



# HG10: Daniel (4/5) 'Mouths Shut And Eyes Opened'

Daniel 6:1-28

## Home Group Sermon Notes

22nd February 2009 - Revd Paul A Carr

**Introduction:** This story is one of the first Bible stories told to children and it's easy to understand why. It's a gripping story and the principle of God as the powerful rescuer is obvious for all to see. How many of us, I wonder, have ever stood in front of a lion enclosure at the zoo and wondered what it must have felt like to be like for Daniel and thrown into a pit of hungry lions! Ch6 stands in contrast to what we've looked at, so far, in Daniel's life. In the other situations, Daniel was, above all, a spokesman for God who interpreted and proclaimed what God wanted said. But in ch6 he only speaks once vs21-22. More important than his statements are his actions, which demonstrate his: character; godliness; and courage. Daniel does nothing to deserve opposition and it stirs up because he's a faithful servant of the Lord. This story is a great comfort in times of trouble. But it also contains some challenges. And, like many challenges from the Bible, it may make us feel more uncomfortable than comforted. It's interesting to learn that the events of ch6 take place near the end of Daniel's life (The experiences recorded in ch7-12 occurred before those in ch6). Daniel is now in his late seventies and, despite being in exile from Jerusalem for nearly 60 years, his true loyalties haven't changed: he still worships the God of Jerusalem, and, as he strives to be faithful to God, we see how God is faithful to him in return.

**The Plot against Daniel vs 1 - 9:** Daniel was no longer serving the Babylonian Empire (we saw in ch5 how that had been destroyed) but the Persian Empire and king Darius. The Persian Empire was more than four times larger than the Babylonian Empire so the layers of administrative government were very different. One of Darius's first responsibilities was to appoint a government to oversee his new kingdom. It was a logical choice - if not wise leadership - for Darius to give Daniel responsibility as one of three administrative overseers in his kingdom. Daniel's long experience and wide understanding of Babylonian affairs made him the perfect candidate. Vs3: *Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators by his exceptional qualities that he planned to set him up over the whole kingdom.* He was the outstanding candidate to be prime minister

The thought that a Jew could actually become prime minister was, to put it mildly, very disturbing to Daniel's contemporaries. Inevitably, their jealousy began to take hold, and they colluded together to ensure that Daniel would never be promoted. And so they investigated his conduct and management of government affairs - to expose grounds for charges against him - but their investigations proved fruitless. They probably looked into every corner of his life for: mistresses; slush funds; hidden sin; any kind of cover-up that they could expose and use to undermine him. But they found nothing. He wasn't even lazy. In the end, vs4: *They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt or negligent.* Daniel's integrity was beyond question. They could not compete with him and, having no weakness to exploit, they exploited his strength. Vs5: *We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.* What a tremendous testimony to Daniel's witness and lifestyle. They saw that he took his faith seriously and they recognised that the only way they could destroy Daniel was to put him in a position where he had to choose between obedience to the Lord and obedience to his government. Daniel's enemies opposed him because he was a righteous man who loved God first, who was honest in his work, and who was, as a consequence of this, 'successful.' If you want an accurate insight into the kind of person you are, it's probably not a bad idea to find out what your enemies think of you.

There was no law against Daniel practising his Jewish beliefs. Somehow, a new law had to be devised that would seem to have positive political implications to king Darius but would impose a religious dilemma for Daniel. And so a subtle addition to the king's laws was proposed. A sort of private members bill! For a period of one month, all prayers throughout the kingdom must be directed to Darius alone. This not only flattered Darius (vs6-9) - we all like to be buttered up from time to time - it was also a shrewd political move. The time limit of one month seemed reasonable after which the people could return to their regular mode of worship. The governmental administrators came to Darius as a group and presented their proposal - falsely implying, vs7, that Daniel agreed with their proposal. In some ways, Darius should have noticed that Daniel wasn't there to speak for himself, but then he had no reason to suspect that the other two royal overseers would misrepresent Daniel's position. The fact that so many of the lower members of the government agreed with this new legislation would have been enough to satisfy any doubts Darius might have had. It's an intriguing scenario, one that is probably acted out every day in some political capital around the world.

The consequence of failing to respond to this new law meant being thrown to the lions - which would be enough to convince even the most verbal sceptic to conform! Darius authorised the new legislation, vs8: *So that it could not be altered.* It was the practice of Persian governance that once a law had been decreed and signed, no one could change it. And so the government officials eagerly set about putting this decree into operation. Unlike SMA Daniel wasn't asked to do something wicked - only to refrain from doing what was good. The conspirators knew that Daniel wouldn't agree with the new legislation, they knew he would continue to pray, but Daniel knew his God! And that came from a lifetime of prayer-fellowship and study of God's word. So, how does Daniel react to 'being set up' and the small problem of not being able to pray? Simple - by praying about it!! How many times, when we hear about a difficult situation have we used the phrase, *Well, the least I can do is pray!* Prayer is not the least we can do, it is the most! Daniel recognised this to be a reality in his own experience, and so it should be with us. A pertinent reminder that prayer must be at the centre of every area of our life and decision making. Daniel was a man of prayer. It was this prayer-fellowship with the Lord that had safe-guarded him from the corrupting influences of Babylonian culture but it carried a cost; the cost of time; the cost of loneliness; the cost of energy; the cost of obedience; and the cost of persecution. Daniel knew that suffering was part of being a disciple. Chris Wright: *Prayer and politics were an integral part of Daniel's whole life. Prayer was not an escape from the dirty world of politics, but the source of power by which he made it a cleaner world.*

**Daniel is Accused, vs 10 - 18:** Why did this situation need to happen - particularly when it would have been so easy for Daniel to avoid it: not necessarily by compromising his faith, but by just keeping quiet? Daniel could have compromised his integrity by ceasing to pray during that month, or by praying privately, or by praying at night rather than the three times daily vs10, *by opening his windows towards Jerusalem.* For Daniel, the choice was loyalty to the Lord or obedience to a sinful government commanding him to bow down to idolatry. He could not have made his defiance more public. William Gurnall: *we fear men so much, because we fear God so little. One fear cures another. When man's terror scares you, turn your thoughts to the wrath of God.* Daniel knew which he feared most and wasn't prepared to compromise his position just to preserve his role in the government and continued to trust in God for deliverance. But did his prayer rescue him from trouble? No! It got him into trouble. God is not a God who makes difficulties vanish, but a God who is prepared to go through every difficulty with us. Remember Jesus' words when praying for his disciples in John 17:15: *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

Being a Christian, is not an easy way out of the everyday struggles of life, that's for certain. How else could we relate to the people and world around us? But, we can have no better support than the Lord himself by our side. That's what made the difference to Daniel and does for us. Daniel was caught 'red-handed' in prayer, vs11, and the officials wasted no time in reporting back to Darius. They asked Darius to confirm that the law was still in place then they landed their killer punch vs13 (you can almost imagine how smug and self-satisfied they must have been): *Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O King, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.* The reason that Daniel prayed three times a day was that, in exile, prayer had replaced the daily sacrifices commanded in Numbers 28 as sacrifices could not take place when the Temple was destroyed (This is still the case within Orthodox Judaism today).

The king was *greatly distressed*, vs14, not because he resented Daniel praying to God, but because, for the first time, the real reason for the new legislation dawned on him. Darius realised how he'd been manipulated by Daniel's enemies! We see something of the esteem and respect that Darius had for Daniel and for his faithfulness to God, vs14, *He was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.* But those efforts were in vain. However, Darius respected Daniel's God and, as Daniel was thrown to the lions, Darius amazingly prays, vs16, *May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.* What another tremendous testimony to the witness and integrity of Daniel that a foreign, pagan king, should recognise his witness and offer those words of endorsement and support - what a picture of effective lifestyle evangelism! Remember the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: *Preach the Gospel and, where necessary, use words.*

**Daniel's Deliverance vs 19 – 28:** Darius went home and fasted and, after a sleepless night, vs18, and *At the first light of dawn vs19* ran to the lion's den calling out vs20 *Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?* It's interesting that Darius should use the term *living God*. Perhaps he regarded Daniel's fate as a test of whether his God was really alive or just an unproved superstition. Perhaps the time lapse between SMA's deliverance from the furnace and the present time had ensured that it passed down into folklore and legend rather than being remembered as an actual occurrence. However, the same God that had delivered the 'Furnace Three!' had delivered Daniel too. Daniel greeted Darius vs21: *O King, live forever vs22: My God has sent his angel and he shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight.* And, just to make a political point, Daniel adds, *Nor have I done anything wrong before you O King.*

Without any trial or hearing Darius ordered Daniel's accusers, and their wives and families - as it was for Persian custom - to be thrown into the pit they'd conspired to have Daniel thrown into. It's almost poetic justice that, vs24: *Before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.* Hungry lions – looking at food all night and not being able to eat anything because an angel was keeping their mouths shut! Darius went on to make a public proclamation, just like Nebuchadnezzar had done, giving glory to the God of Daniel and of the Jews, commanding all citizens of the realm to honour and respect him, vs26-27: *For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.* What tremendous words! And so the mouths of the lions were shut and the eyes of Darius, and others, opened.

**Conclusion:** What are the lessons we can learn from this passage? Well it's a relief to know that none of us are going to be thrown to the lions because we are Christians. Though, metaphorically, it often feels like that - as we seek to live out, and proclaim, our Christian faith to those around us. However, we can learn so much from the courage, moral stability, discipline and spiritual vigour of Daniel, as we seek to serve God and serve others more effectively. We can take encouragement that when the Lord Jesus is lifted high, and His Gospel proclaimed, men/women will be drawn to him. However, just like Daniel, the way we live, act and worship must support, and mirror, something of that life changing faith that we proclaim, that is the challenge to us - 2500 years on from Daniel's experience. Perhaps the most important observation about this story regards Daniel's prayer life. In vs10 Daniel, as he had been in the habit of doing, prayed in front of his open window, facing Jerusalem, three times a day. He wasn't going to back away from the priority in his life. He had learned over a lifetime that he needed the discipline of regular times of prayer and he allowed nothing to get in the way.

The story of Daniel highlights, as I mentioned earlier, the need for prayer to be at the very centre of our Christian existence, to be the focus of all our efforts and plans. We need to immerse ourselves in more active and corporate prayer, for it is the powerhouse of God to strengthen our spirituality, our integrity, our morality and, most importantly, our witness. Many of us wait for the moving of the Spirit or some emotional call to prayer before we pray – you know HELP! These are good occasions for prayer, of course, but in addition, Daniel made prayer a habit. It was this regular experience of prayer that shaped his life. Prayers that begin with God's personal call to us or end with clear answers to our requests are wonderful. However, disciplined, regular prayer that proceeds from gratitude and a determination to obey is what changes our character. Daniel entered God's presence in prayer three times a day for decades of his life. Like ours, his emotions sometimes supported his prayers and sometimes did not. He saw clear changes in circumstance brought about by prayer and, as we do, realized that many of God's answers to prayer are inscrutable. But the deep well of courage and faith that sustained him in the lions' den was dug in the daily sessions of prayer that were his lifetime habit. Remember the old saying: *Seven days without prayer makes one weak!*

But just get a picture of the freedom that prayer brings: We can travel to any part of the world that we like. We can stand alongside anyone we like. We can pray about anything we like. We can enter into any situation that we like. D.L.Moody: *The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.* We often find ourselves in precarious circumstances, whether at work, in the home. There may be external pressures over which we have no influence, it may be a lowering of standards, the demands of others or it may be something that might come in-between our relationship with God - even our closest families and friends can be capable of that. *Prayer can give us the strength, courage and wisdom to deal with those situations.*

We may be faced with circumstances where we might be expected, or challenged, to compromise our faith in order to appease those around us. We may well have to make a stand for what we believe in and all that we represent. Our morals and integrity may well be on the line. It's worth remembering that it is not just us, who might be in the spotlight, but the Lord himself - just as He was for Daniel. But, as Jesus said in John 15:18: *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.* The challenge that often comes our way, is a direct challenge to the Living God whom we praise, worship and serve. *Prayer can give us the strength, courage and wisdom to deal with those situations.*

We live in difficult times to share the Gospel - there is no doubt about that. 1 Peter 5:8-9 reminds us of the spiritual battle we are involved in, *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.* Have your loyalties altered with the passing of time? Or do you, like Daniel, still praise the Lord regardless of the changing world around you? *Prayer can give us the strength, courage and wisdom to deal with those situations.*

When I first arrived here I suggested that the single most important issue that faces any church today is the state of its corporate prayer life. I'd still say the same today. Prayer must be our first priority if we want to move **closer** to God, move **where** God wants to lead us, move **how** God wants to lead us and move in the **power of His spirit**. *Only prayer can give us the strength, courage and wisdom to move in his steps.* And finally, the greatest comfort that we can take from this passage this morning is that this same God can, and does, intervene, intercede, and answer prayer, on our behalf. And, as we seek to be faithful to him He, in turn, is faithful to us (1 Samuel 2:30: *This is what the Lord says, Those who honour me I will honour*).



# HG10: Daniel (4/5) 'Mouths Shut And Eyes Opened'

Daniel 6:1-28

## Home Group Sermon Sheet

22nd February 2009 - Revd Paul A Carr

COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

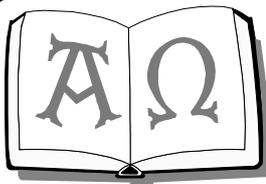
### Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

If you were an MP and had the chance to introduce a Private Members Bill what would it be, and why?



### Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



### Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1:** If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
- 2:** What parts of your life at home or work or church, would you least like other people to know about? Why?
- 3:** Why does it seem that a Christian's public and private lives are so different? Share the biggest difficulty of being a Christian at work/home and pray about these areas together.
- 4:** Why do you think 'being good' provokes such anger and hatred in people, vs4-5? (Read 1 Peter 2:20 - 24).
- 5:** In what ways can our judgement be affected by flattery, vs6-9?

6: Why do you think Daniel continued to pray so publicly and didn't do it 'out of sight' vs10? How do you balance this with Jesus' teaching about *not* praying in public in Matthew 6:5-8?

7: Daniel was known as a man in integrity, vs4, how much does your Christian integrity mean to you? Are you lacking this in your (Christian) life? What can you do to strengthen this?

8: What, out of all that we have studied so far in this series on Daniel has had the most impact on you?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

