

The sermon

Intro

How can we make new disciples in a culture like ours?

In a recent Gospel Coalition article, Bob Thune noted “2 Things the Church Must Do to Help Our Post-Christian Neighbors Trust Jesus (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/post-christian-neighbors/#:~:text=The%20church%20must%20equip%20me,grace%20known%20to%20our%20neighbors.>)”

His answers?

- 1) Simply exist and thrive.
- 2) Embrace a bigger gospel.

We’ll hit thriving throughout. As for a bigger gospel, he means a gospel that “confronts us, changes us, and governs us.” A message we proclaim (forgiveness of sins), an identity we take on (adopted, saved, born again), a kingdom we live for (a new way of doing life).

Given the suggestion that we “simply exist and thrive,” note our

BIG IDEA: The world is watching.

Body

Point 1: Daniel thrives amidst opposition (6:1-9)

READ 6:1-9

Who is Darius?

No archaeological evidence has been found for a Darius the Mede yet.

He might be Gubaru, a governor of Babylon. He might be Gu/Ugbaru, the general credited with conquering Babylon. Darius the Mede might be the throne name of Cyrus the Persian.

There was a time when there was no archaeological record of Belshazzar. We can okay with the unknown.

Setting

Babylon has fallen. Darius is king. And Daniel is still thriving as an exile, 66 years after he arrived. An editorial note explains the reason: **“because an excellent spirit was in him”** (6:3). Because the Holy Spirit was with him, his inner being/heart (spirit) distinguished him from other officials. Things like calm, respect, compassion, wisdom.

Daniel is one of three high officials (6:2) **“And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom”** (6:3). Other officials are opposed. Jealousy maybe?

Plot

So they seek **“to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom”** (6:4). Maybe embezzling funds, mistreating those under him, neglect of duties, conspiring against Darius to take his spot, etc. **“But they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him”** (6:4). Daniel was faithful to Darius, faithful to the kingdom, faithful in his duties.

Finding nothing they try to find something connected **“with the law of his God”** (6:5). We know he’s wholly devoted to his God so maybe we can trap him in his devotion?

They propose *“that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions”* (6:7). The king okays it (6:8-9).

Application: no fault could be found

God saves us for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons is to bring himself glory.

One way God brings himself glory is by transforming his people and placing them in the world so there’s a radical contrast between the world and God’s people. What Jesus called salt and light (Matt 5:16). Transforming us so that the world says in a good way there’s something different about these Christians. The newness of life they speak of must be true!

The Christian life isn’t hiding out to avoid contamination. No, it’s shining in the middle of the darkness. Being living proof of the gospel’s promise of *“rivers of living water”* flowing out of our hearts (John 7:38). The issue is passion for God’s glory. A passion for others to see and treasure God’s glory.

Application: is your devotion obvious to observers?

Daniel’s opponents knew about devotion to God was his priority. Is your devotion obvious? When people look at you what do they see? Do they see a person whose steadfast passion is following Jesus in every aspect of life?

Application: thriving in exile

66 years in Daniel is one of the top three and about to be number one under the king. He’s thriving outside his homeland. He’s thriving in a kingdom of religious beliefs and moral convictions contrary to God’s word. He’s thriving in a kingdom where his co-workers are out to get him.

Daniel’s a picture of us. We’re supposed to thrive while awaiting the heavenly city. Standing firm in God’s word in a culture where sin is normalized and righteousness is odd. Daily having an “excellent spirit.”

If we love people and want to see them saved, we’ll watch our own walk. We’ll pray to God to *“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”* (Matt 6:13). We’ll make use of spiritual disciplines while trusting that *“it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13).

When the world watches us, they may take note of our God. When they see a thriving people, when they see a refreshing contrast, they may ask us questions.

Point 2: Daniel chooses to expose himself to suffering (6:10-13)

READ 6:10-13

Daniel’s response

How does he respond? *“as he had done previously”* (6:10). He doesn’t conceal his prayer. He doesn’t flaunt his rebellion in the public square. Just goes about his normal routine.

Daniel caught

Eyewitnesses capture Daniel’s disobedience (6:11) and drop a bombshell on Darius: *“Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day”* (6:13).

Application: prayer

- 1) Daniel prayed three times a day (6:10).

- 2) Daniel's prayer included thanks (6:10).

Prayer should be a mixture of thanks and requests. If all we do is ask God for more, we'll forget what he's already done. As we remember God's past aid, confidence rises in God's promises, love, ability, etc.

- 3) Daniel's prayer included petition (6:13).

Petition = asking for God's favor and compassionate help.

Application: establishing a prayer routine

Maybe you struggle with establishing a prayer routine? Some practical advice.

- 1) Plan to pray multiple times throughout the day.

When you first wake up. Before breakfast. Before lunch. Before dinner. Before falling to sleep. Not scheduled = doesn't happen.

- 2) For extended prayer time, write a list before starting.

So you don't run out of material.

- 3) Before engaging your day.

Think about your unique challenges and duties that day. Pray for God's help before beginning your day.

- 4) Pray through a Psalm or another portion of Scripture (e.g., Lord's prayer).

Think through a passage and pray about what you're reading. Like God's help to trust and obey.

- 5) Pray through the church directory.

If you don't know what to pray for, pray for basic Christian virtues like growing in wisdom and knowledge of the truth, not being tossed to and fro by error, joy in God, opportunities to share the gospel, etc.

- 6) Pray through the prayer list Judy puts out.

Application: obeying to our own hurt

Note Daniel was faced with a choice. Pray and suffer the consequences. Neglect prayer and be at ease. He could have rationalized it's only 30 days. Daniel chose devotion to God over personal ease.

Sometimes we need to obey to our own hurt.

- 1) Daniel chose prayer over preserving his life.
- 2) Paul risked his well-being to preach the gospel.
- 3) Christians in Muslim countries chose to speak the gospel to Muslims despite laws against it.

When they speak they put their jobs, their visas, etc. at risk.

- 4) When you affirm basic Christian truths in the workplace, family gatherings that subject you to mockery, hostility, exclusion, etc.

Sometimes we need to obey to our own hurt!

Point 3: Darius trapped by his own law (6:14-18)

READ 6:14-18

Whereas Nebuchadnezzar was seething mad, Darius is distressed and plots to rescue Daniel. He labors all day to no avail (6:14).

Trapped by his own law. Duped into killing his most valuable colleague. You'd think he'd execute the guys who duped him and reverse the edict. But he's bound up.

Into the lion's den

Darius has had some exposure to Daniel's God, so he holds out hope Daniel will be rescued:

"May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" – 6:16

- 1) Daniel serves a different God than his other officials.
- 2) Daniel serves his God faithfully.
- 3) It's possible Daniel's God will rescue him.

The stone is set to prevent escape and a seal is set to ensure proof the stone hasn't been tampered with (6:17).

Application: the world is watching

Like Darius watched Daniel, our world is watching us. What are they seeing? As we follow Jesus, they may notice a difference in beliefs. They may notice a difference in conduct. They may notice an "excellent spirit." They may notice a devotion they don't possess. They may begin to believe things about God.

The world is watching. We ought to be mindful. Humble repentance, love for others, wisdom, joy in God, gospel promises lived out may shift people's beliefs. It may cause people to ask questions. **The world is watching.** Darius is taking note.

Point 4: Daniel's trust rewarded (6:19-24)

READ 6:19-24

What the king finds

Early in the morning Darius rushes to see what became of his trusted servant (6:19). In anguish he calls out to Daniel. Daniel responds, "O king, live forever!" (6:21). Daniel explains what happened:

"My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths," – (6:22)

God acted upon the lions (by an angel) like he acted upon the fish that swallowed Jonah.

Darius rejoices and Daniel's *"taken up out of the den"* (6:23) indicating some sort of pit. There's an editorial note:

and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. – 6:23

Daniel was rescued because of his faith. Daniel said something similar:

"and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." – 6:22

God weighed me and found me without fault, so he rescued me. I neither wronged God or the king. I wasn't worthy of death.

Reversal of fortunes

On the other hand, those who conspired against Daniel were thrown into the lion's den along with their wives and children (6:24). No help from the angel here. God overturned the plans of Daniel's "malicious" accusers.

Application: what about the times when God doesn't rescue his people?

The point isn't if we trust well enough God we'll be at ease and free from harm. The point isn't if we obey well enough God we'll be at ease and free from harm.

The point is God is actively involved in human affairs. God is with his people wherever we find ourselves. God acts for us.

And we must remember **Daniel 3:17-18**:

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

- 1) God is able to rescue.
- 2) He may or may not choose to rescue us.
- 3) We will serve God regardless.

Gospel connection

The God of the Bible is a God who rescues. If he chooses not to remove a particular hardship, if he chooses not to extend our days or give us a full 80+ years, we serve him regardless.

God does in fact rescue everyone who comes to him through Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus died as a substitute such that whoever believes will be saved from their sins. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will be rescued on the day of judgment. For those who believe, sins are forgiven and we're welcomed into the heavenly city.

In the end, God rescues everyone who trusts in him from their sins. If you haven't trusted in Christ, turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Keep trusting him by learning God's word and following God's ways and gathering with God's people in the local church.

Point 5: Daniel continues to prosper (6:25-28)

READ 6:25-28

Explanation

Darius commands respect for Daniel's God. Because of his interaction with Daniel, Darius has come to a number of conclusions about God:

- 1) God is actively involved in human affairs.

"the living God" (6:26); *"He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth"* (6:27)

- 2) God is eternal ("*enduring forever*") = never comes to an end.
- 3) God's kingdom is unbreakable = it can't be defeated.
- 4) God's kingdom is eternal.
- 5) God rescues his people.
- 6) God has power over nature ("*from the power of lions*").

Daniel's biographer notes Daniel's ongoing success:

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. – 6:28

Daniel's a picture of a believer thriving in a culture where following God is odd and sin and idolatry is normalized and hostility abounds. Daniel's a picture of a believer who resolves to honor God, regardless of the cost to himself. Daniel's a picture of God's steadfast love following the believer all the days of our lives.

Application: people come to conclusions about God based on their interactions with us.

People who know nothing of God or who've been steeped in false religion for decades don't usually come to faith immediately after you share three verses with them. People usually come to faith after a period of time. Often the light dawns gradually. Often the light dawns because of repeated contact with particular Christians.

Think children in the Christian home. After years of spankings, parents reading the Bible to them, going to church every Sunday, and parents speaking truth into their lives, the light dawns at some point. They see what they didn't see before.

Same with Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. Through interactions with Daniel and his friends, they came to understand more about God over time. Non-Christians, through their repeated interactions with us, make deductions about God. **What deductions is our influence producing? How is our life pointing to Jesus and his gospel promises?**

Application: thriving Christians promotes the gospel

When we're a thriving people, "an excellent spirit," no fault can be found, exceptional wisdom, trusting God in hard times, obeying God at cost to ourselves, etc., people see what a Christian is. What faith is.

They see gospel promises lived out. They see a faith that means something. That isn't cultural. That isn't meaningless ritual. That isn't dead tradition.

They take note. They form conclusions. They ask questions.