

Daniel: Three Lessons

Daniel 6:1-4, 10-11, 16-23, 25-28

As we wrap up our study of Daniel, I want to share today about three lessons we learn about this Godly man in the sixth chapter. We have already seen how he stood head and shoulders above those among whom he served in the Kingdom of Babylon. Because he was faithful to God, he was the only one who could interpret the dreams the king had. He was the only one who could understand and explain the handwriting on the wall. Daniel stayed close to God and God was able to use him in powerful and effective ways.

In this particular chapter, there are three important and valuable lessons we can learn about living life as a member of God's family. They are:

- Do your best for God
- Be faithful in your worship of God
- Trust God for all things.

In the first four verses, we see how Daniel was serving God, and God was using him to serve the king. Now, Daniel could very easily, and we might say, justifiably, taken the attitude that he was there as a captive, it was not where he wanted to be and why should he work hard to serve the king? Actually, by this time in his life, he was in his eighties and had served two other kings before Darius, and would still serve another.

So, long before, he had established himself as a trustworthy man. How did he do that? By trusting God and serving God first. He was a man of integrity. He knew that only by placing God first in his life would he be able to do any job to the very best of his ability. Many of us tend to forget that lesson.

All too often, if we don't get the recognition we feel we deserve, we take the attitude: Why should I try to do my best, nobody cares anyhow. We follow our friends or co-workers and do the same things they do. If they get upset about something, we join in sympathy. We can't be bothered about checking the facts, if they are angry, we get angry, too.

I read about a pastor who served a church in the steel mill areas of Pittsburgh many years ago. He was surprised when one of his church members told him that the workers were being pressured by the union about their work load. As they discussed it, he was even more surprised to learn that the union wanted the workers to keep their work to a minimum. If someone worked harder and did his or her very best, they were making the others look bad.

That's what happened to Daniel. We are told in verse 3, " Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom." He was working too hard, doing too good a job and the others, doing the same type of work, began to get jealous. They began looking for a way to "get him."

You see, I believe Daniel lived his entire life before God. Like most of you, he was not called to be a preacher. Serving God was a lifestyle, not a job or position. He did not spend his days doing

“ministry.” Instead, he was a spiritual man who did his work for God, in the presence of God. You could say that his work was an offering to God.

This being the political season, as various people start running for elected offices from local and state to national, we see a lot of claims being made and a lot of facts being disputed and a lot of false information being told to the public only to be retracted – once someone (usually their opponent) shows them to be wrong. We wonder about the integrity of these individuals. That was something the king recognized in Daniel – integrity.

Perhaps you saw the headline in Tuesday’s Chronicle: “Retrial near, Eversole opts to step down.” It has been going on for the last couple of years: Harris County Commissioner Jerry Eversole was tried last year on corruption charges and it ended in a mistrial. As the headline says, he was going to be retried for, apparently, steering county projects to a friend’s company. Then, on Thursday, a new headline: Eversole to plead guilty to one count. All this because he apparently did his job to help himself, not to live his life before God. Integrity is such an important quality for life, but something that seems to be more and more difficult to find.

When my oldest son was 16, he had a job working in a cafeteria at the local shopping mall. One snowy afternoon, as he was leaving for work, I warned him to come straight home from work, because the snow was only going to get worse. About the time he should have arrived at home, my phone rang. My son said, “Dad, I slipped on the snow and went off the road, through a man’s fence.” I asked where this happened, and he sheepishly told me on the way home from his girlfriend’s house. It took a while to rebuild my trust in him.

Several times, over the course of my ministry, I went to an Evangelism Conference at a church in Arizona. At one of those conferences, the Senior Pastor shared an event in his life that was a test of his integrity. He took his car to a car wash. While the car was going through the system, he picked up a couple of audio tapes (remember those?), and paid for them along with the car wash. When he got outside, he looked at the change he had been given by the young lady cashier. She had given him something like an extra \$10.00. He went back and showed her the mistake she had made and handed her the extra \$10.00. Her comment was that she knew what she had done, she had worshiped at his church the Sunday before when he preached about integrity. She was wondering if he practiced what he preached.

You see, that’s what Daniel was doing. He lived his life for God and did everything to the best of his ability to please God, not to please others. In his case, it drew the scrutiny and the anger of his fellow workers. That may very likely happen to you. If you live your life for God and do the best you can for Him, it may cause you some very painful times, some very hurtful reactions from those around you. But you have to answer the question: Do I want God’s approval? Or do I want my friend’s or co-worker’s approval?

The Bible says: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Well, Daniel's coworkers were really angry that this "foreigner" may very well become their boss. It was bad enough that he was their equal! And, as we saw, they could find no fault in his work or his life. So, they worked out a plan to trap him. They played on the king's ego and got him to sign a decree that only he, the king, could be worshiped for the next 30 days. The king went for it hook, line and sinker and signed the decree – in a way that even he could not rescind.

So, in the next section of this sixth chapter of Daniel, we find that Daniel heard about the decree, and what did he do? He went to his room and, as he always did, got down on his knees and prayed to God. That, of course, is exactly what his enemies expected him to do. The trap was set and Daniel took the bait. But not really. He just kept on doing what he always did. He was not going to allow anyone, the king included, to change his worship habits.

I believe there is an important lesson for us in this piece of Daniel's life story: Don't let anyone or anything change your worship pattern! You see, Daniel didn't stop worshiping. He didn't go and hide to worship. He didn't change his worship pattern or change churches. He didn't change anything. He kept on doing what he always did. There are times when you may get upset about what one of us pastors says in a sermon. There may be times when someone gripes about a song we sing. I've even heard of people getting all bent out of shape over a visitor sitting in "their" pew. We are all human, aren't we? But, I believe it is important that we not stop coming to worship because of something that irks us. It is important that we keep our worship patterns, even when challenged for doing what we do.

Let's face it. Daniel knew what the king's decree said. He knew exactly what the consequences would be. But he didn't change anything. He kept his worship and prayer schedule three times a day, every day. He was faithful in spite of what others may say, in spite of what the government decreed. I know I'm repeating myself, but I believe it is a very important point: Don't change your worship or prayer times for anyone or anything. It may cost you a friend, maybe even a job, but it will please God and will be a powerful statement to all who know you of your faith and trust in God.

Now, I know there are those who just have too many things to do to take the time to worship every Sunday. Even when you are out of town, find a place to worship and spend that time with God. I used to tell the members of my church to be sure and worship somewhere when they were not able to come to our church; and bring back any ideas they use at that church that might help our folks feel closer to God in worship. There are those who just can't seem to find the time for prayer. Daniel was one of the busiest men in the kingdom of Babylon. He was one of the top three administrators. But he still found time to go to his room and pray three times a day. I read about a man who had a sign on the wall of his office. It read, "When you are faced with a busy day, save precious time by skipping your devotions. Signed, Satan."

There was a pastor, one time, who was constantly being bugged by one of his church members who wanted to serve as an Elder. The pastor wondered about the man's spiritual commitment, as he didn't seem to be regular in his worship attendance and he didn't seem to have any organized prayer life. Finally, the pastor visited him in his home and learned that as soon as he came home from work, the man sat down and

watched TV continuously until bedtime. How could he help lead the people of God, if he spent no time with God himself?

Most of the churches I have served have been small churches with limited opportunities for spiritual growth and development. They were limited primarily because of the lack of personnel to help organize and lead them. One of the things I love about First Presbyterian of Kingwood is the many different opportunities to learn and grow and find support for your spiritual life. If you need more discipline or guidance in growing spiritually, I would encourage you to take another look at the many opportunities listed in the weekly.

You will recall the message from a couple of weeks ago on Daniel three. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced a similar situation. They refused to bow down and worship the idol of king Nebuchadnezzar. Different king, but once again a king set loose on an ego trip by those who would try to destroy men who refused to worship anyone but the God of Heaven and earth. Perhaps Daniel remembered the words of the Psalmist: "Honor the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." (Psalm 29:2 NLT)

The third lesson we learn from Daniel in Chapter 6 is: Trust God for all things. Let's face it, Daniel knew what was going on. He knew about the edict of the king. He knew what the consequences would be. But he put his worship of God ahead of any fears for himself. He trusted God for whatever might happen. It's interesting, isn't it, how, when our faith is tested, we are driven to a deeper level of trust in God?

The commercial begins with a young girl standing alone in a picturesque meadow. The camera then pans to another part of the field where it shows a gigantic African rhinoceros. The ominous beast begins a lethal charge towards the girl, whose serene and happy face remains unmoved. As the rhinoceros gets closer, the words appear on the screen, "Trust is not being afraid." A split second before the rhino tramples the helpless child, it stops, and the girl, her smile never wavering, reaches up and pets the animal on its massive horn. The final words then appear, "even when you are vulnerable." The commercial was designed to tout the abilities of an insurance company to protect its clients from the uncertainties of life. How much more does it describe the believer, who can confidently say with the psalmist, "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'"

Daniel had learned to trust God in all things. He had demonstrated that over and over throughout his life. Evidently King Darius had seen that because, even though he was not a believer, his comment to Daniel as he was tossed into the lion's den, was: "*May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!*" (Vs. 16b)

You know, it's not easy to just trust God and let Him take charge of our situations and circumstances and work them out for us. And, let's face it, we don't face extremely difficult situations, sometimes life and death situations or financial make or break situations, very often. We can give thanks to God for that. But when we do, if we have been living a life of faith and trust in God, we can turn those times over to Him to work through for us.

Since we are about to start our stewardship campaign, let me share a personal experience with you. A number of years ago, my wife and I were living in Willis. We had returned from serving a church in Australia, and did not have a call to a new church when we returned. We bought a house, and I began doing some secular work while searching for a new call. It was not an easy time for us. As we were running out of money, the Lord finally led us to a call at the little church in Jones Creek, in southern Brazoria County. We put our house in Willis on the market and I started commuting/living in the manse the church owned. After six months of that, we decided it was time to make a formal move to Jones Creek. We got moved in, but continued to struggle with the mortgage and taxes on the home we had moved from – and we had not had a single offer.

One day, I was looking at our finances, and said to Linda, “You know, we are not tithing our income. We really should do that.” We talked about it, and were not sure how we could possibly give ten percent of my salary to the church. But, we decided to trust God and give that tithe. The next Sunday, I wrote a check for one tenth of my semi-monthly salary, and put it in the offering. When we got home that day, there was a message from our realtor saying she had a contract on the house. It went through, and we were able to continue to make it financially. Once again, the Proverb held true: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.”

You see, friends, Daniel was a man who loved God and knew he could trust Him in all things. These three lessons are very important ones for our life of faith. Do your best as if you are doing it for God. Include Him in all you do and trust Him with the outcome.

Second, keep your worship of God, no matter what anyone says. Today, we find organizations like the ACLU that want to purge all references to God and Jesus from public life. That’s kind of what Daniel’s coworkers conned Darius into doing by proclaiming that people could only worship the king. As you see that happening, be a Daniel. Say to yourself and anyone else who may be listening, I will worship God always. I will not change my worship, my prayer, my faith for anyone or any government.

The third lesson is to trust God in all things. So don’t be discouraged or disheartened. Trust God to carry you through even a test as deadly or as scary as a lion’s den. Don’t test God, like the Ukranian man I wrote about in the weekly. But, do trust Him when others try to turn you from your faith and worship. Let any such efforts drive you closer to God, not away from Him.