

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Unshaken_ Daniel Chapter 6

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Well, hello NCC family, there you are, I can't see you, you can see me but this is it seems virtual but it's real. Okay.

We are looking in this series 'Unshaken' at the story of Daniel. And it's been articulated so well over these past weeks with the pastoral team. And when I look at it from where I sit my vantage, this story, and our times have really made me look at myself. I look at my principles, I look at my values, I look at my actions. I loved what Pastor Mark said last week about those old guys, you know, those old guys who end up with a twinkle in their eye and fire in their belly. I'd like to go there. I'd like to be one of those but if I do, I need to be willing to be self assessing. That's critical for me at this time. So I have to ask myself the question after all these years, what matters? Who am I? Daniel six speaks to that.

Let me start with a story of a boy named Phil. He was born in Rome, Pennsylvania, in 1838. And he had no formal schooling till he was 10. His father Isaac was a dedicated believer. And the first spiritual recollections that Phil had of his father, were the daily family rituals of prayer. These prayers were ingrained into him in childhood and into his memory and they stayed with him throughout his life. His dad was a lover of music. And it was through his dad that he developed, he Phil developed a passion for singing. They went to a Methodist church there in Pennsylvania. In his teens, Phil discovered that he had the ability to compose music. And he started writing songs and he sent his first composition to a fellow named George, I think, who was a songwriter. It was a gospel song, and this was the note he attached, "If you think this song is worth anything, I would appreciate having a flute in exchange for it." Talk about strange requests. Well, apparently the fellow thought it had some merit because Phil got a flute.

The boy's name was Philip Bliss. He went on in his adult life to be a gospel songwriter in the 1800s, of quite great merit. He was a good friend of Dwight Moody, the great evangelist of the day, and he moved to Chicago Phil and his family Emily married had a couple of kids moved to Chicago in the mid 1800s, during the Civil War actually, wrote a lot of great songs. And then there was a tragedy on December 29, 1876. He and his wife died in a tragic train accident just outside Ashtabula, Ohio. And he was 38 years old. And you'd written all these songs. But this one he had written three years earlier stands out to me at this moment in time. It was written in 1873 and it's called 'Dare to be a Daniel'. Some of you may have sung it in Sunday school or children's church or something back in the day. I think it might have been written for adults of a Sunday school class at the church he was at in Chicago but this is how it goes.

Standing by a purpose true
Heeding God's command
Honor them, the faithful few
All hail to Daniel's band

Here's the refrain.

Dare to be a Daniel
Dare to stand alone
Dare to have a purpose firm
Dare to make it known

Many giants, great and tall
Stalking through the land
Headlong to the earth would fall
If met by Daniel's band
Dare to be a Daniel

It became a kid song along the way. And as I said, some of you may have sung it. So, here's Daniel six, I'll come back to that a little bit. Here's Daniel six, a story of betrayal, jealous men, hungry lions. End of the story. Good guy wins.

Dare to stand alone

Dare to have a purpose firm

Dare to make it known

So the question is what can we learn from this moment 2,500 years ago, in a very different culture in a very different time and place? As you know, and you've heard over these last weeks, Daniel was a young teen when he was taken from Jerusalem. He was part of a noble family, no doubt transported hundreds of miles to Babylon, became an advisor to the king. He was 17 when he moved into a role like that; I think he probably thought he'd go home. But he didn't. His whole life was spent in Babylon; he will never get to go home. And now in this story as in last week, he's 80ish, 80 something we think. His given name, Daniel means 'God is my judge'. That's his metric.

The Babylonians changed his name to Belteshazzar. They could change his name, but they could not change his heart. And so we need to see Daniel in this story, particularly through that lens. God is my judge, I want to respond to and please him. At 17, as we read in the first chapter, Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food and everything worked out great. You can go back and read it again if you want. And now it's more than 60 years later, and he's still resolved to worship and honor, Yahweh. The rhythms that he learned when he was small, have stayed with him. They have become his default.

So this is how it reads. Daniel 6:1 *"It pleased Darius the king to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel."*

So, 120, three over them, one is Daniel. He's in that elite group.

"The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss." They're there to take care of the king's kingdom and his stuff. Now Darius ruled a large area, Middle East part of the med, coastal North Africa. And a satrap, I love that word, wouldn't it be great to go to school and you say what does your dad do? He's a satrap. A satrap was a combination of a tax collector, a judge, they built the armies. They often were royal family members. Daniel was one of those. Now, 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, heir apparent. He's going to be heir apparent to that whole kingdom. The challenge for Daniel is that he's already heir apparent in another kingdom, his biological and spiritual roots are in another location. And I don't mean just Jerusalem.

Here's the deal - from his childhood, he's put God first. He's been taught and trained to do that. Putting God first determines everything that follows. I know that last week, Pastor Mark was kind enough talking about us old guys. But I'd like to talk about the kids for just a moment. Those of you with small children, by gifting your children with kids church, by gifting your children with story time on that Instagram thing that your kids folks do, it's wonderful for you to have gatherings with your family and let them know who you worship. That's huge. It's making the foundation; it is laying the foundation for the house that will be built.

And Daniel shows a unique spiritual maturity when he's young. Some of my best spiritual memories were from summer camp. You've heard me talk about this fellow that I met back when I was 10 years old at my first summer camp. His name was Roy Blakely. He ended up some years later, being my father in-law. But one of the great things about Roy Blakely is that he told us stories about Jesus. And he talked to us; we were just kids, right? We're all kids and all kinds of stuff. I'm 10 years old for Pete's sake, which I think might be the perfect day, but that's another thought for another message. But he talked to us like we were real. That's what he did. And in so doing it opened us up to hearing about a God and Jesus who is real. We were developing, we were supple, we were open, and we started learning to worship God, and listen to him and love him.

That truth of putting God first as embedded in Jesus words 500 years after Daniel. That's how it reads in Matthew six, *"Seek first His kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well."* When you seek first when you seek God first and you start thinking that way, it translates over time into action. We pray that it will.

I just had a conversation just today actually, with my friend Bob Cooley, who's the former president at Gordon Conwell seminary, a wonderfully esteemed man, scholar, educator. And we were talking about Daniel, we were talking about this and I asked him what does righteousness that is being right with God looked like in the scriptures and he said, "The gospel is only an idea until it translates to action". And in the Old and New Testaments, it always carries the aspect of community. And my pedigree is in that community, it was somewhere other it is somewhere other than just in the here and now. And then he went on to reflect on the words of Paul the apostle. And I was tickled because the very words he was

quoting from Philippians the third chapter, I already had in my message notes. So this is what he quoted Philippians 3:7 to 10, *"But whatever were gains to me, Paul, the apostle says, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. And he goes on to say, ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—the power of his resurrection, participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

And he went on to say, Dr. Cooley went on to say, we are citizens of a different place. And this really shows up when Daniel is about to take a hip. These are the next verses Daniel six, *"⁴At this, (because he was such a good leader), the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so."* They could find no corruption in him, because he was (1) trustworthy and (2) neither corrupt nor (3) negligent.

Trustworthy, neither corrupt, that is he's not in it for himself. He's not negligent; you'll always get his best. So you can't by him, and you can't beat him. He has taken responsibility for caring for the King's business with integrity. As I reflect on that, and I say, who's my king? And what's his business? How do I care for that? How can I be a trustworthy steward, so that I can't be corrupted in that process? And I always give it 110%. So here's the point, let the quality of our lives and work be our message. Reputation is what we have. You know, we talk about a body of work between players and coaches and musicians and writers and builders and teachers, any craft any profession, you hear that highest accolade you could get is somebody saying, boy, I would love to work with or for that person.

I had the privilege some years ago, as many of you know when I was in town back in the first part of this century 2000 to 2008. When I was there, I had a couple of friends who were in government and one of them was the head of the Navy, Vern Clark, I've mentioned him before, but I remember being queried by one of his aides who was a Marine Corps major. And he asked me, "What do you talk about when you go there? Because you go for lunch, and these guys live their lives in 15 minute increments." And I said, "Well, we do those things that you find in the New Testament - we meet together, we talk about our lives, we maybe have some food, we we talk about who is this Jesus person and we have a prayer. And this person looked at me and said, "That is awesome." There is some sense in finding a person who is trustworthy, not corruptible, not negligent, that is so attractive.

So, Daniel, *"Finally these men, "We will never find any basis (Daniel 6:5), for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."*

They knew if they could get to that piece they'd have him. Can you see him? {Inaudible}, so excited because they've got him. If they can go there, they'll get him and they sort of start counting their chickens before they hatch, as we said back in the day.

So, and I know I'm reading a lot of Scripture, but this really is where the story is. ⁶ *So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever!"* ⁷ *The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed (well all except Daniel) that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.* ⁸ *Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."* ⁹ *So King Darius put the decree in writing."*

What's the Babylonian phrase for kiss up? What's the Babylonian phrase for pandering? This is clearly what it is. Well, what's interesting about this when Daniel found out, he didn't react; he just did what he always did.

¹⁰ *Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. (He's not going private. He's not going silent and he kneels prays towards Jerusalem). Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." It's interesting it doesn't say God get me out of this at least not according to this text. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree."*

And the story goes on in frames it as you would imagine it would. And in verse 13, it says, *"Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, (the king knows this) pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."* ¹⁴ *When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.* ¹⁵ *Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, "Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law, so forth,"* ¹⁶ *So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den."*

The Kings next few words speak volumes about his relationship with Daniel I think. The king said to Daniel *"May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"* And their courage shows up on Daniels part. Daniel refused to compromise his practices.

What are the routines or rhythms that I have? I've been reflecting on this. What are my routines or rhythms that give life to me? What are the habits of my heart? What words, what things feed my soul? We live in a world {inaudible} I mean, its craziness, a world of drowning that's drowning in opinions and they're not worth fighting over or for. I gotta tell you, what are the few convictions that I would go to the wall for? Boldness in a time of great upheaval is, I think, a great virtue when it's in line with the character of God.

We had a baptismal service out here in Colorado some time back. Sort a, one of my favorite testimonials, a man was getting baptized and he said, "You know, I work at a used car dealership and when I went there, there was this one salesman who always read his Bible at lunch, the other guys would all make fun of him, but he befriended me. And I started reading the Bible with him. And over time I started believing that Jesus was who he claimed to be. And I actually came to Jesus in the parking lot between a Ford F150 and a Mercury Milan." I love; I love that story boldness of a man to read the scriptures in front of his friends when they were making fun of him.

So the text goes on to say that a stone was rolled over the mouth of the opening to the lion's den. The king sealed it with a signet ring and the other nobles he went back, and he didn't sleep all night. He didn't have any entertainment gets up early in the morning and goes to the lion's den and shouts in an anguished voice. So what it says in verse 20, "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?*"

He had just breathed such a sigh of relief and say yes when he hears Daniel say, "May the king live forever!" My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions." And I've never done anything wrong before you, your Majesty. The king was overjoyed. It's always good when the King's overjoyed, and Daniel didn't hold it against the king.

So the deal is, we may suffer in circumstances or even because of jealousies or intent because of our convictions. But those circumstances and things can shape us or break us. Corrie Ten Boom, that Dutch lady who had the Jews, who is buried in Southern California, 100 feet from where my mother's body lies. She harbored Jews, suffered greatly, lost most of her family but there's something about suffering that shapes us and I'll come to that again in a moment but the things that happen when we're small, the spiritual experiences, we have, the things that touch our young people, our teenagers. I as a grandfather, Ruth and I pray almost every day by name for our 12 grandchildren and our two great grandchildren. I'm thinking of Daniel, who's 17, 14, actually when they started training him, and I'm thinking to myself, can we have teams in this day who are tough in spirit? I say, yes, I say we can. And because of their openness, and because of our efforts, I believe that can happen.

We come back to Admiral Stockdale's paradox that Pastor Mark talked about the first week, which is, you must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be. Those two things in juxtaposition that is real, I still trust for tomorrow? Suffering can break us or make us. So I'm on a flight 1992 back to the west coast from the east coast. I'm sitting next to a young man. He's grading some papers turned out that he is the son, one of the sons of Admiral Stockdale. We start talking, I said, "How was it?" He said, "My mom raised four of us teenage boys for those seven and a half years that my dad was away, and she held us together and we kept believing that he would come back. And when he came back, I saw something." I said, "How had he changed?" He said, "When he

went in, he was a hard driving high tech, brilliant fighter jock. I loved him. When he came back. He was a human being."

In our present circumstance, we've never needed to listen to God more. Extreme things can break our humanity or reveal it. Many people in these days need to have their humanity affirmed by our voice, yours and mine, by our question yours and mine, by our actions, yours and mine. And when we face what we think is the impossible, I think the things I think are impossible probably don't even raise God's eyebrows. God is the one who does the impossible. This book is full of apparent impossibilities that God overwhelms.

So, here's the rest of the story, rest of the story is this. ²⁴*At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in*" And the short of it, the long and the short of it is, they were gone. Daniel found that his motivation and his refuge lay in one place an audience with the most high. When we have an audience with the most high, when we speak to the king of the universe in the morning everything can change. When we play for as an athlete, we play for the coach don't play for the crowd.

My friend Sara Groves sang a song some years ago that I found to be tremendously helpful. She said, this journey is my own and she has some lines in there that say, "I play for an audience, I sing for an audience of one." I want us to take a Selah moment and just calm our spirits and listen to Sara Groves song. Take a few minutes, but let's reflect and let it bathe us and let's think about it. Here it is.

[Sara Groves singing] - When I stand before the Lord, I'll be standing alone This journey is my own Still I want man's advice, and I need man's approval This journey is my own Why would I want to live for man, and pay the highest price What does it mean to gain a whole world, only to lose my life So much of what I do is to make a good impression This journey is my own And so much of what I say is to make myself look better But this journey is my own And why would I want to live for man, and pay the highest price And what does it mean to gain a whole world, only to lose my life And I have never felt relief like I feel it right now This journey is my own Cause trying to please the world, it was breaking me down It was breaking me down And now I live and I breathe for an audience of one Now I live and I breathe for an audience of one Now I live and I breathe for an audience of one Cause I know this journey is my own And why would I want to live for man, and pay the highest price And what does it mean to gain a whole world, only to lose my life And you can live for someone else, and it will only bring you pain I can't even judge myself, only the Lord can say, well done.

[End of song]

And this is how it ends. ²⁵ *Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly! 26 "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his*

*kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. ²⁷ He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”
²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”*

If I'm a Daniel, I'll be trustworthy, you can count on me. I'll be capable; I'll find excellent ways to execute the mission. I'll be courageous; I have the heart of a lion. Some years ago, when I was president at Bethany, there was a young man who was going to be a senior the next year; he is now in his 60s. He's a leader in Northern California, and I saw him last year. And I said, "Steve", wonderful guy, I said, "Steve, now that you're in your 60s, what have you learned about life?" And he looked at me and said, "President Foth", he always called me president, I said, you know, but he said "President Foth, what I found is at my age I have less to prove, and more to offer, less to prove, and more to offer." Let's go there with Daniel shall we? God help us to be people with less to prove and more to offer.

Let's pray. Father, here we are we submit ourselves to you. Help us to keep our focus in crazy days that we sing and work and play for an audience of one. We want you to be that audience. And we want to be your people in fresh dimensions every day. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

God bless you. Love you. Hope to see you soon. Bye bye.