

NEVER GIVE UP ON PRAYER

Daniel 6:1-28

The subject of prayer makes the “news” every so often. Just recently there was a report of the ACLU bringing threats of law suits against various high schools because their football teams gather together before the games and have a time of prayer. A restaurant recently made a offer to give a 15 per cent discount to their customers if they prayed before their meal. Again the ACLU or some other group threatened them with a lawsuit and the restaurant abandoned the offer. This raises an interesting question that should be addressed to those atheists who oppose public prayer, “since you claim there is no God, why should you care if I pray to Him?”

In some of the references to prayer in the Old Testament it almost seems as if people thought that they need to make an appointment with God and communicate with Him at specific times during the day. In Psalms 51 we read that David prayed evening, morning and noontime. We also see (Psalms 119) that he would pray at midnight and early in the morning. Even Jesus would get up early and go to a solitary place to pray. In Acts, we find Peter and John going up to the temple at “the hour of prayer.” Later on we find Peter (while in Joppa) going up on the housetop to pray at noon. Jesus had noted that some religious people like to pray standing on the street corners and His advice was that we enter into “our closet.”

In Paul’s letters to the various churches he advised that God’s people be continually in prayer and that we pray without ceasing. The Bible has many references to prayer and many books and sermons have been devoted to the subject. When we consider the totality of these various references, we find that prayer is so important that we should engage in it both “religiously” and “spontaneously.”

When Challenges Arise – 6:1-5

¹ It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; 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. 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.” Daniel 6:1–5 (NASB95)

Following the end of the Chaldean rule of Babylon and the takeover by the Medes and Persians, we again see the recognition of Daniel as an outstanding leader who had influential impact. We are not told how the new rulers of Babylon learned about Daniel but it is likely that his influence was known by many in the general populace. The new leaders were not hindered by political affiliations so they could look for “capability” in choosing people to be in leadership positions. Just think how much better our nation would be if we could find leaders whose only criteria were to do the right thing in the right way and for the right reasons rather than picking people based on some senseless ideas of trying to control people while gaining personal wealth.

There is a lot of confusion in the historical writings about this person named Darius. Some think it was another name that Cyrus used. Others claim that the name Darius was a title similar to Caesar or Pharaoh that meant “lord, king.” Some think he was the general who led the army that captured Babylon and that Cyrus gave him the title “Darius” and put him in charge of that area. The Medo-Persian Empire was very large and extended far beyond Babylon. Some commentators think he was not a very strong leader personally and was open to getting help from

capable people such as the governors and administrators that had been appointed.

If it was the case that Darius recognized his limitations and sought capable assistants to carry out the responsibilities of governing Babylon, then that was to his credit and showed wisdom. He may have carried delegation a little too far in his plan to elevate Daniel to a position of being over all the governmental affairs. This proposed change triggered a predictable response of jealousy and resentment among others in leadership positions and they began to look for way to protect their positions in the government hierarchy by discrediting Daniel. Instead of working harder and smarter to do as well as or better than Daniel, they sought to lower the standard. This is the situation we see in our world today. Rather than striving to excel in performance, the tendency is to lower the goal of what is considered excellent.

Since they could not find any weakness or evidence of wrong doing in the way Daniel carried out his responsibilities, they had to create a situation that would use his strength and personal conviction against him. It is helpful to note that the driving issue in this account was “influence and control” and had nothing to do with prayer and religion. The commissioners and governors did not really care about anything other than “who was in control.”

When Faith and Cultures Clash – 6:6-13

⁶ Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: “King Darius, live forever! ⁷ “All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together 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. ⁸ “Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction. ¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (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. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king’s injunction, “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.” ¹³ Then they answered and spoke before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day.” Daniel 6:6–13 (NASB95)

There seems to be a common theme of several accounts of events that occurred during the time of the seventy-year captivity of the Jews. All these have jealousy and prejudice as the common motivating reason for accusations brought by “those of the world” (evil) against faithful individual Jews of superior capability (good) who were seen as having too much influence on various policies of the government. These are part of the overall battle between the forces of evil and the forces of good that is characteristics of the book of Daniel. The accusations in all these cases involved the unwillingness of the Jews to be unfaithful to God by showing deference to pagan idols or to a public official. The account of the three Hebrew young men who refused to bow down to the golden statue, the account of Daniel who continued to pray to God, and Mordecai who refused to bow down to Haman as given in the account found in the book of Esther all follow this theme. In all these cases those who plotted against the Jews failed because of God’s miraculous intervention or by having a well-placed person in power in the case of Esther. In all three accounts, the enemies of the Jews were subjected to the terrible fate of what they were attempting to bring upon the Jews whom they were targeting.

There were important lessons that the Jews needed to learn and these accounts teach these lessons with memorable events in an effective way. Among the lessons to be learned are

- God rewards his people’s faithfulness with recognition and responsibility.

- God's faithful people should use their influence to make the world a better place.
- Success and recognition spark resentment and envy in those who do not belong to God.
- Those of the world are not limited by truth or facts.
- People in leadership can be manipulated to pass inane laws that are contrary to Godly principles.
- Man-made rules and regulations can have hidden agendas.
- Rules that are contrary to Godly principles are usually harmful to God's people.
- Those of the world will persecute God's people using their faithfulness against them.
- Maintaining faithfulness to God even in the face of persecution leads to deliverance.
- Vengeance belongs to God who will vindicate His people.

Those who were plotting against Daniel used the weaknesses of the king to their advantage. They appealed to his pride and for a desire to have affirmation from the people that they respected his leadership. This led to the seemingly silly statute that no one could ask or make a petition to anyone beside the king for a period of thirty days.

They looked for a fault in Daniel, but since they could find no weakness in Daniel they resorted to using the strength of his faithfulness to God as a point of accusation. As Christians, we should be living our lives in such a way that our enemies' worst criticisms should confirm our faithfulness to God and His word.

In our present day culture, we can find examples of Christian virtues or strengths that are viewed negatively. There are people who are not considered for a job in public relations since they refuse to twist the truth to put a positive spin on a bad situation. I have known people who were not considered for a position of responsibility as a representative of their company to a national organization because they did not drink alcoholic beverages. We should be delighted if the worst criticism that the world can throw at us is that we do not support abortion, gay marriage, do not appreciate dirty jokes, we don't drink or do drugs, we go to church on a regular basis, we insist on praying before meals, we read our Bible, we routinely relate what happens around us to some scriptural principle, and we will not go to places or businesses of questionable morality.

Just as Hananiah, Meshael, and Azeriah did not need to answer Nebuchadnezzar regarding their decision about bowing down to the golden image since he knew how they would respond, those who were setting a trap to catch Daniel did not need to actually see him praying to God, they knew what he would do. Daniel was not ignorant of the edict so he deliberately chose to obey his commitment to God rather than submit to a senseless law of man that sought to elevate anything above God. That would be idolatry and Daniel knew the consequences of idolatry as evidenced by what had already happened to Israel and Judah. This refusal to follow pointless political correctness was what Peter and John did when they told the high priest of the Jews that "we ought to obey God and not man."

Of course, for the scheme to work, the plotters would need to make Daniel's failure known to the king and to remind him of his edict that could not be reversed. The practice of not being able to reverse a law was a result of the ruler thinking that he was godlike and was infallible. The doctrine of infallibility is still practiced by certain religions today regarding the spiritual head of the group. The Latter-day Saints and the Roman Catholics are practitioners of this concept. As Darius discovered, if anyone follows this practice, then he had better be perfect or he will create a situation that has serious unintended consequences.

We don't have any official policies in our government that say that a law, once it is passed, can never be reversed. We have seen practices that bad laws have been enacted and even though more problems than solutions are created, those in power will not admit the error and will block all attempts to repeal the law. They are, in effect, thinking of themselves as being godlike

and above error.

When Personal Danger Looms – 6:14-18

¹⁴ Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions’ den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.” ¹⁷ A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him. Daniel 6:14–18 (NASB95)

Do you recall the main enticement point of the temptation that the serpent made to Eve? “If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will become like God.” Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I think that God wants us to be like Him. To most this prospect simply means that they would have godlike power and control. If people had that kind of power without having the character of God, then there would be total chaos in the world and it would be like hell. Having ultimate power requires perfect character and perfect knowledge or we wind up with a perfect mess. This is where Darius found himself. He had been ensnared by a trap that he unwittingly had helped build.

There was no way that he would have willingly sent his best and wisest advisor to certain death in a lion’s den. We may find ourselves on the “horns of a dilemma” with no good options available to us. What can we do when we can do nothing? We can learn from Darius in this case. His words are evidence that he knew he was powerless to change the situation and he simply said to Daniel, “God deliver you.” Some have interpreted this statement as a prayer to the God of Daniel and others have rendered his words as a confident statement that God would protect Daniel. Based on the way he spent the rest of the night, I would question his confidence that Daniel would be OK.

When God’s Help Is All That Will Do – 6:19-23

¹⁹ Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹ Then Daniel spoke to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.” ²³ Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. Daniel 6:19–23 (NASB95)

A miracle is how we describe something that seems impossible to happen. The “natural” thing for a hungry man-eating lion to do is to kill a defenseless human being. Why did that not happen? God had made a covenant with Israel and He had promised (Deuteronomy 28) to protect them from all manner of peril if they were faithful, but to let them be exposed to various dangers in the world if they were unfaithful. One of the dangers that was specifically mentioned in verse 26 of that chapter was that their carcasses would be meat for the beasts of the earth.

Daniel was faithful to God and had lived in obedience and devotion to God for more than eighty years. God was true to His covenant promises.

Daniel saw his deliverance as evidence of his innocence before God which is not surprising. Daniel also declared himself to be innocent before the king even though he had not followed the king’s edict. Notice his plain statement, “I have committed no crime.”

Could we make the argument that if we defy a law of man that is contrary to the principles of the Kingdom of God that no crime has been committed? If a communist or Islamic government declares that being a Christian is a crime, then we should disregard such laws as being of no consequence to a true believer. This is essentially what Daniel did and what the three young Hebrew men did who would not bow down to the golden image.

Darius was pleased with the outcome of God's intervention and had Daniel removed from the lion's den. This shows that he was not an evil person, but he had not made very wise decisions in allowing himself to be manipulated by those who were evil.

When God Vindicates His Own – 6:24-28

²⁴ The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. ²⁵ Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! ²⁶ "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever. ²⁷ "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." ²⁸ So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Daniel 6:24–28 (NASB95)

Those who had wrongly created this plot to ensnare Daniel should have realized that such lies and evil intent would one day be discovered and there would be a high price to pay. Apparently, they thought they were too clever to be discovered. People today have the same delusions in thinking that targeting political enemies with such things as harassment from the IRS or falsifying records in governmental agencies so they could get a bonus in their pay or changing test answers in evaluations of learning in certain public schools would never be discovered.

In the struggle of good versus evil, the lesson of this account in the life of Daniel should encourage us to know that good overcomes evil in the end and that those who oppose God will not prosper but will be judged and punished. While physical kingdoms rise and fall and eventually pass away, the eternal spiritual Kingdom of God is forever.