

Sermon – 30/09/2007 am

A Man of Prayer

Study Text: Daniel 6:10–17

Daniel and his friends were carried off to a foreign land – a heathen land. They could no longer go to the Jerusalem temple to worship God. They saw most people going off to worship idols. Such worship would have colourful with lots of music. To go along would have made living in this city much easier because everyone was going. It was in some ways like living in Sydney.

Idol worship was in fact demanded of Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of himself and commanded everyone to fall down and worship. But these young men told the king *we do not serve your gods nor will we worship the gold image you have set up* (3:18). Daniel was not with them at the time they faced the fiery furnace, but now he faces his own trial. To pray or not to pray, that was the question.

Decree

Out of jealousy Daniel's colleagues had drafted a wicked decree aimed at his destruction. They lobbied the king to sign this decree which would forbid prayer to any god or man for thirty days, except to the king. Satan was actively working in these men to destroy a man of God. Daniel was a faithful witness in this pagan place, as we have seen, so the enemy of God wanted him taken out. The wicked men desperately wanted Daniel in the den of lions.

The decree was valid for just thirty days. If there was any substance to this religious law why was it not an ongoing decree? Clearly this was religion designed by men for their immediate benefit. Man-made religions are useful in this way – you can change the rules as you like. Man made rules often cater to man's fallen nature. Men turn to Islam or to Mormonism so they can have more wives. Some even try to change the teaching of the Bible to suit themselves.

There would also have been politics behind the thirty days. They flattered the king as they lobbied him, and probably suggested that the decree would be no big deal – it was just for thirty days. Here was Satan parading as an angel of light, as Paul would say (II Corinthians 11:14).

Decision

When Daniel heard that this decree was signed he went home (6:10). What would Daniel do? What were his options? He could have stopped praying for thirty days – just thirty days. That way he would escape being fed to the hungry lions. For some Christians this would not even be a decision to make for they rarely pray anyway. One month without prayer would be no big deal for some.

Others might reason that to stop praying is not a serious sin. After all Daniel was not being forced to worship idols like his friends, just to stop praying. Moreover, this was the law. Do

you think it polite not to pray when you have visitors or when you are in public? Should Christians not offend others by their prayer or reading of the Bible!

Imagine you were there with Daniel and he sought your counsel. How would you have counselled him? What do you do when sport or a family picnic clashes with going to church? I remember when church time had to be changed because of a TV show. What do you do when friends drop in just as you are going to church? Don't forget that for Daniel the stakes were much higher than they are for you – it was stop praying or die! Maybe we should let Daniel counsel us!

Daniel, it appears, did not spend hours agonising over what he should do. He knew from the outset what he must do. He went home and went to his upper room. He did not go to confront the king, or attack his enemies. He did just what he had done every day since he was a boy. He went to his upper room, knelt down and prayed. How disciplined is your prayer life? Are you a 'spontaneous' prayer person, or is your prayer as regular as your meals?

Do you find that you are too busy to pray? A friend of mine once tried praying as he walked to work. Sure we can call upon the Lord in any place at anytime time, but he does like to have your full attention. Daniel was a governor in the most powerful kingdom on earth. I imagine he was a busy man. But he made the time to pray, not just once a day, not just twice a day but three times a day! Daniel never went to work before praying and never went to bed without praying.

What did Daniel say in all his prayers? Do run out of things to say to the Lord? It would be wonderful to know all that Daniel said. We do have one of his prayers in a later chapter (Daniel 9). It is one of the few-recorded prayers in the Bible – apart from the Psalms. But we do know something from what is written in this passage. *He prayed and gave thanks to before his God* (6:10). Thanksgiving is an essential element of prayer. If you have nothing to thank God for you should question your salvation. What about Jesus who died for you that you might live!

It has been suggested that Psalm 92 would have been a fitting prayer for Daniel at this time. Many of the Psalms are prayers and we can use these as a guide to prayer. After giving thanks, Daniel would have brought his concerns before the Lord. He would have asked the Lord to help him and been assured that God indeed was powerful to deliver him from the hands of his enemies.

How did Daniel pray? He went to his upper room, and facing Jerusalem, knelt down and prayed. He did not make a public show of praying like the Pharisees, but at the same time he was not ashamed to be seen in prayer. He did not go into hiding for fear of being seen. He continued *steadfast in prayer* as his custom (Romans 12:12).

He prayed toward Jerusalem, for God's presence was in the temple (or had been). Solomon spoke of praying towards the temple when he dedicated it with prayer (I Kings 8). This was not a meaningless ritual but was a way of focussing upon God, and the covenant he made with Israel. It is good to focus on the works of God and his covenant promises when we come before him in prayer. For this reason it is good to read the Word of God before you pray.

Deliver

His enemies could find no fault in Daniel because he was faithful (6:4). Sure enough, when they came to spy on him they found him being faithful to his God. Their trap had worked. They caught Daniel breaking their law and raced off to tell the king. *That Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah* (6:13). He was not ‘Daniel the governor’. Daniel had been in Babylon for some eighty years but still they called him a captive from Judah. In their jealousy they derided Daniel in every way they could think of.

Time does not make life in this world any easier for a child of God. If you think life will get easier, if you think that corruption, dishonesty and idolatry will decrease, then think again. Sure we pray for revival and that many will be saved, but ultimately only the coming of the Lord will set things right in this fallen world. This world must pass away to make way for the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness. While we live in this world we will face tribulation. You cannot love the world and love God also (I John 2:15). It is just like it was in the days of Noah.

King Darius, who was fond of Daniel and planned to promote him, realised his mistake. He ‘kicked himself’ for being tricked into making this wicked law. He tried desperately to get Daniel out of this mess, but he was in a corner. He was just where Daniel’s enemies wanted him. The law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed.

Darius reminds us another ruler called Pilate. In fact the whole scene is reflected in the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews plotted to get Jesus. They demanded of him if he was the Christ, the Son of God. If Jesus said ‘yes’ they would charge him with blasphemy, but if he said ‘no’ Jesus would be denying the truth. Like Darius, Pilate was tricked into signing the death warrant of an innocent man and regretted doing so only when it was too late.

Den of Lions

Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. He came silently like a lamb to the slaughter. The king expressed confidence that his *God whom you serve continually will deliver you* (6:16). That the king should express such confidence in God saving Daniel shows how Daniel must have witnessed to him. Even under the threat of death like Paul and Silas, Daniel maintained a faithful witness to the Lord.

What do people around you know about God from your witness? Do they see you honouring God in all things and putting Jesus before all others – before work, before study, before friends, before family? Have you ever said to your friend ‘I cannot come to your party because I am going to church’? Imagine how God would be glorified if you acted in this way. Do people see that you are sincere and serious about following Jesus?

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