

**Daniel 6:1-28 (1984 NIV)**  
***Faith That Says “No”***

**Introduction**

Legend has it that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, a little monk named Telemachus from Asia Minor was led by an inner voice to go to Rome without knowing why. He followed the crowds to the Coliseum.

Two gladiators were fighting. One fell and the other was about to plunge his sword into the chest of the fallen one. Telemachus jumped down from where he was in the stands and ran to them. Standing in between them, he tried to stop them, shouting three times, “In the name of Christ, stop it!”

The crowd was enraged that someone would dare to interfere with their entertainment. Hence, they picked up stones and threw them at Telemachus who refused to run away. Rather, he faced the hurling stones with determined resolve to stop the two gladiators from fighting each other. Telemachus eventually was stoned to death by the crowd.

When the crowd saw the little monk lying dead in a pool of blood, they fell silent, leaving the stadium, one by one. Because of Telemachus’ death, three days later, the Roman Emperor by decree ended the blood sports.

Telemachus stood on what he believed and paid the price with his life, BUT he made a significant difference for the name of Christ in a pagan world.

(<https://bible.org/illustration/last-gladiators>)

Christians live in a world of spiritual hostility where the temptation to compromise our faith is with us every day. In some parts of the world, standing up for Christ means suffering and death. In some other countries, it means ostracism, ridicule, scorn, being left out, and perhaps being passed over.

The book of Daniel tells us how to live for God in a hostile environment. His example shows us that it can be done but not without being disadvantaged. If you don’t compromise and go along, you may get into trouble sooner or later.

The people who hated Daniel were no friends of God. They came after his faith because they could find no fault in him. Two things about him in Chapter 6:

- Daniel was now a very old man. He came to Babylon as a teenager. All his adult life had been spent serving in the courts of various pagan rulers.
- He was now serving under a new king named Darius who ruled over a new kingdom, the Medo-Persian Empire. The names had changed but the spiritual challenge was the same.

Would Daniel remain faithful when the pressure was on? Would he say “yes” to the powers that be and say “no” to his God? Let’s answer these questions by first examining the first scene.

### **I. Scene 1 - Daniel 6:1-12**

As Chapter 6 opens, we find Daniel once again about to be promoted to high office. Daniel survived the downfall of Babylon in the hands of the Medo-Persians. He was even given a high position as administrator by Darius, the Medo-Persian conqueror. In fact, v. 3 tells us that he displayed such “exceptional qualities” (“excellent spirit” in NKJV) that Darius planned to elevate him to be some sort of a prime minister in the whole kingdom.

At this, the satraps and the other administrators tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs. The satraps were appointed to collect taxes and check rebellion, and they were responsible to the administrators who in turn were directly answerable to the king. They could find no corruption in Daniel because he was trustworthy; neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said in vv. 4-5, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

In Daniel’s case even his enemies had to admit he had no glaring weaknesses. No better thing could be said than for your enemies to admit that they can find nothing wrong with you. Daniel’s enemies had to admit that he had an “excellent spirit”.

To understand what this “excellent spirit” means, we have to look at 1:8 which says, “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine ...” Daniel had purposed in the heart from a young age not to defile himself with food or other things, but to keep himself pure for God’s sake.

- He stood by this purpose in his early years during the rule of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar by not defiling himself with the king’s food (Daniel 1).
- Many years later in his advanced age, Daniel again purposed in his heart during the rule of Darius not to defile himself with the corruption of his peers (Daniel 6).

In other words, he stood firm at the very beginning when he was young and at the time of King Darius when he was advanced in age. Daniel did not do the right things so that God could be the centre of his life. He first purposed in his

heart that God be the centre of his life so that he could do the right things all the days of his life.

We do well today by having this same purpose of Daniel. This right purpose will lead us to look for God's presence in our situation.

One man went to church on Sunday morning. He heard the organist miss a note during the prelude and that upset him. He saw a teenager talking when everybody was supposed to be bowed in silent prayer. He suspected that the usher was watching what he put into the offering bag and it enraged him. He caught the preacher mispronounced a certain word five times. Unable to tolerate any more, he slipped out during the closing hymn and vowed to himself, "Never again will I want to be a part of all this slip-shod hypocrisy!"

A second man was at the same service that Sunday. He heard the organist play a special arrangement of the hymn "A Mighty Fortress" and he was lifted up by the greatness of God's majesty. He heard a teenager take a brief moment to share with an unbelieving visitor the meaning of praying to God. When the usher handed him the offering bag, he was touched by the fact that it was a special offering for hungry children in a faraway land. He heard the sermon and thanked God for using the preacher to answer a question that had bothered him for a long time. After the service, he walked out of church saying to himself, "How can someone come here and not feel the presence of God?"

Both men came to the same church on the same Sunday for the same service. Each found what he was looking for.

What do we look for this Sunday morning? When we like Daniel purpose in our heart not to defile ourselves as God's people, not only will it sharpen our perception of right and wrong in the world, but also our sense of God's presence in where we are.

Daniel had "exceptional qualities" or "excellent spirit" not so much in terms of doing things well, but more in terms of his purposed resolve not to defile himself with anything that would displease his God. His right purpose developed right perception in him which in turn helped him do the right things and sense God's presence regardless of circumstances.

But Daniel was hated because he was successful and godly. Even when you do everything right, you still have to trust in God. Doing right is no guarantee everything will go right.

Let's suppose that your enemies decided to check you out the way the satraps came after Daniel. Suppose someone hired private investigators to look into every aspect of your life, public and private, past and present. What would they uncover? Suppose they checked out your ...

- Shopping habits
- Internet usage
- Favourite TV programmes
- Tax returns
- Business deals
- How you act on the job
- How you enjoy your fun with your peers
- How you deal with the opposite sex
- How you treat your family

Could any of us survive that kind of scrutiny? Daniel did. Try as they might, his enemies found nothing wrong in his life. He lived so consciously in God's presence that he was a man not perfect, but "above reproach".

Daniel did have one "flaw". He was utterly predictable in his daily prayers. He prayed every day at the same time in the same way so that his enemies realized this was where they could catch him.

So the satraps asked Darius to pass a 30-day law forbidding anyone to pray except to Darius. They said in effect, "O king! How would you like to be God for a month?" That appealed to the pride of Darius. So the king signed the law, knowing that it could not be repealed, not even by himself. He had no idea that Daniel was the intended target.

Daniel's enemies knew he would break the law—i.e. they knew Daniel would keep on praying just as he had always been doing. Daniel was a victim of his own faithfulness in prayer. He was predictably faithful to God. His troubles came not from his weakness, but from his strength.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been proclaimed, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. And three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had always been doing.

Note the last phrase in v. 10—"just as he had done before." For perhaps 80+ years Daniel had prayed three times a day—morning, afternoon, evening. So when his enemies tricked Darius into signing the 30-day law, Daniel still went ahead with his daily routine. He went home, knelt down, faced towards Jerusalem, and offered his prayers to God. He did it knowing that his adversaries would catch him.

If you stop praying, the world will stop bothering you. The lions won't come near you. Your friends will finally think you are normal again. Your boss will think you are one of the guys. The lions win when we are silent.

Certainly Daniel could take other options such that he need not have to disobey or be seen to disobey Darius' order.

- He could have simply closed the windows and the satraps wouldn't have seen him pray.
- He could have said, "I'll pray in my heart. No one will know." After all, he was being forced to do this and it was only for 30 days.
- He might have reasoned that by going along with the law, he could protect himself so that he would not jeopardize his influence and help to others.

But none of those excuses were needed because long ago Daniel had made up his mind to serve God no matter what. He just kept on doing what he had been doing all along.

By committing himself to continuing in prayer, he won the only battle where it mattered—i.e. in his heart. When he won there, the real lions were no problem. We think the miracle was that Daniel survived a night with the lions. But the greater miracle was that he remained steadfast in his heart not to defile his devotion to God by continuing to pray when his life was on the line.

Daniel was a responsible and upright official in the royal palace and he was loyal to the king. But he knew when and where to draw the line and make his convictions known. Though he was loyal to Darius, he would not defile his God when there's a conflict of interests. He would continue to pray to his God and not pay homage to his king. And what was he praying at this crisis moment?

As a captive in exile, Daniel must have remembered God's covenant to His people—i.e. if they were to humble themselves to pray, seek His face, and confess their sins, the Lord would deliver them and send them back to Jerusalem. Daniel had this concern in prayer. So he opened his window towards Jerusalem to pray and claim this promise of God. He was not so much praying for his personal emergency, but he was praying for the deliverance of his own people (the nation of Israel) "just as he had done before".

Daniel did not intentionally open his window as a defiant act so that he enemies could see him pray. He habitually opened his window towards Jerusalem every time he prayed for the deliverance of Israel. He did this as a gesture of his hope and faith in God's promise coming to pass "just as he had done before".

When we decide in our heart not to defile ourselves before God no matter what, saying "no" to the pressures of the world and "yes" to the persuasion of God will no longer be an onerous decision. Why? It is because this decision-making pattern has become a habitual, on-going lifestyle.

We now move on to examine the second scene.

## **II. Scene 2 – Daniel 6:13-28**

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When Darius realized he had been tricked. He immediately began seeking loopholes to prevent Daniel from being thrown to the lions. But even the king could not repeal his own law because that would make him look weak, inconsistent, and indecisive. No, the law must stand and Daniel must go to the lion's den. But Darius was hoping against hope that Daniel would be somehow saved. In v. 16 he wished Daniel well with these words, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" What a testimony this is to the reality of Daniel's faith. Even this pagan king could recognize Daniel's true faith in God and respected it.

So Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. It was a crude and cruel form of capital punishment. No one ever got out alive. Daniel would be no exception. Daniel was as good as dead the moment they threw him in. Or so they thought.

Daniel might believe that God would rescue him, but he could not be sure until the moment came. Perhaps he had some anxiety when they took him to the pit. But I'm sure he was praying as they flung him into the darkness of the den. He could hear the sound of the lions breathing a few feet away. But there were no roars, no menacing movements, and no teeth tearing into his flesh. As the seconds ticked away, he began to relax. Minutes passed and then hours and the lions still did not attack him. Daniel later said that an angel came to rescue him. And the lions became not like giant beasts, but like gentle pets.

But it was not the same for the king that same night. That night he didn't sleep well, but Daniel slept like a baby. The king tossed and turned, paced the floor, refused all offers of entertainment, and even refused to eat. Early in the morning he rushed to the lion's den, hoping against hope that Daniel had somehow survived. You note the difference in emotional state between Daniel in the den and Darius in his palace—Daniel was calm and restful; Darius was uptight and restless. Indeed, when all is said and done, it is better to be a child of God in a lion's den than to be a king without God in a royal palace.

It's true that God didn't prevent Daniel from being thrown into the den. But the Lord went in with him. That's why, when morning came, he was still alive and unharmed in any way. When they pulled him out, he had no wounds. No one had to apply any first aid on him or call an ambulance. Though he was an old man, he came out at least as healthy as when he went in. Indeed, God takes care of one who belongs to Him.

Back to Darius—when he came rushing to check on things early in the morning, he cried out in v. 26, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" He recognized the genuineness of Daniel's faith and though he did not believe himself, he had hoped that Daniel's God would deliver him.

Verse 23 tells us why the miracle happened—"He (Daniel) trusted in his God." For over 80 years Daniel's faith had rested in the God of Israel. Daniel simply

kept on trusting in God, and as a result, the lions couldn't touch him. Faith believes God, even when belief is unbelievable. Without dependence on God, nothing can happen that will matter for eternity's sake. But with dependence on God, even the humanly impossible can happen.

I was invited to speak at a church camp one time. The church asked me to share three messages with them. I thought the first two messages went very well. But not long after I finished my second message, I felt a sudden heaviness in heart and low in spirit which I could not explain. I said to myself, "What a time to feel like this." And I wondered how I could bring my exhortation to a befitting climax when I came on with the last message. I confided my struggle to my roommate and he prayed with me. And it was indeed a "power-packed" prayer! I was very much in prayer myself as I prepared to preach for the last time at this camp.

When I was preaching my last message, I felt I was strangely stammering and floundering at some points. It was a relief when I finally finished and sat down. I remember requesting to retire early that night. Perhaps I had a very busy schedule just before coming to the camp, and I was feeling worn out. I asked the Lord to recharge me physically, emotionally, and spiritually as I prayed myself to sleep that night.

The next day was a time of reflection and sharing. Many shared how one particular message had touched them at the camp. And you guess which one? It was the last message—the one that I preached feeling so weak in myself and praying so hard to the Lord to help me. Many sensed the Lord speaking to them through me with that message, and responded with some personal decisions and commitment in their heart.

I told my wife after I returned from the camp that it was "strange" that I spoke my most impacting message when I was feeling most weak and most dependent on God. She asked me, "What did you preach on?" I answered, "Repenting of sins and returning to God." She replied (and I believe with a touch of divine insight), "Of course you will feel weak. Satan will not let you speak so freely and boldly against him."

Indeed, we can do nothing without the Lord helping us in our infirmities. It is when we are weak in ourselves that we become strong in the Lord. Yes, Daniel was at his weakest in himself when he was in the lion's den. Yet he was also at his strongest because he was most dependent on God the whole time he was in the lion's den.

The end of the story of Daniel in the lion's den comes quickly. First, the enemies who plotted against Daniel were thrown to the lions, along with their wives and children (v. 24). Then Darius offered public praise to "the God of

Daniel” (vv. 26-27). What amazing words coming from the lips of a pagan king. Or perhaps he was a pagan no more.

## Conclusion

Let me pose again the questions I asked at the beginning of my sermon.

- Would Daniel remain faithful when the pressure was on?

Answer: Yes, he was faithful consistently from beginning to end, with or without pressure. His faithfulness and devotion to God is a lifestyle regardless of circumstances.

- Would Daniel say “yes” to the powers that be and say “no” to his God?

Answer: When the ways of man would violate the ways of God, Daniel was ever ready to say “yes” to God and “no” to man, even prepared to face the dire consequences of defying human powers. He had resolved to always please God as his life-long commitment.

Some lessons for us:

- It is possible to live godly lives in an ungodly world. So, purpose in our heart not to be defiled. Often we carry a defeatist attitude when we keep complaining about the difficulty of being a Christian in a secular environment. Often we focus on how we suffer ridicule and humiliation because of our faith. But at some point we have to say to each other, “Stop complaining. It is true that life in those big high-rise office buildings isn’t like life at a church camp. But we have to face the fact that not everyone shares our faith, and then we have to go on from there. We can live for Christ in our office, in our classroom, and in our neighbourhood. There is always a way to compromise for those who want to compromise. And there is always a way to obey God for those who purpose to obey God.”
- God can use us to touch unlikely people when we are faithful to Him. So, be bold to make our convictions known. Daniel 6 emphasizes the powerful impact that Daniel’s personal integrity had on Darius. While it is true that many of his colleagues envied Daniel and plotted to kill him, it’s also true that he made a huge impact for good on the most powerful man in the then known world. We never know who is watching us or what they are looking for. This story teaches us that not every unbeliever hates Christians. For every satrap out there planning our downfall, there is a Darius keeping an eye on us, hoping that our faith may prove to be true. Such people may have little or no faith but deep inside, they want what we have. Even though they may never say so, they are cheering for us because they hope that what we believe will turn out to be true. Some Darius may be having his eyes on you right now. Your God-honouring example may be leading someone to Jesus Christ some day.

- God always delivers in His own time and way. So, persevere in hope, faith and love. Not all our prayers are answered in the way we pray them. And in the end, we must confess that it is good that God has veto power over our fervent petitions. Sometimes God overrules because He sees the bigger picture and knows that He can glorify Himself in some way other than by delivering us from a difficult situation. This story ought to be a great encouragement to us because from it we learn that God can and sometimes does deliver in amazing and miraculous ways. Therefore, let us pray with confidence to a God who can tame the lions we may face. And if God should choose to answer in some other way, we may rest secure that God makes no mistakes. God makes everything good in the end. If it's not good, it's not the end.

Let me say a final word to the people of God today—"In the days to come we will all face hostility in one form or another because of our Christian faith. Those who serve the Lord never have an easy road in this world. But be of good cheer. If we will be faithful, God can use us to touch many people, including some in high places, who watch us from a distance and cheer us on, hoping that our God will deliver us. Remember that we can say 'no' to the world and 'yes' to our God because when we go into our lion's den, He goes in with us."

Let me also say a closing word to those who are not yet Christians—"The same God who rescued Daniel will rescue you from your sin if you will trust in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who trust in Him are counted righteous in God's eyes and their sins are forgiven. This is God's promise to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. I urge you to approach and talk with a Christian you know or whose faith life has impacted you to find out more about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith."

### Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We do not ask for an easy road but for courage to walk the path you set before us. We thank you that our lives are in your hands and that we have nothing to fear because all our days are appointed by you. Give us the faith of Daniel. May our convictions be clear so that people will know that we belong to you. May you be glorified in our lives so that others will see Jesus in us.

We pray for courage to face the lions in our lives in the name of Jesus Christ who Himself is the victorious Lion of Judah. Amen!