

With a View From Inside: The Fear of the Lord in Daniel
Daniel 1-6 – Part 3
Series: *Why Everything Matters*

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bibles and join me in Daniel chapter 6, Daniel 6. Fear God and Keep His commandments! This is the command which has dominated our thoughts these past few weeks. It calls out to us from the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, as the key to a Biblical worldview which will produce a God-honoring and eternally valuable life. This brief summation of the message of the book of Ecclesiastes has left us wanting more – and that is a good thing. We need the rest of the message of the Scriptures to know what it means to fear God and keep His commandments. We finish up this morning with our brief look into the life of Daniel with this lens – what does it mean to fear God and keep His commandments? What can we learn about this from taking a look inside the lives of Daniel & his three friends? We’ve seen Daniel fear the Lord as a teenager even if it was going to cost him his life. We’ve seen Daniel fear the Lord as a man in the corporate world of great political success. And we’ve seen his three friends – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – all fear the Lord at the height of their careers even if they had to die for their singular worship of God. And now we look at Daniel in old age. In Daniel chapter 6 we find Daniel somewhere north of 80 years of age. If there was a time to rest on his laurels and relax in his spiritual life – now would be the time. But instead, we find a man as strong as ever in his fear of the Lord. Let’s look into the life of this man of great faith in God and great fear of God, starting in verse 1. *Read chapter 6.*

What we see in Daniel’s life in this chapter is the mundane and the normal and the almost unbelievable and spectacular. His daily habits and patterns of seeking after the God of mercy produce in him a character which stands one of the most unbelievable tests of loyalty to God that anyone has ever faced. We see his daily routine collide with the drama of political schemes which rival the worst imaginations of Washington D.C. But what do we see about his fear of the Lord? How does he show his unending loyalty and love for the God of Heaven? What is the result of his singular worship of the God of Heaven in the face of such man-centered and man-exalting political whirlwinds? Well, we find that Daniel’s fear of the Lord simplifies his life and it exalts God through his life. This can be your life beloved. By the strength which God supplies and because of the great grace He has shown you, you too can walk in loyal love and unending singular worship which simplifies your life and exalts God through your life.

- I. The Fear of the Lord Simplifies Life
 - a. *By giving true understanding*

- i. Let me explain what I mean by saying that fearing God simplifies life. There are some really conflicted men in chapter 6 and there is one man of complete resolve. I don't mean that Daniel doesn't face hard things here, but he isn't conflicted about what to do. His fear of God has simplified life for him. Think about this in contrast to these evil men who are all around him for a second. They fear man – meaning that they value men and worship men and find their value and meaning and purpose in man-centered and man-dependent realities. This fear of man does nothing but complicate their lives. They have to manipulate and scheme and coordinate their efforts so as to produce the best possible results based upon their fear of man. This is where most of the struggles with the decisions of life can be found. These struggles are rooted in our over-valuing of self and of others and our under-valuing of God.
- ii. These government officials who surround Daniel in this chapter are drowning in the complications of the fear of man. It all starts with their envy of Daniel in verse 4. Daniel had an excellent spirit in him and Darius needed a trusted overseer, and so Daniel was the obvious choice. But because these other officials loved themselves and their own fame so much, they plot and scheme to bring Daniel down. Notice how complicated and twisted their evil becomes.
 1. They hide true intentions. They act like they are trying to honor the king through this decree they present to him. But their true intention is the destruction of Daniel. But they obviously can't say that! So, they have to craft a plan which hides their intentions and manipulates their superior.
 2. They also fake worship of others while actually worshiping themselves. This is the complication of evil. You have to act like you are in it for someone else's honor when all the time you are actually in it for your own glory. They base this whole scheme on Darius being singularly worshiped, but in reality, they are worshiping themselves the whole time.
 3. And notice that they must trump up charges of evil to get their way. So, in verse 13 they say that Daniel pays no attention to the king. This is the same trumped up charge which was brought against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter 3 – that they paid no attention to the king. But in reality they did pay attention. They did mind his laws and they did honor him and there was no other accusation against their character which could have stuck. But fear of man so complicates life that it makes ludicrous accusations so as to get its own way.
 4. And all of this fear of man in the government officials is topped off by the Darius great love for himself and for his own honor. This climaxes in verses 14-15 when Darius is pressed to the wall by these government officials. They have crafted a law which

demands that no one make petition to any god or to any other man other than Darius for 30 days. And now they have used that law to trap Darius into destroying his most trusted government official. And in verses 14-15 the stewing pot of circumstances reaches a boiling point. *Read vs 14-15.*

5. Either the king has to lose face or Daniel has to lose his life. There is really no choice here. The king can issue another edict which will effectively spare Daniel's life, but then he would lose face and be the mockery of his government officials. But is that really so bad when a man's life hangs in the balance. Do you see how a relatively simple decision becomes incredibly complex because the fear of man muddies the waters?
 6. This obviously really bothers the king by the way. After he is pressed by the fear of man into this decision to have Daniel sacrificed to the ravenous lions he went to his palace and spent the night without any food and without any entertainment and without any sleep. This is yet another complication of the fear of man. It leads us into the trap of evil which ensnares us by its elaborate deceit. Darius experiences the agony of this wicked trap because he was perplexed over whether or not he should lose face or if Daniel should lose his life.
- iii. But look at Daniel in this text. His life is so simple compared to this. I do not mean that his life was emotionally simple. I imagine that he knew every emotion from great moments of courage and confidence to terrifying moments of the fear of death. But he is not confused about what is going on here. Darius has been trapped and these evil co-conspirators have been elaborate in their manipulations. But Daniel is singularly resolved and sees all of this for what it is. He doesn't see just a human king and a human court of government officials. He doesn't just see a human king's legacy and reputation. He doesn't just see a human king's absolute power on earth. He doesn't just know the law of the Medes and the Persians. If this was all he knew then his fear of man level would be through the roof and his reaction would be as complicated as the evil scheme. But instead, he sees a Heavenly King who will be his ultimate Judge. He knows a Heavenly Law and he sees the reputation of his God at stake. And this simplifies things for him. No matter what it may cost him – he is singularly resolved to love the Lord His God with all his heart, soul, mind, and body – even in death if it has to come to that. Fearing the Lord simplifies life by giving us an understanding of what is really going on and of what is really important in life. When we are confused about that it is because we are overvaluing us and others and undervaluing God.

b. *By guiding steady responses*

- i. The fear of the Lord also simplifies life by then guiding us to steady responses. So, Daniel sees this situation for what it is because he fears God. This then produces a clear path to a right decision. The command conjured up by these evil and conniving men was aimed directly at Daniel's daily practice. They knew he prayed three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem. And so they sadistically plotted to beat Daniel by using his own loyal commitment to the Lord against him. But Daniel knew that the issue here was not about prayer or about private or public prayer. He knew that the real issue was them trying to destroy him by using his fear of the Lord against him. So, what is Daniel to do? Should he simply close the windows and kneel down like he did before – toward Jerusalem, but just with the windows shut so that they didn't have any proof of his violation of their silly law? Well, instead of destroying his body in death that would destroy the reputation of his God. It would prove that his God wasn't really worth worshiping even if it cost him his life. But Daniel fears the Lord. Daniel loves and honors and respects the Lord. Daniel views all things through the lens of God and the truth of God. Daniel knows the character of his God. He knows that God is able to save him from these silly and wicked men. He knows that God is able to save him from ravenous lions. And so, this guides his response. He is not going to hide and thereby besmirch the character and reputation of his God. No, he is going to keep the same loyal pattern of seeking after God's mercy, no matter the cost.
- ii. So, in verse 10 we are told that after he hears the decision and finds out that the document was signed he went to his house and got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God. Some of the most helpful and convicting words in this whole chapter are found at the end of verse 10. They are simply – “as he had done previously.” He was patterned and loyal and fervent in his pursuit of the God of mercy. This prayer that Daniel is praying is the one that Solomon described in his dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8. Solomon built this grand Temple in Jerusalem according to the direct command and plans of God and the manifest presence of God dwelt there. And Solomon, in his dedication prayer, prayed and asked God to remember his people when they were carried into exile for disobeying God. That while they were in exile and they prayed toward Jerusalem from their distant lands – that God would hear them and have mercy on them and send them a Redeemer.
- iii. That is what this prayer is all about. It is a thrice daily prayer of pleading with God for mercy. He opens the windows and directs his attention toward Jerusalem as a physical reminder that God's people are not where they are supposed to be. They are in exile because of their own sinfulness, and they need God's rescue. Daniel is here expressing his daily awareness of the sinfulness of his people which resulted in their exile to Babylon, and his desire for God to restore them to their land and to the nearness of his

manifest presence. This was not some religious ritual or robotic worship or legalistic exercise intended to affect the favor of God. No, he is genuinely and fervently and regularly seeking the mercy of God in light of the sinfulness of God's people.

- iv. This is confirmed by the words used in verse 11 to describe what Daniel was doing. So, these evil plotting men found Daniel doing just what they thought they would find him doing. But the text in verse 11 says that they found him – not simply praying – but making petition and plea before his God. This making petition is an earnest searching for something. It is the same word used in verse 4 to describe the wicked men's earnest search for some character flaw in Daniel. More importantly it is also used in chapter 2 and verse 18 when Daniel and his three friends respond to the news that all the wise men in the kingdom are going to be killed if someone can't come up with Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. The text says that these men made petition to God to intervene and save their lives. So, here in chapter 6 Daniel is doing more than religious ritual. His prayers are a fervent search for something. He is in dire straits and he is on the hunting trail for the God of mercy.
- v. This prayer is also described as a plea before his God. The Hebrew counterpart to this word is used in Genesis 42:21 by Joseph's brothers to describe how Joseph pled for his life when they cast him into the pit. It is also used in 2 Kings 1 where the Syrian captain pleads with Elijah to spare his fifty men's lives. And in Esther 8 it says that Esther pled with the king to stop Haman's plot to kill all her people. These are urgent and dire situations of life and death and pleading seems like a good response.
- vi. That is Daniel here. He doesn't have a clinical or robotic response to the wicked affairs of men. No, he is so deeply affected by it that it moves him to fervent prayer to God. He so feared God that when his life is threatened he can't help but find himself on his knees. But notice that he finds himself on his knees in the most critical of moments because he found himself on his knees in the most common of moments. He had a pattern and a habit which served him well in the crisis. Like a well-trained soldier – his hours of combat training paid off when his call came.
- vii. This is what good habits do for the believer. It is not legalistic for you be self-disciplined in establishing patterns of daily humbling yourself before the God of heaven and seeking for His mercy and listening to His truth from His Word. It can be legalistic and merely religious exercise to pray every day and to pray at certain times of the day. It can be your self-generated effort to make God happy with you so that you can earn your own salvation. But it doesn't have to be –and that is definitely not what is happening here with Daniel. I am sure there were days when he didn't feel like praying and when he didn't want to fall on his knees before the God of heaven. Just like there are days when the Olympic athlete would rather stay in bed than get up and train or the soldier would rather spend a day

laying on the beach rather than running 10 miles with a ruck sack over difficult terrain. But the athlete and the soldier have a bigger picture informing their daily habits and informing their wishy-washy emotions and ever-changing desires. Beloved, if God has rescued you from your sin through the completed work of Christ, if you have been born again to a new and a living hope in Christ Jesus – then you can't help but long for the manifestation of the presence of God. That is what Daniel is longing for here – the presence of God. He is in a foreign land and he is not yet home. He is daily expressing to God his longing for God's saving intervention to bring His people home to the Promised Land and the fullness of His own presence.

- viii. This is the mark of a true believer – one who truly fears the Lord and who truly knows God through His saving work in his soul. He realizes more and more that this sin-cursed world is not home. He is not drawn into the lures of the fear of man which dominate the lives of others. He does not linger at the amusements of our world as though they will provide him ultimate or lasting value. Rather, he regularly and habitually falls before his God with a longing heart and pleads with God to come back soon and bring the fullness of salvation with Him. His heart is heavy with the desire for the future grace that is yet to come while he walks every day in the current grace of our all-sufficient God.
- ix. Daniel feared God so Daniel sought God regularly and frequently and especially when things were incredibly hard. It doesn't take much to stop us from praying. We are too busy or too tired or too distracted or we don't know how to pray or we don't see immediate results. But nothing could stop Daniel from praying – not even an edict from the Medes and the Persians which could not be changed. You see – we don't pray because we don't fear God, but rather we fear man –and particularly we overvalue us and others and we undervalue God and so we find every excuse in the book to do anything but pray. We don't pray because we don't fear God. When we do fear God we find that our lives are simplified in that we are not guided to the right response in every situation.

II. The Fear of the Lord Exalts God

- a. This builds up throughout the text to scream our last point to us. When we fear the Lord we end up exalting God in all the Earth. Those who are rescued from sin by the grace of God are those who want to magnify God in all things in front of others. And the pathway to exalting God in your life is to fear the Lord – to see Him as He is and to know Him and to serve Him loyally and faithfully.
- b. *By producing godly character*
 - i. This fear of the Lord exalts God by producing godly character in the life of the one who fears God. When we make much of God in our heart and in our life then our life begins to be shaped by God and our character begins to look like His. We heed His Word, we want to know how He views all things in this life, we long to walk in every moment in obedience to His

truth. It's like the psalmist in Psalm 1 who is blessed and who then becomes a blessing to others.

- ii. This is what we see with Daniel so clearly in chapter 6. His fear of the Lord produces this godly character in his life. So in verse 3 he is described as being a man with an excellent spirit – better than all the other officials – so much so that the king planned to set him over all the whole kingdom. And in verse 4 this excellent spirit is further explained as the other officials search high and low for a character flaw to accuse Daniel with, but they found he was faithful and that no error or fault was found in him. Then in verse 5 they realize that the only way they can destroy Daniel is to craft a way to charge him in connection with the law of his God because he was so faithful to heed the law of God. In verse 10 we already saw his patterned and unfazed response to the threats of these evil men – he continued to seek the God of mercy, as was his pattern. In verse 11 he is found pleading with God for mercy. In verse 13 he is described as paying no attention to the king's edict but continues to pray to his God. Then in verse 16 King Darius says to Daniel that he hopes God will rescue him, and he describes God as the one whom Daniel serves continually. This is repeated in verse 20 where Daniel is described as a servant of the living God, whom he serves continually. Then in verse 22 Daniel says himself that he was blameless in regard to the king and his edict which is why God spared his life. And in 23 the narrator describes how no harm at all was found on Daniel when he is lifted from the pit because he trusted in his God.
- iii. This is an overwhelming testimony of a life lived to the glory of God no matter the cost. Daniel's commitment to serve God continually is so much a part of his core makeup of life that everyone sees it and knows it. Even these pagan politicians who are as godless as they are selfish, realize that the only way they can take Daniel down is by using his commitment to the Lord against him. In other words – they expected Daniel to react to the king's edict just the way he did. That is how predictable Daniel's godliness was. That is how steady he was – even his worst enemies knew the extent of his character. This is what the fear of the Lord produces in us. The fear of man puts our character in subjection to the whims of those around us. We might act this way to one person and then this way to another. Or we might talk this way in this scenario and then another way later. The fear of man produces an ever shifting character because it produces an ever shifting value system. What we value is always moving around. But the fear of the Lord sets our sights firmly on the God of Heaven. He never moves and where we develop this right valuing of Him we see this steadiness of character like Daniel. So, the obvious question for us brother and sister is – do you have a character like this? One that is so tied to the unchanging character of God that even your enemies know how you are going to react when they seek your demise? If someone at

work was trying to take you down so that they could get your job would they even think to maliciously accuse you in regard to the character and the ways of God? This was Daniel's testimony because Daniel feared the Lord.

c. *By portraying God's worth*

- i. This fear of the Lord also exalts God by portraying his worth. Daniel's life becomes an unmistakable testimony to the worthiness of God. So, look again at verses 16-20. The king can't find a way out of his own man-centered dilemma, so he orders for Daniel to be brought and cast into the lion's den. But before he throws him in he says to Daniel – May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you! And then in the morning, after a sleepless night of worry he rushes to the lion's den at the first break of morning light and he cries out in great anguish – O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?
- ii. Do you see what Darius is saying here? He was so aware of the faithful worship of God in Daniel's life that he hoped a God who could muster that kind of faithful worship would also be a God who could save his servant from unavoidable death. No man on his own could save himself from these lions. There is no doubt about that in anyone's minds. Daniel is a goner, unless the God he serves continually intervenes. This is what the fear of the Lord does in our life. It puts on display the great worthiness of God. We choose Him over life itself, and over the easy path and over the self-exalting path and over the self-protecting path and when we do this we show that God is worth way more to us than anything else in this life.
- iii. This then puts us in the spot where God can providentially magnify himself through the circumstances of our lives. In other words, God can allow difficult and trying realities to enter into our lives because we will react in a way which shows our deep trust in Him and our fervent obedience to Him. This life of great fear of the Lord now becomes a telescope to put on display the often missed glory of God. Daniel's circumstances become this lens through which the unbelievers around him can see the greatness and the glory of God because Daniel worships God singularly.
- iv. But notice also that God's worth is put on display by His timely and miraculous intervention into the normal course of human events. God could have stopped this charade long before it got to the lion's den, but he waited until then in this particular circumstance to show to all that He is a God who is worthy of worship and who can be trusted. God is especially delighted to intervene in the lives of his servants when His own plan and reputation are on the line. If he didn't intervene in Daniel 6 then we wouldn't have this great book of God's revelation in our Bibles. God's plan would have been altered by the evil of wicked men. But God intervenes and doesn't allow that. But he also doesn't allow it because his

reputation was on the line. Daniel had lived in such a way as to make his life all about God and so God's intervention here spoke to God's character and reputation in a unique way. Therefore, we can deduce from Daniel's life that God is most pleased to intervene in our lives, even in miraculous or unusual ways when his plan and his reputation are on the line. Now that is not what we always want. We would rather God always intervene in unique ways when our plan and our reputation are on the line. But God's ways are higher than our ways. And this displays His great worth in unmistakable ways.

d. *By proving God's nature*

- i. Lastly, let me point you to how the fear of the Lord exalts God by proving His nature. When Darius comes to the mouth of the den of lions he cries out and asks the question – has your God been able to deliver you from the lions? In many ways this is what has been at stake in the book of Daniel so far. Is God able? Daniel – is your God able? Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego – is your God able? This is exactly how those three men talked back in chapter 2 when they were facing the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to the golden image. They declared that God was able to save them even if they were thrown into the fiery furnace. After they are miraculously delivered from the flames Nebuchadnezzar testifies to the whole world that indeed, the God of these three men is able to deliver. Then in chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar is humbled before the Lord and at the end of the ordeal he declares that God is able to humble whomever He wishes to humble because it is God who sets up kings and who takes down kings. Indeed King Darius – God is able!
- ii. After Daniel answers Darius and they bring him up out of the pit, then Darius orders all the men who conspired against Daniel to be thrown to the lions – they and their families. This detail is included to let you know that Daniel's escape from the lions wasn't because the lions were somehow disinterested in tearing his flesh apart. Before these men even reach the floor of the den these ravenous lions are feasting upon them. God had shut their mouths – of this there is no doubt!
- iii. And then Darius is so compelled by what he has experienced that he can't help himself. He has to make a kingdom wide declaration to all peoples everywhere about the greatness of Daniel's God. Verses 25-27 happen because Daniel feared the Lord in verses 1-10. All throughout the book of Daniel the fear of the Lord has been implied, but not yet stated. But now here in verse 26 the king makes a decree that all people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. This is not a message of salvation, but a message of worth and honor. Darius simply knows that Daniel's God is different from all the other gods which are worshiped in his kingdom and he wants all people everywhere to know that. He wants Daniel's story told because he is so overcome by the greatness of God displayed in this series of events.

- iv. This is now the 3rd kingdom wide proclamation about the greatness of God in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree honoring the God of Heaven in chapter 3 after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are rescued from the fiery furnace. Chapter 4 is a letter to the whole kingdom written by Nebuchadnezzar to let all people know of the greatness of God who is able to humble the proud. And now, in chapter 6 another kingdom wide proclamation is made by Darius. On top of that you have the recognition of the greatness of God in chapter 2 out of the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar, and out of the mouth of Belshazzar in chapter 5. And, in case you are unsure about this, let me also point out that this is the only section of your Old Testament that was originally written in Aramaic. Most of your Old Testament is written in Hebrew – the language of the Jews. But this section – from 2:4 to 7:28 is written in the court language of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian kingdoms. In other words – this section of Scripture had a wider audience than just the Jews. God intended for His glory to be made known to all the peoples of the Earth. This exaltation of God to all the peoples of the Earth happens because Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fear their Lord and thereby display His great worthiness!

Conclusion: As we close, look at the decree in verses 26-27. Darius describes 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 he rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. Darius knows these things to be true because he has seen them proven in Daniel's life. He hadn't read the Bible, but he had read a life and this is what he saw. These are basic and fundamental truths about God which should shape our everyday lives and should inform our every action. God is alive and endures forever and his kingdom will never be destroyed and his dominion shall never be overcome. He rescues and saves. Does your life put these things on display to those around you? Do you know the saving work of God from certain death – the certain death of your own sin? We all face a lion's den and it is the certain death which sin brings into every life. Do you have a hope of rescue from this death? Do you know the God who gave His own Son to die in your place and to shut the mouth of the lion of sin? Will you be destroyed or saved? If you know this salvation of God does your life display this fear of God like Daniel's does? Let's pray!