

**Chalmers Church – Some of the Sunday service at Home!**

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**The text below can also be heard in audio version at <https://chalmersmemorialchurch2020.podbean.com/>**

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – Prayer (2) – “I’m not giving in!”**

**Introduction**

Hello and welcome to this podcast. My name is Robin Allison and I am the minister at Cockenzie and Port Seton’s Chalmers Memorial Church.

In the podcast for last week – for the 7<sup>th</sup> June – I began a six week series of reflections on the subject of prayer, something that many of us have found increasingly important during this period of lockdown. That is not to say, as I said last week, that this makes prayer any easier for us. With so much to pray about... with so much to be concerned about in our world and even in our own personal life... with concerns about our loved ones – it is difficult to know where to start.

However, as I also suggested, Jesus himself gave us what really is the perfect example of prayer in what we know as the “Lord’s prayer”. In that prayer Jesus blends our concern for the reality of heaven with the all too real reality of our daily living. In one short and simple prayer, Jesus shows us how we can praise God for who he is... pray for the coming of his kingdom... seek forgiveness for our sins and food for our world.

So, when we find prayer hard it is ok to use the words of Jesus for ourselves. That’s why Jesus shared them with his disciples in the first place.

This week, we’re going to start delving into some stories in the Bible where prayer plays a central part, something we’ll be doing for the next few weeks.

It’s time, therefore, to take a look at the story of Daniel and everyone’s favourite story in that book when Daniel finds himself in a den of lions and all because he would not follow the orders to start praying to the King instead of his usual prayers to the God he had worshipped all his days.

More of that in a moment, however. For just now, though, shall we pray?

Let us pray...

**Opening prayer and Lord’s Prayer**

Ever living and ever loving God, today we seek to worship you – to place you at the centre not only of our thoughts, but of our lives.

We gather to know your love... to be aware of your presence... to sense your guidance...

We seek to see you more clearly, to love you more dearly and to follow you more nearly...

We recognise that that is not the work of one day alone, far less of even one act of worship... but is rather fulfilled in the steady devotion that we offer you... day by day... week by week... even year by year...

Lord God continue on that journey with us. Draw us ever closer to you...

Even as we ask for you to draw close to us, we confess that we have not always made that an easy thing for you to do for we do not always readily make ourselves available to you...

We get caught up in the ebb and flow of life... wandering from moment to moment... not always thinking about what is important... about where our priorities should lie, or our hopes and aspirations should take us.

Forgive us, we pray... forgive us for misplaced priorities... for mixed up motives...

Bring to us day by day, week by week and year by year the steadiness of your love and the constant forgiveness that we so much need.

In this moment of worship speak to us we pray... continue to guide us... and to shape us as we bring these our prayers in the words which Jesus has taught us to pray saying:

*Our Father*

*who art in heaven*

*Hallowed be thy name*

*Thy kingdom come*

*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread*

*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power*

*and the glory, for ever, Amen*

### **Bible Reading – Daniel chapter 6 verses 1 to 23**

*It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three chief ministers over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'*

*6 So these chief ministers and satraps went as a group to the king and said: 'May King Darius live for ever! 7 The royal ministers, prefects, satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered – in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.*

*10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: 'Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?'*

*The king answered, 'The decree stands – in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.'*

*13 Then they said to the king, 'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.' 14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sunset to save him.*

*15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, 'Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.'*

*16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!'*

*17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. 18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.*

*19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'*

*21 Daniel answered, 'May the king live for ever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.'*

*23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*

**Amen and may God add his blessing to this reading of his Holy Word and to his name be the praise and the glory.**

### Reflection

The story of Daniel is a familiar one... Daniel was a faithful follower of God who was captured by the Babylonians as a young man but who finds a remarkable respect amongst, and from those who had captured him.

As the story opens Daniel interprets dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar... the same King that has Daniel and his friends thrown into a fiery furnace... and the same King that Daniel rightly predicts is on his way out.

Enter Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, who – we read at Daniel chapter 5 - decides to use the sacred cups and goblets stolen from the Hebrew captives as his own personal drinking vessels... an act of outrageous provocation to the Hebrews which ends up with the so called writing on the wall episode... where the hand of God writes the words *Mene... Mene... tekel... parsin...* which Daniel translates as roughly meaning that Belshazzar has been weighed in the balance by God and found to be wanting...

This is becoming a bit of a habit now for Daniel... he sees off more than his fair share of Kings... and yet throughout it all somehow God is with him and Daniel never loses his allegiance to the God he believes to be the **only** God.

By the time we get to our story today, Daniel is a much older man.

The story might have passed in a series of mere chapters but by the time King Darius appears at Daniel chapter 6 most commentators estimate that he is around 80 years old, meaning that he has spent far more of his life in exile in Babylon than he will have spent in his own land.

Yet, Daniel still occupies a place of considerable influence in the Babylonian court.

Now most people like Daniel would have exited stage left long before this point but Daniel's so called success in achieving such longevity of service is to be found in the combination of wisdom and loyalty which he has shown over the years – despite his unwillingness to drop the demands of his faith and simply fit into society.... despite his unwillingness to just comply with the demands placed upon him which would have made his life so much easier.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Daniel could have eased the strain of his long life if he had just given in... if he had done what everyone else was doing... if he had complied... but Daniel is faithful to his God and is ready for whatever will come his way.

Darius, as I say, is the new kid on the block... and just as new Prime Ministers and Presidents around the world want to set their own team of advisors around them so Darius, as King, wants to do the same.

We are told that he appoints 120 governors (or satraps as they are called in our reading) to help him rule the land... a whole new team of people each of whom wants to clearly impress the new King. Daniel, however, is still right at the heart of them... the same Daniel who has been at the heart of government and a trusted advisor of the King for more years than they could even remember.

Why, they wonder to themselves, does Darius still hold onto Daniel as if his life depended on it?

And why place your trust in someone who, by their standards only lives there because of something that had happened so long ago that no one can quite remember the original reason?

More to the point – why does Darius continue to rely on someone who doesn't even share his basic faith system... Daniel who has consistently refused to relinquish his belief in God and to do "as they do?"

They are not stupid, however... and they know that Darius is not going to get rid of Daniel on a whim... so the suggestion that no one should pray to anyone else but King Darius for 30 days seems a touch of genius.

If there was one way to flush out Daniel, then it would be to expose his religion...

They could never prove that Daniel was not up to the job – because even they knew that he was...

All they could do was to chip away at Daniel's faith...

"Surely", they thought to themselves, "this will be his undoing?"

The governors and advisors around Darius were not the first, nor would they be the last to think this way.

It's the tried and tested formula for flushing out everyone who won't simply give in...

So, they tighten the rules down to such an impossible level... they ask the King to send out a decree that they knew Daniel would never accept and then they simply wait for Daniel to do what they probably knew he was going to do all along.

They knew that Daniel would not stop praying to his God... And they were right, because Daniel does as Daniel always does... as he has always done... he goes to his room... he doesn't hide in another corner to pray... indeed he sits in the window in full view and he bows three times a day in prayer to his maker... to his God... to his very saviour...

And here we get to the heart of the matter. It is almost as if Daniel uses his prayer not just as way of demonstrating his continued faith in God but also, remarkably, as an act of defiance.

Sometimes our faith life takes us to the edge – if not further - of defiance...

Sometimes to follow the faith we have in God requires us to sit in the so called “open window” of the world and say, as the famous reformer Martin Luther once said, *“Here I stand... I can do no other”*.

Of course, it would be easier if we simply gave in... said nothing... complied...

It would have been easier for Corrie Ten Boom and her family, whom I mentioned in last weeks podcast, to have not tried to hide Jews in their house. If her Father had just kept on mending his watches and clocks and said nothing when the needs of others landed on his doorstep then they could have avoided the awful reality of the concentration camp. After all, no one was bothered with them – they were Christians. It was the Jews that the Nazis were after.

And it might have been easier for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great theologian, to have said nothing about what he saw around him in the war years. If the gospel he preached had just steered away from saying that it was wrong to seek the demise of a whole religious community, he could have spared himself from what was, for him, his ultimate demise.

And those who, in more recent years, held communion services outside of nuclear bases and who found themselves arrested for doing so – well they could have spared themselves the trouble, couldn't they?

Or the church leaders in the States and around the world who have spent these recent days leading peaceful marches in recognition of the awful thing that was done to George Floyd – well, perhaps it might have been easier to keep a lower profile...

And yet, Roman Catholic Bishop and Baptist Minister and Gospel Hall preacher, alongside lay leaders decided that, even if it were easier, that it would not have been right to say nothing... or leave action to one side...

Being passive might be easier...

It is always easier just to go with the flow of things.

To get back to Daniel – this was, as we have observed, not quite his way of operating. Since the day that the Babylonians brought him and his friends to this new land, they had been trying to get him to comply.

But he would not eat the food that was dedicated to the idols...

He refused to sit at tables where wild parties were being held using the goblets that belonged to the Temple where once God had been worshipped and which marauding soldiers had plundered.

And when the King decrees that he should pray only to him and not to the God that he normally worshipped – well, Daniel was not going along with that either.

The God whom he worshipped had kept him safe this long. And so, Daniel defies the order...

Opening the windows as wide as they could be, Daniel literally bends his knee in prayer...

Bending knees in silent prayer can oftentimes – as we have seen in recent days – be the most powerful witness.

Without a word being spoken the world hears the loudest voice of defiance that only silence, and prayer can bring.

**Let us pray.**

### Closing Prayer

Lord, as we draw this time of worship to a close, we draw to mind the witness of Daniel as he quietly, but confidently and trusting in you, holds fast to things that are important to him. We thank you for the witness of Daniel who put his faith in you at the forefront of his life and witness.

Lord, in these days we pray that you would be with those who hold fast to the things which they hold dear but who do so at great personal cost to themselves. As they seek to serve you, grant them the knowledge that you walk with them even when inaction and holding back an opinion would be an easier road to walk.

At the same time, Lord, we ask that you would help us to be able to tell the difference between the things to which we hold fast and those things which are simply down to our own stubbornness and personal preference.

We pray this day for those use their voices as a tool for bringing a positive message to the world as we pray that your kingdom of justice and mercy and peace would be experienced here on earth and in our daily lives.

Let our words be words of love giving voice to the voiceless...

May our hands be healing hands bringing assurance and affirming those in need.

May our hearts be filled with compassion as we seek to follow you.

Again, we pray for those who use their words and hands and hearts to support others at this time. Bless them in all that they do.

And hear us as we now offer these our prayers through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

### Benediction

*Let us go now and proclaim the gospel*

*Not just through words but in our actions – through what we say and do, and we are.*

*As we meet others may they meet Christ in us.*

*And may the blessing of almighty God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with you this day and forevermore, Amen.*