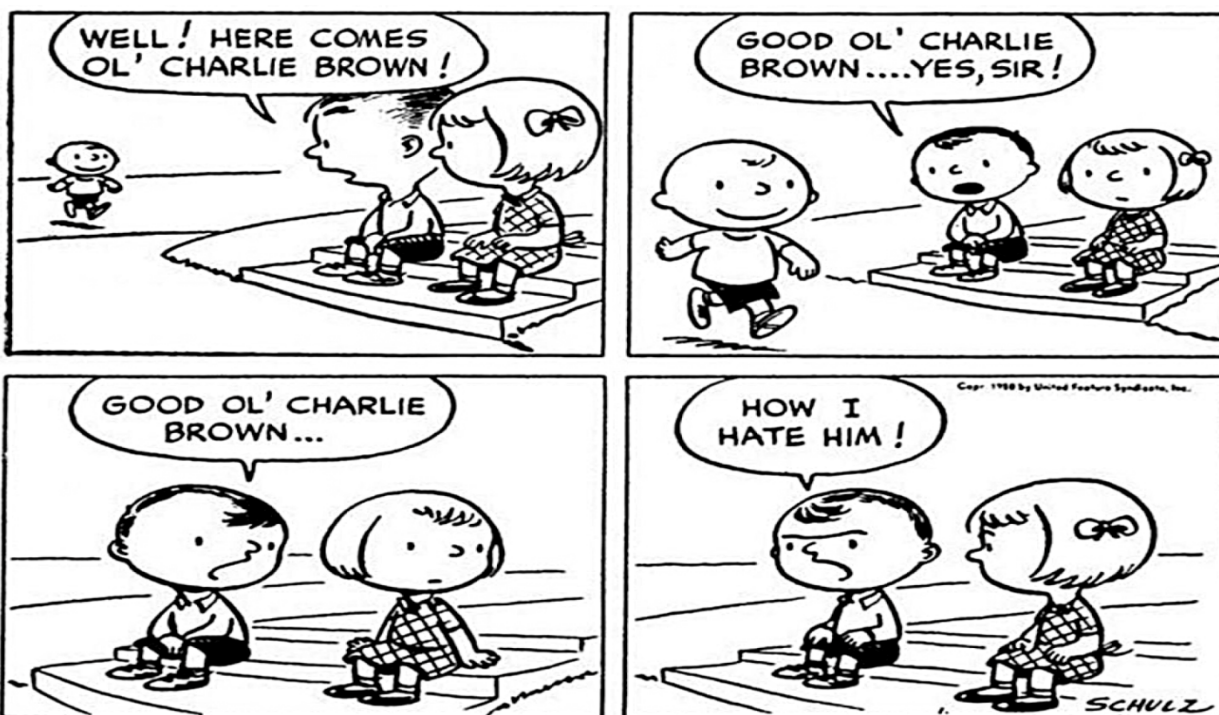


Thriving in Exile: Part 1
 Ordinary Responses to Extraordinary Faithfulness
Daniel 6

Introduction: On October 2, 1950, Charlie Brown made his first appearance in comic strip form, two days before Snoopy, two months before his signature shirt was created, and before he was ever called blockhead. Charles Schulz created a comic that's significance outlived his own life, but was insightful into the human condition. In his inaugural foray into the world, Charlie Brown captured a universal truth that resonates with Biblical truth: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, **therefore the world hates you.**" (John 15:18-19) Charlie Brown was hated NOT because he was brash, prideful, or evil, but because he was identified as "good". Without even a word out of his mouth, poor Charlie Brown was hated, and that tone would be carried with him for the next 50 years. Good grief!



As we come to perhaps the most well known passages in Daniel (what kid in Sunday School has not heard about Daniel in the lion's den!), we are once again reminded of Daniel's uncommon faith and uncompromising nature. It's important to frame the context to get an even deeper picture of this man's commitment to honor his God above all others. Daniel is now an old man (I think someone in their mid 80's can identify as old....I think) and is now a governing official of a **completely new kingdom!**. At the end of chapter 5 we saw the fall of Babylon, the gold head from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, and the once great world power had given way to 'chest and arms of silver', the Medo-Persia empire. Within a couple of years, Daniel had already established himself with a new monarch and gained his trust, which points to his exemplary character. As we unpack this story faithfulness, its important to note **two pieces of background information** that will help us understand the text.

1) The first is: **who was Darius the Mede?** And secondarily, why does it matter? Note at the end of Daniel 5 we are introduced to this ruler and given a specific age: 62. He then becomes a main character in Daniel 6 and history itself. Here is the problem: we don't have historical evidence of this man as ruler of Medo-Persia. Archaeological finds and documentation are immense for Belshazzar in ch. 5, but sparse in ch. 6. In fact, this chapter has been scrutinized and attacked by liberal scholarship to try to prove the fact that Daniel is either myth or written much later, and definitely NOT authored by Daniel. **Remember**, the Bible will always be attacked as to its veracity, authority, and inerrancy, and we must be committed not only to stay strong in our belief, but also in our study to show that what is recorded in Scripture is accurate historically. There are two possibilities for the identity of Darius. a) He could have been **Gubaru**, a governor of Babylon who was mentioned in the Nabonidus Chronicles, that he received a kingdom (5:31), was made a ruler (9:1) and fits the age description. b) This is all possible, but I believe a **second possibility** is the name "Darius" was more a title for a king (Like "Pharaoh"), and simply referred to **Cyrus himself**. Duo titles were not uncommon, and titles that represented both sides of the vast kingdom would make sense. Now some of you very astute readers will note **Daniel 6:28** and declare "AHA", it can't be since two men are mentioned there, *"So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius AND the reign of Cyrus the Persian."* However in the Aramaic language, much like Hebrew, the conjunction 'waw' can be translated **"even"** (like in 1 Chron. 5:26). This would mean that verse 28 is two descriptions referring to the same person. Either is possible, but the second is much simpler, and in the absence of much information either way, the most straightforward is preferred.

2) **How were these kingdom's ruled?** When a strong ruler would rise and conquer the known world, they would not (nor could not) move all of *their people* in to rule, but would instead put local kings and governors under **tribute**. We see this at the end of the tribe of Judah, when they were conquered would keep kings like Jehochin and Zedekiah in Jerusalem, but would exact taxes from them. If they withheld, the conquering nation would come in and do horrible things to put down any thought of sedition or aligning with others in rebellion. The point is, this practice was help by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and in some part, with the Medo-Persians. When we read about 120 satraps throughout the whole kingdom, these were both Persians AND other conquered nations leaders who made up the bureaucracy of the new regime. It was designed to keep the money flowing back to the leader and to keep down any thought or movement toward rebellion.

Now, let's look at how Daniel navigated this new environment and a new threat from those who, like Charlie Brown, hated him.

Common Hatred, Uncommon Integrity (6:1-9)

"Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 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 or complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him."

A Distinguished Politician - Some have said there are two miracles in this chapter: the lions didn't eat Daniel, and Persian found an honest politician! Let's first note the **uncommon integrity** that Daniel had in this new kingdom: **First**, Daniel had continually distinguished himself in the midst of the political machine of Persia to the point that the king himself had placed him as one of three top positions, and was going to be placed over each of those! I'm sure the legend of Daniel had spread a bit, especially as his actions in ch. 5 were told to the incoming invaders, but Daniel was not just consistent in the moment, but his character and integrity was **clear and comprehensive**. This is the truth of our character: *put a*

person of character in ANY situation, or place ANY circumstance around him, and who he truly is will always be revealed. For Daniel that meant the same way he acted as a teen or an interpreter of dreams had only grown over time and gained traction with the most powerful men of the world. **Second**, he was **above reproach**, being faithful, with no error or fault found in him. This did not mean others didn't try to trap him or falsely accuse him, but when his affairs were examined, both **publically and privately, both professionally and personally, in person and in social media**, he was found blameless. Being above reproach is the foundational qualification for an elder of God's church (1 Tim. 3:1), but is truly the **goal of all believers**, that people could examine ANY area of our life and find consistent faithfulness rather than wavering hypocrisy. **Third**, and this is fantastic, the ONLY grounds they could find to complain about or to accuse him in was **in connection with the law of His God!** Seriously, put that on my tombstone someday. The only thing they could grab onto was the fact that he was so committed to the God of the universe in both fidelity and practice, that he lived out what he believed, and though it was not negative toward them nor harmful to anyone, **they hated him for it!** This is the life we strive to live by grace, but we also understand the **irony of this life: a life of integrity will bring resistance, hatred, and anger, just as it did with Daniel and with Jesus Himself.** This is counter-intuitive, but true. Daniel's integrity also had to show itself in its response to being treated unfairly for simply being faithful.

An Angry Mob - They had done their due diligence but couldn't find anything to accuse Daniel of (and boy, did they look). So they did what most do when they don't like a person or decision: **they had to get rid of him, cancel him, get him out of the way so they could get what they wanted.** Here, they took legal action to get rid of Daniel.

It seems clear from the text that the other two high officials got a number of the satraps together and hatched a plan. **First**, they represented that they had **ALL** the high officials of the kingdom with them (6:7), meaning EVERYONE who was ANYONE was with them, unanimously. This is the classic ploy of mob rule, where a few claim to represent the whole, giving weight and credence to their threats. **Second**, they appealed to the king's pride and hubris. "We think it's a good idea that you establish yourself with your newly conquered people that they see YOU as the go between to the gods, and that you are the only one who really can do that!" This kind of flattery is transparent in terms of motivation but also effective when appealing to people in power. **Darius** (or Cyrus) was not immune to this kind of saccharine flattery. **Third**, the conspirators knew that if the king signed this document by royal decree, even he could not break it for 30 days. This was check mate for them, and clear doom for Daniel.

Common Practice, Uncommon Courage (6:10-11)

"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open towards Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

What could they gain traction in terms of Daniel's practice? **Prayer.** The book of Daniel is surprisingly a book of prayer, both as we have observed and will in the later chapters. This is where Daniel's **boldness and courage are clearly seen**, since he knew exactly what he was doing and what the consequences would be. What do we know about this prayer?

1) **What was Daniel praying?** When Solomon dedicated the Temple in **1 Kings 8**, he stated this, *"if they repent (referring to the people of Israel who sinned against God and were sent away in captivity - v. 46), with all their mind and with all their heart 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 plea, and maintain their cause and forgive your people."* (8:48-49a). Daniel was praying for the restoration of his

people to their land through them repenting of their sin and God granting forgiveness. The **irony** here is that Cyrus had already decreed the exiles could begin to return by this time (539 B.C), but more work of repentance had to be done. He was directing his prayer toward Jerusalem as that was the destination that Daniel longed for but he himself would not touch again in this life.

2) Why three times a day? Psalm 55:17 mentions praying for salvation in the **evening, morning and at noon**. Most likely this was the principled template of prayer that he followed.

3) Why didn't he close the shutters? Since prayer is something we can do anytime, anywhere, Daniel would have simply closed himself off from the outside world and prayed in his home, or prayed silently, or made all of his vocal requests "un-spoken". I believe there are at least **two strong reasons** why he continued his practice. **First**, he did not change anything since this was his normal and known practice. This was nothing like an "in your face" response, but a practice that I'm sure he started when he was a young man. **Consistency assists courage, and discipline feeds faithfulness. In the crisis Daniel's habit set him free to be faithful** (Dale Davis). This is why crisis **reveals**, both good and bad, and our disciplines have either been built up for it or are found wanting when it comes. There is a valid concern that through this pandemic families have got out of the habit of consistency and faithfulness in the grace filled discipline of Bible intake, true fellowship, and corporate worship and are unprepared for the attacks of wrong thinking, depression, and schemes of our enemy that would keep them away from God's church.

Second, it was clear that Daniel KNEW about the plot, how it was trumped up and directed at him, so he was not going to back down and give credence to their plot. Often when we yield to false narratives we give them platforms and seeming veracity. Daniel did not play that game. I remember a seminary chapel (one of the handful that I attended), where John MacArthur talked about threats during his ministry. He said he's received death threats and every other kind that you could think of, but he doesn't have extra bars on his windows or locks on his doors. In fact, he said that what would concern him the most is **false accusation**, that kind that is thrown out into the ether and believed by uninformed people. The tendency would be to allow that kind of public up swell to cause a cessation of certain ministry or preaching, but that he determined to never back down, even in the midst of false claims. Daniel knew the heat was coming, and he did not stop just to avoid the burn.

Common Inability, Uncommon Affirmation (6:12-19)

"Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him...The king declared to Daniel, "May your God whom you serve continually, deliver you."

The trap was set. Daniel walked willingly into it, swallowing the hook without hesitation. The mob leaders gleefully grabbed Daniel after his publically viewed praying and hauled him before the king. Their accusation was two fold: **He pays no attention to you, O King, or the injunction you signed.** in other words, he's disrespecting YOU AND YOUR LAW!!! This **exile?!!!** You could almost hear their fake shock and horror at the thought! The king, though a bit dense before, saw exactly what was really going on. He realized that the whole exercise was truly a rouse to get Daniel into the lion's den, the common consequence for breaking this command. According to the complex constitution they followed, the **law of the Medes and Persians, even the king could not break his own law, even one that he himself enacted.**

This is a huge reminder. **Psalm 146:3-4** says, *"Do not put your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish."* **The irony here** is the fact that the one put forward as **deity or at least a mediator to deity** was

impotent to overcome a mere law of the land. Darius, like **all political entities**, cannot save nor are they the answer to the problems of life, but are more times than not a contributor to the problem. Darius saw that he was powerless to save the man he had come to respect, whom he was going to give the most power of anyone in his kingdom, and had exhausted all possibilities into the night.

This led to an **uncommon affirmation**. Daniel was cast into the den of lions, most likely a pit filled with intentionally hungry lions who were there for one purpose: **to exact pain and death to whoever was thrown into their midst**. After casting Daniel in, the king uttered, "**May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you.**" This is remarkable. The king had no problem putting people to death, nor did he have a problem having people used as lion food. But this was a most unusual night. He could not eat (both he and the lions fasted that night), did not have his usual nightly entertainment, and could not sleep, but instead was **hoping that Daniel's God would save him**. Much like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he recognized the **power and might of the true God BECAUSE OF THE LIFE OF A FAITHFUL SERVANT IN DANIEL**. What a testimony! The king was up early and ran to the tomb, hoping against hope that something unusual had happened. He was not disappointed.

Common Consequences, Uncommon Salvation (6:20-28)

*"Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, **because he had trusted in his God.**"*

The king cried out **in a tone of anguish**, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lion?" Great question, weak theology (God obviously is able to do it), but best of intentions. Daniel's response was tremendous: O King, live forever, God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths, and I am unharmed, **because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king, I have done no harm**. To this point of the narrative and story, *Daniel had not uttered a word. This means that he did not try to defend himself, did not answer the fools according to their folly, but entrusted himself to God who judges righteously, even down to thoughts and intentions*. Daniel allowed God to vindicate him, even when he was falsely accused and set up to fail. What an example for life in a fallen world, while living as exiles in a foreign land. Salvation belongs to the Lord and is found in Him alone, and to the level that we **trust in our God** is to the level that we can live with confidence and freedom in any situation.

The story ends with both **retribution and proclamation**: the conspirators and their families were thrown into the pit, and before they reached the bottom, their bones were torn apart (I'm typically hungry after fasting too). This led to a parallel statement of praise by Darius, much in the same way as Nebuchadnezzar after the fiery furnace of chapter 3. He called on all in his kingdom to **tremble and fear 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 has saved Daniel from the power of lions."* Whether this was a statement of salvation or affirmation we don't know, but it is clear a second king and kingdom was marked by Daniel's witness and God's faithfulness.

So why was this event recorded, as the last of the narrative sections of Daniel?

1) It shows the power of a life of integrity throughout a lifetime. Daniel's faithfulness was begun as a teen, forged as an adult, and solidified as a senior. A life of godly character is influential no matter the place, leadership, or circumstance. If you think your particular set up makes it *impossible* to be above

reproach, remember Daniel and how he rose above every fray and did not allow the culture around him to influence his heart and mind within.

2) God is seen as faithful throughout, even in a transition of world powers. God consistently was present and guided through Israel as a nation, through Babylon as a conqueror, and Medo-Persian as a restorer. We remember that God never changes and always keeps his promises, regardless of the conservative nature of a political majority or not, and since He is working, we can live with **confidence and joy**.

3) This is the bridge that shows God's restoration of His people back to Jerusalem, but we will also see a glimpse of the stone made without hands and His rule that will come, starting in ch. 7. The reason we can see ourselves as **exiles here**, and take the hatred of people, is the fact that there is **a kingdom that is coming**. Next week we will look back and summarize how we are to live as exiles, particularly looking at Jeremiah 29, and then we will look ahead to what God has in store starting in ch. 7. May we learn to utter what Darius did, that **all people would tremble and fear before our mighty God**.