

Daniel 6

Exegetical Big Idea: Unlike those around him, Daniel's life and actions are governed by his reverent fear of the Lord, which bring about his salvation and glorifies the Lord.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The fear of the Lord governs the life of the Christian.**

Fallen Condition Focus: If Christians do not live life in the lived-out conviction of who God is and what he does, then we are susceptible to all kinds of infidelity to our Lord and fear of what man may do or think.

Background:

We are looking today at the last narrative part of the book of Daniel. Daniel and his friends were taken into captivity from Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faithful in exile and rose in prominence in Babylon. The last we saw of the three friends is when God rescued them from the fiery furnace after refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. Daniel himself survived through the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and through Belshazzar's reign. And now a new king is ruling. He is not a Babylonian king however, because if you remember in the last chapter, in a single night the Babylonian empire fell to a Mede named Darius.

This is where we pick up the story today. Darius the Mede is ruling in what is now the Medo-Persian empire and he has recognized Daniel as useful to him and Daniel is in his service.

Intro:

Have you ever stopped to think about how many cars there are on the road every day? It's a lot. Have you ever stopped and think about how many times you get into a vehicle every week. That's big number too. It amazes me, that when you compare the number of people driving at any given moment, and the number of accidents on the road, that those numbers are not even close. There are exponentially more successful trips taken in a car, than there are accidents. Why is this?

Well for one thing we have rules of the road. White lines show which lanes to drive in. Coloured lights show whose turn it is at an intersection. Signs tell us different things like which roads are one way or how fast you can drive or when to let other cars go first.

Sure these rules exist, but what is physically stopping someone from breaking these rules and driving wherever they want? Nothing! White lights and coloured lights are not stopping you from driving like a maniac. What is it that generally keeps people following these rules? It is a recognition that these rules are good, and that breaking these rules can be serious trouble! It is a reverent respect for the rules of the road.

Let's think along those same lines for the Christian life. What is it that governs the life of the Christian? What is it that makes the Christian act like a Christian? Now we might say well the Word of God does. And yes that's true on one level, but just like the white lines on the road, if you don't adhere to the Word of God, it does you no good! God's Word is not physically stopping the Christian from acting like an unbeliever. What is it that drives the Christian to live a life of integrity as he or she strive to obey God? And I'm not just talking acting like a Christian when other people are around, I'm talking honouring the Lord even when we're all alone.

See unlike the rules of the road, there is a person behind the commands given to us in the Bible. God has set out for us plainly who he is, what he does, and how we ought to live in accordance to that. Because God is behind his Words, I think it is the fear of the Lord that governs the life of the Christian.

Now when we're talking about the fear of the Lord, I want to be as clear as I possibly can. What I do *not* mean is that fearing God is like fearing a grumpy old man who at any minute can get mad at you for no reason. What I mean by fearing the Lord is having a lived-out conviction of who God is and what he does.

God is Holy, we are not. God is infinitely powerful, we are not. God is just, he will punish our sin. God made us and owns us, we do not belong to ourselves. God has given his people commands by which we are to live. God takes rebellion and sin seriously, and we should to. But also, as we will see, God is infinitely good, and gracious, and merciful, and faithful to his people.

I think as we look at Daniel 6, we see a man who is nearing the end of his life, but for his whole life he has been governed by the fear of the Lord. This is the last narrative section of the book of Daniel, and we are seeing here in one sense the same thing we've seen in the previous chapters with Daniel and his friends, that God alone is King over all, his kingdom is supreme and eternal, and his people's lives are governed by the reverent fear of this King.

The fear of the Lord governs the life of the Christian.

VV. 1-9 Fearing the Lord drives the Christian to holiness.

As we start off we are already seeing Daniel in a high position. Daniel is one of three high officials in the kingdom under whom 120 junior officials report. The king does this we are told so that he would not suffer loss. Obviously Daniel and these other two high officials are amazing at what they do that they can be trusted with such a position. But Daniel so distinguishes himself among the three high officials that we are told in verse 3 that because Daniel had "an excellent spirit in him" the king was planning on making him basically ruler of the entire Persian kingdom under only the king himself.

Naturally, this creates so jealousy among the other officials and they see out a way to smear Daniel's name and stop his promotion. But look at what happens when they try and do that in verse 4. They cannot find any ground for complaint against Daniel in regards to the kingdom. There was no fault found in him. Are we supposed to understand from this that Daniel never made a secret deal for his own benefit? That Daniel never took any bribes for personal gain? That Daniel never backstabbed anyone or lied or cheated? Yes! That's exactly what we're supposed to understand from this!

Why is this? Because while Daniel is in service to the king, he knows who is true King is. Daniel is above all, a servant of the most high. Daniel fears the Lord, and this drives him towards holiness.

God's people should strive for this type of integrity. That even when our enemies are looking for dirt to destroy us that they find none. I pray that we would be a people who now who are King is, and we reflect him in our everyday lives. Remember Daniel did not wake up one day with no dirt on his record. This is a daily striving for holiness because he fears the Lord. This is a desire to glorify the Lord, when there is no one else around to see.

[It has been my experience with kids that they are better at obeying when they know mom and dad are keeping an eye on them. Our kitchen can see directly into the back room where the kids often play. I can

tell that they know when I'm in the kitchen cooking or cleaning up, and that I am watching to see who will start a fight. Now I'm glad they obey more when I'm watching, but that's not what I really want. I don't want my kids just to behave when they know I'm watching. Yes, I want them to avoid the consequence of their sin, but I also want them to obey because dad gave them rules, and to know dad gave them these rule because it's good for them and because I love them!]

It's not good enough to act like a Christian in front of other Christians because there are eyes on us! That's not a fear of God, that's a fear of man. We should strive for obedience because we know the commands of God are good, and that he gave them to us out of his love for us, and also that God takes our rebellion seriously! That's a fear of God that leads to holy living!

Well because of Daniel's integrity, they cannot find any grounds to accuse him of anything according to the law of the kingdom, so they resort to trickery.

Verses 6-7 outline their plan. First off, they lie to the king. Look at their claim, "all the high officials of the kingdom..." are in agreement. They are obviously tricking the king into thinking that Daniel is on board with this as well; that Daniel thinks this is a great idea.

And the idea? Well it's to make a decree that for the next 30 days, nobody should make a petition to anyone except the king. Why does this work? At first it seems like an outrageous idea. But it appeals directly to the pride of the king. What this decree is doing, is making people declare that everything they need or want comes solely from the king. You don't need to go anywhere else to get anything at all. The king is your source for all things.

But Daniel knows who his King is. Daniel knows who his need is, and it's not Darius. Daniel is not about to give up his practice of honouring his God by petitioning him alone for all his needs. Daniel fears the Lord.

The fear of the Lord governs the life of the Christian.

This leads us into the next few verses:

VV. 10-15 The fear of the Lord leads to dependency on him.

So Daniel hears of the decree and he's got a difficult decision to make. One the one hand, if Daniel obeys, he acknowledges that Darius is on some level his god, meaning that he admits that Darius is the one who Daniel needs.

On the other hand, if Daniel disobeys, he would look disloyal and treasonous to the king, which he's not! Daniel has been serving the king faithfully and honourably

Notice here that Daniel here is not looking for trouble. Instead, he wants to live a quiet life. Daniel is not a trouble maker! He doesn't look for reasons to cause division or poke those in authority over him. Daniel would not be in the position he is in now if he did not aim to serve those in authority over him with diligence and honour. Daniel's aim for his whole life is to serve where he is called, out of reverence for God. Fearing the Lord above anyone else does not mean looking for fights or asking for trouble. It means going about our lives humbly, with the aim of glorifying God in all we do, wherever he may have put us. Daniel is not governed by the fear of the king or the praise of man, but by the fear of God.

We cannot help but take note of a little statement in verse 10. When Daniel knew that the king had issued his decree, Daniel goes to his house, open his windows that face Jerusalem and he prays. But the end of the verse give us this statement “as he had done previously”.

Here is a guy who has the Spirit of God powerfully working in him to give wise counsel to the king. God enables him to govern wisely and interpret dreams. But Daniel knows that nothing he does has any power to it without the power of prayer. I think we all know that we should pray. But I wonder how many of us are truly convinced that we *need* to pray. Individually, but also together as a church.

I say with shame that as a leader of this church, my heart does not believe in the necessity of prayer as much as I should. I confess that in all the business of getting things done, taking time away of “work” to pray too often does not happen. And the sad reality is that a heart that does not see the necessity of prayer is a heart of pride. It is a heart that says that my ability is more important than God’s ability.

[Let’s say you buy a hamster from the pet store. And the person at the pet store tells you to give him plenty of food and water. So you take the hamster home and you put him in his cage with the shavings and a wheel to run in, but you ignore the advice from the pet store because the hamster looks perfectly fine to you, and besides, it takes time to get the food out and fill the water jug. The next day you play with the hamster and again he seems fine so again you don’t bother giving him food or water. You play with him the next day and same thing. But the next morning you wake up and the hamster is barely alive and not moving. Well now clearly the hamster needs food and water so you take the time to get the dish and put food in it and fill the jug with water. Is that how you take care of a hamster? No! You need to always have fresh food and water for him]

But isn’t that how many of us treat our prayer lives. Everything seems to be going just fine so we rely on our own abilities and strengths, until there is an emergency. Then we desperately call out to God! Now God is a gracious God, but oh how we desperately need God to work in our hearts with this chapter today to plant deep within us a fear of the Lord that drives us to pray continually. The fact that our monthly prayer meetings have 6-10 people on average is I think a solid indication that I am not alone in this failing.

People who know their dependency on God are praying people, and praying people, are people who fear the Lord. Daniel prays because he knows there is no one to fear but God alone.

Well Daniel prays as planned and the officials catch him in the act. They report this to the king and hear from the king’s own mouth that his decree stands and cannot be revoked. But when the king is told that it is Daniel, one of the exiles who has broken this law, he is “much distressed” as verse 14 tells us.

Note that deliverance cannot come from the king. Even the king of most of the world at the time cannot save Daniel. V14. He is distressed. He labours till evening. Do you see the irony? The decree is put in place to appeal to the pride of the king that nobody needs to go outside of himself to receive what they need. And yet, when Daniel needs something, the king is not able to supply it! Thus proving, if you needed any proof, that the decree was worthless and foolish. As we will see, Daniel petitions the only one who can meet all his needs. Like Daniel, it is not our job to know the outcome of the situation, it’s our job to depend that God will work it out.

The fear of the Lord governs the life of the Christian.

VV. 16-24 Fearing the Lord and trusting the Lord go hand in hand.

Daniel is brought to the king under his command and cast into the lion's den. We do get a glimpse of hope here when the king says to Daniel "may your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you". But of course, pretending for a moment that we don't know the story, this is no guarantee. The friends thrown into the fiery furnace said to the king just before they were thrown in that God is able to rescue them, but even if he doesn't, they will not bow down to the statue.

Well Daniel is thrown in and a stone seals the mouth of the den we are told in verse 17. Not only that, but the stone is sealed with the king's ring and the rings of his officials. I bet they were happy. I can picture the scene where the stone is placed in front, sealing Daniel's fate so they thought. The king who is distressed reluctantly seals it with his ring, then the smiling officials use their rings to seal the stone. And for added measure verse 17 that they do this "so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel". Oh what irony of that statement! They think that their efforts are ensuring that Daniel's situation is not changed from bad to good. The reality is that Daniel's situation truly has not changed, but not because of them. Daniel was never in a bad situation because the sovereign hand of is faithful God was always upon him. God's mind is not changed concerning Daniel.

We are held in suspense just like the king, until the break of dawn when the king race to the den and calls out in an anguished voice "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" We already know the answer, of course he has! Daniel answers back in verse 21.

One commentator said he imagined a scene where Daniel was cuddled up next to a furry lion talking on and on to an angel about heavenly things, until they were rudely interrupted by Darius' question. I'm not sure it happened exactly like that, but one thing we get the impression of, that Darius' night was worse than Daniel's!

God sent his angel to shut the lion's mouth. Why? Look at verse 21. "Because I was found blameless before him, and also before you, oh king." Daniel would be judged by God's law, not any man's. Daniel trusts in the justice of God. Daniel fears the Lord, so he trusts the Lord.

[Let's say I own an exclusive fancy restaurant that is insanely expensive. Only the richest and most popular people get into the restaurant. You can try and make a reservation but it's always full. You can try and stand in line but it's always long and most people don't get it. But suppose I give you a call one evening and you say "hey, why don't you swing by the restaurant tonight? Dinner is on me." Now you can think of all the reasons why you would never get in. You don't have a reservation. The line is too long. You're not a celebrity so they won't let you in. The food is too expensive. Or option 2 is you can trust me. You can come to the restaurant. Walk past the line. Walk past the celebrities to the head table I've set aside for you. Get served expensive food, and have it all paid for. Why did you get in and get a table and a free meal? Because you're richer or better than anyone else there? No! Because you trusted.]

Look at verse 23. Why ultimately was he saved? Was it because he was better than anyone else? Was it because he deserved this? Nope. Because he trusted in his God.

How can we not see the lions' den as pointing to something more? Daniel is "taken up out of the den". Is this not a picture of the hope that the Christian has?

In the same way, man tried to condemn Christ by man's law. They too tried to seal the tomb with a stone and sealed it. Those who wanted the death Jesus stood by and approved of what was going on. But none of this would stop God's will being done.

There is a warning here. Death swallowed up those who plotted against Daniel. Death swallowed up those who plotted against Christ. But where is Christ now? He is alive, and they are still dead. Where is Daniel now? In the presence of Christ, with the hope of a bodily resurrection one day. Death will not have the final say over those who are in Christ. But death will swallow up those who are not in Christ.

All of us will be judged according to God's law, not any man made one. So it's foolish to obey man's law when it contradicts God's law! Not only was the king's law absurd because the king could never be God, but it was immoral because it required others to admit that the king was above God. Daniel would rather be guilty of the king's law, and innocent in God's sight. And because of this, God caused Daniel to stand.

Do you fear the Lord? Do you trust him? He has made it clear in his Word that faith in Christ alone leads to everlasting life and that rejecting the gift of Christ leads to eternal damnation. We will all one day stand before God and be judged according to his law, not man's. Does Christ's righteousness apply to you, or will you stand before him with our own good works? I chose the wording for this sermon very carefully when I say that "The fear of the Lord *governs* the life of the Christian". Does the fear of God govern you? If it doesn't, you stand under the judgement of God. Turn to God now and ask for forgiveness and trust in his salvation. He is merciful and will grant it in Christ.

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VV. 25-28 Through his people, God causes his goodness and glory to be declared to the nations.

After Daniel is rescued from the lion's den and the officials and their families who plotted against Daniel are thrown in instead, the king sends out a royal message in verse. 25. Now it's interesting to whom he sends this message to. He is sending it to "all peoples, nations, languages that dwell on the earth".

He want to declare something to the entire world. And what is his message? That Daniel's God is the God to fear. Why? God alone is the living God, all others are lifeless. God's kingdom shall never end, all others rise and fall at his command. God alone delivers and rescues, no earthy king can do that. God alone works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth.

But look who is the subject of this royal announcement. It isn't Daniel. God's glory is declared to the nations, not Daniels. God's glory is displayed *through* Daniel. More accurately, God's glory is displayed through the faithful hardship of Daniel.

[Parents, and in particular mothers, go through a lot before a baby is born. Through the faithful endurance of a mother, a baby is born into the world. Without that perseverance and labour of love, we wouldn't have the gift of children.]

This would have never gone out if Daniel was not thrown into the lion's den. Often we want to be delivered from the lion's den, and out of every trouble on this earth, but the reality is that God will often use our faithfulness through the hardships to show his faithfulness.

Paul uses this analogy when he writes to the Galatian church that it's like he is in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in them. God secures us through hardships and troubles, causing us to trust him and sanctifying us so that Christ is formed in us. And all this is for the purpose of declaring his glory to the nations.

When we suffer for doing good, we show the worth of the glory of God. We show that we are suffering because we are holding out for something better. Something eternal and fulfilling. We are holding out for the glory of God. I'm not talking about suffering because of doing evil. If we suffer because of our own sin that's just called consequences. But if we suffer for the sake of Christ, God uses us as a declaration that he is worth it. We declare the glory of God and God draws people to himself through us.

We persevere now, for the better that is to come.

Look at how this passage ends. Daniel prospered until reign of Cyrus. That's the last comment on Daniel's life we have.

Daniel likely died in exile. God did not, in his sovereign grace, allow Daniel to return to Israel as far as we can tell. And yet he prospered. Daniel's reward was not in exile, nor was it for that matter in returning to Israel, but instead in the New Heaven's and the New Earth.

I go back to the theme of the church in exile. Whether we suffer or prosper in this exile, may we fear the Lord. May we have a lived-out conviction of who God is and what he does. May we trust that we, like Daniel will enter into the Promised Land.

May our lives be governed by the Fear of the Lord.