

Shutting the Mouths of Lions

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, if you could open your Bibles again back to page 723 to Daniel chapter 6, which is what we'll be looking at today.

As well, there's a sermon outline in your bulletins today, which will help you to follow along. Well, picture this. You arrive at work on Monday, and the following email is in your inbox.

The CEO of your company has resigned, and a new one is appointed. Well, the old CEO, it turns out, didn't make the cut. The KPIs weren't met, and the company is still in the red.

The new CEO is a young gun, recruited from an investment bank, a prestigious one at that. He says, this is a great company that has lost its way.

Together we can turn this company around again, but there will be changes. And so he proceeds to name the key management changes in the company, some of which raises your eyebrows.

[1 : 21] And everyone begins to wonder about their own positions. Sounds familiar? Or imagine this. It is the morning after the federal election.

The night before, at exactly 9.07pm, Anthony Green of the ABC and Kerry O'Brien correctly calls a win for the then-opposition.

The new PM, in his or her victory speech, declares that this is a great nation that has lost its way. But together, we can get Australia back on its feet again.

As a result, changes will be made. The old ways of doing things no longer work. And so now in the morning, the Prime Minister announces his new cabinet.

And some department heads have rolled. Well, some of you will say, that's politics for you. That's how human power works.

[2 : 21] Whenever someone comes to power, he or she tries to stamp their authority on things. They need to make their mark. They need to show who's in charge. And even lowly curates, starting at new churches, are prone to do such things.

And so here in Daniel 6, we find the new King Darius doing a very similar thing. Now, if you remember last week in chapter 5, we had King Belshazzar having a great feast in his palace.

But in his pride, he drank from the vessels of the Lord's temple. And so God judged him. We see the writing on the wall, which was his judgment. And Daniel interpreting the writing on the wall.

And so we find in Daniel chapter 5 and verse 30, that that very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed. And Darius, the Mede, received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.

Now, we're not quite sure what Darius' position in the empire is. Some scholars say that it's actually the same person as Cyrus in chapter, in verse 28 of chapter 6, who is the ruler of the entire Persian empire.

- [3 : 31] More likely, I think he was a governor that was appointed by Cyrus, king over just Babylon. But whatever it is, we see that Darius is exerting his power over the kingdom.
- And so in chapter 6, if you look with me in verses 1 to 3, we read, It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, stationed throughout the whole kingdom, and over them three presidents, including Daniel.
- To these the satraps gave account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was found in him, and the king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom.
- And so from what we gather here and later on in the passage, it seemed like Darius was a good king. Or at least, he had an eye for appointing and promoting good people.
- People like Daniel. So far, so good. The problem, of course, with politics is that there are always winners and losers. When you promote winners, they usually end up being loyal to you.
- [4 : 40] But at the same time, losers hate to see power taken from them. And so it is, potentially with these presidents and satraps. They saw their power potentially slipping away, and they weren't going to go down without the fight.
- But what could they do with this man, Daniel? As we read further on, Daniel was beyond reproach. Nothing wrong could be found in what he did.
- And so in verse 5, all they could think of was to use his obedience to God against him. Now, if you had been following Daniel up to now, you'd realize that Daniel's obedience to God has seen him rise in stature in Babylon.
- But now, his obedience, this very thing, is the thing which will be used to entrap him. And so in verse 6, the presidents and satraps come before Darius.
- And as I read their words again, just notice their words dripping with mocking allegations, allegiance, or lies, appealing to Darius' vanity.
- [5 : 48] And so they say to him, O King Darius, live forever. All the presidents 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 interdict that whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to you, O King, shall be thrown into a den of lions.
- Now, O King, establish the interdict and sign the documents so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. And so Daniel finds himself caught in the middle.
- Now, if you were Daniel, what would you do? Well, I sort of came up with three options, which is in your handout. See what you think.
- Option one, taking a leaf out of potentially one opposition leader we know. Repeal the law. It's based on a lie. Persuade Darius to revoke what he had just done.
- Option two, pray in secret. After all, as long as you're not caught, you'll be safe. Or the third one, take a thirty-day break.
- [7 : 06] After all, it's only thirty days. God will understand. Particularly if you're Daniel and you realize what enormous good you're doing in this kingdom and for the exiles by staying in this position.
- Well, Daniel would have none of that because in verse 10 and 11, we read that although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room, open to its Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.
- The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God. Well, for Daniel, the choice was clear. He was going to take a stand.

And I think we can find, we can learn three things by the stand that he took. Firstly, it was clear to Daniel that this was a test of his loyalty.

So if he prayed, if he stopped praying even for thirty days, it would show that he was being more loyal to Darius than to God. Now clearly, the words of the edict was worded to cover everyone.

[8 : 19] But we all know that it's specifically targeted at Daniel. And so this test of loyalty, second point, was also a public one. Everyone knows that Daniel is faithful and serves only his God.

And everyone knows that part of that is him praying three times a day, facing Jerusalem with the window of his upper room open. So clearly, all eyes were now on Daniel to see what he would do.

So again, to go up to your room and close your windows and pray in secret was not an option for Daniel. But third, what I find most interesting is that even as Daniel pledged loyalty to God and made clear to everyone that he served no one but God, yet by his actions he remained subject to the laws of the land.

He did not put himself above the laws of the land. Now, I think people think that Daniel probably knew that Darius could not repeal the law.

You know, the passage seems to suggest that there was a higher law, the law of the Medes and the Persians in play, which meant that once Darius had signed the edict, he couldn't revoke it. But I want to say that at every turn when we look at Daniel's actions we show that he actually submitted himself to this unjust law.

[9 : 41] So he utters not a word in his own defense. He doesn't try to resist arrest. He doesn't try to resist being put into the lion's den. Nor does he expose the wickedness of the other officials or even criticize the king.

He doesn't even plead for clemency with Darius. You know, this episode with Daniel reminds me a lot of Jesus at his own trial.

You see, the officials are like the Jews wrongly accusing a righteous man. And then we have Darius like Pilate, well-meaning, but ultimately unable to free the accused, a righteous person from their sentence.

And then Daniel and Jesus both conduct themselves in a very similar way, willingly accepting their fate. Like Jesus, Daniel doesn't resist human authority.

At the same time, he doesn't entrust himself to them either. He knew that only trusting God would deliver and rescue him. And it is exactly how the officials find him in the upper room, praying and seeking mercy before his God.

[11 : 01] And notice again the parallels between what Daniel's doing and what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane, praying to his God. And then when Darius comes to the den in the morning, after, and finds Daniel safe, it says there in verse 20 that the reason no kind of harm was found on him was because he had trusted in his God.

Which means that Daniel is able to then declare back in verse 22 after God had rescued him that on the one hand he was not only blameless before God because he had been loyal and trusted God, but also that he had done no wrong to King Darius because he had submitted to his decree.

Daniel served God, while remaining subject to human powers. Well, friends, this is the same thing that we are being asked to do if we follow Jesus.

We are commanded to faithfully serve God while being subject to human powers. The Apostle Paul in Romans 13 instructs us to be subject to governing authorities for there is no authority except from God.

And those of us who have been here for the last two or three weeks, and been hearing the readings from 1 Peter, would have probably recognized that the Apostle Peter gives very similar instructions.

[12 : 29] The thing is that when authority that is placed over us, be it governments, employers, schools, parents are good, then it's pretty straightforward, isn't it? There's no problem.

We know that we need to obey and submit. But what if these authorities ask us to do things against God's law? Or perhaps more likely and a bit more subtly, what if they demand our loyalty, which undermines our loyalty to God?

It's not uncommon, is it, to find ourselves in that kind of situation, whether at work or at school. And even if you have stopped working, you probably have children or grandchildren that you find in that similar situation.

And they probably don't forbid you to worship God, because we live in a country that provides for freedom of worship, but they can certainly make it difficult for you to live out your faith. Perhaps you have a boss that likes to cut ethical corners, or perhaps your job demands so much of you that you can't make it to church or to Bible study each week.

Perhaps you work in a culture which actually ridicules people who have faith. So as long as you go with the flow and don't rock the boat, then all things would be fine.

[13 : 52] But the moment you try to take a stand, that's when opposition begins. And I have to say that this is playing out not just at the personal level, but nationally as well.

When we look in the media, we look at politics. Some of that is actually happening as we speak. And so it's actually important to understand the exact dynamics of what is going on here.

You see, the shore of power is often very overt and intimidating. And often it seems irresistible. They seduce you into believing that if you play by the rules, then all will be well.

You know, you'll get that promotion you've been working for. Financially, you'll be taken care of. You'll be praised, patted on the back, for being fair-minded and tolerant. Conversely, they also play on our fears and make us believe that the worst will happen to us if we don't toe the line.

And so this sort of leads some of us to make the following compromise. We say that if we pray by the rules for a while, then perhaps when we get into a position of authority, that's when we can make our stand.

[15 : 04] It'll be much easier because we'll be calling the shots. Well, I think some of you know that that probably doesn't work like that, does it? And to my shame and credit, I've been there before.

Sometimes doing the right thing, often doing the wrong thing. The truth is, it doesn't get easier. If we are not willing to make a stand when we have no power, then it'll be much harder to do it when we actually have power to lose.

Well, look at Daniel. His courage to do the right thing here in Daniel 6 is a result of him taking a stand all the way back in Daniel 1. He's able to face the line, to face death now, because when he first came to Babylon, he refused the king's food so as not to defile himself.

Of course, when we step back and look at human power, the reality is that it often offers much, but delivers little. It looks impressive, but let's not forget that every empire that's mentioned in this book of Daniel has come and gone.

In our own day, we've seen communism rise and fall. The British empire is actually no more, even though the queens probably are still able to put on a good party.

- [16 : 27] America, well, many people say it's going the same way. And so everyone now is talking about hitching their fortunes to the rise of China. But let me say, that too will go one day.
- Look at Darius. He's supposed to be a king, yet he proved unable to save Daniel. Supposed to be this big shot, able to issue decrees and laws, and yet when the crunch came, he couldn't even do what was right and save an innocent man.
- By contrast, Daniel is still standing into the reign of the third Babylonian king. On the other hand, who is it that can shut and open the mouths of lions?
- Who is it that rescued his faithful servant and rightly punished the evil doers? Who is it that without even so much as uttering a command brings all he wills to pass?
- Who is able even to put words of truth and wisdom into the mouth of an otherwise clueless and helpless king like Darius? Well, it's none other than the living God of Daniel, is it?
- [17 : 41] Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the God that we are called to faithfully serve. If we had to choose between God and earthly power, then the choice is clear.
- This is the God who, as Darius decrees in verse 26, look with me, says that all my royal dominion people should 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 has no end. He delivers and rescues. He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth.
- For he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. Human kingdoms promise much, but ultimately it is only God that can save.
- Now, none of this means, of course, that God must always save us from physical harm. That would be to take the wrong application from this story. But it is in Christ Jesus that God rescues, delivers, and saves us.
- [18 : 44] Not just from the power of lions, but from the power of sin and death itself. But know this, God's kingdom is a hidden kingdom.
- God does not exercise his power the way human kings do. As you read this story, there is no show of, you know, there's no public show of force. None of the public trappings of power.
- God doesn't appoint presidents and satraps or issues decrees or pushes weight around to exert his authority. Remember what Jesus said when he said to Pilate at his trial? My kingdom is not from this world.
- If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here. Instead, God works even when it seems corrupt human powers hold sway.
- So yes, let's by all means keep praying for good government and just laws in Australia and around the world, particularly as Eric has done with Syria. But even if bad governments and unjust laws remain, it doesn't mean that God's plan has been frustrated.
- [19 : 55] We only have to look at Daniel 6 to know that that's true. Or else we can read the book of Acts or hear stories about the church and Christians in China. God continues to work even in the midst of suffering and persecution.
- In fact, it is when God's servants remain faithful even through trials that God's rule is most clearly seen. See, everyone, including Darius, knew who God was only because of Daniel's public faithfulness.
- Don't do it right now, but if you go back later on and count the number of times in the passage, there are seven times in which God is referred to as Daniel's God. God is his God.

And when Darius is talking to Daniel, he's your God, the God of Daniel. And God will keep raising up servants like Daniel, like Jesus, you and I, servants who will faithfully and publicly declare with our words and with our actions our loyalty to him.

And so the question for us today is will we be faithful servants of God, even if it means taking a stand against earthly powers and authority?

[21 : 15] Will we remain loyal to his son, Jesus, even at the cost of public ridicule, loss of status, and financially? Will we entrust our well-being to God, even when we know that our public loyalty may result in hardship and suffering?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us ask God for a measure of Daniel's courage. Let us remember that even as he took his stand, Daniel got down on his knees three times a day, just as he had done previously, to pray to his God, praising him and seeking mercy before him.

Let's pray. God and Heavenly Father, we admit that there are many times when we are afraid of what we can lose when we stand up for you.

And we prefer to either go along or remain silent, just so that we will not cause trouble. But Lord, we ask that when it comes to a test of our loyalty, that you give us the courage, the courage that Daniel had to stand firm, to stand and show that we faithfully serve you.

And Lord, we ask that in your mercy, you will protect us and watch over us as we do that. And even if that means hardship or suffering or the worst, death, help us to remember that in the last day, you will rescue and deliver and save us.

[23 : 05] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.