

The God Who Holds Your Breath

Preacher: Harold Summers

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References: **Daniel 5-6**, Daniel 5:16; Daniel 5:23; Daniel 5:24-25; Daniel 5:26; Daniel 5:27; Daniel 5:28; Daniel 5:29; Daniel 5:30; Daniel 5:31; Daniel 6:1-2; Daniel 6:3; Daniel 6:4; Daniel 6:5; Daniel 6:6-7; Daniel 6:8; Daniel 6:9; Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:11; Daniel 6:12-14; Daniel 6:15-17; Daniel 6:18; Daniel 6:19-20; Daniel 6:21-23; John 3:16; Numbers 21:8-9; Daniel 6:24; Exodus 20:5; Daniel 12:13; Daniel 6:25

The Fall of Babylon

So we're studying today in the book of Daniel, chapter 5. And we're in the middle of the story. It's always a problem to start in the middle of a story, so I'm going to give you a very brief background, and then we'll get into the detail.

There was a man whose name was Nebuchadnezzar. He was the first significant world emperor. He pretty much did what he wanted in the world. He was a very proud man. That's logical. And God spoke to him, and he didn't pay much attention. And then God spoke to him again and again, and the third time he paid attention—that was the fourth time he paid attention. Amazing things happened in that man's life, and he paid attention to God. He turned to God, and God blessed him and encouraged him.

And then he died. His kingdom began to weaken after he died. Those who succeeded him, his sons and sons-in-law and so on, they were wicked men. They killed one another. The kingdom wasn't very good after he died. They still ruled the world, but there was a problem. And part of their kingdom was the Medo-Persian Empire—and it wasn't an empire at this point, but the kings of Media and Persia, they ganged up on the kings of Babylon.

The ruler in Babylon was a man by the name of Belshazzar. He was probably Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, maybe great-grandson, we're not precisely sure. But nevertheless, he was the boss; he was in charge. What we didn't mention last time was that the Medo-Persian army had decided that they were going to go up to Babylon and maybe even try to conquer the city.

The king, whose name was Belshazzar, decided that he would make a great big party for a thousand of his senior people, and they were going to have a rip-roaring party. It was really

nothing more than a great big drunk. But to make things worse, he decided that he was going to let his people drink their alcohol out of the vessels—the cups and so on that had been used in the worship of God in the temple in Jerusalem. And not only that, he mocked God. And he said, "We don't care about God. We worship the gods of gold and silver and wood and stone." And he drank out of the cups that were reserved for God.

And then in a most unprecedented way, God decided that He would speak to him and all who were at that great big banquet. And so He wrote four words on a wall with His fingers—probably writing it right in the plaster, He wrote four words on the wall. A miraculous intervention and a miraculous writing. The problem was he couldn't understand what was written. He was smart enough to know that it must have been God who wrote it; he just didn't know what it said. So he called for all his wise men to tell him what was written and what it meant, and they couldn't.

And then his mother—I think his mother, but the woman called the queen—came in, and she said, "There's a man in your kingdom who can understand it. You'd better call him." So anyway, he calls him in, and Daniel comes before him. Way back in chapter 5 now and verse 16, we read these words:

[Daniel 5:16 NKJV] - And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

He says in the first line, "I have heard of you." Daniel was God's agent in that kingdom. Daniel and his friends had been behind four incredibly miraculous events in that kingdom. And Belshazzar says, "I have heard of you." Don't you think that the most outstanding man in the kingdom would have even been a counselor to this man who escaped? Apparently he had never visited him. Apparently he had never employed him. He would have had to fire him to get him out of the positions he was in, but he is so arrogant, he says, "I have heard of you." He is typical of people in our day who say, "I've heard of God, I've heard of Jesus, but frankly, I don't really care."

So as we learned last week, Daniel comes to him and tells him about the fact that God had spoken clearly to his grandfather, the king. And he reminded him of the things that He had done from God through his grandfather. He reminded him of the miracles that had been done, and he didn't care. He simply ignored it.

The Writing on the Wall

So we're going to pick up verse 23 of chapter 5 before we get into the rest of the story. Daniel says to him:

[Daniel 5:23 NKJV] - And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

Now here's the key line: "And the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified." That's the big issue in everyone's life, isn't it?

Who made us? God.

Who chose our environment? God.

Who keeps our breath in our bodies? God.

Wouldn't it make sense to glorify Him? Wouldn't it make sense to remember Him? Wouldn't it make sense to try to learn about Him? Wouldn't it make sense to obey Him? And so he says, "This is your problem: you didn't glorify the God who made you."

Verse 24 then:

[Daniel 5:24-25 NKJV]

²⁴ Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. ²⁵

"And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

And so on the wall came these four words: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. Okay. And so the question is, what does it mean? Daniel says, "Belshazzar, I'm going to tell you what it means." Verse 26:

[Daniel 5:26 NKJV] - This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

Okay, who's the boss? God. Who's the king? Belshazzar. What does God say about him? God says, "I have numbered your kingdom. I know how many days you get." Most people think they get a pretty lengthy time in life. God says, "I've got you all numbered." We have in English an expression—I don't know if it's in Chinese, but it goes like this: your number is up. Belshazzar, I've given you lots of time, but your number is up. Now, we're going to deal with this. And so the interpretation is numbered, numbered. No question: God has numbered your kingdom and finished it.

Now, the next word is Tekel:

[Daniel 5:27 NKJV] - TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

Okay, have you met people who say, "I think I'm pretty good; I think God will let me into heaven because I think my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds"? So they say, "I'm a pretty good guy. You put me on the scales, my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds, and everybody will say, 'You're pretty good, you'll make it.'"

Oh, it says, "Belshazzar, you've been weighed in the balances, and your bad deeds outweigh your good deeds. Belshazzar, you're in deep trouble." God said, "I've already put you on the scale. Belshazzar, your bad deeds are far more than your good deeds. You're in big trouble now."

All right, so three words here: Mene, Tekel, and Upharsin. Mene means you've been numbered. Tekel means you've been weighed. And Peres or Pharas is the last word—Pharsin, rather; the u- is apparently the word in the language "and." So it reads like this: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Pharsin. And Pharsin and Peres are simply different tenses of the same word.

[Daniel 5:28 NKJV] - PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Okay, what happened to your kingdom, Belshazzar? It's been given to the Medes and the Persians. That army that's up north of town, that army is going to take you. You're going to give it to them.

Verse 29 says:

[Daniel 5:29 NKJV] - Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Now, that's what he had promised Daniel at the beginning. Daniel said, "I don't want that, but I'll tell you what's going to happen." But he says, "I'm going to make you third ruler of the kingdom." And he promised that he would do it, and he lived up to his promise. He kept his promise.

Why did he make him third ruler of the kingdom? Because he himself was only the second ruler of the kingdom. His father was the official king; it's just that his father had retired from Babylon to Arabia. So he couldn't make Daniel second ruler because he himself was second ruler. So he said, "I'll make the third ruler, Daniel."

So why do you think he lived up to his promise? Probably because he knew that his only hope was that the God who told him he was going to be killed would relent if he made Daniel his third ruler.

How do you think Daniel felt? The prophecy was that the new kingdom was coming in soon; it was going to be the Medo-Persian kingdom. When they came in, what would they most likely do? What do you do when you conquer another kingdom? Usually you find out who the former king was, and you either put him in prison or kill him. Daniel says, "Big deal. I get to be the guy in charge now, so when the enemy comes in, I'm the one they'll kill first."

What happens next? Verse 30:

[Daniel 5:30 NKJV] - That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

That very night! History tells us this is what happened. The story is, history says, that the Medo-Persian army moved in to the north side of the city of Babylon. We're not sure how many miles north they were. Instead of going to war, Belshazzar said, "We'll have a party." He probably said that in part because the city of Babylon was extremely well fortified. It had high walls. It had soldiers, I'm sure, on the walls. And he basically said, "They can't get in."

The river Euphrates actually ran through the city. And unknown to the Babylonians, the Persians, the Medo-Persians, had diverted the Euphrates River. So instead of a raging river

flowing through the city, they cut off most of the water, and the river was way down. And consequently, people could march into the city through the riverbed.

Okay, so did they get in easy? Yep, marched right through the riverbed. Could the soldiers on the wall stop them? No. When they got inside the city, could the rulers in the city stop them? No. Why not? Because all the rulers of the city were at the party! They were all drunk.

So you get this city—the greatest city in terms of empire that the world has ever known. It was the head of the largest empire the world has ever known, the best empire, and it all fell in one night. Who's in charge here? God.

Now, if God's in charge of Belshazzar and the Babylonian kingdom, if His prophecies for Babylon that we read about in Daniel chapter 2, if they're going to come true, who's in charge? God's in charge.

Okay, so what happens? Verse 31 says:

[Daniel 5:31 NKJV] - And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

So who's in charge of the Babylonian empire now? Darius the Mede. So how long was Daniel third ruler in the kingdom? An hour and a half? It's amazing. I think that's the shortest time anybody's ever been boss! I hope there was a retirement clause in there somewhere, or he didn't get a very good deal.

And you can imagine Darius the Mede marching into the city and stopping and saying, "All right, who's in charge here?" Belshazzar has just been killed, and Daniel steps up and says, "Excuse me, sir, I'm in charge." Did Daniel die? No. God preserved him, even in this ridiculous set of circumstances.

The Rollercoaster Life of Faith

Can I remind you of a short summary of the life of Daniel? It goes like this: Daniel was born into the kingdom; he was in the royal family of Israel. He expected that one day he would either be king of Judah or he would be a high official in the Judean government. Then Nebuchadnezzar overcomes Jerusalem, and Daniel goes all the way down to the bottom. Daniel doesn't have any hope at all apart from God.

Nebuchadnezzar says, "I want some of the brilliant Jews to come to Babylon." So they went to Daniel and said, "Guess what? You're not going to die. We're going to take you to

Babylon." So he goes off to Babylon, and they put him in the university, and everything is great.

And then they say to him, "Daniel, you've got to eat the king's food and drink the king's wine. If you don't, we'll kill you." And so Daniel makes a deal with them. Instead of going to the bottom, he makes a deal, and he ends up being ten times smarter than his professors.

So Daniel, are you at the top or the bottom? He says, "I've often been at the bottom, but now I'm at the top." And so he's promoted; he gets a really good job.

And then the king comes up with the idea that everybody's going to have to worship him. Daniel and his friends didn't, and Daniel along with his friends goes down to the bottom. And when he didn't die, and his friends didn't die because they followed the Lord, they were all promoted to the top.

And Nebuchadnezzar dies, and Belshazzar becomes the king, and he goes down to the bottom, and all Belshazzar can say about him is, "I've heard of you." And then Belshazzar says to him, "Can you interpret that dream?" And he says, "Yes." And Belshazzar says, "All right, if that's the case, you can go to the top." And he's at the top for how long? Well, I suggested an hour and a half; it might have been a day. And where does he go? To the bottom.

Did he stay there? No! Okay, so come back next week, because he goes up and down and up and down and up and down. Who would you rather rely on in life: your boss, or the God who's in charge of your boss? You say, "Okay, God, I want to be on Your side."

And I probably told you—I won't give you the whole story, but there was a night when I said to myself, "Harold, you are going to have to resign. You're going to have to quit. You have broken the rules in this company. You're going to have to quit." And in the goodness of the Lord, the boss changed his mind. And instead of being fired, I remember God's goodness: God changed the boss's mind. The boss changed his mind, and then I was supposed to be fired, and then I was promoted!

God is God. He's not just a theory; He's not just a tyrant; He's not just the God who made the worlds and forgot about everything else. He's the God whose hand is on Belshazzar and on Daniel, and by the grace of God, on you and me. And so we say, "God, Belshazzar forgot, and he even forgot Daniel. But I'm not going to forget God. I want to glorify Him."

The Plot Against Daniel

So where's Daniel? He's at the bottom. Chapter 6, verse 1:

[Daniel 6:1-2 NKJV]

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; ² and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss.

Where did these 120 satraps come from? Answer: there were probably 120 or 127 provinces in the empire. Each one had a governor over them, called a satrap here, and each of them reported to—we'll call them a vice president. Each of them had something like forty satraps, forty governors reporting to them. And they reported to the king.

Who was one of those presidents? Daniel. Where was Daniel? He was at the top! I just think it's absolutely hilarious. Up and down and up and down, and here he is, riding at the very top. You keep on God's side, you'll be riding at the top.

All right, verse 3:

[Daniel 6:3 NKJV] - Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.

So what was Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom? He was the third ruler. What's he expected to be in the second kingdom, the next kingdom? The second ruler. That's absolutely marvelous!

All right, so the story then goes on from here. Verse 4:

[Daniel 6:4 NKJV] - So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.

When you get to be boss, what do other people try to do? They try to bring you down. And they said, "We're going to find where this fellow was wrong. We're going to find something he's done that's wrong, some advice that he gave that was foolish. We're going to find a mistake in this man. And when we do, we're going to exploit that and get rid of him. We don't

want a good man in charge of this kingdom. We're all bad men, and we want one who's like us." But they could find no charge or fault because he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

How did he get to be so good? God helped him. Okay, I told you that over and over, but when I went to university, I was a bad student. But sometimes I got really good marks. How did I do that? God helped me. It's all very simple. I won't go into more detail, but frankly, it was fun.

All right, verse 5:

[Daniel 6:5 NKJV] - Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

So they said, "We can't find anything wrong with this guy." And somebody came up with a bright idea, and it went like this: "If we make a law that he can't obey, then he'll be guilty of breaking the law." Are they creative!

Now, do you know that's what's happening all over the world today? People who don't love God are making laws to say you can't preach, you can't teach, you can't talk about the Bible. The lady sitting beside me used to teach school, and she taught school every day around here, and she taught the Bible every day. And it was marvelous; everybody was happy in the class, they all learned the Bible. And then the government and the principal decided that they weren't going to be allowing anybody to teach the Bible in the school anymore. And they announced that, and one of the ladies in the class said, "We don't want that; we want our children to learn the Bible." And so she sent a petition to every parent in the class that Norma was teaching, and they all said, "We want to continue to teach the Bible in the class." All of the parents signed a petition.

And what did the principal say? "We don't mind what the children want or what their parents want. There will be no Bible teaching in this school." So Norma said, "I've got more important things to do than to teach without being able to teach the Bible." And so she resigned.

Okay, so they said, "Let's have a law. Let's have a law about what you can believe in this kingdom." That's what the Medo-Persian rulers said. So here's their plan, verse 6:

[Daniel 6:6-7 NKJV]

⁶ So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

What does it say? Nobody can worship anyone other than the king for thirty days.

So what was inaccurate about that statement in verse 7? What was wrong with that verse? It's the first word: All. Did every one of his servants, everyone in the kingdom—did they all agree to that? No, Daniel didn't agree to it! So have you ever noticed that when people want to do bad things, they very frequently use lies? What do we know about the devil? He was a liar from the beginning. The devil's people are going to tell you lies. Don't listen to them. The devil's people are going to tell you lies; don't listen. Read your Bible. You don't get lies there, but you'll get lies anywhere and everywhere else.

So verse 8, they say:

[Daniel 6:8 NKJV] - Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

Now they took advantage of a rule in that kingdom. In that kingdom the rule was, there can never be a change in the law. When a law is made, it must stand firm.

Verse 9:

[Daniel 6:9 NKJV] - Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

Why do you think he signed it? I think he signed it because he was pretty proud. He said, "I think it would be nice if everybody worshiped me. Everybody asks me things. I'm a pretty good guy. I'll be nice, but I think that's a good idea. I don't think we should have lots of false religions around here; they should all worship me." He was very proud. He said, "I am the

king now. After the law was signed, everyone must come to worship me. They cannot worship anyone else." He thought this was a very good idea, so he signed the ban.

Daniel's Uncompromising Devotion

Where is Daniel? He is at the top. So what does he do at this point? Verse 10:

[Daniel 6:10 NKJV] - Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

So what was Daniel's custom? Three times a day he prayed toward Jerusalem. One of the prophets had said, "When you're cast into another country, you pray toward Jerusalem; God will hear your prayers." So he said, "I'm going to pray toward Jerusalem."

So where did he pray? He said, "Well, I'm going to find a room in my house; it can be my prayer room, one that's going to be facing Jerusalem." And then he prayed three times a day. I'm not sure why three times a day, but the psalmist said:

[Psalm 55:17 NKJV] - Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

And so I think he copied that prayer. And how did he do it? He got down on his knees. He knelt down. And then what did he do? He made sure his windows were open.

Now, what was the significance of all this? That's what he always did. Okay, so how did the bad guys who betrayed him know that they would get him on this problem of praying to somebody else? Because they all watched! You can imagine him going to work in the morning, and at noon he says to the staff, "Okay, it's lunchtime. You go have lunch; I'm going to go home." And he goes home, and they have lunch, and then he goes back to work. After he's home, he's home not having lunch—he's home praying.

And I think those wicked men said, "This is going to be easy. He doesn't just pray three times a day; he kneels so that everybody knows he's praying, and he leaves the window open so that everybody can see that he's praying." So instead of stopping worshipping God, he continues to tell everybody that he worships God.

Does he sound like a pretty honorable man to you? Frankly, it's no wonder that he's top of the heap. He's a good man.

Verse 11:

[Daniel 6:11 NKJV] - Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

So one day, probably just a couple of days after this decree came into effect, he's praying there, and after he's praying, he opens his eyes and he sees all these governors in front of him—many of the men that report to him. They're all standing in front of him, and they're all waving at him and saying, "Hi, Daniel! We saw you praying! We saw you praying, Daniel!"

So what would an ordinary man do? He'd get on his horse and he'd ride off to Africa! He'd get out of there as far as he could. Not Daniel.

Verse 12:

[Daniel 6:12-14 NKJV]

¹² And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." ¹³ So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." ¹⁴ And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

When is the sentence going to be executed? In five years? In six months? In two weeks? No, tonight!

All right, verse 15:

[Daniel 6:15-17 NKJV]

¹⁵ Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed." ¹⁶ So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." ¹⁷ Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

So where is Daniel? He's kind of at the bottom, isn't he? All right. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." Okay. Is the king able to do that? No. Is God able to do it? Yes! Amen. Amen.

Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

Have you ever heard of a similar story? And the answer is yes. The similar story is very simple: They put Jesus on a cross. They put a spear in His side to prove He was dead. They took Him and put Him in a tomb. They rolled a stone before that tomb, and then they sealed it with an official seal, and they put guards outside to watch. Okay, they basically said, "Jesus, You're not getting out. That's final. You're in there, and You won't get out." And these men said to Daniel, "So sorry, Daniel, you're not getting out of that lions' den."

Verse 18:

[Daniel 6:18 NKJV] - Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

He had a sleepless night. What do you think he was thinking? He was probably saying, "What a fool I was! Imagine me saying that I'm like God and nobody should worship anybody but me. What a terrible fool I am! And the best man that I've ever met, the man who should be running my kingdom, is in a lions' den. What a fool you've been, Darius!"

He said, "What a fool you've been, Darius. You made such a law. You said, except for yourself, you can't worship any other god. I think I'm a god?" So now you're saying, "What's the situation in my country?" That's the smartest person—I hope he's smart.

Delivered from the Den

Then:

[Daniel 6:19-20 NKJV]

¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

You can understand that. Could he get in to check? No, the door was sealed. His own seal was on the door; he couldn't get in. Could Daniel get out? No. So you can imagine him crying, "Daniel, are you in there?"

Okay, that's not the end of the story. Where are we? Verse 21:

[Daniel 6:21-23 NKJV]

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." ²³ Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Do you notice the respect that Daniel has for this king? He could have said a lot of other things to the king! The only reason he was there was because the king put him there. What humility!

Verse 22, he says, "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." Would you like to have a man like that on your staff? Pretty good man.

Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Why was he delivered? Because he was smart? He was pretty smart, all right. Why was he delivered? Because he served the king faithfully? No. Why was he delivered? Because he believed in his God.

Do you believe in Jesus? That's all that matters. It doesn't matter what your boss thinks. Doesn't matter what your friends think. Doesn't matter what your enemies think. Doesn't matter, whether the guy wants to stab you in the back, what he thinks. All that matters is: do you believe in your God?

"Daniel, do you believe in your God?"

"Yes," he said.

"Is there any evidence?"

"Well," Daniel says, "there's lots of evidence, not the least of which is that I pray three times a day, kneeling in front of my open window towards Jerusalem, crying to the God of heaven that He will have mercy on me and on His people and fulfill His great promises."

Now remember, the issue always is this: do you believe in God? Do you believe in God in the easy days when everything is going just fine? Do you believe in God in the hard days when everything is going wrong? What is it that you believe in God?

The story of John chapter 3 is that Jesus said, "If you believe Me, then I will not let you perish; I'll give you everlasting life." I'd better quote the verse to you again:

[John 3:16 NKJV] - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That's Jesus dying on the cross—that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

If you believe that God created the heaven and the earth, does that mean you'll go to heaven? The Bible doesn't say that; lots of people believe that. If you believe that God is good, does that mean you'll go to heaven? No, a lot of people believe that. What is it you've got to believe to make sure you go to heaven? You've got to believe that God sent His Son Jesus into this world to die for your sin, so that you could be forgiven, so that you could go to

heaven—not as a guilty man or woman, but go to heaven as a forgiven man and woman. That's what it's all about.

And so the picture here is: Daniel believed in God, and therefore he was delivered. You and I say, "I believe in God, I believe in Jesus, I believe that I'm a sinner, and that if I don't get forgiven, I'll never get near God; I'll just perish." If I say I believe in God, I believe in Jesus, if I believe in Him, my sin will be pardoned. If I don't believe in Him, my sin will never be pardoned; I will be in hell forever. And those of us who say that, go to heaven. Those who say they believe, go to heaven.

There's a story that John tells us that Jesus told about the children of Israel in the Old Testament:

[Numbers 21:8-9 NKJV]

⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

The story is that the children of Israel were rebellious, and they complained, and they sinned, and God sent some snakes amongst them. And the congregation were snake-bitten; many of them died because of the venom in the snake bite. They cried to God, and they said, "What do we do?" The Lord said, "Moses, you make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole, hold it high on the pole. Moses, tell them, if anybody looks at that snake on the pole, when he looks, he'll live."

And there were two kinds of people in the congregation who had been bitten. One said, "That's absolutely ridiculous! How can you possibly heal somebody with snakebite by telling them to look at a snake on a pole? That's daft!" And they didn't look. And what happened to them? They died.

And there were the other kind of people who were there. What did they do? They looked. They said, "That's ridiculous, but you know what? God said, 'If I look, I'll live.' So I think I'll take a look." They said, "That's ridiculous, but if God said, 'Look, you can live,' so I'll look." And they looked, and they lived!

Now Jesus said that's exactly the same thing with you and me. We're all sinners. We've done all kinds of things that are bad, and we deserve, frankly, to be punished for our sins. Most of

us say, "I always get away with it." But just as Belshazzar's days were numbered, so are our days numbered. We're not going to get away with it.

So what do we say? The Bible says Jesus came into the world to go to the cross to die, to pay the price of my sin. And then after He was buried for three days, He arose again, and He's alive today! Daniel believed God, and God got him out of the lions' den. I can believe God the same way Daniel did, and He'll forgive my sins just like the children of Israel were forgiven for their snake bite.

Have you ever done that? Do that! Say, "God, I'm sorry. I'm a sinner. I'm like Belshazzar: the God in whose hand my breath is, I haven't glorified. I'm in trouble. But if Daniel could believe in God, I can believe in God. I believe in God." I'm going to tell Him that.

God Is My Judge

Back to chapter 6 and verse 24:

[Daniel 6:24 NKJV] - And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions--them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.

It didn't take long. These men who had accused Daniel—you can imagine them going to bed at night, and they said to themselves, "We won! We'll be going to the office in the morning, and Daniel won't be there. We'll be the boss in the morning." And they get up late, and there's a knock at the door, and the king's guards say, "You're under arrest. We're taking you out to the lions' den."

And they say, "What?"

And the guard says, "Daniel is alive, and the king knows what was in your heart, and he understands the whole thing. You will be lions' breakfast today."

Did you note the tragic additional part of the story? Who went with them to the lions' den? Their children and their wives. We live in a world which says all kinds of terrible things. One of the things it says is, if you get two people and they agree to do something that's bad, that's okay—if they agree, it's all right. And God says there is no sin that you can keep to yourself. Who's going to suffer for your sins? First of all, mostly those who are closest to you.

A man says, "I can sin." And his wife says, "That's terrible." And his kids can't sleep at night, and they think all kinds of terrible things. And when they grow up, they often say, "I can do this; my dad did this. I can do this because my father did it." And the Ten Commandments say:

[Exodus 20:5 NKJV] - you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Don't ever believe that if you and those with you decide to do something wrong, that that's all that matters. "If you're happy, everything's fine." No, it isn't!

All right, so are these serious matters? God put a man like Daniel in the Bible very simply so we'll learn the story. I didn't fully understand the story, but I was taught the story before I went to school, I know that. This is a very important story.

But I don't think I've told you yet: what does the name Daniel mean? What's the name Daniel mean? It's got two parts, maybe three parts—I don't know Hebrew, but I'm going to try. The suffix -el is God. The prefix Dan- is judge. And the vowel in the middle is me. What does the word mean? Daniel: God is my judge.

That's all that matters! If God is your judge, all you have to do is make sure He's happy. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. If God is happy, you're happy, because God is your judge. Daniel says, "God is my judge."

What did God do for Daniel? We start him at the bottom, put him at the top: up, down, up, down, up, down. Okay, as a baby, where did he start? At the bottom. As an old man, where did he end? At the top. Did he have an interesting time in the middle? Yeah!

Can I turn you to the end? You may as well see what the end is. Daniel chapter 12, verse 13. God is speaking to Daniel, and verse 13 says:

[Daniel 12:13 NKJV] - "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

Do you think Daniel is going to get a good inheritance? Yeah, he'll get the good inheritance, all right. Absolutely marvelous.

We don't have enough time to give the conclusion. Verse 25 says:

[Daniel 6:25 NKJV] - Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

And what he wrote is what we're going to consider when we get together next Tuesday, Lord willing.

Now I've just got to remind you, Daniel had a unique perspective on the world. He was born into a family of kings. He was raised from infancy to think like a king. And then he goes to Babylon, and he's elevated to the point that he's the highest ruler in the kingdom other than the king. Do you think he learned to think like somebody running an empire? And then the Babylonians are defeated, and the Medo-Persians take over, and Daniel's at the top again.

Have you ever heard of anyone who was supposed to be a king, and he didn't get to be king—he just got to run world empires in two different world empires? Absolutely nobody ever did that! How could you even think of doing that?

What's the rest of the book of Daniel all about? It's all about what God is going to do in the world, in world empires that are to come. If you wanted to get a good perspective on world empire, can you think of anybody you'd rather speak to than Daniel? He knows more about world empires than anybody who's ever lived. But he knows all about God; he knows all about the God of world empires. I guess if I were Donald Trump, I'd start reading Daniel.

Lord, we want to thank You for the Bible, and we just pray that You'll help us understand. And Lord, we don't start at the top; we're at the bottom. But Lord, if he believed You, and You were able to take him to the top, we believe that You could help us, and forgive our sins, and give us eternal life. And that's what we pray for each one of us. Do that for us, we pray. May each of us say, "Lord, I choose to make God my judge, just like Daniel chose to make God his judge." We give thanks now in Jesus' name. Amen.