivering His faithful servants – this time from Darius’ fierce lions).
- In Daniel 3, God’s servants are pressured to do what God prohibits; in chapter 6, God’s servant is prohibited from doing what God commands. In chapter 3 God’s servants refuse to participate in idolatrous worship; in chapter 6 God’s servant refuses to refrain from proper worship.

Throughout the book we have been observing Daniel’s life and listening to his wisdom – but he has been speaking and acting as part of a larger narrative where someone or something else has

been center stage. However, in chapter 6 Daniel is the main character and his life is on center stage for us to see and hear.

And we discover that the Daniel we met in chapter 1 as a young man of about 20 years of age is still as faithful and consistent at the end of his life and ministry some 70 years later!

- Faithful over the course of many years;
- Faithful in the face of uninvited opposition – Before Daniel faced the possibility of being devoured by four-footed lions, he was attacked by two-footed lions (Ps 57:4-6);

*My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts— the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. <sup>5</sup> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! <sup>6</sup> They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah*

- Faithful despite fearsome consequences;
- Faithful to the uttermost (his own life).

And what delivered Daniel unharmed from the den of lions was the very thing his opponents hated about him . . . his devotion to God and his faithfulness to His law!

Of the many things we can and should learn from this chapter, I want us to focus our attention on one main observation – **Daniel’s faith finished strong!** And so must ours.

The question we must answer from our text this morning is this: “What enabled this kind of faith in Daniel? Answer . . . he trusted God (6:23b)! How does this kind of faith finish strong? A faith that finishes strong is one that is:

### **I. Constant and Consistent over a Lifetime: 6:1-5**

*It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; <sup>2</sup> and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. <sup>3</sup> **Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him.** And the king planned*

to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup> Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, **but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.** <sup>5</sup> Then these men said, **“We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”**

### ***A. Distinguished in Service (6:1-3)***

- Daniel had ruled with insight, intelligence, and wisdom under Nebuchadnezzar (5:11). This was recognized by Belshazzar’s mother who was Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter and would have known Daniel personally.
- Darius has come to see this same consistent display of excellence in Daniel and ***determined to set him over the kingdom.***

#### ***Why Daniel? He distinguished himself continually (verb tense)***

- His long and successful experience administrating and ruling the affairs of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar
- His unimpeachable reputation for honesty and integrity
- His reputation and ability to interpret dreams and solve riddles
- His bold confrontation of Belshazzar and his unaffected prediction that the Persian empire would gain ascendancy would have impressed Darius/Cyrus.
- As one commentator noted, he was a man who lived a life that was consistently exemplary in performance and extraordinary in spirit.

### ***B. Dependable in Character (6:4)***

- He was hated by the others because he was dependable and incorruptible and stood in the way of their plans to enrich themselves at the king’s expense
- However hard they tried, his opponents could not find any grounds against Daniel because he was “trustworthy” (faithful).

- Later in the chapter we will find that he was “trustworthy/faithful” because he trusted God faithfully (6:23).
- He lived in light of Proverbs 11:3 – *“the integrity of the upright guides them but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them!”*

### ***C. Devoted in Worship (6:5)***

- We are introduced early on in the text to the one thing that Daniel valued above all others . . . “the Law of his God.”
- This law included the Law of Moses but was actually the full counsel of God available to Daniel at the time of his life.
- The immutable Law of God is introduced here to set up a contrast that is coming later in the text when we meet another unchangeable law . . . the Law of the Medes and Persians.
- Both laws come from the hand of a royal lawgiver.
- Both laws are unchangeable in their nature.
- Both laws are unforgiving in their penalty – death for disobedience.
- Only one law leads to life in this text – and it is the Law of Daniel’s God.

Daniel has been consistently devoted to reading, loving, trusting, obeying, and doing this Law . . . and for 80 years it has resulted in life . . . abundant life in Babylon.

So where did this kind of consistent, irreproachable, devoted character come from?

- The Holy Spirit produced it . . . fruits of the Spirit evident in his life.
- The holy habits cultivated by Daniel strengthened and confirmed it.
- **Adversity revealed and displayed it!**

God has always used simple, ordinary men to do extraordinary things for His kingdom when those men are men whose lives are marked by trustworthy faith that is faithful under fire.

Illustration: Martin Luther (1521) stood before a council of very powerful religious leaders who were bent on denouncing his character and destroying his influence by forcing him to recant his convictions that salvation and justification come by faith alone in Christ alone. As he stood before those men, realizing that they had the power to burn him at the stake as they had others before him, Luther said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, for going against my conscience is neither safe nor salutary (healthy). I can do no other, here I stand, God help me. Amen."

## II. Faithful in the Midst of Ruthless Adversity: 6:6-9

*Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup> **All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup> Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.**" <sup>9</sup> Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.*

### A. Their Relentless Opposition (6:6)

- They come rushing in to the king as an angry conspiring group bent on discrediting Daniel's record in order to thwart his impending promotion.
- The language is strong to show us how they came together to the king to demand his attention about a matter that had angered them greatly . . . his intended appointment of Daniel . . . and the text shows they would go to any extreme to stop this appointment.

### B. Their Ruthless Intention (6:7)

- Not just to discredit Daniel before the king;

- Not just to demote Daniel from the position granted him by the king;
- But to devour and destroy Daniel by means of the king's lions!

### ***C. Their Diabolical Deception (6:8-9)***

- First, they lie to the king.
- Then they intentionally set the king up as the sole mediator between all the people in his kingdom and their gods.
- Finally, they set a trap for the king in order to destroy their real target, Daniel.
- The trap they set placed Daniel in the position of having to choose which king he would ultimately serve (the King of Heaven or the King of the Medes and Persians), and which Law he would ultimately obey (the Law of God or the Law of Medes and Persians).

#### ***So why this opposition at this time in Daniel's life?***

- On a ***practical level*** – he stood in the way of powerful people who planned to enrich themselves at the king's expense.
- On a ***personal level*** – he represented a despised group of people who continually found themselves in positions of honor and power.
- On a ***theological level*** – the Kingdom of Darkness has always resisted, opposed, and persecuted those who represent the Kingdom of Light. And a major event was on the horizon to restore Jerusalem, the city that represented God's Kingdom on earth – and Daniel and Cyrus were to play key roles – and so Satan moved to take Daniel out of the picture.

### **III. Aligned with God's Kingdom Priorities: 6:10-14**

*When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. <sup>11</sup> Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. <sup>12</sup> Then*

*they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." <sup>13</sup> Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." <sup>14</sup> **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.***

### **A. Loyal to God's Law (6:10)**

- Upon hearing that the document was signed, he went to his normal place, assumed his normal position, and engaged in his normal practice . . . he prayed and gave thanks 3 times per day (Ps. 55:17-19).

**NOTE:** He prayed in Chapter 2; he prays here in Chapter 6; and he prays again in Chapter 9 (where we have the content of one of his prayers).

**NOTE:** Only three people in the OT are described as kneeling in prayer: Solomon when he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chr 6:13), Daniel (here in this text), and Ezra when he confessed the national sins of Israel (Ezra 9:5).

### **B. Committed to God's Purposes (6:10)**

- Daniel was "seeking and imploring God" as he prayed facing toward the ruined city of Jerusalem.
- Why pray toward Jerusalem? And what was he praying for? After all – the city that represented the kingdom of God on earth was nothing more than a pile of rubble and the house of God in Jerusalem had been burned – nothing was left of the kingdom that supposedly mattered more . . . so why pray toward that city and that temple?
- Answer: Because God made promises to His people back when Solomon dedicated that temple centuries earlier (1 Kings 8:46-51):



*“If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, <sup>47</sup> yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’ <sup>48</sup> if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, **and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, <sup>49</sup> then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause <sup>50</sup> and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them <sup>51</sup> (for they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace).***

### **C. Opposed by God’s Enemies (6:11-14)**

- While Daniel was faithfully seeking God; his enemies were fervently seeking to trap Daniel . . . and having caught Daniel, they now come to catch the king.
- They come in malice – *“This Daniel”*
- They come to malign – *“Pays no attention to you or to your law”* . . . this was not true; Daniel found favor before the king precisely because he paid attention to the king and to his business . . . and the king knew this to be true!
- They come to murder – evidenced by the king’s determined but futile effort to deliver Daniel from the penalty of death.
- And the king was deeply disturbed and displeased – the plot was evident to him and the thing was repugnant to him (term used means to stink) – but he was powerless to deliver Daniel from either his enemies or his edict.
- Daniel dared to pray! That is the real point of the passage – this was not defiant speech opposing the king and the law of his kingdom; rather this was daring speech to the God of Heaven in conformity to the law of the kingdom that mattered more!

*(Perhaps he prayed the words of Psalm 57.)*

#### IV. Trusts in the Right Mediator for Deliverance: 6:16-18

*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!"<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.*

Note: The whole focus of verses 16-20 is on the king! Daniel's prayer to God reminds us that:

- Hostile rulers cannot harm you apart from God's permission;
- Favorable rulers cannot always help you;
- We must trust ultimately in God and not men!
  
- Daniel will not be saved or delivered by an earthly king who desperately wanted to save him from a bad law wickedly made; He will be saved by the King of Heaven because he loved and faithfully obeyed His good law!

**A. *The Position of the King*** . . . the sole mediator between men and the gods for 30 days.

**B. *The Purpose of the King*** . . . to deliver Daniel (6:14 – he strived with intensity to find a way to deliver Daniel).

**C. *The Powerlessness of the King*** . . . he was unable to deliver Daniel and was forced to judge and enforce the penalty the law demanded. (4x Daniel's enemies remind the king of the unchangeable, unmovable nature of the law he had signed).

**D. *The Plea/Prayer of the King*** . . . "May the God who you serve deliver you from what I am powerless to divert!"

- For the first time in the passage, we hear someone other than Daniel pray . . . and it is the king. He is praying to Daniel's God and asking Him to deliver His servant from the king's own powerless hand!

## V. Validated and Vindicated by God at the End: 6:19-24

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup> 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?” <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> 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.**” <sup>23</sup> Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, **because he had trusted in his God.** <sup>24</sup> And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

**A. The Question** – “Daniel, servant of the Living God, has your God, whom you serve (worship) continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

- Note: He is the only pagan king in the book to call Daniel by his Hebrew name, which means “God is my judge/deliverer” – “Daniel was the God whose name you bear able to deliver you?”

**B. The Answer** – “My God delivered me because I trusted in Him and was trustworthy before you!”

- He sent his angel to shut the mouth of the lions – both four-footed and two-footed lions . . . just like He sent His angel to deliver my three brothers from Nebuchadnezzar’s fierce wrath and fiery furnace. (Same term for the divine rescuer is used here as in 3:25). Cf. Ps 34:7 “*the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.*”
- Note: Daniel was not claiming to be sinless; he was claiming to have lived with integrity before God and toward the king.

**C. The Effect** – The king was delighted; the enemies were devoured!

**D. The Lessons** – Darius acknowledges the truth about Daniel’s God and the truth about his own gods (the gods of Babylon).

- Throughout these six chapters we have consistently seen the power of the living God who rules over the kingdom of men and the powerlessness of the gods of Babylon – powerless to answer the king (2,4), to protect the king (4,5), or to protect the kingdom (5); in contrast to the God who reveals (2,4,5), rescues (3), humbles (4), judges (5), and now delivers His servants (6).
- The God who Daniel serves is a Living God (in contrast to Darius' lifeless gods).
- The God who Daniel serves is a Sovereign God (He does what He wills in the kingdoms of men).
- The God who Daniel serves is a Powerful God (He delivers from the penalty of even the Law of the Medes and Persians).
- The God who Daniel serves is Merciful and Compassionate toward those who love Him and serve Him faithfully.
- The God who Daniel serves will bring fierce wrath and judgment on those who oppose Him and rebel against His purposes (the lions devour Daniel's enemies).

## **VI. Accomplishes God's Purposes Both Then and Now: 6:25-28**

*Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. <sup>26</sup> I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, **for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.** <sup>27</sup> He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions." <sup>28</sup> So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

**A. His Purposes for the Nations** – to display His unmatched glory and unchallenged sovereignty – He rules (vv. 25-28)!

- Darius sends out a decree to all people, nations, and tongues that summarizes beautifully the theological message of the entire book! Darius declares:
  1. The Glory of God – He is the living God who endures forever.

2. The Greatness of His Kingdom – His kingdom will never be destroyed (Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar, comes to realize that his kingdom will not last forever, but God’s Kingdom will last forever!)
3. The Sovereignty of God – His dominion has no end, and His laws far surpass those of the Medes and Persians.
4. The Power of God – He delivers and rescues; He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth.
5. The Faithfulness of God – He has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

***B. His Purpose for His People*** – His kingdom matters more (v. 28).

*So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

- Cyrus is important because it is through his royal edict (probably prompted by this declaration and possibly composed by Daniel) that Israel is allowed to return to their land to repair Jerusalem and rebuild their temple (2 Chronicles 36:23).
- Israel is to be encouraged by Daniel’s example to continue to worship God fervently and obey His Word faithfully as they trust Him to protect and preserve them in the earthly kingdoms that are yet to come as they witness boldly and wait patiently for the kingdom that is to come!
- And this kingdom will come on account of the faithfulness of One greater than Daniel . . . who like Daniel would obey the Law of God fully for us, be placed in a pit, and be killed by the one Peter described as a fierce and raging lion seeking whom he can devour. But like Daniel, this One rose from the dead because He was found blameless before God and men.
- And this One could do something that even Daniel could not . . . He could rescue others from the raging lion by imputing to them unstainable righteousness and imparting to them unending life! And His name is Jesus!
- *“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:54-57)!

## **Conclusion: So what are we to do with an example like Daniel?**

- A faith that finishes strong must start now.
- A faith that finishes strong must be cultivated by holy habits.
- A faith that finishes strong must be anchored in unswerving loyalty and unadulterated devotion to God and His Law.
- A faith that finishes strong must work to advance the Kingdom of God by living redemptively among the kingdoms of men.
- A faith that finishes strong must trust in the trustworthiness of God.