

Have you ever been reading the Bible and you thought to yourself what you would do or what you wouldn't do in a given situation that you're reading about in the Bible? Maybe you're dealing with the apostles and how they never seem to understand anything that Jesus is saying. They're always getting it wrong. Maybe you think to yourself in that moment, "If I was in their shoes, I would do it differently. I would understand what Jesus is saying, because he always speaks so clearly. So if I was in that situation, I would definitely do things different than they did." Or maybe you're reading about the people of Israel when they're wandering around in the wilderness, and they're always complaining, complaining that they want to go back to Egypt, complaining that they're going to die, complaining, complaining, complaining. And you think, "If I was in that situation, I wouldn't complain. Because it's obvious that God is with them. It's obvious that God is taking care of them. So there's no reason to complain." Or maybe you hear a passage like we have for this evening from Daniel chapter 6--the famous story of Daniel in the lion's den--and you think to yourself, "If I was in Daniel's place, I would do the same thing. Because he's obviously doing what's right, resisting the command of the king and listening to the Lord his God. So I would think that in that situation I would do the same."

But the problem with this way of thinking about the Bible, Christians, is that it's kind of like winning arguments in the shower. Because you always win an argument that you have with yourself, don't you? Because you always have the situation under control. You always know exactly what you're going to say, and you always know what someone else is going to say too. It's all perfect, and it's all easy to keep in control. But then when you get down to real life, maybe even the argument were preparing for, you find that it doesn't quite work. What you thought you had completely under control ends up being a lot more difficult. And if we treat the Bible in that same way, just as a way of giving us these hypothetical examples and hypothetical situations that we can decide what we're going to do, then we're not really going to be ready for the things that come at us as Christians. God does not give us the story of Daniel in the lion's den as a way of showing us how to deal with hypothetical lions. God gives us the story of Daniel in the lion's den as a way of showing us through Daniel what it means to follow after God, what it means to not compromise in the things of God, and also what it means when we deal with these situations to pay a cost for the sake of God. So when we hear this story, we can learn something of how to deal in our own lives with the situations that we face every single day.

Because Daniel in our reading in Daniel chapter 6 is now a very old man, but he is in a very good position in this kingdom. Because now that the kingdom has passed to the Persians, Daniel has been made one of the leaders of the whole empire. And this is an empire that was far bigger than anything the Babylonians ever had to deal with. He is a very busy man, the kind of man who has a lot of responsibilities, the kind of man who has a lot on his plate. But he is still faithful to the Lord his God in the midst of all of that. Because we learned in Daniel chapter 6 that the Daniel prayed to the Lord his God three times a day. It didn't matter how busy he was. It didn't matter what he was putting up with. It didn't matter with what was going on in the kingdom. Daniel was faithful to God, and he listened to him in everything, so that he never failed to pray, giving thanks to the Lord for all that he had done.

But Daniel was also very good at his job. And when you're really, really good at your job, that can make your colleagues look really bad. And when your colleagues look really bad, what often happens is not that they want to become better so that they end up being just as good as you are.

They very often want to bring you down, so that you end up being destroyed in the process. That's exactly what they tried to do. They want to bring Daniel down, to their level at the very least, or even better to get rid of him entirely. But they can't do it through his work. Daniel is too good at his job. He is blameless when it comes to the affairs of the kingdom. So they say, "Well, then, we're going to get him where it counts. We're going to make him compromise in his relationship to the Lord. If we can get him to compromise in the things of God, we'll bring him down and we'll take care of this problem of this exile from Judah." And that's exactly what they do. They go to king Darius, and they offer to him a proposal: "Darius you should enact this law," which we hear in verse seven. "All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, 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." In other words, what they say is for the next month everyone has to pray to the king. Now, that might sound a little odd to us. We don't usually think of praying to men in that way. But you have to understand, the Persians saw their king as a kind of link between heaven and earth. He was the whole reason why their kingdom could survive. He was the whole reason why this whole thing was working. So Darius really didn't think very much about this. It sounded pretty good to him. He figures, "I'm the reason why this is all going in the first place. So why not pray to me for the next thirty days?" He's probably kinda flattered by it too. So without even thinking about it, he makes it a law.

But the trap has now been set, hasn't it? Because Daniel now has a dilemma. Is he going to compromise with what God has said to him, to listen to the voice of the king? Because if he chooses to compromise, to listen to what Darius has commanded even just for 30 days, it would certainly mean that his life would be easy. He could keep his job. He could keep his money. He could keep his way of life, continue on as if nothing had happened. But in so doing, he would have to reject the Lord his God. But if he refuses to compromise, if he refuses to listen to what the king has commanded him, he's going to die. He's stuck between a rock and a hard place. How was he going to deal with this situation? How was he going to not compromise with the things of the world? Or is he going to give in?

And Christians, when we see Daniel in that light of dealing with that question of whether to compromise with the demands of the world, it helps us to see how Daniel also applies to our own lives. Because we don't have to face a question of life or death, that's true. But there are lots of situations that we deal with even on a daily basis where we have to ask ourselves, are we going to compromise or we going to listen to what God wants us to do? Let me use one real good example. Maybe you have a job or you know someone who has a job where the boss says you need to come in and work at a time that you would normally be devoting for church. And the boss tells you at that time, if you don't do this, you're going to lose that job. Now if you compromise on that and say, "Okay, I'll listen to what the boss wants me to do, because I don't want to lose my job," you may end up drifting further and further away from God, drifting further and further away from where God wants us to be. But on the other hand, if we don't compromise, we may find ourselves without a job, and maybe we need that money as a way of paying the bills. What do we do in that situation? Do we compromise with what the world demands of us or do we not? Or another example that we might have, something that's becoming far too common these days, although thankfully it's not so much the case here, but dealing with high school sports. Where the school or the coach says that you need to come in for practice or

even for games during times that would normally be devoted to church, whether on Wednesday evenings when we would normally have confirmation or even sometimes on Sunday mornings. That's becoming far more common than we might realize. And if you don't do that, they say, well then your kid is not going to be able to participate. They're going to have to sit it out. So do we compromise and say, "Okay, we'll do this thing," but realizing that this may lead our children further and further away from God? Or do we not compromise and leave our kids in a place where they can't do something that maybe they enjoy doing? What do we do in that situation?

Or maybe something that even hits a little bit closer to home. Do we have family members or friends who don't want to go to church, who don't even like hearing prayer, who don't want anything to do with the things of God? And maybe we'll want to compromise and say, "Okay, then, we won't talk to them about it, because then at least we'll keep a good relationship with them." But then that might leave them without ever hearing the saving grace of Christ. Or if we refuse to compromise on that, maybe it will cause a rupture in that relationship. What do we do in that situation? Or one last one that really drives it home. When we are busy with our daily work and the work of the week, we end up working very hard for the sake of our families. But then we find on Sunday morning that we're tired. "I'm just so worn out. I have so much to do. It seems like it would cost me a lot of effort and a lot of time to get up and go to church. I mean, after all, Sunday is the only day I have off. Maybe I would rather use this day as rest in preparation for the coming week." So do we compromise with ourselves and say, "Okay, I'll just sleep in," maybe leading ourselves further and further away from the things of God where God wants us to be? Or do we just pay that cost and go anyway, even though it costs us time and even effort? But you can see, Christians, that these questions are never quite so easy, are they? We have to ask ourselves what are we willing to pay for the sake of the kingdom of God?

But Daniel gives us an answer here in Daniel chapter 6, because Daniel refuses to compromise with the king. Yes, he knows that this is going to cost him his life. Yes, he's fully aware that he is going to lose everything as a result. But yet he still goes back to his upper room and prays three times a day just as he always has. And Darius, even though he now realizes his mistake, because he is now going to lose his favorite servant, still carries out the law upon Daniel, throwing him into that den of lions. But Daniel still goes, Christians, because even while he's looking into the open mouth of that pit with the lions below him, and even though he knows he's about to lose everything, even his own life, Daniel is willing to pay the cost, because he knows that God is worth every cost that we might pay. God is worth more to us than anything we might lose in this life.

And really that's the whole point of God even delivering Daniel from the den of lions. Not to show us that he's going to somehow miraculously deliver us in every circumstance. That's not his point. But God does this to show us that no matter what cost we might have to pay for the sake of the kingdom of God, God will reward us. God will take care of us. And God will even give back to us more than what we've lost. It's like Jesus says in Matthew chapter 19 verse 29: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life." God is worth the cost, Christians, because God is going to take care of us no matter what. If we do lose our jobs, God is still going to provide for us. He's not going to leave us destitute. He may even get us a better job, one where we don't have these kinds of conflicts. If we have problems in our families or our friends because

of our faith, God will lead us through that too. He may even use us as a way of bringing them to faith. And no matter what we might lose, Christians, for the sake of the kingdom--money, time, effort, even our lives--God is worth the cost. Because he has prepared for us something far greater than we can even imagine. Eye has not seen, Paul says, nor has ear heard the things that God has prepared for those who love him. It will all be worth it, no matter what the cost may be, because God is our dearest treasure.

So Christians, let us not compromise with the things of God. Let us seek after him, because he has promised to take care of us. And no matter what the cost may be in this life, God will be with us always. Take up your cross and follow after Jesus, knowing that he is our dearest life and our dearest treasure.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you are worth more than all the treasures of this life. We pray that you would lead us through every difficulty so that we may follow after you with confidence, knowing that you will take care of us in every circumstance. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.