

Daniel 6:1-10

I. Daniel 6:1-3 — It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; 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. **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.

What is this “excellent spirit” that was in Daniel? Remember what the queen said to Belshazzar:

□ Daniel 5:11 (cf. 5:14) — There is a man in your kingdom **in whom is the spirit of the holy gods**. In the days of your father, **light and understanding and wisdom** like the wisdom of the gods were found in him...

So the “excellent spirit” that was in Daniel was a spirit of knowledge and understanding and wisdom. On the one hand this wisdom was an ability to live life skillfully according to God’s Word (cf. Dan. 1). On the other hand, this wisdom was an ability to discern “mysteries” – to understand dreams and explain riddles (5:12). Remember what Nebuchadnezzar said in chapter four:

□ Daniel 4:8-9 (cf. 4:18) — At last Daniel came in before me... and I told him the dream, saying, “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because **I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you**, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.”

Daniel is certainly unique and set apart as a prophet; but there’s also a sense in which he’s being held before us as a model of true “wisdom” – a model for us to copy and to aspire after ourselves.

But is this really all about Daniel? Where did this wisdom come from? Where did this “excellent spirit” that was found in Daniel come from? All the way back in chapter one, we read:

□ Daniel 1:17 — As for these four youths, **God gave them** learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Daniel knew that his wisdom didn’t come from himself. He knew that any true wisdom he had was graciously given to him as a gift by God. And when you think about it, isn’t wisdom a wonderful, wonderful gift? So on the one hand, this encouraged Daniel to pray and to ask for wisdom. Wisdom is a gift that God gives to those who ask.

□ Daniel 2:17-18 — Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.

We'll never need to be asking for wisdom to interpret dreams and visions, but we do still need wisdom not only to live life skillfully according to God's Word but also to discern and understand the Gospel "mysteries" that are hidden in Christ (cf. Col. 2:3) and that have now been written down for us in the Scriptures. Paul speaks of our need for "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:15-23). Every single day of our lives we need this wisdom to be graciously given to us by God. And so this is why we, too, should be daily "asking" and "seeking" and "knocking."

- Matthew 7:7 — Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
- James 1:5 — If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.
- Luke 11:13 — If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit ["give good things" (including wisdom); Mat. 7:11] to those who ask him!

Brothers and sisters, are we asking and seeking and knocking? And are we asking and seeking and knocking with the absolute confidence that it will be given to us and we will find and the door will be opened to us? As James says, are we asking in faith, without any doubting? (James 1:6)

Daniel's knowledge that any true wisdom he had was graciously and sovereignly *given to him* by God caused him not only to ask God for wisdom, but also to give all the glory to God when God answered his prayer.

- Daniel 2:20–23 — **Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might... he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;** he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. **To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might,** and have now made known to me what we asked of you...

On the one hand, when God enables us to live life skillfully—to walk obediently in true wisdom before Him—we ought to joyfully give Him all the praise and glory.

- Philippians 2:13 — It is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

But more in line with these verses in Daniel, when we're enabled to grasp more fully the mysteries of the Gospel and of our salvation, we should joyfully praise God for giving to us these spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear. Remember what Moses said of the people of Israel:

- Deuteronomy 29:4 (cf. Isa. 6:10; Mat. 13:14-15) — To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

And then think of what Jesus could say to His disciples and also to all of us who have believed:

- Matthew 13:16 — But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.
- Luke 10:21 (cf. Mat. 16:17) — [Jesus] rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things [these Gospel mysteries; cf. v. 22] from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”

Daniel glorified God not just for giving him the “solution” to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream but for enabling him to understand and truly delight in that dream’s message of the everlasting kingdom of God. This, too, was the “wisdom” that God gave to Daniel. Daniel’s knowledge that any true wisdom he had was *given to him* by God caused him not only to *ask* God for wisdom and not only to *give glory to God* for the wisdom that He gave, but also to *testify to others* that in and of himself he had no more wisdom than anyone else.

- Daniel 2:27–30 — Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries... as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living...”

And look at what we read right here in our passage this morning:

- Daniel 6:3 (cf. 5:12; 6:5, 28) — Then ***this Daniel*** became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, **because an excellent spirit was in him.**

Six times in chapters 8-12 Daniel will say, “*I, Daniel*” (8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5). But here, when Daniel speaks of the “excellent spirit” that was in him, he refers to “*this Daniel*” very much as though he himself were not Daniel. Daniel is watching himself, as it were from the sidelines, and even marveling himself at the “excellent spirit” that was in “that man” because of God’s gracious gift. As Daniel watched himself from the sidelines what he was really marveling at was not Daniel, but the God who had given to Daniel this “excellent spirit” according to His own purposes and for the end of His own glory.

Can you see from all this how there’s a sense in which humility is the essence of wisdom? Humility recognizes our need for wisdom; humility recognizes that only God can give true wisdom; humility enables us to seek mercy from the God of heaven and ask Him for wisdom; and humility then gives God all the glory for any true wisdom that’s ever found in us. It’s in this light that we can read the book of Daniel and see in Daniel’s life an inspiring example of what it looks like—not a “how to” manual, but a living example of what it *looks like*—to live life wisely (and humbly) even in our own exile (cf. 9:23; 10:11, 19). So we go on to read in verse four:

II. Daniel 6:4 — Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but **they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.**

The point isn't that Daniel was without any sin. The point is that he represented the king honorably and always served in such a way that the king and the empire should never "suffer any loss" because of him. Darius is still a pagan and idolatrous king just like the world we live in today is still a pagan and idolatrous world, but a big part of wisdom is to be always "aim[ing] at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man" (2 Cor. 8:21). Paul says in Romans:

□ Romans 12:17 — *Give thought* to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

And Peter writes:

□ 1 Peter 2:11–12 (cf. 1 Tim. 3:7) — Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles... Keep your conduct *among the Gentiles* honorable...

As we live in exile in a foreign land, we always seek to live in such a way that *the world* can never find any "legitimate" ground for complaint against us. Unfortunately, this isn't always true of Christians. The Apostle Peter exhorts us:

□ 1 Peter 4:15 — Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer *or as a meddler*.

In fact, the exact opposite should be true of us. Paul says that a necessary qualification for elder is that he be "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:7). Are we working diligently to be always well thought of by outsiders? Are we giving careful thought to do what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man? Do we realize just how much our reputation as Christians matters in this world? This is an important part of living skillfully and wisely in our exile and Daniel is a model here that we can copy and aspire to ourselves. But does this mean that the world will always like us and think the best of us? Once all the high officials and satraps realized how faithful and honorable Daniel was, did they suddenly become Daniel's "best friends"?

III. Daniel 6:5 — Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel **unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.**"

Look how much these men knew about Daniel just from carefully watching and observing his life. They knew from observing his life not only his honorable and blameless conduct in the kingdom, but also the strength of his devotion to the Lord. In fact, they were so confident about the strength of Daniel's devotion that they were equally confident it would not fail to provide them the grounds they needed for a complaint against him. I wonder if these men had been observing us, would they still have been as confident? Would they have been as confident that we would choose a den of lions? Are we known in this world not just as honorable people with good reputations, but as people who are wholly devoted to the God that we serve?

Even as Daniel sought to live honorably in the sight of all his *goal* was never to be a people-pleaser. Even as Daniel sought to keep his conduct among the Gentiles honorable his *motivation* was never to receive the praise of men. It can be so easy and so tempting for us to

confuse these two things. If by always living lives that are above reproach we have a good reputation with outsiders, that's a good thing – that's the fruit of a true wisdom. But when we become motivated by the world's approval that's not wisdom at all – that's the ultimate folly. Daniel had a perfect reputation among all the high officials and satraps in the kingdom, but in spite of that perfect reputation they still hated him. True wisdom, then, navigates between caring deeply about the reputation we have in the world and yet at the same time caring nothing for the world's "approval" or "acceptance" because it's God who we love and trust and whose favor and "approval" we delight in more than anything else. Can you see how this truly does require wisdom – the wisdom that only comes from above and that's only given to those who ask, and seek, and knock (cf. James 3:17)?

IV. Daniel 6:6–9 — Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! 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. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

We don't yet know exactly why or how this was going to incriminate Daniel, but it's obvious the high officials and satraps are confident this will be the end for Daniel. Notice what they say: "Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the *law* of the Medes and the Persians." See how the "law" of the Medes and Persians is being set up in opposition to the "law" of Daniel's God. And yet couldn't we still reword the injunction like this? "For thirty days, if anyone *is caught* making petition to any god or man except the king there is only one sentence – to be cast alive into the den of lions." Isn't that Daniel's way out? After all, how is anyone to know that he's still making petition to His God? *How is anyone to know?* Right? And then we read these amazing words in verse ten:

V. Daniel 6:10 — 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.

So here's the first question we need to ask: Is this wisdom or is this folly? On the one hand, Daniel's not looking for trouble. He didn't hear of the king's decree and then start doing something out in the open for everyone to see that he'd never been doing before. That would have been foolish. On the other hand, all Daniel had to do was take a time out from his usual practice of praying in the window (for just thirty days) and go pray in secret behind closed doors and his life would be saved. Wouldn't that have been the wise thing to do? Wouldn't that have resulted in a greater good – not only for Daniel, but really for all of God's people who were living in exile? Doesn't that make the most sense? Isn't that what we would have been most tempted to do and then even to justify and excuse as the truly "wise" thing to do – especially when the alternative is a den of lions?

Do you see how much we really do need that wisdom that comes from above – that wisdom that only God can give to us? If Daniel had suddenly decided to pray in secret for the next thirty days what message would that have sent to the men who were conspiring against him and who already knew full well his usual habits of prayer? This would have been the message loud and clear: “The God that I serve isn’t worth my life. In this case it’s the “law” of the Medes and Persians that takes precedence over the “law” of my God.” Of course, there wasn’t any law requiring that Daniel pray in front of his open window three times a day, but there was this law:

- Deuteronomy 10:12 — And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

We can try to spin things every which way we like so that it sounds like praying in secret (or at least not in front of an open window!) for just these thirty days would have been the wise and prudent thing for Daniel to do (or for us to do if we were in Daniel’s shoes), but the reality is that this would have been the path of ultimate folly. Do we have that wisdom from God that enables us to see this clearly – as if it were black and white before us? Do we have that wisdom from God that would enable us to see things just as clearly even if we ourselves were the ones in Daniel’s shoes? The world says the opposite. Why?—Because their god is their belly (their earthly, fleshly appetites) and their minds are set on earthly things (cf. Phil. 3:19). But what did Jesus say?

- John 12:25 — Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Jesus said that this was true wisdom. To what extent is our god, too, our belly—our earthly, fleshly appetites? To what extent is our mind still set on earthly things? To what extent have we fully realized this truth—that to save and preserve this life that we’re living now—this life that we’re living in exile—is not the ultimate good? To what extent have we seen with Daniel that sometimes even death is better than the preservation of this life in exile because it assures us of that far better eternal *life* in our true heavenly home?

But how do we really grasp this so that we’re able to go on praying in front of our open window and then face with steadfast fortitude even the prospect of a den of lions? Well, what exactly has Daniel been doing *every day, three times a day*? “[Daniel] 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.” At the dedication of the newly built temple some 400 years earlier, Solomon had prayed these words:

- 1 Kings 8:46–53 — If [your people] sin against you... and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, “We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,” if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, **and pray to you toward their land, which**

you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them.”

There wasn't anything magical about physically facing toward the temple while praying. This was just a powerful, tangible expression of a person's longing for the Lord and for His saving, redeeming presence. We read in Psalm chapter five:

□ Psalm 5:7 — But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down **toward your holy temple** in the fear of you.

But what about when you're living in exile hundreds of miles away from home, and the temple and the city are in ruins? How much more, then, is this praying toward Jerusalem a powerful expression of Daniel's longing for the Lord's saving, redeeming presence (cf. Tobit 3:11; 1 Esdras 4:58-60). Regardless of how successful Daniel had been in Babylon, where was his heart? It was in Jerusalem, the city of His God; it was at the ruins of the temple where God had promised to put His name forever (1 Kings 9:1-3). That's where Daniel's heart was, and so his facing toward Jerusalem was just the physical, tangible, most natural expression of that deepest desire of his heart. We see the strength of this longing, too, in Daniel's posture of prayer (getting down on his knees) and in the constancy of his prayer (three times a day). The words of the psalmist while the temple was still standing can help us understand how Daniel was praying even in his exile:

□ Psalm 122:1-9 (cf. Ps. 14:7; 51:18) — I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!” For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, “Peace be within you!” For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

Daniel's heart was in Jerusalem. Daniel prayed constantly for the peace of Jerusalem. Daniel longed for home.

□ Psalm 137:4-6 — How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

And so as Daniel prayed and gave thanks day after day after day, what was he doing? He was continually learning wisdom – the wisdom that would enable him, once he knew that the document had been signed, to go to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem and to get down on his knees three times a day and to pray and gave thanks

before his God, as he had done previously—even though it would mean being cast alive into a den of lions.

Conclusion

Daniel never did return to Jerusalem and Daniel knew that he never would. So when he prayed with his face toward Jerusalem, he was showing not that his longing was for an earthly, corruptible city, but rather that his longing was for that heavenly, eternal city of which the earthly Jerusalem was just a copy and a shadow (cf. Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16). The question is, are we living our lives with our faces set toward Jerusalem? If Daniel did this in the days of the types and shadows, *how much more* should we do this, who live in the days of the substance and the reality? We read in Hebrews chapter two:

- Hebrews 12:22 — But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.

Are we truly praying earnestly and without ceasing as Jesus taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?” Have we learned the true wisdom of these words:

- John 12:25 — Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

To what extent have we realized this truth—that to save and preserve this life that we’re living now—this life that we’re living in exile—is not the ultimate good? To what extent have we seen with Daniel that sometimes even death is *better* than the preservation of this life in exile because it assures us of that far better eternal *life* in our true heavenly home? When we know that the document has been signed, will we, too, go to our house and pray in front of the open window? Is every day of our lives an expression of this true wisdom that God promises to give freely to all who ask and seek and knock? Jesus said:

- Luke 9:23–25 — If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

And the Apostle Paul writes:

- Philippians 3:18–4:1 — Many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.