

Intro –

Good morning Mercy Church! I bring greetings from Mercy Providence Rd. By the grace of God, things are going really well. Our launch team has been incredible and things have by in large gone very smoothly. We saw our first person get saved two weeks ago! And that's why made this move! So, thank you.

Today, we are going to continue in our series in Daniel which is titled "Lions, Fire, & Faithfulness of God. In this series we have been looking at life of Daniel, and specifically, the manner in which he lived as an exile in a foreign land. If you remember, Daniel was taken from his home where they served the God of the Jews, to Babylon, a place that hated the one true God. Frequently, we see how Daniel's faith clashed with the culture he lived in and he had to make a decision... Was he going to trust God or fall in line with the culture. We face a similar pressures today, now we're not necessarily captives in a foreign land, but we are spiritual exiles. By this, I mean that this world is not our home. We as children of God we belong to the kingdom of God. Jesus mentions this in the Sermon on the Mount series we did a number of months ago. And his desire for us is bring that taste of the kingdom here on earth. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray he said, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven."

But let's admit it. Following Jesus on earth is hard. Our way of living clashes with culture. It always has. Jesus told us that we would be true. He said that he would be sending the disciples out as sheep amongst wolves. But the beauty of this series has been that we get to catch a glimpse of how we can live for the kingdom of God in our culture. Praise be to God that he gave us the most relevant and powerful book that would ever be put together.

I think one of the most powerful observations I've seen in this series that we haven't mentioned yet is that Daniel's theology determined his biography¹. By this, I mean that his theology (or what he truly believed about God) determined how his life story played out. We see this all throughout this book but in chapter 6 we see how his theology on full display in the area of kingdom prayer. What we're going to see in this chapter we're going to see that for Daniel, prayer was the key to kingdom living. That's what I want us to take away from this sermon is that **Prayer is the key to kingdom living**.

Before I get into this, I just want to admit that this story has worked me over. To be honest, prayer has been the hardest spiritual discipline for me to cultivate. And if you're like me, when pastors preach on prayer I can be tempted to either check out or just leave feeling guilty or defeated. That's not my goal today. Expect conviction from the Holy Spirit, but reject condemnation that's from the enemy. My goal is to hopefully, lift your eyes to the glory and majesty of God.

¹ Tony Merida. Quote from his sermon on 2 Kings. He said, "Our theology determines our biography." This was certainly true for Daniel.

As I mentioned a second ago, Kingdom living is hard. In fact, it's impossible without God. Jesus told us this in John 15 says, that apart from him we can do nothing. But that's where we go wrong. I truly believe that every Christian in this room wants to make an impact for Christ in this world. You do. But the truth is that our prayer lives show us something very different. Our prayer lives often show us that we think we can do this without God. Our prayer life exposes what we really believe about God. For the Christian, our prayer lives communicates more of what we believe about God than anything else.

Daniel chapter 6 is packed with some incredible truth and evidence of God's power, but I believe that kingdom prayer is the big takeaway. Let's get into the story...

Last week, we saw God humble Belshazzar and this king died in defiance to God and now we have a new king. King Darius. Let's walk through these next few verses.

Let's read

1 Darius decided to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, stationed throughout the realm, 2 and over them three administrators, including Daniel. These satraps would be accountable to them so that the king would not be defrauded. 3 Daniel distinguished himself above the administrators and satraps because he had an extraordinary spirit, so the king planned to set him over the whole realm.

So, once again, we see that our boy Daniel has found favor with another king. But notice that it said that Daniel distinguished himself about the administrators because he had an "extraordinary spirit." This isn't the first time Daniel was spoken of in this manner. We see this said of him in 4:8, where King Neb said that Daniel was "a spirit of the holy God." We also saw this last week when Belshazzar said something similar in 5:14. The point is... God's hand was on Daniels life. Daniel was constantly being put in positions of influence by the Lord because of his Godly character and Daniel's character would advance the kingdom of God.

Even though Daniel was a Godly man and had an "extraordinary Spirit" Daniel had some enemies. We see that the other satraps and administrators grew jealous of Daniel and made a plot to take him out. Look at what happened...

4 The administrators and satraps, therefore, kept trying to find a charge against Daniel regarding the kingdom. But they could find no charge or corruption, for he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him. 5 Then these men said, "We will never find any charge against this Daniel unless we find something against him concerning the law of his God." Since they couldn't find something against Daniel, they decided to use his relationship and commitment to God against him. So, they set him up. 6 So the administrators and satraps went together to the king and said to him, "May King Darius live forever. 7 All the administrators the kingdom, the prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an edict that for thirty days, anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions' den. (This was a lie.

Daniel didn't agree to this. He would have never agreed to this. Why would he agree to pray to an earthly king instead of God. Wouldn't happen. And these political leaders knew that) 8 Therefore, Your Majesty, establish the edict and sign the document so that, as a law of the Medes and Persians, it is irrevocable and cannot be changed." 9 So King Darius signed the written edict.

This plan was pretty genius. They have got everything covered. They were going to kill Daniel getting him to break the law. These political leaders made it to where the king couldn't even reverse the law. That's a great plan.

Look at Daniel's response in verse 10... and in the next number of verses we're going to see 3 marks of kingdom prayer.

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel petitioning and imploring his God.

Right away, we see that Daniel's prayer life was not governed by an earthly king, but rather his heavenly king. Daniel's primary citizenship was in the kingdom of God and when the law of the land went against the law of his God, he obeyed God. Daniel's prayers were defiant to earthly rulers and obedient to his true king. Daniel went upstairs, opened the window faced Jerusalem, which is was the symbol of his citizenship, and prayed defiantly to God. This reminds us of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:11-12, when he says: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against your soul..." This is our first mark of Kingdom prayer... **The First Mark of Kingdom Prayer is Defiance.**

There are plenty of times throughout history where we see people of God disobeying rulers and authorities to follow God (China). Our prayers can be defiant as well, but most of the time our prayers are defiant against our fleshly desires. I'm sure that Daniel's fleshly desire was to not die. But, he had to defy his own desires to be obedient to God. We need to do the same. So, quick question... What fleshly desire keeps you from prayer? The answer to that question will show you which kingdom you're serving. We're not all in life or death situations, but some of us need to defy our desires and spend time praying to God.

There are a few that came to mind so let's try these on for size. Maybe for you it's productivity. We all struggle with this right? We wake up and right away we're thinking about our to-do list. We're thinking about all of the emails we have to respond to. So, instead of spending time with God we decide to "pray in the car." ... Now, I don't think praying in the car is wrong. But if you are sacrificing quality prayers for productivity, your allegiance is to an earthly kingdom not the heavenly kingdom. Deep down, a desire to be productive over prayer is a desire for success.? We want to be successful. And if we're successful, then we can finally find security. Or maybe it's FOMO... you fear missing out. So right when you wake up in the morning you are checking

every social media platform on your phone. What you're doing in that moment is you're checking to see if you missed anything because you don't want to be left out. You're also wondering what other people did last night, and you're ready to start posting your highlight reel on Instagram. Unfortunately, too many of us look at our phones before we even talk with God. By the time it comes to pray, our anxiety levels are through the roof because we laid in bed for 20 minutes looking at a screen full of our idols. And we wonder why our prayer time is distracted. We just filled our heads with a million images. In that moment, we're serving a different kingdom. Instead of prayer, your fear of missing out is really a desire for approval. Approval that you already have in Christ! He paid for it with his blood. And what about sleep. You know this one, you wake up to spend time to pray to God, but, "you just need a few more minutes." Let me snooze one more time, and then another. In this moment we serve the kingdom of comfort. Listen, spending time with God in the morning is always 10pm decision the night before.

Ok, so we see that Daniel was defiant in his prayers by defying an ungodly law and defying his desire to live. So let's read vs 10 again and we will see our second Mark of prayer.

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

In every season, good or bad, Daniel committed to the discipline of prayer. This is our second mark. **The second mark of kingdom prayer is discipline.** Daniel knew that this was the key to kingdom living. He didn't leave his prayer life up to chance. He didn't wait to get into a season of difficulty. Crisis was not the motivating factor. He was committed to a routine that ensured he prioritized God as his kingdom. Daniel knew that if we were going to glorify God with his life, he needed to be in touch with his father. If he was going to make wise decisions, he needed to routinely meet with God. If he was going to advance God's kingdom in an earthly kingdom that was opposed to God, he knew that he needed to meet with God frequently.

Some of you might be thinking, "Oh, I pray three times a day." That's great. But let's make sure we understand the sacrifice Daniel was making. Daniel was a busy guy. He ruled over the kingdom, which is an enormous responsibility. In the midst of a weighty and difficult job, he scheduled 3 times per day to spend devoted to God in prayer. Reminds me of the reformer, Martin Luther. He told a friend one time that he had so many things to do that he needed to spend the first three hours in prayer. How many of us schedule time to pray? I'm a pastor, and it's hard to do that sometimes. We need to do this if we're going to be kingdom people. Flippant prayers won't cut it. We schedule lunches, we schedule dates, we schedule workouts at the gym... we can certainly schedule prayer. If there is one thing I've learned about Charlotteans, is that our schedule is full. But if our prayers were as scheduled as our gym routine or lunch dates, our lives and the lives of others around us would radically change. I also don't think that the Bible is communicating that being disciplined and having a routine of prayer is not legalistic. The grace of God is not opposed to effort; it's opposed to earning."

Let's jump back to verses 10 & 11...

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel petitioning and imploring his God.

So, Daniel is now facing a crisis. The men who set him up have now found him petitioning and imploring his God. This is where we see our third mark. **The third mark of kingdom prayer is desperation.** Daniel knew that the document was signed and that the law couldn't be reversed, and they have him completely cornered. A simple reading of this passage might lead someone to believe that Daniel was only praying for the preservation of his life. But, again, in verse 10 it said that he was praying just as he'd done before. Was he praying for God to spare his life? I'm sure he was but his desperation wasn't for the preservation of his life, he had already been doing this, even in prosperity. His desperation wasn't for his life, but for the advancement of God's kingdom. His whole life was about this.

Let's ask this question... When are you most desperate in prayer? For most of us, we pray a ton in moments of inconvenience or discomfort, but once that discomfort leaves, we quit praying. That's because we got what we actually wanted. We didn't really want God, we wanted his stuff. Daniel's goal in prayer wasn't the alleviation of suffering, it was precious communion with God. This is where I was convicted by the Lord this week. Our prayers are soooo connected to circumstances. If my circumstances aren't what I want them to be, I'm praying a lot. As it should be. God wants us to pray to him in times of need especially in times of suffering. Psalm 9:9-10 says, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." He wants to hear our prayers. But if our prayers are only about us and about what we want or need, whose kingdom are we really living for? It's not God's kingdom. It's our kingdom. Our prayers need to start like Jesus taught us in Matthew 6, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." The first thing Jesus modeled for us was that our prayers shouldn't start with us. It should start by giving God glory and showing him honor. "God you are our treasure. You are holy and mighty and we want nothing but you. You are good and mighty." This is so important for us to see. Not only do we need to discipline ourselves to pray, we also have to discipline the content of our prayers. Our prayer life and the content of our prayers, are a direct reflection of our theology (what we actually believe about God). If we only pray for in times of need or pray selfishly, we don't actually want or love God, we love ourselves. So this week, instead of starting with your laundry list of things you want God to do for you, start with just worshipping him and telling him why you love him. We should have millions of reasons why we love him. Thank him for salvation, for your family, shout out your favorite things about him and marvel. For me, God as a good father is what I try and take to God often. It reorders my heart and my prayers. If you start with worship, your prayer life will shift.

I also think part of the reason we don't pray well is because we don't actually know God's word. Because we don't know his word, we run out of things to say to him. Any time something

difficult happens, we lean into ourselves and our own understanding rather than what we know to be true about God. The first verse I memorized as a child was Psalm 119:11, "I have stored your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

A couple months ago, at our staff retreat, we had a pastor from another church come in and teach and minister to us. During one of his sessions he said something that I'll never forget. He was talking to us about the importance of knowing God and how that affects our prayer life. And he said this, **"Can you articulate your troubles better than you can articulate character of God?"**² What he meant was that we are so good at naming every little detail of our troubles, but we can barely articulate what God's word says about who He is in the midst of our troubles. So, here's a little exercise this week. Take some time this week to reflect on God's character and expand your vocabulary to describe Him. So... this week don't use words like "good, great, or awesome." Tell God who he is to you. Who have you seen him to be in your time in the word? Instead of good, maybe you need to tell God that he's been kind or sweet to you. Instead of great, tell God that he is preeminent. Instead of awesome, tell God that he is matchless and unsurpassed by anything else. When you do this in your prayer life it will change you to the core. Often times we pray to change our circumstances, but we're usually that one that changes and grows. Use scripture this week. Praying the Psalms is always good. Y'all, we need to know God's word if we want to honor God as kingdom citizens. Especially in our prayer lives.

Let's jump back into the story and see how it ends. ... Daniel has been caught defying the law against prayer. And in verses 12-15, we see Daniel's enemies rat him out to the king. And due to the nature of the law, the king was unable to reverse it. Vs 16... **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 continually serve, rescue you!" 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den.** And then, the king went to his room distraught by what had happened.

And what we see next is the result of Daniel's kingdom minded prayers. Daniel knew that God was powerful enough to use these crazy circumstances for his glory. And next we will see how God responds to Daniel's kingdom prayers in a miraculous way.

19 At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 When he reached the den, he cried out in anguish to Daniel. "Daniel, servant of the living God," the king said, "has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm."

The result of Daniel's kingdom prayer was salvation from lions that could have devoured him. Daniel cried back to the king and gave the king the explanation that God rescued him. But you know what... Daniel isn't the hero of this story, God is! He said, "My God sent his angel to shut

² Point from Chris Gaynor's message at Mercy Staff retreat 2018.

the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me..." This is amazing and should be a celebrated moment. However, Daniel's salvation from physical death shouldn't be the thing we ultimately celebrate. We should celebrate that God's kingdom was advanced on this day! Daniel's kingdom minded prayers led to his salvation and the proclamation of God's glory around the earth. Darius killed Daniel's accusers and then did this...Look at this... It's amazing...

DARIUS HONORS GOD

25 Then King Darius wrote to those of every people, nation, and language who live on the whole earth: "May your prosperity abound. 26 I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel:

For he is the living God,
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his dominion has no end.
27 He rescues and delivers;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth,
for he has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions."

Church, Darius' words and Daniel's life in this chapter point to something much bigger reality found in the scriptures. Something I hope you hear often at Mercy is that when we read the Old Testament, it is full of stories like this that point to Jesus. This story is not meant to tell us about Daniel, it's meant to point us to Jesus! Jesus is the greater Daniel.

Like Daniel, Jesus' goal was bring God's kingdom to earth. Like Daniel, Jesus was wrongfully accused by rulers and beurocrats of the age. Like Daniel, Jesus was wrongfully found guilty of crimes. Like Daniel, Jesus was thrown into a cave. Like Daniel, Jesus' cave was covered with a stone. Like Daniel, Jesus was comforted by God's angels. And like Daniel, Jesus came out of that cave alive! Jesus is the greater Daniel!

So, today we have seen that prayer is the key to kingdom living. We have also seen three marks of kingdom prayer: defiance, discipline, and desperation. But how should we respond to this passage this week? **Pray for kingdom advancement & expect God to answer.** Pray for God to use you in your office. Pray that God would give you the courage to share the gospel with your roommate. Pray that God would save your sister, even though you've shared with her a million times. But listen, sometimes our greatest barrier to a devoted prayer life is *a lack of expectation*. We are called to *watch for reward*, to pray with expectation and look for God's answers to prayer. As Paul writes, "Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving." (Col. 4:2). Christian, God wants to answer your kingdom prayers. Keep praying, and expect God to answer.

Church, as I close I want to remind you that the God of the universe hears you when you pray. This should blow you away. The God of the universe, the one that spoke things into existence has his gaze set on you, his children. He loves you and you get to talk with him whenever you want. Be amazed this week and go spend time with God in prayer.

I think there is one response for prayer that I think would be appropriate for today. I believe that there are people in this room that have yet to give their lives to Jesus. If that's you, listen to me. You are a sinner, we all are. And your sin separates you from a loving God. But the Bible tells us some amazing news. God, in his grace, has sent a savior to the world. His name is Jesus and he can save you from your sins. He did it by living a perfect life and dying on the cross. He took your sin upon himself and he died for you. But like Daniel, he didn't stay in the tomb long. Jesus rose from the dead. This means that he has power over death and that your sins are in the grave. All you have to do is turn to him. You can do that right now by praying to him. There aren't any magical words, but a prayer could be something like this... "God, I know that I'm a sinner. And that my sin separates me from you. I don't want to be separated from you any longer. Lord, please forgive me of my sin. I'm leaving them behind. Please save me. I believe in what you did for me. I will do whatever you want me to do, and I'll go wherever you want me to go. I love you. Amen." If you prayed that and really meant it. Please raise your hand. Amen! Do not leave until we speak after the service.