

## **Dare to Live Differently: A Study of Daniel 1-6**

### Dare to Suffer

Daniel 6

Mark Vroegop

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One of the most famous documents from the Civil Rights era of the 1960s is the “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” written by Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1963. The letter was written after King had been arrested for protesting without a permit against the segregation laws of the city of Birmingham, Alabama. This was the unsightly era in American history of segregated bathrooms, restaurants, and schools. During this era, all kinds of methods were used to keep African Americans from becoming registered voters, causing the legislative and judicial systems to be the protectorate for institutional racism.

From his jail cell he drafted an open letter to Birmingham clergy who had published an essay in the paper calling for an end to the protest and for unity. MLK wrote the letter on scraps of newspaper, and it was eventually published in a series of national magazines in June of the same year. “The Letter from the Birmingham Jail” became the hallmark argument for the civil rights cause and a defense of civil disobedience.

Let me give you a taste with the hopes that you will read the entire document on your own. But I also want you to notice how the book of Daniel appears:

*An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because it did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote, despite the fact that the Negroes constitute a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?*

*These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. There are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust. Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions*

*and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.*<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr. appealed to the book of Daniel as an example of what it means to obey a higher moral law. The biblical record of the lives of Daniel and his three friends provided courage and a model for how to stand and even how to suffer when it becomes necessary to disobey the law of the land.

Today is our last message on Daniel 1-6, and I want to see what we can learn about how to live differently in a world where we may be called to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:27-29). I want to help you consider *when and how* you might dare to suffer. My hope is to get you thinking about the category of civil disobedience, because it seems as though it is only a matter of time until some of you will face very real decisions that fall into this category. I want to help you.

But let me also offer a qualifier. Navigating the decision as to what line to draw or what law to disobey is not always simple and straightforward. There are frequently nuances, options, and implications that all need to be weighed. What's more, there is the matter of personal conscience that also must factor into this discussion as believers have to decide what God is calling them to do or not do. This is where living differently is challenging and potentially loaded. This is also what the church family is for – to help one another navigate the complicated nuances of following Jesus with love, wisdom, and prayer. So, I'm not going to answer all of your questions about how to apply this message. But I do hope to give you things to consider and think about.

Daniel 6 is the biblical account of Daniel's disobedience to the king's law and his experience with the lions' den. It is the last story in a series of narratives that are designed to show God's supremacy over powerful kingdoms and nations. Daniel 6 shows us how Daniel became the personal intersection between God's law and man's law. It highlights the power of daring to suffer and what it looks like to live in the world while not allowing the world to live in us.

### **Righteousness in Unrighteousness**

In the first nine verses of Daniel 6, we see the way in which Daniel distinguishes himself as a righteous man in the midst of unrighteous people with unrighteous actions. Darius the Mede, who is likely a subordinate of Cyrus, is now ruling Babylon, and we learn that he assigned 120 deputies (satraps) the responsibility to govern the various provinces of the empire. They were given some kind of authority probably civil and military, to ensure that "the king might suffer no loss" (v. 2).

Additionally, there were three high officials who were responsible for managing this system of governance, and over time Daniel emerged as uniquely qualified. Verse three says that he was

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<sup>1</sup> [https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter\\_Birmingham\\_Jail.pdf](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf)

“distinguished” above all the other leaders because “an excellent spirit was in him,” and Darius intended to make him a ruler over the entire kingdom.

Once again we see that Daniel stands out from the rest of his culture. There is something special about the way that Daniel lives that makes him incredibly trustworthy and credible. If you were to trace the stories of other people who God used in the Bible, you will see something similar. The Bible says that “the Lord was with him” when talking about Abraham, Joseph, David and Hezekiah. Noah and Enoch are called those who “walked with God.”<sup>2</sup> There was something about these men that set them apart from the culture around them. God’s favor was upon them, and they chose to follow God in their generation. Could that be said of you? Are you distinguished from the rest of the culture by virtue of your godliness or something uniquely Christian that people see in you? Don’t miss the fact that Daniel is one of those people who just continues to faithfully follow his God. Whether its Babylon or the Medo-Persian empire, whether its Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, or Darius, Daniel consistently pursues a godly life.

In verses 4-5 we see that a plot develops against Daniel. The other leaders develop jealous hearts toward Daniel, or perhaps there is some kind of malfeasance that is happening that they want to keep covered up. Regardless, Daniel’s promotion is viewed with contempt, and these leaders collude to bring him down.

However, there is a problem. According to verse 4 there is nothing related to Daniel’s governmental role that they can use against him. There was no ground for complaint; no fault and no error could be found in him. In fact, the only way to bring Daniel down was to bring something against him related to his religious beliefs. He lived such a godly life that the only thing that they could use against him was his obedience to God. What an amazing and convicting statement!

One of the first places that opponents of the gospel go after is character. Discrediting a person by virtue of inconsistency or some other charge can serve their cause well. And yet Daniel is the kind of man and leader who can only be charged with being godly. Amazing.

In verses 6-9 we see the specifics of their plot. It plays into Daniel’s righteousness and Darius’ pride. The entire court, high officials and the satraps, suggest that the King should make an ordinance 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” (6:8). The king probably viewed this edict as a way to unite the kingdom and to position himself as the mediator between the gods and the people.<sup>3</sup> Plus, it must have stroked his ego that all of the leaders desired this kind of law. As a result, he signed the document.

If we take a step back from the story, it is helpful to consider a number of applications as they relate to following Jesus generally and when civil disobedience might be required:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/lord-was-him/>

<sup>3</sup> Iain Duguid, *Daniel – Reformed Expository Commentary*, (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 95.

- A believer’s normative posture toward those in authority should be one of joyful and respectful submission. Romans 13:1-4 tells us that authority is something given by God, and that we should consider authority as a part of God’s common grace. We obey as unto to the Lord (Col. 3:23). Of course, there are limits to our obedience. We must obey God rather than man. But that reality should not create a theological and exceptional “chip on our shoulders.”
- We ought to strive to be the kind of people whose lives make us worthy candidates for future opportunities to be used by God. Would your godliness stand the test this kind of persecution? Could God entrust you with the spotlight of being singled out at work, in your neighborhood, or in some other context?
- Despite living a righteous life, unrighteous people are going to act in an unrighteous and conniving way. More often than not, godliness results in persecution and disdain more than it does affirmation and applause. Don’t be surprised when opposition comes.
- Daring to suffer usually involves some kind of ridiculous unfairness. The leaders were jealous, the king was proud, and the law was foolish, and all of these events converge to create an undesired opportunity. Moments like this are rarely convenient or reasonable.

Daniel helps us to see what it looks like in one situation for a man to be righteous in the midst of a culture of unrighteousness.

### **Obedience through Disobedience**

In the next section we see Daniel’s response and the trouble that it causes. There is a sense of immediacy and determination in verse 10:

*<sup>10</sup> When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Daniel 6:10 (ESV)*

There are a number of things to note here. First, Daniel did not do what many others would have done. There was no angry response, no loud protestation, and no call for some kind of power play. There was no petition, no boycott on Facebook, and no uproar. But neither is there any appeal to the king for redress or the request for an audience with the king to change his mind. Instead, Daniel simply goes home, opens his windows, gets on his knees, and prays like he has always done.

Second, you should not consider Daniel’s prayer time something that he intended to be private. Daniel’s actions were an open act of disobedience – even defiance. It was a public display of obeying God rather than man. He didn’t have to pray by his windows and in his upper chamber. But he did. He could have prayed when no one was looking or prayed in such a way that no one knew he was praying. But he chose to be public with his disobedience.

Third, praying three times a day toward Jerusalem was not directly commanded by God. There was no explicit command for Daniel to pray where he did, when he did, and how he did. His actions were his expression of defiance to the king's command to pray to the king.

These three observations are important because this was the unique way that Daniel, in his context and his own way, drew a line. In other moments in Biblical and world history, appeals to kings and those in authority are made when unjust laws are written (Esther 4:16ff). In other situations, the disobedience is less public and more specifically tied to a biblical command (Exodus 1:15-20).

The point is to simply recognize that there is no easy and clear formula for what requires civil disobedience and even what civil disobedience should look like. John Piper, in a message on Romans 13 regarding submission to the government, summarizes the challenge well:

*Under what conditions, then, might civil disobedience be morally called for? One could say with the apostle Peter: Obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). In other words, if the law commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands then you must break the law. But the problem with that simple guideline is that much of the civil disobedience in history has involved doing things that are not clearly commanded by God. Sitting down on the sidewalk in front an abortion clinic in 1989 was not explicitly commanded by God in the Bible. Eating in a white-only restaurant in St. Augustine, Florida in 1964, and marching and praying in Montgomery, Alabama in 1965 were not commanded explicitly in the Bible. In other words, some Christians have come to the point in history where they believed laws were so unjust and so evil, and political means of change had been frustrated so long, that peaceful, non-violent, civil disobedience seemed right. <sup>4</sup>*

Daniel 6 is helpful at one level because we are able to see what he chose to do in that particular situation. But we have to be careful that we do not limit civil disobedience to only what we see in this chapter. Deciding what issue requires what kind of response is never easy, and yet people within each generation must decide what line they will draw. What laws could be broken? What laws must be broken? What company policies should be tolerated? What policies require your resignation? On what issues do you share your views? In what context do you share your views?

Those who follow Jesus must be willing to obey God rather than man, and we must do it in a way that honors the Lord, no question there. But determining why, how, and when requires more than a proof-text. It demands an understanding of the Bible and our culture. It requires us to be engaged aliens.

Well, this section continues as the leaders caught Daniel in the act of praying (v. 11) and as they confront the King regarding Daniel's disobedience (v. 12). The leaders appeal to the principle or rule of law that was a part of their culture to box the king into fulfilling his previously issued law. These leaders have found way to use the system to facilitate their jealousy and trap the king. What's

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/subject-to-god-and-subjection-to-the-state-part-3>

more there is a hint of racism and insurrection in their words as they highlight Daniel's history as an exile and as they accuse him of "paying no attention" to the king.

And despite the king's distress and his determination to free Daniel (v. 14), Darius chose to save face with his leaders and sacrifice Daniel. The plots of wicked, jealous men seemed to have worked. Daniel's obedience was viewed as treasonous disobedience.

### **Regret and Deliverance**

Our story continues with the king summoning Daniel and casting him into the den of lions. And as the king does this, he offers a prayer of sorts: "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" (6:16), and after that statement, a stone is placed over the lion's den with the king's seal upon it. When seen from God's perspective, how laughable is the seal of an earthly ruler! Darius and Pontius Pilate, with the tomb of Jesus, both set their seals upon the fate of those loved by God and had no idea how silly their little seals actually were.

The king had a terrible night. He didn't sleep. No doubt he was filled with anxiety and regret over what he had done. This is one of the potential effects of godly behavior and the right kind of civil disobedience. It can bring an awakening of the conscience.

In verse 19 we find the king rushing to the lions' den to see if Daniel had been delivered. Apparently the king had some level of curious faith in Daniel's God, or maybe it was a long-shot hope that somehow he would not be responsible for Daniel's death. Regardless, he cries out "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (v. 20).

Daniel's response must have been music to the king's ears, but it is noteworthy how respectful Daniel is: "O king, live forever!" (v. 21). Daniel then proceeds to tell the king about his deliverance through the presence of an angel in the midst of the lions' den, and he also reminds the king that he has not done the king any harm. Daniel is innocent, and his deliverance only serves to reinforce God's hand in the midst of all of this.

The king was exceedingly glad, ordered Daniel to be pulled out of the lions' den, and also ordered that all of his accusers and their families should be given the punishment that they had designed for Daniel. Justice, in this situation, was served.

God delivered Daniel. Daniel entrusted himself to God. Now not everyone will be delivered in the same fashion. Some people might see a very specific divine intervention. But every follower of Jesus can entrust their lives to the one who judges justly. I love how 1 Peter 2 summarizes this truth in light of suffering:

*... But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup>  
For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that*

*you might follow in his steps.<sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.<sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:20–23 (ESV)*

What a verse and what a calling! When you know the One who judges justly, and when you follow the example of Jesus, you are free to not revile and not threaten when you are being treated unfairly because you know that one day, God will make everything right.

### **Exultation through Suffering**

The story of Daniel and the lions' den ends where the entire story-line of the Bible ends – with the people exulting the supremacy of God. After all the story of Daniel is not meant to simply be a lesson in how to be an exile in a foreign land, nor is it just about the arrogance of kings at the seat of power.

Therefore, King Darius sent a letter to everyone in his royal dominion instructing them to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. The obedience of Daniel became a platform for people to hear the following words from their king:

*... He is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.<sup>27</sup> He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 6:26–27 (ESV)*

Through Daniel's suffering, God was glorified in a remarkable manner. And the story of Daniel ends by telling us that Daniel continued to prosper under Darius and also under Cyrus who authorized and helped fund the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Despite the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Israel, God preserved His people by blessing people like Daniel with the ability to live differently in a foreign culture.

Daniel is a book that is meant to help us the supremacy of God over powerful nations, kingdoms, and rulers. It is a book that invites us – even dares us – to live differently. It dares us to believe, to stand, to speak, and even to suffer when necessary.

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