

A Final Call to Faith

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

5th in a six-part series

April 30 & May 1, 2016

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Daniel 6:3-9, 16-23 (CEB)

³ Because of his extraordinary spirit, Daniel soon surpassed the other officers and the chief administrators—so much so that the king had plans to set him over the entire kingdom.

⁴ As a result, the other officers and the chief administrators tried to find some problem with Daniel’s work for the kingdom. But they couldn’t find any problem or corruption at all because Daniel was trustworthy. He wasn’t guilty of any negligence or corruption.

⁵ So these men said, “We won’t find any fault in Daniel, unless we can find something to use against him from his religious practice.”

⁶ So these officers and chief administrators ganged together and went to the king. They said to him, “Long live King Darius! ⁷ All the officers of the kingdom, the ministers, the chief administrators, the royal associates, and the governors advise the king to issue an edict and enforce a law, that for thirty days anyone who says prayers to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, will be thrown into a pit of lions. ⁸ Now, Your Majesty, issue the law and sign the document so that it cannot be changed, as per the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled.” ⁹ Because of this, King Darius signed the document containing the law.

[Daniel defies the law and continue to pray to his God. His enemies turn him over to the king for trial.]

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and hurled him into the pit of lions.

The king said to Daniel: “Your God—the one you serve so consistently—will rescue you.”

¹⁷ A single stone was brought and placed over the entrance to the pit. The king sealed it with his own ring and with those of his princes so that Daniel’s situation couldn’t be changed. ¹⁸ The king then went home to his palace and fasted through the night. No pleasures were brought to him, and he couldn’t sleep. ¹⁹ At dawn, at the first sign of light, the king rose and rushed to the lions’ pit.

²⁰ As he approached it, he called out to Daniel, worried: “Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God—the one you serve so consistently—able to rescue you from the lions?”

²¹ Then Daniel answered the king: “Long live the king! ²² My God sent his messenger, who shut the lions’ mouths. They haven’t touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I haven’t done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty.”

²³ The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God. ²⁴ The king then ordered that the men who had accused Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions’ pit—including their wives and children. They hadn’t even reached the bottom of the pit before the lions overpowered them, crushing all their bones.

A final story of faithfulness and courage. Open windows and hungry lions.

After all that Daniel and his friends had been through, you’d think that Daniel could have settled into a quiet life as his exile extended from years into decades. But there would be one last trial, driven by envy in its conception and its execution. Not too long ago, we looked at the seven deadly sins, of which envy is one. Here is a bit of what I wrote then:

We interchangeably refer to *jealousy, covetousness, envy*, and *greed*, though the words mean different things. DeYoung helps us with this by providing a pithy explanation of envy: “feeling bitter when others have it better.”

The key to grasping the potent danger of envy is the word, “better.” Envy is grounded in the comparison between ourselves and another. In our mind, we come up short and begin to hate the other person for it. Perhaps we lack the talent or gifts of another or perhaps we aren’t willing to put in the work or perhaps life got in the way or perhaps it

was just luck. The reason doesn't matter, envy poisons our heart and we begin to tear the other person down -- so we fare better in the comparison. We can't be what they are, so we'll just knock them down.

De Young uses the cinematic masterpiece, *Amadeus*, to illustrate envy at work. Salieri is an eighteenth-century musician and composer of some renown. But then he encounters the famed Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Salieri envies his gifts. He doesn't understand why God has given such gifts to a seeming buffoon and not to the much more deserving Salieri. He grows to hate Mozart for it. Salieri strives to hide his envy, which is often the way, but the poison does its deadly work. He begins to tear down Mozart and even, possibly, kill him. That's envy at work. Jeff Cook¹ writes that envy can be summed up in three words: *Why not me!* Cook has it right. . . .

So it is when Daniel is elevated by the new king, Darius, to a position of elevated responsibility and prestige. Daniel would be one of three men appointed to oversee those who did the running of the kingdom. And his rivals thought to themselves, it was just wrong and something had to be done about it. This outsider. This Jew. Part of the king's inner circle? Why Daniel?! *Why not me!*

So all those who felt wronged nurtured the envy that consumed them, and hatched a plot to eliminate Daniel. They looked and looked for evidence of corruption on Daniel's part. Surely there must be some. Everyone was on the take in some way or another – right? But they found none. Daniel was both capable and honest in all his dealings. So his opponents, his enviers, took a different approach.

Knowing Daniel was a Jew and knowing that these Jewish exiles were dogged in their commitment to their god, the enviers convinced the king to prohibit prayers to anyone or any god other than Darius himself for a period of thirty days. The penalty for violating this law? Becoming a meal for a den full of lions . . . ingenious. This wasn't an edict for all time, but only for a month. Couldn't everyone in the kingdom give the great King Darius his due for a month? Who could really refuse? The enviers believed they knew someone who would refuse: Daniel. And they were right.

Opening the windows

When Daniel learned that the king's edict had been signed, he went directly to his home. He went upstairs and opened the windows that faced Jerusalem (westward from Babylon). He knelt down. He prayed. And he praised the Lord God three times. Just like he always did. For all the world to see.

Did Daniel pray in front of open windows to make sure that people knew of his defiance? I think so. So did Gandhi. D.L. Smith-Christopher writes:

Mahatma Gandhi made interesting comments, between 1909 and 1937, on the book of Daniel in his work in both South Africa and India. Gandhi stated that he had "found much consolation in reading the book of the prophet Daniel in the Bible" and declared Daniel to be "one of the greatest passive resisters that ever lived." Gandhi appears to have been particularly intrigued with chap. 6, the story of Daniel in the lions' den, vv. 10–11 especially. In his earliest article referring to Daniel, Gandhi suggested that Daniel was a model of resistance to South African "pass laws" for Indian South Africans. It is interesting to see how Gandhi used the Daniel theme when he stated that the Indians should "sit with their doors flung wide open and tell those gentlemen [South African authorities] that whatever laws they passed were not for them unless those laws were from God."

Clearly, Gandhi assumed that Daniel had actually flung open the windows in flagrant disregard of Darius's decree against prayers to any god but the king: "When Daniel disregarded the laws of the Medes and Persians which offended his conscience, and meekly suffered the punishment for his disobedience, he offered satyagraha [passive political resistance] in its purest form." Particularly when dealing with Western audiences, Gandhi returned to his Daniel interpretation, again emphasizing

¹ Cook, Jeff V. (2008). *Seven: The Deadly Sins and The Beatitudes* (p. 52). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

the opening of the windows. Furthermore, however, Gandhi also stressed the idea that Daniel was otherwise portrayed as a model citizen: "It must be remembered, that neither Daniel nor Socrates ... had any ill will towards their persecutors. Daniel and Socrates are regarded as having been model citizens of the states to which they belonged."²

Sure, perhaps Daniel had long made a practice of praying before open windows. But now, in view of the king's law, Daniel could have closed the windows and, perhaps, none would have been the wiser. But he chose open windows. He knew what it meant. He knew the consequences, but an unjust law is an unjust law. Daniel chose the path of disobedience rather than submit to what he believed was an unjust law and an affront to God. But what is our path? Can we envision realistic circumstances in which we would feel compelled to choose between God and obedience to our nation's laws? In my sermon on the fiery furnace, I mentioned that *Christianity Today*'s cover article in their latest issue was on the question of civil disobedience. They offered five guidelines for Christians. Perhaps some or all will be helpful to us:³

1. The Christian life is not simply a matter of subjective religious experience; it is a way of obedience to the revealed will of God in Christ.

Certainly, we ought not to place unnecessary barriers between the church and the surrounding society. But the church's call to obedience does not hinge on that society's sympathy or permission.

2. Political leaders owe their authority to God, whether or not they acknowledge it.

If God is King, then our laws must conform, in at least some limited way, to his standards of righteousness. . . . We need not support theocracy to recognize that the Bible calls on earthly rulers to do justice within the context of their offices (Ps. 82, Isa. 10:1–2). Christians as far apart politically as Jim Wallis and James Dobson have recognized this. To remain faithful to our calling, we cannot keep our light hidden under a bushel (Matt. 5:15). When rulers ignore or flagrantly transgress their biblical mandate, believers may need to take dramatic steps to awaken consciences and agitate for change.

3. Even an unjust law does not invalidate the entire political order.

Where a political system can accommodate reform movements, it's generally best to renounce revolution and work for justice within the system.

4. Contemplating civil disobedience is best done in community.

Human beings are never autonomous. We always answer to another, whether to God or a human institution of some sort. Rightful civil disobedience cannot rest on self-assertion—the sacred, conscience-driven Me asserting independence from the law. We break the bonds of civil authority only because we belong primarily to a higher authority—to God and his church.

There is not only strength in numbers, but wisdom as well. If my fellow Christians agree that a ruler is mandating something idolatrous or unjust, this strengthens my conviction. But if they disagree, I'm bound to ask whether my judgment is mistaken.

5. The means of civil disobedience matter as much as the ends.

During World War II, European resisters engaged in illegal and sometimes violent acts against their German occupiers. Subsequent generations have judged them heroic because they battled an obvious evil. Pro-life activists deem our permissive abortion laws every bit as monstrous. Yet the vast majority forswear violence, because they understand that even a worthy end cannot justify immoral or disproportionate means.

I'm not sure what Daniel would make of those guidelines. We know only that he chose to disobey, knowing exactly what it meant for him. And his opponents did not disappoint in this. When they came upon him praying openly, they were unswayed by

² Smith-Christopher, D. L. (1994–2004). The Book of Daniel. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 7, pp. 94–95). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

³ Koyzis, David. "[Consider] Civil Disobedience," *Christianity Today*, April, 2016, p. 38

Daniel's courage and faith. They simply turned him in, counting on the king to take of Daniel for them.

But in a surprising twist, King Darius sought a way out. He liked Daniel and respected him. The king had named Daniel to a top post for a reason. He had served his kings well. But the king was trapped. A law was a law. He could not simply set aside the edict. That wasn't how things worked in Media and Persia, the successors to the Babylonians. So Daniel had to be punished, as Daniel knew he would be. The law was the law.

Off to the lions

So, just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tossed in the furnace for their disobedience, Daniel is tossed into a den of lions. The king seems to believe that Daniel's god will rescue him. I suppose we could read v. 16 as a taunt, but I don't. Even the king is trapped by the law, as is the king in the story of Esther. The law is the law.

So, the king had Daniel enclosed in the den of lions and sealed the entrance with his own signet ring. And the king went home. He wouldn't eat nor sleep that night. So at first light, the king raced over to the den. Could it possibly be? Might Daniel's god have saved him again? Arriving at the stone that closed up the den, the anxious king shouted to Daniel, hoping to hear good news. And . . . yes! Daniel was alive. The Lord God had intervened and protected Daniel as he stood in the midst of the lions.

Overjoyed, the king had Daniel lifted out of the den. Daniel's enemies would take his place. And the Persian king lifted prayers of praise to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for "he rescues and saves; he performs signs and wonders . . . he is the living God and he endures forever." Amen!

Daniel Saves Susanna

There is another ancient story featuring Daniel. It doesn't come from the book of Daniel, but the brief tale of Susanna, which is part of the books of the Apocrypha. These are Jewish writings from the period between the old and new testaments. Christians have not all agreed about the canonical status of these writings. They weren't accepted by the Jews as Scripture, but were seen as inspirational and helpful. Some are certainly entertaining. Sharon Pace gives us a brief summary of the Susanna's tale.

The story of Susanna tells the moving account of a married Jewish woman of considerable means who becomes the object of two judges' voyeurism. The story assumes that Jews have autonomous rights to judge one of their own in some matters—here the issues are adultery and bearing false witness. They give her an ultimatum: they will either force her to have sex with them or accuse her of committing adultery with an unspecified lover. Susanna chooses to submit to their lies, claiming, "I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord" (Sus. 22–23).

These elders apparently think they have a foolproof plan to ensure a capital sentence for Susanna because they can provide the required testimony of two witnesses. Although she has a wealthy husband, respected parents, hundreds of servants, and four children, no one questions the false testimony of these elders or takes steps to ensure that their words are honest. Perjury was a serious offense according to the law of Moses, and indeed any perpetrator would be subject to whatever punishment would have been imposed on the falsely accused (Deut 19:15–21). The turning point in the story comes when Susanna prays. Indeed, God hears the cry of the innocent, and the young Daniel is stirred to come to her defense. Even before he begins questioning the men, he knows they are guilty (perhaps God has revealed this to him), and he gathers proof that the elders are providing false testimony by questioning them separately, catching them in their lies. The community, happily, believes Daniel, and Susanna is saved.

1. Pace, Sharon, *Daniel*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Macon, GA. 2008.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do you think that Daniel opened the windows so people could see his disobedience? Why? What place, if any, does such civil disobedience have in our lives? Go through the guidelines from *Christianity Today*. How do they strike you? Sensible? Which would you modify and why?
2. King Darius seems to regret Daniel's arrest and punishment. How do you read verse 16? Is the king hoping that Daniel's God will save him or is he taunting Daniel? Why does it matter?
3. When you look back over the stories of Daniel and his friends in chapters 1-6, what have you learned about faithfulness? What can you take away from these stories that you wouldn't have grasped as a child?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Five passages about staying faithful to God

Monday, Deuteronomy 6 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all strength."	Tuesday, Deuteronomy 10:12-22 "What does the Lord ask of you?"
Wednesday, Joshua 24:14-15 "Fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness."	Thursday, 1 Corinthians 16:5-18 "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."
Friday, Ephesians 6:10-20 "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."	Weekly Joys and Concerns

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottngle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are studying Paul's letter, 1 Corinthians

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Judges

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

The current series:

Making Sense of Revelation:

The Theology of John's Apocalypse

Coming May 9 & 16:

7pm in Smith Worship Center

Two Special Evenings with Rev. Arthur Jones and Dr. Scott Engle

Connect the Dots: The Bible in Six Acts

A dynamic multi-media presentation of the entire biblical story.
Come learn the Bible in a way you never have before and have
some fun along the way!

Sermon Notes
