

Before Whom I Stand

Mention Daniel and most people's immediate reaction is 'lion's den'. **Daniel 6** brings us that familiar story, but there is much more hiding beneath the surface.

Darius (probably Cyrus's uncle) takes the throne at the age of 62. Daniel is years older, most likely in his eighties, and is immediately trusted to take high responsibility as one of three administrators over the 120 local governors. As Daniel distinguishes himself above the others, Darius sees the ideal person to run the Babylonian kingdom for him. (**Daniel 5:31-6:3**). The 122 others seem to have different ideas! They were envious of Daniel, just as others had envied Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego years before (**Daniel 3:8-12**).

This envy turns to white-hot hatred for Daniel and the fact that he seems to be 'whiter than white' intensifies that hate (**Daniel 6:3-5**). As this octogenarian shows them up by his wisdom and ability, the conspirators tell blatant lies in their plot to set Daniel up for downfall and death.

How did Darius not notice that his most distinguished adviser was absent when the others claimed that "The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have **all** agreed . . ." ? (**Daniel 6:7**) Perhaps he did not realise that the 122 had specially arranged to all be there together, without Daniel. Their hatred was obviously well-hidden.

It seems that the first Daniel knows about it is when he hears the news that the king has signed the decree (**6:10**).

What would we have done? Perhaps we would have rushed to the court to explain the deceit to Darius, or gone to challenge the 122 about their underhand tactics. Would we have 'gone public' and told everyone we knew, in an attempt to discredit them? Surely any or all of these would have been quite reasonable? As a respected public figure, Daniel would have been very convincing and could probably have turned public opinion against his enemies. After all, this was a plot to kill him!

He might at least have played safe. Perhaps he could tone down his prayer times? Everyone seemed to know that he prayed 3 times a day with his windows open – perhaps he should reduce it to once or twice, and maybe shut the windows? Surely the LORD would understand?

It is easy to forget that, while all of this was happening in Babylon, the LORD's plan for His people was still unfolding. **Daniel 9:1-3** (and on through the chapter) shows us that, **right at this same time**, Daniel was pouring his heart out to the LORD about the restoration of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. The LORD sent Gabriel with encouragement and (unexpectedly) **detailed** information about the coming of the Messiah, timings that would point the Jews' expectations towards the time of the reign of King Herod in Judea and Caesar Augustus in Rome!

Daniel was certainly aware of the conspiracy against him, but even more aware of the purposes of God for His people, pouring out his worship, his confession of Israel's sin and his deeply heartfelt passion for Jerusalem (**9:20**).

It was while he was absorbed in all this that the peace of Daniel's upstairs room was shattered by the arrival of his accusers, who could then go back to tell Darius of the 'shocking news' about Daniel (**6:11-14**).

The king must soon have realised that the whole thing had been a plot to get Daniel. He had been tricked into enacting a law that would kill his most valued adviser – no wonder he tried so hard to reverse it! Perhaps he began to think how he would eventually deal with the conspirators, but now he was preoccupied with trying to rescue Daniel.

Everybody knows the rest of the story – including Darius's 'hoping against hope' comment:- "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Daniel survives unscathed, his accusers are executed and Darius recognises that 'the God of Daniel' is 'the living God' – and gets his whole kingdom to 'fear and reverence' Him.

In this whole chapter, Daniel hardly speaks! No words of self defence or counter-accusation, not even of explanation! Just words of reassurance to a worried king, together with a clear statement of the judgment of God in the whole matter (**6:22**).

That is exactly where Daniel stands secure. He is not taken up with status, nor intimidated by the fear of man (whether king or politician). He knows who he is, 'Dan-i-el' – 'God is my judge'. Not in an arrogant way, as if no-one else matters, just that, in the end, he stands or falls before his God, whatever anyone else may say or do.

He shares this characteristic with Elijah, Elisha and Paul – in fact, with anyone who walks with God, and especially with anyone who speaks in God's name.

Famously, as he announces the 3½ year drought on Israel, Elijah says to Ahab “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve (literally, ‘before whom I stand’), there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (**1 Kings 17:1**). See also **1 Kings 18:15**, **2 Kings 3:14**, **2 Kings 5:16**.

Paul was the same. See **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**. He certainly had plenty of troubles, not least of which was the criticism of him and his work, accusing him of being a false apostle. The church in Corinth were fed some of these accusations, and Paul feels their judgment against him keenly. Nonetheless, he knows that it is only the Lord’s judgment that really matters.

He does not claim to be innocent; he just says that he is not aware of anything against him. Like Daniel, he is content to let the Lord’s judgment stand. Even his ‘defence’ of his apostleship in **2 Corinthians 4** is soaked in the same theme: “we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (**2 Corinthians 4:2**).

Right through this chapter, with all his difficulties, Paul’s reference point is God’s judgment, God’s priorities, God’s plan and God’s provision. In verses **13-15**, Paul says that he believes, and so speaks, because he knows that, ultimately, he will stand in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Like Daniel, Paul does not try to defend himself, but leaves the issue with the Lord. There is tremendous security here – he is relying on what he knows.

How can we share this same certainty?

Developing the kind of certainty that will take us through problems takes time for us, just as it did for Paul and Daniel.

For Daniel, there was dogged loyalty to the God of his fathers. Even as an old man, 70 years after the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, he was aware of the times at which the various sacrifices would have been offered (**Daniel 9:21**) – a little insight into the lifelong devotion of this man of God! His passion was to see the LORD’s purposes fulfilled, and his trust was in what the LORD had promised.

For Paul – and for us – there is so much more. Paul learned to live by the grace of God, and so can we. (**1 Corinthians 15:10**)

Right at the foundation, it is vital that we take hold of what is ours in the Lord Jesus. For example, we all know the truth that forgiveness is

ours because the Lord Jesus shed His blood for us, but how often do we actually take hold of that truth and put it into practical use in our lives, to give us release from guilt and failure? Again, instead of springing to our own defence, allowing the conviction of the Holy Spirit to show us where we have gone wrong and then simply agreeing with His diagnosis – which is what confession really is. **1 John 1:6-9** is the classic passage which explains it so clearly.

Perhaps we think that God's grace to us is all about forgiveness and nothing else. It is a vital starting point, but there is much more. Our old life is over, crucified with Christ, meaning that we have been set free from constant failure – and from religious rules and regulation, whether imposed on us by others or ourselves! (**Romans 6:1-7, Colossians 2:8-15**)

Maybe we think that we cannot possibly please God? That is certainly true if we try to rely on our own achievements, but we have been given a new quality of life through the resurrection of Jesus! (**Romans 8:1-11**). More of our Father's grace to us!

The power of the Holy Spirit may seem remote, but the Lord Jesus made it clear that He would be poured out on the Church, based on the fact of Jesus' own ascension to sit at the right hand of the Father. (**John 16:5-15, John 7:38-39, Acts 2:32-33**).

All these are basic truths, some of which we celebrate through breaking of bread and believer's baptism, and we can continue to grow in our appreciation of the reality of what our Father has done for us in Jesus!

Often we say 'the grace' to each other. Surely to wish that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ should be with us all evermore means that we will be learning to live by that grace – actively taking hold of what our Father has given us!

So what has this got to do with standing before the Lord and letting Him be our judge?

Simply that, as we learn to stand in what He has done for us, we also learn not to be intimidated by the pressures and accusations which come our way, not to give in to the fear of man but rather to trust in the Lord (**Proverbs 29:25**).

Like King David we can say "in God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?" (**Psalms 56:11**)

Dave Taylor March 2012