



Being a pastor, I've related much with those who are quite a bit older than I, and I've experienced the same type of blessings. But I want to talk about one consistent statement I've heard from people as they've gotten older and as they've experienced the weakness of their bodies – and their inability to do as much as they used to. They will say something like, "I don't know why I'm still here."

You know, you don't have to be elderly to ask this question. If you've experienced significant trials in your life, you've probably wondered, "Why am I here?" I've had many times in the midst of chronic pain and even seasons of depression in my past where I've thought, "If this is going to last the rest of my life, what's the point?" This is a very good question to ask. Shouldn't we want to know the purpose?

As we continue through this series on exile and even make the transition soon back to Matthew 5, I think we should ask this same question. The Scriptures, and Jesus himself, paints a different portrait of life for followers of the Lord. While all people have trials, and experience the brokenness of this world, Jesus calls us to act and respond like the exiles of the Old Testament. Why? Because we are. This world is *not* our home. So, we are to live like it. But what's the point? Why doesn't Jesus just take us out of the world immediately when we come to trust him? Wouldn't that bring him more honor to do that? Clearly not.

As we spend our final week in Daniel, focusing in chapter 6, I want to answer this all-important question. By the beginning of chapter 6, Daniel has spent at least 66 years in Babylon. Sixty-six years from chapter 1 to the beginning of chapter 6! Daniel is at least in his 80's when he enters a lion's den, if not pushing 90. Living in exile so long, and even being this age, Daniel could wonder, "What's the purpose?"

We see his purpose so clearly in this chapter – which I hope encourages us all. What is it? Well, the main idea of the sermon today is this: **God designs to produce fruit through exiles (i.e. – Christians living in this world).** Before we get into the background, and the rest of the sermon itself, I do want to explain what I mean by fruit. "**Fruit**" can tend to be a "Christianese" term. So, if you're not familiar with it, the word simply means that **God intends, like a gardener, to work in his children in such ways that godly results come about through our lives.** By the way, this doesn't mean that fruit comes immediately. Nor does it mean that God gives us what we think is best. No. God gives what he ordains is best – which is best. This is God's work. And, what we'll discover is that part of the soil of God's work in us is actually this fallen world. We, as exiles, are planted here – in what might even feel like dirty, muddy soil. And we can feel like we're planted here for a long time – and we may even long to get out. And, we may wonder why we're still here. But in this soil, God will make us rise up for his glory.

So, whether you're older, or maybe you're younger, this message is for you. We live in this soil of this earth, and at some point in our lives, we will all wonder, "Why am I still here?" We're here because God designs to produce fruit in and through us.

For the sermon today, I do want to give you a heads up on the progression. We're going to focus on Daniel 6 to see God's fruit-bearing through Daniel. Then we're going to jump into the New Testament to see how the lion's den scenario finds fulfillment in Jesus. Finally, we're going to see how this then should affect our living today. Now let's jump into Daniel 6. Please turn there with me, and get the background in the first three verses.

**The Background.** Verses 1-3 say, "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; <sup>2</sup>and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. <sup>3</sup>Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."<sup>1</sup> We see that Darius raises Daniel up in his kingdom. Darius is highest. Then he has three high officials under him (of which Daniel was a part), and then there are 120 sub-rulers. But Daniel was so wise among the high officials that the King planned to raise him up to the second in command – setting him over the entire kingdom! This is the background for the Lion's Den. And here, we will see how God worked to bear fruit through Daniel.

**God bore fruit through Daniel (vv. 4-28).** As we think of the word picture of bearing "fruit," I want us to remember that to bear fruit takes time. Here, in the soil of Babylon, Daniel has lived for almost 70 years. Here, in chapter 6, we can rehearse many times that God has bore fruit in Daniel's life – through his example of humility and obedience in chapter 1 to his interpretations of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, along with his faithful words pointing to Nebuchadnezzar's need to humble himself before the Lord. God has borne fruit through Daniel, but Daniel's still in the dirt of Babylon. How much more work does God have left for Daniel? We can ask the same questions, can't we? Aren't we done yet? How much more, Lord?

As we walk through this chapter and see how God bore fruit through Daniel, I am going to highlight a progression of events. Again, this is how fruit is borne – through process. We often don't like process. We want God to do things right now. But that's not how God often works, and we see that progression here. And, as I highlight the progression here, you're going to see how this progression is on display in Jesus – as well as those of us who trust and follow Jesus.

**Promotion:** What we see with Daniel is that he's going to be promoted *again*, by a third ruler of Babylon. Remember that promotion is not Daniel's goal. Like we saw in the previous chapter, Daniel even tells Belshazzar that he can keep the promotion. Promotion in this world is not the same as godliness. That said, he was promoted, and we see the reasons why. These reasons are more important than the promotion itself. So, what is so special about Daniel? Clearly, God was working through him. **What were Daniel's consistent, daily patterns for living?** What set him apart from others? I'm asking this because I think we, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, can tend to look at someone like Daniel (or any other person in the Bible that we respect), and we say, "I want to be just like them," and all we do is focus on the fruit of their lives. We look at what was accomplished. If we think that way, all we want is acclaim. What about *who* they were? The title of this message is faithful day-by-day because there are patterns in Daniel's life that were daily habits that carried him throughout his exile. Through these God-driven habits, God bore fruit through Daniel. I believe that through these same habits, God bears more fruit even through us. So, what were these patterns?

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:1–3.

First, **Exceptional Work (v. 3)**. In verse 3, we read that Daniel became distinguished because of an excellent spirit in him. Through his work, he was recognized as different. He served and did an exceptional job. Clearly, this was the result of God's work in him. But note that because of God's work in him and through him, he cared about the job he did. By the way, the New Testament speaks this way to Christians about doing your labor as unto the Lord. That's exile-speech! The Lord has given you grace to live for his glory in your work. Thank the Lord for the power he gives you and live this out.

Second, **Faithful & Blameless Character (v. 4)**. At the end of verse 4, we're told that the other leaders sought to find some dirt on Daniel, but this is what they discovered: he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.<sup>2</sup> He was faithful and blameless. Faithful means that he was consistently a certain way towards a certain thing. Daniel was faithful in his service to Darius – which was ultimately a result of his faithfulness to the Lord. Ventura, remember the kingdom Daniel is serving within. This is *Babylon!* This is the wicked kingdom that God is going to judge someday, but at this point in time, God designs to show his kindness towards Babylon, and he commanded through Jeremiah the prophet to “. . . seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”<sup>3</sup> Daniel, under wicked rulers, shows honor and respect to them. I believe this show speak strongly to us in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, Christians. There's a lot we can do as exiles in this world that doesn't betray God. We may not like being in the positions we are. We may not like being in the dirt. But we stay there. We pray the Lord would grow us and that if even our enemies in this world try to find a problem with us that all they can say is, “That person (or, those people) are always only trying to seek our best!” The only way Daniel could be perceived this way was through a consistent way of living. This was a pattern that led to the conclusion of faithfulness. Oh, may we all reveal *faithfulness* in our jobs and even in our actions as citizens of the United States of America.

Third, **Prayerful Life (v. 10)**. Read the end of verse 10 with me: He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.<sup>4</sup> I simply want you to notice that prayer was the way of Daniel's life. This is the habit I want to drive home to all of us. I don't believe Daniel would have been faithful in his work towards the Babylonians (the enemies who captured him) if it were not for God's grace working through prayerful dependence. Ventura, what about you? Do you cry out to the Lord? Do you have habits and rhythms in your life where you commune with the Lord and speak with him? Sometimes I can't help but wonder if we (myself included) are so focused on getting things accomplished that we *forget relationship* with the Lord and even loving others. How can we love others well if we aren't dependent on God in prayer? How can we love God if we're not on speaking terms? Do you have rhythms of prayer? We cannot live in exile without speaking with our King.

Now, these are the three things that characterized Daniel's life. None of these things are illegal, but they were tremendously frustrating to other leaders in Babylon.

This leads us to the second point in the progression of the story: **Envy (v. 4)**. The leaders are envious. After we hear, in verse 3, that the king plans to raise up Daniel, verse 4 begins with “Then. . .” They want the position, and they don't want Daniel to have the position. That's envy. It's not just jealousy, which is “I want.” It's envy: you must not have it. So, they search for all sorts of reasons why he should be punished, but they can't find anything. But that's not a problem for them. They realize Daniel's Achilles' heel. Daniel's faith.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:4.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 29:7.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:10.

So, we come to the third step in the progression: **A Trap (v. 5)**. The men say, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”<sup>5</sup> So, they have to somehow create a rule that Daniel would necessarily break. Oh, Ventura, how amazing that the only way Daniel could be persecuted was to directly attack his faith. Oh, how I long for this to be the reason why all Christians are persecuted. Yet, sometimes I think Christians can tend to think they’re being persecuted when in actuality, they’re not. This past week, I read about reporters in Afghanistan being beaten by the Taliban for attending a women’s rally. That is horrific and I do not want to downplay that. But, what if one of those reporters was a Christian and the other wasn’t. Was the Christian faith being attacked there? Not really. If the person was silent about Jesus, his persecution is simply of this world. This principle applies to us in America. If a Jew and a Muslim and a Christian can be mocked by this world for a certain belief, we’re not experiencing distinctly Christian persecution. So, don’t get on the martyr-bandwagon if you’re not declaring the Lord. The leaders *knew* Daniel’s dedication and devotion to the Lord. So, they attacked him there. If we are attacked by the world, I pray they would know we are followers of Christ and they would see that’s the only way they could attack us!

As the story goes on, we see that the leaders came up with a law in Darius’ favor – that everyone should only pray to Darius and to no other gods for 30 days. From an ancient perspective, this really simply affirmed what many thought of the king. The king was a mediator to the gods. So, this law wouldn’t have sounded weird back then. It sounds like they’re just telling Darius that his rule is set, and they think it’s wise that he affirm it by making this law. Now, it’s according to the Medes and Persians, which means it can’t be revoked. And, Darius agrees with the law. Not only does he agree to the law, but he agrees to the punishment, which was throwing the person into the den of lions.

Now, what happens? Read verse 10 again with me: <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.<sup>6</sup> Daniel continues to do what he’s always done. This is an essential habit of Daniel’s life because he needs God more than anyone or anything else. But notice something here. When Daniel hears of the document being signed, he isn’t out in the streets saying, “What?! How absurd! I’m going to pray 5 times a day. . . IN THE STREETS!” Sometimes people act that way in our current days, but it seems to be that when we do that, we are emphasizing ourselves more than God. We spend more time talking about what we ought to be able to do instead of actually doing it! Daniel didn’t need to prove anything to people who hated God. He just needed God; so, he goes to his house and prays.

But you could say, “Hold on! It says his window was open towards Jerusalem. So, that probably means he was making his defiance known.” I don’t think we can go that far here. There are examples throughout history – and Jesus’ own teaching – where we see that Christians can hide if needed. With Daniel praying in the upper room, people who have to try to see what he was doing. They’d have to climb and peer in, and that’s exactly what they did.

Now, the leaders have something on Daniel, which leads us to the fourth point: **Trial**. They go to the King. They reaffirm the law. Once Darius affirms the law, they then tell him about Daniel, and we read of Darius’ response in verse 14: [Darius] was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:5.

<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:10.

labored till the sun went down to rescue him.<sup>7</sup> But they remind him of the law of Medes and Persians. Darius must send Daniel to the den of lions.

I agree with certain commentators who actually believe this was a type of punishment that was to prove Daniel's guilt or innocence. In ancient times, they would have these kinds of punishments where they wouldn't make the decree of guilt or innocence, but because they questioned it enough, they would put them into a position where death was inevitable, but if the "higher being" wanted to rescue them, he could – thus proving his innocence. Darius even states, before going into the pit, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you." This is the kind of trial Daniel is under. Daniel is charged. Daniel, the 80-90 year-old man is going to be tossed into a pit of lions. And what happens next is shocking. We're told that Darius is so disheartened he can't sleep. And, he doesn't want any aid in getting his mind off of this. At first light of dawn, Darius goes to the lion's den. Did God rescue him? Is Daniel innocent?

This brings us to the fifth point: **Vindication**. Read verses 20-24 with me: "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"<sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever!<sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."<sup>23</sup> Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.<sup>24</sup> And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.<sup>8</sup> Vindicated! How many times we're told that God has done this work. Because Daniel was blameless before the Lord and before Darius, Daniel's vindicated. God saved him from the Lion's Den.

Then we come to the sixth and final point: **Fruit**. What's the fruit that comes from Daniel's life? God's glory is declared by Darius to the Babylonian world. Read verses 25-28: Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. 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."<sup>9</sup>

I want to say something similar to what I said last week. Do you think this story is to lead us to tell other Christians today that they shouldn't worry about their circumstances today because they'll definitely be rescued? I mean, would you say to Christians in Afghanistan that they can rest assured they won't die because Daniel was rescued from the Lion's Den? No. The historical account of Daniel is meant to speak to Christians today as encouragements towards a greater reality. We have a greater homeland than the physical Israel that was Daniel's home. We have the New Heaven's and the New Earth. We are exiles here, and we are in the dirt until we sprout up and are carried into a new home. So, how should we think about this story?

First, Daniel is intended to point us to Christ himself! As God intends to bear fruit through exiles. We see that this fruit-bearing culminated in Jesus, our King. Think through this sequence of Daniel's life. You can

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<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:14.

<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:20–24.

<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 6:25–27.

see it in greater ways in Jesus! Jesus was **promoted** at Palm Sunday, where people worshipped him as Lord! Religious leaders were **envious** of him, yet Jesus asks them in John 8:46, “Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?”<sup>10</sup> The religious leaders set a **trap** for Jesus. They had to get false witnesses, and they attacked him at the core of who he is. Jesus is God! So, they had a **trial**. And you know what? It was a similar trial to that of Daniel. Listen to these words from Matthew 27:41-43: **So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.”**<sup>11</sup> Essentially they’re saying, “If God rescues him like he did Daniel, then he’s innocent!”

But God wasn’t going to work this way through Jesus. Instead, Jesus cries out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” You see, Jesus’ death was different than Daniel’s punishment. Daniel couldn’t save humanity, but Jesus could! If Jesus came down from the cross, then no one would be rescued. On that cross, Jesus took the just punishment for all the sins of sinners! His staying on the cross was the ultimate act revealing God’s justice and also God’s love and grace. How do we know this? Because Jesus was also **vindicated**. He rose from the dead. And now he has ascended into Heaven. And now he calls people from every nation, people and language to come to God through Him! That **fruit!** The God-Man came in the flesh and experienced our curse so that we could have Life forever with God. Have you turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God? If not, the Bible calls you to do so even now. Turn to God. And, if you have turned to Christ and experienced forgiveness, you now are made part of his kingdom, and you are privileged and empowered to follow him, in his steps.

Remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 – right before we jumped into Daniel? “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” That’s what we see of Daniel. That’s what we see of Jesus, who is the Light of the World. And then Jesus tells his followers that his light shines through us. Well, what does that look like for this of us who are in exile? It looks like **exceptional work, blameless character, and a prayerful life**. As Paul writes to the Colossians and Ephesians, we are to work as unto the Lord. As James calls believers to blamelessness (which is not perfect, but it is a character that’s focused on godliness). As Jesus, and the New Testament teaches, Jesus died to provide us communion with the Lord through prayer. These are essential to the life of an exile. We may experience worldly promotion, envy from others, experiencing a trap and a trial. But let’s not focus on that. We live in a fallen world. Fallen things will happen to us. Instead, focus on the fact that someday, we will be vindicated when Jesus returns – and focus on the fact that God will make his glory known through us. And if you look at this list and say, “Ugh! I’ll never attain! I’m such a failure!” Right. Left to yourself you’ll fail. But you’re not alone! You have the Spirit, Christian. Also, remember, this is a process of daily steps, all by God’s grace. For Daniel, this was a process of at least 65 years! And, if you’re a believer, you’re called into this process to. God is faithful. He will do this work.

So, if you’re here today and you wonder, “Why am I here?” Remember that **God designs to produce fruit through exiles (i.e. – Christians living in this world). You may not see the fruit, but you can trust that God is still working in and through you in this fallen world. Someday, he will replant you. Until then, he is working through you day-by-day to be faithful to his calling and to bear fruit for eternity!**

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 8:46.

<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 27:41–42.