

Witness

Message #6 in the series "Daniel – More than a Lion's Den"

Pastor David Woolverton

Well, good morning. Welcome to this time of worship and also to this opportunity for us to hear the word of the Lord as we prepare for our message today. Will you join your hearts with me as we go before the Lord in prayer?



Let's pray.

Gracious Lord, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Lord, we pray in Jesus' name and all God's people said, Amen.

Well, we are bringing a rough close soon over the next couple of weeks to this series that we have begun on the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. And part of our journey through the Book of Daniel is the realization that we are living in a time that could be equivocated to Babylon. And no, it's not a particular nation. It's the reality of living as a follower of Jesus Christ and the challenges of remaining faithful in a culture that is progressively getting more and more difficult for Christians. Babylon, what does it look like for us as followers of Jesus to remain faithful to following Jesus in a season where following Jesus is hard? It's no longer politically correct. What we have been talking about is what that culture may look like. I got to be honest with you over the course of my almost three and a half decades of doing ministry, I've heard the phrase over and over and over that the church should indeed be counter cultural. We should be counter cultural. What does that even mean? Well, the essence of what has been met by that phrase is that whatever we see going on in the culture in which we find ourselves, we are to live counter to that because the culture is not where Christians should be finding their identity. While in principle, I understand that as I was preparing this message series, a new thought began to kind of worm its way into my long-standing understanding of that particular phrase. That the church should be counter cultural. This thought that has been upsetting my status quo with that particular way of thinking is that in reality, it is not the church that should be going counter-culture, for the reality is that society is actually moving counter to God's design.

So, when you look at it from that vantage point, from scriptural bases, I want to pause it that life as God intended it, is actually life in the kingdom, as Jesus modeled it. That the appropriate culture should actually be what the church has been trying to embody and that the world in which we live society at large is actually the movement going against culture. Did I lose anybody? It's a reversal of our thoughts. So rather than the church moving against the grain of culture, society has been moving against the grain of God's original design. What would happen if we began to reframe our thoughts from that vantage point? It is, after all, why in Mark's gospel chapter one, starting in verse 14 and 15 and other gospels, Jesus has been saying that the Kingdom of God is at hand and it's time for us to repent and believe in the good news that word repent. You've heard this proclaimed from this pulpit many times over the years. I will say it again that word repent in the original language of the Greek New Testament as the word metanoeo, which literally means to change one's mind or in metaphoric language, if you're going in this direction, turn and go in this direction. Jesus is in effect saying the very thing that I really believe is accurate. That God has designed culture, to use that word, to function in a way that Jesus himself has modeled. And we, as the broken human condition has testified, we are going against the grain of what God has in fact called us to be.

So, the good news that we introduced the very first of this series is that culture can shift when people act differently than the way they used to. So, what would it look like if we lived differently today than we did yesterday? And what would it actually look like if we embodied the very principles of the culture that God himself has in fact modeled for us in Jesus? What would it look like if we lived the change that we are trying to see occur within our world? And what would it look like if we believed that God has called and raised up the Church of Jesus Christ to set things right again to get society back in alignment with the design that God has inaugurated? That is what I'm arguing is the way of the exile. It's the way of the exile. And what we learned from Daniel from chapter one is that all it takes is one act of obedience at a time to live that life of faithfulness that God has called us to.

So today, Daniel, Chapter 6 takes us further into that journey. Daniel, Chapter 6 is the centerpiece of this entire series. It is. I know you've been waiting with bated breath. I'm sure it's the story of Daniel in the lion's den. But as we have been describing in this series, it's more than a lion's den. What is it? So, I want to draw you in, I invite you to open your Bible to Daniel Chapter 6 or your Bible app. I'm going to periodically to let you know some things that I am beginning to see and that are challenging me and hopefully invite you into that same challenge. Why should I be challenged alone, right? So, starting Chapter 6:1, it says,

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, stations throughout the whole kingdom," [Daniel 6:1 NRSV].

So, this is King Darius and as I indicated in prior weeks, we don't exactly know if this is Darius or if this was a name that perhaps is not so much Darius, but is referencing a different king, or perhaps even Cyrus. But just to not get bogged down in all of that history, we're going to call him Darius. In fact, the Bible does. So we're going to use that name. Satraps were kind of like regional leaders. So if you kind of get this picture in mind, there's the emperor, and the emperor is setting in place a variety of structures of leadership that's going to be important in just a moment. Verse two,

"And overall them three presidents, including Daniel; to these satraps gave account, so that the king might suffer no loss." [Daniel 6:2 NRSV].

It's great strategy that the king is setting up all of these layers. He's in other words, he's setting up a government and there's going to be three presidents. Daniel is one of those presidents who will oversee all of the 120 satraps. That's the structure of the organization. Verse three,

"Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king plan to appoint him over the whole kingdom." [Daniel 6:3 NRSV].

This is so important. I want you to see what's going on because this is actually setting the stage for the rest of the chapter. So, Daniel is distinguishing himself because of his leadership capacity anointed by the spirit of God, he is raising the bar on what it means to be a leader under King Darius. So much so that the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. So now we have in verse four,

"So the presidents and the satraps tried to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom." [Daniel 6:4 NRSV].

Doesn't that really just stimulate, this is like a great novel that's leading us in, there's conflict brewing here. What could that be about? So the presidents and all of the satraps are trying to look for a reason to complain. I know that this is all hypothetical because this stuff never happens in today's world and in the rest of verse four,

"But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him. The 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." [Daniel 6:4-5 NRSV].

Unless we find it connected to his faith. So, what this is telling us is that this group of leaders of which Daniel was a part is trying to conspire in a way that undermines Daniel's authority and the best way for them to do that is to go after this guy's faith. So, the presidents in the satraps conspire to go to the king and they actually manipulate the king using flattery to get the king to write and pass an edict, an edict that for 30 days, no one in the entire empire is going to be allowed to pray to anyone or anything other than the king himself for 30 days. And if somebody violates that law, they would be thrown into the den of lions. So, the king, listens to his leaders and he establishes an edict, and it says, "according to the laws of the Medes and the Persians," those were the empires that had taken over Babylon. And so, these rules that the king is setting in place had by the laws of those empires, the power that once they are inaugurated, once they are enacted, they could not be repealed. So, this was like X Cathedra statements of law that once they came out of the emperor's pen, they were in place for good.

So, the conspirers gathered their wits about them and colluded against the king, manipulated him and got him to pass this law. Why did they do that? Because Daniel was better. Then them. Daniel was better than they were. Friends, one of the very first lessons this teaches me from the Old Testament book of Daniel is that any time we try to assassinate someone else's character, it always says more about us than it does them. Always. This is critical for us to see, especially in our world, and especially as we're gearing up for yet another election season. And all we see are political ads on TV. I'm not taking a political side, I told you that at the beginning of this series. I am an equal opportunity offender when it comes to looking at our culture. But it clearly, clearly when we try to assassinate someone else's character, it always says more about us than it does about them. In fact, when you look at it for what it is, when leaders publicly assassinate another leader's character, they are telling us what kind of leader that they themselves will be over us. We all would do well to keep that in mind. Verse 10,

"Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward 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." [Daniel 6:10 NRSV].

Well, there's several words that I would like to touch on there. First, the word, although is an important word, most often we just kind of gloss over that. But it's a good segue a word. And what this is telling us is that even though Daniel knew that this law was enacted, he continued to do what he had always been doing. He continued to go to his house and open up the windows towards Jerusalem, get down on his knees and pray three times a day. Now, I don't have time to share with you why that's important. It connects us to the Old Testament Book of First Kings and the pattern that was in place. It also takes us back to many other examples in the Old Testament that illustrate this powerful connection that Jerusalem and Judea, the Promised Land has for itself and all of the people in exile continued to look to Jerusalem as they prayed for the hope of the promise of redemption being fulfilled. That God himself would fulfill his promise through Jeremiah to bring all of those individuals back to their land.

This particular verse of scripture reminds us of what we ourselves need in order to not only survive in Babylon but thrive in Babylon. Notice, Daniel did this just as he had done previously, it was his rhythm. In fact, he had a rhythm of prayer. As I looked at that verse of scripture, and I realize that what we're seeing play out is a rhythm of prayer, I wondered, "how is my prayer life?" And it's not so much that we are followers of Jesus need to get on our knees three times a day, although there are some groups of

believers over the history of the church that have felt that. But what kind of rhythm do we have, or don't we have when it comes to praying? You know, from that vantage point, I began to ask, "how's my prayer life? How's your prayer life?" When we look at it, you know, honestly, when we think of our prayer rhythm - is our response prayer? What's that? Or very quick to say, "well I say grace at meals, maybe not out loud, but I'm thanking God for what I eat, and sometimes I'm thanking God for what I'm not eating." Yeah, or do I pray with the kids at home and I'm content with that? Or do I pray during rush hour and 283? Well, that's a given right. We use God's name on Route 283 quite often. Oh, maybe, maybe I only pray in times of crises. Or perhaps I pray daily, and I pray at specific times, or maybe I pray daily at various times.

What's the rhythm of your prayer? What's the rhythm? I often think that perhaps our pace is so rapid in our lifestyle that we think that we just don't have time to spend time with God in prayer. Maybe that's where you are. I know there are times when I start my day and I'm late and I just jump into the day and my prayer is, "Oh Lord, get me to where I need to be on time." What does that prayer rhythm look like? For me, I know that sometimes distractions pull me away from my rhythm of prayer. When I look for the ideal, I got to be honest with you, I think my wife is my hero when it comes to the rhythm of prayer. She's up every morning by four, sometimes even earlier, she jumps out of bed, runs down to the basement where she does an hour of aerobics, comes back up and by 5:00 in the morning, she's spending an hour in prayer in her devotions. Me, well, let's just say I exercise by proxy. And, you know, I do my devotions the opposite end. I'm up doing my devotions at midnight because I'm a night person, but my wife is my hero. She has figured out how to maintain that rhythm of prayer. Really, she has done it so well that I think she, without realizing it, models what I think is important for all of us. A rule of life. That phrase became more known and popular way back in the early days of the church, where we're talking like 300 A.D., 400 A.D. and then again resurged in the Middle Ages through the monasteries.

Saint Benedict was probably the most well-known for the Benedictine rule of life. And basically, what a rule of life is it's an intentional rhythm. You a set of practices that helped to create space for us to be with Jesus, to order our lives after what Jesus taught and to orient our choices and behaviors in a way that best honors Jesus. Yeah, it's not so much that what Daniel was doing three times a day is to be our mandate. It's not like the Daniel diet that Daniel did, so it must work. And so, we just do that diet and we'll end up losing weight that just doesn't work that way. But, the rhythm of life, the rhythm of prayer, there's rule of life that Daniel embodies should challenge us to ask the question, "What kind of rule of life do I have? What kind of rhythm do I have? Or am I succumbing to those distractions?"

In simple terms, what you have heard me teach in the past and you know, those of you who have been a part of huddles and grow groups, you've seen this as we've taught it, in a picture, what we're looking for is a balance in our life of the up, the in and the out. The up is our relationship with God and it's clearly involving worship and devotion and prayer, and that becomes important, and it also becomes important for us to build on our relationships with other believers. That's the in. And to be in balance with those two, we need to be serving one another who especially are in our communities that may not be connected to our faith. That's the out. Rhythm of prayer begins to formulate that balance of rule of life balances the up and in the out. Often regardless of how we may feel in any given moment. That's why it's a rule of life. And quite honestly, our ability to handle the challenges of exile in Babylon come from a consistent rhythm of spending the time with God. God is our strength. He is our deliverer. He's the one who created us, He's the one who calls us. He's the one who reminds us of our redemption. In the midst of our brokenness. That's the challenge for us. Verse 11,

**"The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God."
[Daniel 6:11 NRSV].**

So, what happens as the president's and the satraps they tattle on Daniel? He continued to pray. He continued to pray for not only himself and his friends, but also for all of those individuals he was called to serve. So, the president's and satraps tattle on him. And look at the king's response verse 14,

"When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel, and until the sun went down he made every effort to rescue him." [Daniel 6:14 NRSV].

So, here's something to be aware of, for the first time in Daniel, we have an emperor who's actually on his side, who likes Daniel, and who's deeply distressed and is trying to struggle to find a way out of his own law. But there was no way out. So, Darius ends up giving the order to throw Daniel into the lion's den, but this is what he says in verse 16,

"The king said to Daniel, 'May, your God whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!' A stone was brough and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then, at break of day, the king got up and hurried to the den of lions. When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, 'O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?' Daniel then said to the king, 'O king live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.' 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. [Daniel 6:16-23 NRSV].

I remember from last week. Daniel, at this particular point is in his mid-80s. His mid-80s. He's not a young teenager. He's been in Babylon for close to 70 years now. He's in his mid-80s, so the king was so relieved by this, he ordered that all of the accusers of Daniel, the ones who falsely accused them, were to be the ones thrown into the lion's den. And that verse is pretty graphic, so I'll leave you to your imagination with that. Verse 25,

"Then King Darius wrote to all of the peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world: 'May you have abundant prosperity! I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble in 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."**

**So, this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."
[Daniel 6:25-28 NRSV].**

So, in a nutshell, what Chapter six teaches us beyond what I've already shared with you, is that Daniel's life at the window prepared him to lie with the lions. It was his consistent, ongoing rhythm of prayer was his

consistent rule of life that prepared him to face whatever challenges that were coming at him in Babylon and in the succeeding empires that were taking over from Babylon. And the same is true for us. Our life at the window has the capacity to prepare us to lie with the lions, whatever those lions may be. So, what about your life at the window? What about your rhythm of prayer? What about your rule of life? Whether you realize it or not, you are already operating on a rule of life. But is your rule of life more about the culture that exists in society or the culture that has been embodied by the one who created it and called us? That is our challenge.

For those of you who have been tracking with us for the past several weeks of our series, you know that we're ending each message with an opportunity for you to engage using our prayer wall. The prayer wall is on the wall as you exit the sanctuary. It's a fishnet prayer wall. We invite you to respond to this message to consider responding one of three or more. If you so choose one of these individual prompts. What are those prompts for today?

Number 1 - Is there a word or phrase that best describes your prayer life right now? Maybe it's grace at meals is nonexistent. Maybe it's vibrant. Maybe you have an intimate connection with the Lord.

Number 2 - in terms of up our relationship with God in prayer and worship, devotion in our connection with other believers or out our ability to serve, especially those who are not connected with the faith, which is the more difficult for you to live out consistently? Maybe on your card, you just simply write up in or out or a combination of those.

Number 3 - A commitment, perhaps, that you are making to developing and living a rule of life. Or a rhythm of prayer. Maybe for that, it's simply, yes, Lord. Yes. Maybe it's more detailed. Maybe it's a commitment that you're going to get up in the morning or before you go to bed, you're going to spend the time and seek the heart of the Lord for your life, whatever that is. Feel free to write that on a card and send it to the church office anonymously or call us. We will be in prayer for you and with you as you live that out.

Friends, the reality is, we are living in Babylon and God has called us His church to be a witness within Babylon and the best way for us to do that is to connect to the source of life. That's the rhythm of prayer or the rule of life that connects us to the heart of God. Psalm 18 that is quoted above, Verse 1,

"I love you, oh, Lord, my strength." [Psalm 18:1 NIV].

That Jesus loves you. Maybe it's time for us to repent, to turn and to reconnect to the culture that God has called us to be a part of. A culture of love, forgiveness, hope and grace. What about you?

Let's pray.

Gracious, Lord, I thank You for Daniel and for his testimony. Thank You for the opportunity to engage because Lord, as we reach out to You, we discover a God who is reaching out to us, a God who is calling us to be intimately connected, to be embraced. Thank You for Your love. Thank You, Lord for moving towards us. Draw us now towards You as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.