



August 31, 2014
Pastor Megan Hackman
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

The Upside Down Kingdom: Upside Down Risk Daniel 6

You've already heard the end of the story with Greta and the kids. You know Daniel's going to get thrown into the lion's den and God is going to spare him. The question today is—what does this story teach us about God's Upside Down Kingdom? Is anybody threatening to throw you into a den of lions? No? So then we also want to ask—what does this story teach us about what it means for me to live right now in God's kingdom? If we are not being threatened with a lion's den, what are we threatened with? And when we are faced with threats, what kind of risk will we as God's people take?

So we know the end of the story, but let's get reintroduced to Daniel. Let's look at Daniel 6. I'm not going to read the whole chapter, so just follow along with those little numbers, the verse numbers, as I point out for us some of the things we learn about Daniel.

First, how old do you think Daniel is in this story? Let's see if we can do some not-so-easy math. (Come on... smarter than a 5th grader!) He was 15 when he was forced to come to Babylon in 605 B.C. as a prisoner of war. (This is tough because we're dealing with B.C. numbers.) What year was he born if he was 15 when he went to Babylon in 605? (620 BC) So we know from history that Darius became king after that writing on the wall incident we saw last week. That year was 539 B.C. So 620 to 539 B.C. is... 61. When you think of Daniel in the lion's den, did you ever think of a 61 year old man? So Daniel is older than my dad at this point.

He's been around a while. How many kings has Daniel been under? (2, now 3) How many times have Daniel and his friends' lives been threatened? (twice) Have they died yet? (No) So at 61 years old, did Daniel know God? (Yes!) Do you think he trusted him? (Yes!) Do you think other people saw that Daniel was different after all these years? (Yes!)

Daniel 6 tells us what all these people thought was different about Daniel—in verse 2, we all recognize that Daniel was one of just three men next in line to the king. Verse 3 says Daniel was in that position because of "his exceptional qualities". A better way to say that is that Daniel "possessed an extraordinary spirit". (NASB) Have we seen that Daniel has an extraordinary spirit? (Yes!) Then listen to this; this is how Daniel's enemies describe him in verse 4: "Daniel was trustworthy" and they

could find “no corruption or negligence” in him. That’s in relationship to his work with the government—Daniel was completely faithful, totally trustworthy in the matters of the secular state for which he worked. (I wish we could say that about our politicians!) So if Daniel has the extraordinary spirit and is at the top of the political power structure and totally faithful—why is he threatened with the lion’s den?

Here we come to the crux of the issue, and it’s the same conflict that we often find ourselves in. There are two conflicting paths of loyalty Daniel’s having to operate between. First, whose kingdom is he in? Originally, it was Babylon. Remember, that was the gold in the statue. But the gold has fallen, and now we’re onto the silver kingdom from Neb’s dream in Daniel 2. Who’s the next kingdom in line? The Medes and the Persians. So Daniel’s living in the Kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. That’s a reality. There’s a king on the throne, his name is Darius, and Daniel reports to him. It’s equally true that Daniel lives in God’s Upside Down Kingdom. It’s just as real. God is really on the throne, and Daniel has to report to him. So we have these two kingdoms operating at the same time. Both are real. And Daniel’s going to have to decide which is going to have priority in his life?

The conflict between these two kingdoms comes at a question of law. It’s the law of God versus the law of the Medes and the Persians. Look at verse 8 and verse 12. How do Daniel’s enemies describe the law of the Medes and the Persians? They say “It cannot be repealed.” What does that mean? It means they think this law endures forever! It can never be changed! Whose law does that sound like? God’s law! So Daniel’s going to have to decide which is going to have priority in his life when these two laws contradict?

And so we know the story. God’s law to pray only to him, to have no other gods before him, comes into conflict with the king’s new law that you must pray to him for 30 days. And when Daniel decides which one to follow he’s in effect saying, I think God’s Kingdom or Darius’ Kingdom is more important.

What’s really scary for Daniel is this is a life-threatening situation! If Daniel chooses to follow God’s law and refuse to pray to King Darius, then he’s going to be thrown into the lion’s den. What risk is Daniel going to take?

We see it in verse 10. What does Daniel decide to do? In the face of a life-threatening situation, Daniel risks trusting God by continuing his regular practice of prayer.

That’s not the risk I expected Daniel to take! At this point if I were Daniel, I’d be feeling like I can be super risky and daring. Remember—he’s 61! Dreams and fire and the whole bit! He’s seen it! So if I were Daniel, I would have marched up to King Darius and told him how ridiculous his idea is to keep us from praying to God. But that’s not the Upside Down Risk God wanted Daniel to take. What was the bold, defiant, Upside Down Kingdom risk Daniel took?

The risk Daniel took was the quiet life of obedient trust in God. Daniel chose to not alter his priorities in any way. The king's helpers were offended by his quiet life of obedience, his regular practice of prayer. That's what led Daniel to the "real" risky business of standing before a hungry lion and trusting God to close his mouth. But that's not where the risky life began for Daniel. Daniel's greatest risk was his quiet life of obedience as a citizen of the Upside Down Kingdom who let that citizenship take priority over the demands and expectations of these earthly kings.

Daniel's boldness to run the risk of quiet obedience was firmly attached to God's promises. He had settled into a habit of prayer King Solomon had said would be needed 400 years before. God always knew his people were going to be living under a different king because they couldn't follow his commands. When everything was different—when God's people all lived in their own, beautiful city with their own king, when these two kingdoms, the earthly one and the Upside Down one were more aligned—they built God this beautiful temple. It's called Solomon's temple after King Solomon. Even on that perfect Kingdom day, Solomon prayed about the years God's people would spend away from their city under enemy kings. Jot down 1 Kings 8:46 and take a look at this in your time in God's word later today.

Allow me to summarize it now. King Solomon prayed: when your people sin, and they will, and they end up under an enemy king, if they pray to you and repent and plead with you. If "they turn back to you with all their heart and soul"... "and pray to you toward... the temple I have built for your Name." (Has that happened? Is Daniel praying like this? Yes! He prays three times a day toward Jerusalem.) Then, Solomon prays to God, "hear from heaven, hear their prayer and their plea... forgive them... cause their conquerors to show them mercy..." (Has that happened? Yes! Remember when Dash/Faith gave everyone carrots? And Darius doesn't want Daniel to die!)

The riskiest thing Daniel could do was trust that God would fulfill the promises he made to a praying, exiled people. Daniel takes that risk in the face of threatening situations.

Do we risk like that? How do we respond when we feel threatened? When our health is threatened? Or someone takes legal action against us? I'm not necessarily proud of this, but I can tell you what my gut reaction is. I go all "Mama Bear" when I or someone I love feels threatened. I verbally get going in such defense of myself or others that a good response to my tirades is, "Preach it!" Maybe you're like me, leading a demonstration. Or I know some of you choose the more indirect route of publishing your tirades on Facebook. I don't know about you, but I think I need to back down and take lessons from how our brothers and sisters are responding in Iraq and Syria in the face of being threatened.

What if the conflict isn't so much a threat on your life or your reputation and more a conflict of values? Like, God's kingdom says to value rest and stop working for a solid day to enjoy him, but this kingdom—our earthly kingdom—says maximize

productivity! Don't neglect sports or study or email! Which kingdom gets your priority? I've been in internal conflict this week over writing this sermon. Is it for your approval or for God's? I sincerely want this to matter, so I've let my dominant question be, "How will the church receive this?" But that's a "this kingdom" (lower) question! The citizen of God's kingdom asks, "Am I seeking to give God glory in this?" My work this week was writing a sermon, but if yours was a presentation or a marketing campaign or appeasing your kids... Were you asking the questions of the earthly kingdom, "How will they receive this?" or the Upside Down Kingdom, question, "Is this in line with God's will for me?"

What if we believed that the most risky act of defiance, in response to threat or a priority conflict, was to live into God's Kingdom? Daniel did. Daniel lived quiet obedience, praying for God's promises to be fulfilled instead of the easy route of just not praying for 30 days to keep everyone happy and his life safe. What if we, like Daniel, knew the promises of God and actively lived as though God were going to set all this right in the end? What if we looked back into the Scriptures and knew the promises and could see out further than our 61 years and saw the long range nature of the promises of God? What if we believed that our life did not end in death but continues in resurrection and in being with Jesus forever? Would your prayer life be different? Would you calculate threat and risk differently? Would your priorities change at all?

Daniel did choose to risk that God would fulfill his promise to hear his people. He believed the words later in that same prayer of Solomon, that God "would never leave us nor forsake us." He believed in God's promise even further in the prayer, "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God that there is no other." Solomon closed his prayer, "But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands."

Daniel's heart was fully committed. He lived actively risking to trust God. And the risk paid off. Darius judged Daniel guilty for not obeying the laws of the Medes and Persians, so Daniel was thrown in the lion's den. But when God's judgment is rendered, Daniel is rescued. Daniel's name means, "God is judge." God judged, and the judgment was "innocent." How do we know? What did God do to the lions in the pit? (He closed their mouths).

This whole situation is exactly what we have come to expect of an Upside Down Kingdom. Let's remember where we've been. What are the Upside Down things we have discovered in Daniel? What is Upside Down in God's Kingdom? (Blessings, Power, Rescue, Values) Daniel is in this situation because of his Upside Down values. The world would have him value his reputation with the king, but he values God's long-term promises. We have an Upside Down rescue—Daniel is not delivered *from* the lions but *in* the lion's den. And that rescue reveals the upside down power of God. The law of the Medes and Persians does not have the power; God has the power, and it's his law that cannot be changed. The threats of the king's helpers turn out to be an Upside Down blessing of God, because Darius saw through this

that God's law doesn't change and God has the power to rescue. The whole world heard about God because of it!

This Upside Down Kingdom story sounds a lot like another story to come 700 years later—it's the story that Greta's Storybook Bible calls, "the Greatest Rescue the world has ever known." Think about this with me. Jesus' accusers, like Daniel, sought a reason to kill him. They came to arrest him in his place of regular prayer. But when he's taken to court, the governmental leaders could find no fault in his actions, because he was innocent in the eyes of the secular law. Pilate works as Darius did all night to try to set him free, but Jesus is sentenced to death at the outcry of the people who accuse him of violating God's law.

Jesus' rescue is certainly Upside Down, because Jesus isn't rescued from the cross. Jesus, God's own son, was not spared death. Yet he was rescued through death—not spared like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And yet through suffering, Jesus lives "the Greatest Rescue the world has ever known", for he is sealed in a tomb, dead. Miraculously, he is called out of the tomb by God's own power. We would have thought God's power would have spared Jesus from death. But instead, God's Upside Down power is revealed when he raises Jesus from the dead! Like Daniel, Jesus walks out of that sealed tomb of death alive! Now the whole world receives the Upside Down blessing of Christ's new life through death.

What a very Upside Down Kingdom! Are you living as a citizen of this Kingdom that lasts forever? Daniel's story is our story. He's teaching us how to live our lives now! We live in parallel kingdoms—this modern world with all its values, laws and false promises, and also God's Kingdom with its values, laws, and true promises. When those are in conflict—and they are in the way you spend your time and your money, the things you talk about, the ethics of your work, and the long-range goals of life—when they are in conflict, which takes priority? Will you take the Upside Down risk and trust God?

During this next piece of special music, I invite you to reflect on Daniel's risk—to risk that God's promises are true and come often through the trials of this life. We value singing together, but at some points we allow one person to give voice for us. Bridgett and Hailey are going to sing "Blessings" on our behalf, a song we shared at the beginning of the month when we first were looking at God's Upside Down Blessings. They have lived the difficulty of receiving God's Upside Down blessing through the most difficult of circumstances. These ladies have been there with their friend, a young girl in our church who died a year ago from brain cancer. Some of you also have walked with us this year and with the Dickerson's in this fire. We really fight to comprehend this conflict between what is a horrific tragedy for us here (low) and yet is working a Kingdom blessing here (high).

So as they sing, and we reflect and pray, this is an opportunity to praise God for what he's given us, even if it's Upside Down blessings. Take the opportunity to really meditate on the words of this song in light of what we have learned about

God's Kingdom which comes despite and through the death of a 10 year old... despite and through the quiet obedience of prayer that leads to a lion's den... despite and through our eagerness to please others instead of God... despite and through the trials of this life.

God's promises are true. Noel and Ben are going to come forward and offer us God's benediction. Remember the way that he has promised his presence to you by the power of his Spirit. And after they proclaim that benediction... if there are promises of God you need help believing, I encourage you to come forward after I close and pray with one of our prayer team for the Holy Spirit to give you his power to believe. If there are priorities you need to up-end, I invite you to come forward and confess those and receive assurance of God's forgiveness. If there are risks and threats you are up against that you need prayer to risk quiet obedience in God's way, I invite you to come and pray with these folks.

We pastors want to meet you if you are new here. So please come join us at Newcomer's Coffee just around the corner in He Brews. Ben and Noel, please offer us God's benediction.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. List the top 5 priorities in your life. (A good way to determine this would be to say— how did I decide what to do first today? or What determined the last big purchase I made?) Evaluate those priorities. Do they line up with God's Upside Down Kingdom priorities?
 2. What are the things God has promised that are easy for you to believe? Which feel riskier to trust that God will fulfill?