

HONOR PRAYER ABOVE LIFE ITSELF

Daniel 6: 1-28 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

For many years, I have thought that the word **satrap** was equivalent to bear trap or mouse trap. Rhyming words produce more good satrap words like **claptrap**—a flashy person with no substance, or **death cap**—a large deadly poisonous mushroom, **entrap**—to try to trap another into a compromising position, **fool’s cap**—a conical paper cup teachers used to make troublesome students wear as their punishment—something these satraps should have had to wear, **madcap**—a rash, impulsive, reckless, flighty, harebrained person, **shrinkwrap**--to wrap (as a book or meat) in tough clear plastic film that is then shrunk by heating to form a tightly fitting package—the satraps were trying to shrink wrap Daniel, **skullcap**—this is the brimless cap of Jewish men, so know these satraps were not skullcaps, but they had four skullcaps they wanted to eliminate, and Daniel was the # 1 skullcap on their list, and **wiretap**—a concealed listening device—which is what these satraps were. Now really, what is a satrap? *A satrap is a ruler or governor of a province who is controlled by a king or higher authority.* Daniel 6: 3 tells us that cream rises to the top. Daniel was one of the three high officials who were over the satraps. You can be sure these Medo-Persians wanted no mere Jew telling them what to do. One of the meanings of satrap is a **henchman**, meaning an obedient attendant to a king, who carries out without demur, delay, objection or any scruples, the instructions of the king. In our country, we might call such a satrap, the king’s mafia—his secret organization of terrorists who have their own code of laws and no fear of God before their eyes.

Now one such satrap would be terrible—how much more terrible it would be to have 120 satraps on your team and two high officials with them—in all, 122 enemies ready at all times to death-strap you, to coin a word. That’s the setting of this amazing chapter 6 of Daniel. This last message this Sunday morning at Snow Camp 2014 is such an honor to preach, because it is at the center of our theme, “RISK IT ALL TO BE A DANIEL!” This man Daniel is a man among men, a leader among leaders, and a prayer warrior among prayer warriors. This amazing account in Daniel’s amazing life teaches us four principles that need to be sounded over and over yet today. What are these four principles?

THE SPIRIT WITHIN US WHEN GOD IS IN US WILL BE EXCELLENT.

(I.) I love these words in Daniel 6: 1-4. We could rightfully say, “more excellent.” When God is with us and in us, the spirit that the rest of the world sees is

attractive, winsome, reverent, and wooing. Now the Hebrew word for excellent in verse 3, is **yattiyr**. Yattiyr means pre-eminent, a cut above, exceedingly excellent, and without cause for complaint or fault, faithful down to a gnat's eye, and thus without just reason for a ground of accusation. No wonder we read that this new Persian king, Darius the Mede wanted to set him over the whole kingdom of Medo-Persia which was its own territory, but had now swallowed up and assimilated all of the old Babylonian Empire. Young people, I call you to rise about the satraps and good ol' boys and popular girls around you. I call you to a more excellent way, to a more excellent spirit. How can we rise above others? The way is because of what I John 4: 4 declares, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." God wants us to stand out in our world, not to make us look good to ourselves, but to make Him look good through our lives. What was true of Daniel, God the Holy Spirit wants for us. Paul wrote in Philippians 1: 9, 10, "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the Day of Christ." Are there other examples than Daniel in the Word of God? Yes, there are! Hebrews 11: 4 states, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent or a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous." The Greek word for excellent is **pleion**. It means more or exceedingly more in quality. This is not for the purpose of puffing us up like a poisonous toad or to make us proud like the Pharisees. No, this excellent spirit is what the world sees in us that attracts them to Jesus. Our excellence should be like a vacuum that draws others to Jesus. Those around us should see that we have been with Jesus. Did you know this excellence in spirit is not a one-time fire cracker excellence folk see in us? No, our excellence in spirit is something that we are known for all the time. Do you remember the queen of Belshazzar who told her husband about Daniel? Guess what she said about him in Daniel 5: 12. She said, "An excellent spirit is found in him." Do we have an excellent spirit in us or are we just run of the mill, no different from the world, just another "same old, same old" in the world's stampede? Young people, leaders and sponsors, I call us to an excellent spirit as God lives powerfully within us. There's a second principle here:

THE STANDING HABIT OF OUR LIVES SHOULD BE PRAYER. (II.) Look carefully with me at Daniel 6: 5-13. The clever satraps out to bear trap and entrap and wiretap Daniel, landed on the only possible way to catch and kill him. As with Jesus, the cry of "crucify Him" was the only solution for those jealous and proud Pharisees. So it was with Daniel! Death to Daniel was the only long term solution for these satraps. Eliminate him. Make him richer than dog food. Make Daniel lion "feast." But how? Puff up the king with how great he is and inveigle him and entrap him to sign an unalterable injunction that anyone making petition to any

other god or man for thirty days would become Medo-Persian lion chow-down “Crunch a bunch!” What a way to puff up Darius! Wow! It made him sound so important, so vital, and so powerful, and so influential. Yes, and he realized later, he was duped, baited and caught in his own words and in his own signed document. I warn us all! Don’t sign anything too hastily without thinking, praying, and even seeking Godly counsel about the wisdom of signing it. You could be entrapped like Darius was. Now what’s the big sin the 120 satraps and 2 high officials over them were all conspiring in? It was to catch Daniel praying in one of the next 30 days. That was like giving a prize for reporting that the sun came up.

Do you know how sealed Daniel’s doom was when Darius signed the 30 day injunction? 100%! Would Daniel back down from his standing prayer habit to avoid becoming “Crunch a bunch” for Babylonian lions in a den, lions which were perhaps some of the remnants of the Babylonian kingdom that didn’t get destroyed when Darius killed Belshazzar? Not a chance! Did you know that the word pray is used 121 times in the Bible? Prayed is found 68 times, prayer 106 times, prayers, 32 times, praying 36 times, and prays 12 times. Do the math. That’s to the penny, 375 references to prayer in the whole Bible. In Daniel 6: 10, we read, “He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. We also find the phrase “ask or make petition” three times in v. 7—written into the injunction Darius signed, and in verses 12 and 13, in the accusations the satraps made before the king, saying Daniel was making petitions to his God twice. It amazes me that the satraps never once used the beautiful word prayer. Daniel had a standing prayer habit. They had him dead to rights. Their plan was a shoo-in. Do you know what a “shoo-in” is? The phrase was coined maybe in Kentucky, but it was an evil plot made with corrupt jockeys to get a big pay off and thus conspire to hold back a fast horse they were on, and another jockey would agree with them to urge on his slower horse to win a bet. This is called “shooing in a slow horse.” In this kind of a contest, the ‘shoo-in is the only horse in the race that is trying to win. Daniel was a ‘shoo-in’ to win the lion’s “Crunch a bunch” contest and he would get to experience the win personally by winning a free trip to the lion’s den. Would to God all of us were ‘shoo-ins’ for the world to entrap because of our standing habit of daily prayer! A 3rd principle:

THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF OUR GODLY LIVES CAN CHANGE THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW THE LORD. (III.)

Notice what the spirit of excellence in Daniel opened up in King Darius. What spirit was this in Daniel? It was the Spirit of the Lord. Watch out when the Holy Spirit starts moving in others through your life! It’s an awesome metamorphosis! Darius was in a cocoon of unbelief wanting out that sad night after he carried out his dastardly injunction that

he got sucked into signing. Darius had labored from morning light til' sunset to find a way to get around making Daniel "lunch meat for his lions." Many a time Darius must have rejoiced to see a man tossed like rotten elk meat to his hungry lions. Not now. Darius is changing. The cocoon is moving, as Darius was in agony. Finally, Darius spent the night fasting. What's crazy about not eating all night? Well, when a king didn't sleep, the eunuchs, the queen, the attendants, and everyone who knew he was awake in the king's palace wanted to settle his stomach, and everyone had just the remedy, Tums, Papaya, Alka-Seltzer, or who knows what Medo-Persian kings took when they couldn't sleep. None for Darius! He was fasting, and dare I say it, was he in that cocoon of unbelief, starting to pray to the God of Daniel? Faith kept trying to rise in the king. His parting words to Daniel before the den guards threw Daniel in the den were, "May your God, whom you serve continually deliver you!" Daniel was no longer on the line. No! When we serve God with His excellent spirit inside, with the standing habit of prayer, God is on the line, and a would-be convert is asking—"Just how powerful is your God, Daniel?" Oh, the attendants tried to bring diversions to the king—literally that means Darius turned down instrumentalists playing their harps, lyres or dulcimers for him. Everything was deathly quiet in the king's chamber. Follow me in Daniel 6: 16-18. The lion's den was sealed with wax with his own signet ring and also with the signet rings of his lords—perhaps that was those two high officials over the 120 satraps. It was a sleepless night as God was doing a work in Darius. He was under conviction and he could not sleep a wink. Sleep fled him. That's one bad night! Don't give up! David wrote in Psalm 30: 5, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning *light*." There's a fourth and final principle—and this cocoon is breaking up, out and what will emerge?

THE SAGA OF OUR LION'S DEN EXPERIENCES CAN BECOME THE MEANS GOD USES TO END OUR BATTLES AND SAVE OUR FRIENDS.

(IV.) Watch out for morning! What can God do at daybreak? Look with me at Daniel 6: 19-23. How many people knew the king could run or would run? How many were up to see King Darius trying by faith to break out of his doubting, unbelieving cocoon as He went in haste from the palace to the den of lions? There must have been a rip in his cocooned soul as he cried out in anguish, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Can you hear the anguish of a convicted unbeliever who is crying, repenting and saying inarticulately, "Could your God, Daniel ever be my God?" What all was going on in Darius' soul? What I see is his head, then his heart, then his very soul and spirit breaking out of the old Medo-Persian dead idols cocoon as he heard the sweetest sound he had ever heard on earth. What was that? "O king, live forever! (Yes, I hope to see Darius in Paradise someday.) My

God, don't you love it? "**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.**" Put the pieces together. Daniel from the den is shouting and not afraid of disturbing the hungry lions who have been fasting with Darius. Something I believe was happening inside Darius. Daniel said "My God" and I want the God of Daniel to be "my God too." The understatement of the book of Daniel is right here in Daniel 6: 23—"Then the king was exceedingly glad! —make that ecstatic. The king demanded the guards pull Daniel up out of the den. It's another "it's cool in the furnace story." God did it again. No kind of harm was found on Daniel because he trusted in his God. It's a divine déjà vu. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had no harm to their cloaks, no smell of fire on them, and not a hair of their head was singed. Daniel is out—free of the lions, and Darius is hugging him—that's my version of what Darius did. Maybe he stood at attention and saluted Daniel and said, Good job!"

However Darius responded, he was still the king, and what happened to Belshazzar was moments away from 120 satraps and two signet ring officials of Darius. And while Darius was at it, he was thinking of those hungry lions and knowing how hungry they must be, so he got carried away—bring their wives too, and their children. Read it—Daniel 6: 24! That was a reversal the kingdom would never forget. Before they hit the ground floor of the den, those hungry lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. There is no doubt those satraps and their families never ever again set out to come against the Lord or His people. Then, and this is the end of the chapter and the end of my message. Then Darius made his confession of faith public to the world. Look at it in Daniel 6: 25-28. All peoples and nations and languages on the earth were given the words of a spiritually transformed king. "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 saved Daniel from the power of the lions." Who were the wise men who worshipped Jesus in Bethlehem? Satraps anymore? Never! The king must have appointed real wise men, who kept telling the story of the God of Daniel and about the coming Messiah Daniel taught them about—King Jesus. I charge you all—Risk it all to be a Daniel! Honor Prayer Above Life Itself. Amen!