

Consistent Living

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[0 : 0 0] aid your prayers throughout the week. We're going to turn now in our Bibles. You'll find it in Daniel chapter 6, which you will find in page 743.

We had hoped, I'm sorry if you're turning up this morning expecting to hear a sermon for Dr. Richard Pratt. The sad news is that Dr. Richard Pratt wasn't able to make it out of America in time to be with us this morning due to all the cold and adverse weather that the east coast of America have been experiencing. But I'm very glad to say he will be with us tomorrow morning to take the sessions at the pastor's training course. So maybe be in prayer for Richard. He arrives tomorrow morning at quarter to ten and then will come straight here to begin his sessions for lunchtime. So you don't have Richard Pratt. You're stuck with me.

I'm not American. I'm not six foot tall. I don't have a beard and I am definitely not a Pratt. Let us read God's word together. Daniel chapter 6, reading the full chapter.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom. And over them three presidents of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom. But they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful. And no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, O king Darius live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the councillors, the governors are all agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petition to any

God or man for 30 days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and injunction. 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. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, O king, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes petition to any God or man within 30 days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, the thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.

[3 : 32] Then the answer answered and said before the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day. 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. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, no, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and the Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed. Then the king commanded and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, may your God whom you serve continually deliver you. And a stone was brought and laid in the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him and sleep fled from him. Then at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions? Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him and also before you. O king, I have done no harm. 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 in him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions. They, their children, and their wives.

And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the people's nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble in fear before 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 the lions. So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, during the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus, the Persian. Amen.

And may God have his blessing to this, the reading of his word. I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Daniel chapter 6, which you will find in page 743 of the Pew Bible. And as you turn that page up, just a brief prayer.

Father, what we have not, we pray that you would give us. What we know not, we pray that you would teach us. And Father, what we are not, we pray that you would make us for the glory of your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

[7 : 20] Amen. I was reminded of the story of one of our most famous Olympians, Eric Liddell, who you might remember, won the gold medal in the 400 meters during the Olympic Games in Paris 1924. You may remember that he was supposed to be running in the 100 meter sprint. But as the heats were to be running a Christian, sorry, to be running a Sunday, how can you be running a Christian? To be running a Sunday. And as Eric Liddell was a Christian, he refused to run. Instead, he was able to run in the 400 meters. And even though it wasn't his event, remarkably, he won the gold medal. And he set a new world record in the process. Well, the Sunday Post reported on this. And the Sunday Post wrote, It was the last 50 meters that was the making or the breaking of Eric Liddell. It was the last 50 meters that was the making or the breaking of Eric Liddell. And what was true physically for Eric Liddell in that race is also true spiritually for us as we fight the good fight and run the race of faith.

And this was especially true for Daniel as we come to chapter 6. If we were to play the word association game and say the name Daniel, then I am sure that those who are not familiar with the Bible would say lions or lions den. The story in chapter 6 is one with which we are very familiar, especially amongst the young. But the children's Bible storybooks are often misleading.

as they portray Daniel as a young boy or a young man. But the truth of the matter is this, that as we come to chapter 6, Daniel is in his late 70s or maybe in his early 80s. He is definitely in the last 50 meters of the race. And it is here in chapter 6, in the last 50 meters of his life, in his early 80s. That Daniel faces his biggest and hardest battle. Maybe this comes as a shock to us of a younger generation, who maybe think that the battle is most fierce during our younger days.

And we just can't wait until we are 30, 40 or maybe even 50, as it will be a stroll from then on in. There is no doubt the battle is fierce during our younger days. But someone once said this, the devil doesn't care if we start the Christian life well, if we achieve and accomplish great things for God in our early days. But the devil does care if we finish well. If there is one thing that the devil would like to destroy more than our very lives, it is this, our spiritual testimony.

And especially the spiritual testimony of those who are in their latter years. For friends, if we fall in our latter years, then the integrity of all the years that have went before will be called into question. Folks will say it was all just a sham. It was all a lie.

[10 : 44] Now you younger folks, I think I could safely say that there are dozens of older folks in this congregation that pray for you every day. But I wonder, do you younger folks ever get round to praying for the older folks? Do you ever pray that they would continue to live consistent Christian lives? And that they would finish the race and finish it well? Well, I hope you do. And if you don't, maybe you could begin this year. Because the older folks need our prayers. And to our older folks, especially those of you who are in the last 50 meters of the race, and I am making sure not to make eye contact with anyone. You need to resist the devil by standing firm in the faith. We need you to burn on for the Lord, not to burn out, to finish the race, and to finish it well. For your good, and for the good of all of us who are coming behind you, we need you with God's help and power to model consistent Christian living right to the very end of your lives. Well, let's get into the text of Daniel chapter 6. The first thing I want us to see from this chapter, you will find in verses 1 to 9.

The determination of the devil. The determination of the devil. You remember, as the book of Daniel opens, Daniel finds himself in a far-off foreign land in exile in Babylon. In chapter 1, we were told that the might of the Babylonian empire came and laid siege to Jerusalem, the city of God. And the people of God were defeated and carried off into exile under the sovereign hand of God. Daniel and his friends were enlisted into Nebuchadnezzar's training program, which was designed to put God out of their lives.

But Daniel and his friends could see that this is what was going on, and they drew the line, purposing in their hearts that they would not defile themselves with food and drink from the king's table, as a reminder to them that they did not belong to the king of Babylon, and in order that they would remain faithful to the Lord, that they would faithfully live for him throughout the exile. And under God's sovereign hand, that's exactly what they did. Well, as chapter 5 comes to an end, so too does the Babylonian empire. Chapter 5, verse 30. That very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old. This was just as Daniel had seen in his vision in chapter 2. And so as chapter 6 opens, Daniel is still standing. The Babylonian empire has fallen, but Daniel, God's man, is still standing. And this is totally symbolic of what God said he would do in chapter 2, verse 44, that the God of heaven would establish a kingdom that would destroy all other kingdoms, and this kingdom would stand forever. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ said,

I will build my kingdom, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Well, in this chapter, all hell was about to be set loose in Daniel. The devil is not mentioned in this chapter, but his handiwork is all over this chapter. Our former minister and good friend, Sinclair Ferguson, said this. Sometimes the attacks of the devil are subtle, as in Daniel chapter 1. Sometimes the attacks of the devil are brutal, as in Daniel chapter 3. And sometimes the attacks of the devil are both subtle and brutal, as in Daniel chapter 6. Well, as chapter 6 opens, we are told about the structure of Darius' government, 120 satraps, or regional governors.

[14 : 57] And above them were these three presidents, or three administrators. And we are told that Daniel was one of these presidents. In chapter 1, Daniel was 14 years old, and we saw that he was drawing the line.

Well, here in chapter 6, he is in his early 80s. And I suppose we would expect to see him drawing his pension. But no, at the start of this new regime, there is a role, a vital role for Daniel to play.

And I hope this is an encouragement to those of you who are retirement age or older, that you never retire in the Lord's service. We are not beginning a new regime here today, but we are beginning a new year. And it just may well be that for some of you who are retirement age or older, as we begin this new year, God has a role, a vital role for you to play in the life of the Tron church, even in this stage of your life. For you have many things that younger folks do not have. You have wisdom, you have experience, and a great commodity that lots of younger folks do not have. Time, time to be used for God. I hope that's an encouragement to you. Well, we are told about the structure of Darius's government, and we are told about why it was set up, so that the king might not suffer loss. So it seems that financial gain and feathering your own nest were as much part of political life then, just as it is today. But we are told that Daniel was distinguished. He was a cut above the rest. And it seems that he was better than everybody else at making sure the king's interests were protected, as the king planned to set him above the other presidents and make him number two in the whole kingdom. Friends, Daniel was up for the top job, not because he stood all over other people or because he bribed or bought his way to the top.

No, it was because he had an excellent spirit. The king and everybody else knew that Daniel was a man of integrity because Daniel was a man of God's. And friends, that's what made verse four all so inevitable. The determination of the devil through the scheming and planning of these men to bring Daniel, God's man, down. They look in his public life and his private life, and they find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful. And no error or fault was found in him personally. There were no skeletons in Daniel's cupboard. It's often said that every man or woman has their price, but not Daniel.

Daniel couldn't be bought at any price. He wasn't in bed with the Rupert Murdoch's of the day. No, he wasn't in bed with anybody. Daniel's beliefs were backed up by Daniel's behavior. He exhibited consistent, faithful living in every area of his life. So consistent was Daniel that these guys knew, verse five, that the only way they could get him would be in relation to his God. Yes, they knew he was faithful and loyal to King Darius, but they also knew that that was because he was first and foremost faithful and loyal to his God. So they would set a trap, a trap that would make him choose between his God and the King. And they knew that there was only going to be one winner. Daniel would always put God first. I wonder, friends, if folks were out to get us, to get you and to get me, how would they get at us? It's the only way we could be got at, the only way that Daniel could be got at. That in a situation where push came to shove, we would put God first. If you live your life in a way that puts God first, then there is no doubt you will affect the world for good.

[19 : 07] But it is also true, you will also make enemies. The world does not like to play second fiddle to anyone, and especially not to God. And friends, if you put God and his word and his ways first, people will rise as enemies against you. And some of these enemies will rise from some of the most unexpected places. Well, the plan was hatched and all that was needed for it to be completed was Darius the King to agree to be made God for 30 days. You see, friends, these guys knew that Daniel's strength was that Daniel was a man of integrity who was totally devoted to his God.

But they also knew that Darius's weakness was that he was a man who could be manipulated by using flattery. And these men used both of these things to accomplish their evil plan.

And you can just imagine the spin that they put on this. Oh, King, in the early days of your reign, this would be great for uniting all the people, peoples of your empire. And would also be great for focusing the people's affection and submission to you and to you alone, oh, King.

But friends, these words echo from the early chapters of Genesis, spoken to Adam and Eve, and you will be like God, revealing the identity of the one who stands behind these men.

And notice too, the dishonesty that is employed. The devil just can't help himself. He's the father of all lies and has been a liar from the very beginning. All the presidents, satraps, prefects, counselors and governors are agreed. We are all agreed. It was almost true. And if Darius hadn't been too drunk on the idea of him being made God, he would have smelt a rat. He didn't think to ask, where's Daniel? What does Daniel think about all this? What does Daniel, the fellow I'm planning and setting over the whole kingdom, think about all of this? The one man he could have trusted wasn't there and he wasn't consulted. And the determination of the devil causes King Darius to sign the document and the injunction. Well, what would Daniel do? Well, this brings us secondly to verses 10 to 15.

[21 : 35] The discipline of Daniel. The discipline of Daniel. It is here in these verses that Daniel faces his greatest trial. These verses were the real lions then for Daniel. The temptation for him to, would have been overwhelming for him to give up praying. You can just imagine the voices in his head day after day telling him, Daniel, you've lived faithfully all these years. You have prayed faithfully three times a day all these years. I'm sure the Lord wouldn't mind if you didn't pray for 30 days.

I mean, it's not as if you're being asked to bow down and worship an image of gold like your pals were back in chapter three. No, you just have to give up praying and only for 30 days.

And those voices can be heard in our heads too, can't they, friends? Maybe saying to us, you've attended the prayer meeting for years. You don't need to go anymore. Let the younger folks start going to the prayer meeting. I mean, I've done my bit. I mean, they've got a good number of folks that go to the prayer meeting anyway, so they wouldn't miss me. It is true. It would be great to see more of our younger folk committee to coming to the prayer meeting notes. It's also fair and true to say that in recent months, there has been a great number of our younger folks at the prayer meeting.

And it's also true. We do get a good number at our prayer meeting, a good number who consistently come to pray for God's concerns all over the world. But there is also a great number absent, absent from the most important meeting of the week. Someone once said, you can tell how much the church is loved by attendance at the morning meeting. You can tell how much the preacher is loved by attendance at the evening meeting. And you can tell how much the Lord is loved by attendance at the prayer meeting.

Now, friends, I'm just putting that out there. All of our lives and circumstances are different. But you must take this and apply this to your own life. There were other temptations too for Daniel.

[23 : 41] Daniel knew that the exile was nearing its end. If you read the opening verses of chapter 9, where we are told that in the first year of Darius, Daniel had learned from reading the prophet Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years. And those 70 years were nearly up. Again, the voices in Daniel's head saying, come on, Daniel, how foolish would it be for you to get killed when the exile is nearly over? Don't be a fool, man. Remember, you're up for the top job. Think of all the influence you could have. Think of all the changes you could make. And think of all the good you could do for the kingdom of God. You can't do all of that if you're dead. And nor will you be going back to Jerusalem.

The only way you'll be going back to Jerusalem will be in pieces, in a box. The devil was prowling like a roaring lion, looking to devour him. Friends, I think it's fair and also true to say that the devil didn't want Daniel in the lion's den. No, he didn't want him dead. He wanted Daniel to capitulate and to compromise and to destroy his spiritual testimony. Friends, I've heard it said that the real miracle, the real miracle is not that Daniel get out of the lion's den. The real miracle is that Daniel get into the lion's den in the first place. It's true, friends, isn't it? That amid all this pressure and temptation to capitulate and compromise, Daniel continued to live consistently. Well, what did Daniel do? Well, verse 10, 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. Some people say that this was done in defiance.

You say that I can't pray. Well, I'll show you I'm praying. An act of defiance. I suppose a wee bit like the fellow who it seemed was never out of her news a few years ago, a fellow by the name of Stephen Goff, who's also known as the the naked rambler. He has spent the best part of 10 years in prison due to anti-social behavior. His anti-social behavior, he wouldn't stop walking about the country absolutely naked. His 10 years in prison were spent in solitary confinement, locked up for 23 and a half hours a day. But this didn't deter him from walking about naked. And this is what he said.

I am not a naturist. I am protesting at the social conditioning that you have to wear clothes. If there was a law that said you couldn't wear balaclavers, I would wear one every day.

Well, I suppose that would keep his head and his ears warm. I don't know about the rest of them. But you see what he's saying? It's an act of defiance. You say I can't do it. Well, I'm going to do it.

[26 : 37] But friends, that wasn't the case with Daniel. It wasn't an act of defiance. It was an act of discipline. Look to the end of verse 10. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. It wasn't an act of defiance. It was an act of discipline. Daniel was consistent. Friends, that's the very reason that these guys knew they could trap him. Daniel went home and done what he had always done. He opened his window towards Jerusalem and he prayed. Still others say opening his windows towards Jerusalem was Daniel making a show of things. But it wasn't. It was a statement of faith, a statement of total dependence on God and his covenant promises. Daniel probably had the words spoken by Solomon at the dedication of the temple ringing in his mind. The words from 1 Kings chapter 8 that even if the people of God have been carried off as captives into a far off land, that even there if they turned their hearts towards

Jerusalem in repentance, then God in heaven would hear their prayer and maintain their cause. Friends, that's exactly what Daniel was praying. Read Daniel chapter 9 when you go home.

Daniel was reminding himself that there is a higher throne than all this world has known and he was trusting himself to God. That's what real faith is. It's a real relationship with God that shows itself in real trust and the real things and the real battles of life.

Daniel knew well in his heart and his life the words that we have in our from one of the hymns in our hymn book. For you we live and for you we may die. Through us may Jesus be seen. For you alone we will offer our lives. In this dark world our light will shine. You see friends, Daniel knew that duties are our responsibility. For you we live and Daniel knew that events and consequences are God's responsibility and for you we may die. Even if it cost him his life, Daniel wasn't going to give up on God or turn from him. And remember friends, Daniel didn't just become like this overnight. No, he was a soldier of God in training for years. Remember chapter 1 verse 8? He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.

And all these years later the resolve remained the same. I say this to the younger generation. God may have great things for you to do when you're 30, 40 or maybe even 50. But God needs you now. He needs you now to start resolving in your heart that you will not defile yourself. He needs you now to start living a consistent disciplined life. And friends, this charge comes to all of us. We are ever more increasingly in the West living in days that are something akin to Daniel chapter 6. Where public opinion has resulted in laws being passed.

[29 : 56] Laws that are against the laws and the word of God. In the areas of morality. Ethical issues. The assault in marriage. And now the assault on our children. And what it means to be human.

These laws and voices are shouting at us. We don't care what your God says. Public opinion in our laws says this. So you lot better just fall into line.

It may not be the lines then yet in this country. No, not yet. But the serious threat of losing your job or being thrown into prison are very, very real indeed. Well friends, what are we to do when we are faced with situations like this?

Well, we are to be like Daniel. We are to be disciplined and live our lives consistently by God's word. We are to keep on doing what we are doing.

Not for 30 days. Not for 30 minutes would Daniel give up praying. And neither should we. Duties are our responsibility. And events and consequences are God's.

[31 : 02] For you we live. And for you we may die. Through us may Jesus be seen. For you alone we will offer our lives. In this dark world our light will shine.

Against the power and the scheming and the determination of the devil Daniel live a consistent disciplined life. And friends, we must do the same.

And that brings us thirdly and finally to verses 16 to 18. Delivered from death. Delivered from death. I'm sure we all know how the story ends.

Daniel is dumped into the lion's den after King Darius has tried frantically to free him. I always find it ironic that the one who was to be prayed to for 30 days as God is totally impotent to do anything for Daniel.

Daniel is dumped. And the king says to him, verse 16, May your God whom you serve continually deliver you. And a stone was brought and laid in the mouth of the den. And the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet of his lords that nothing could be changed concerning Daniel.

[32 : 13] The king then spends a sleepless night of anguish in the palace while it seems there has been a night of calm in the den. And it seems that no one eats that night either. The king doesn't eat.

And the lions don't eat. Early the next morning, the king goes down to the den and cries to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king.

I have done no harm. In other words, Daniel was fine. There was not a mark on him because he was innocent. Then the king was exceedingly glad, verse 23, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den so that Daniel was taken up out of the den and no kind of harm was found in him because he had trusted in his God.

Daniel was delivered from death. Daniel was delivered. But the king orders that those men who had maliciously accused Daniel and their families were to be thrown into the lion's den and they were killed.

[33 : 26] Then King Darius makes a decree and sends it all around the empire that the peoples are to tremble in fear before the God of Daniel because he is, verse 26, the God who lives, because he is, verse 26a, the God who reigns, and because he is, verse 27, he is the God who rescues.

Friends, this chapter is a great encouragement to us. Well, why, Terry, you might ask, why is this chapter a great encouragement to us? Is it because this chapter says that if we are ever faced with a lion's den in our lives, then we will be delivered?

Well, no, it's not. And the chapter doesn't say that, nor promise that. We would only have to read reports from the Barnabas Fund to know that Christians are being killed every day all over the world for their love and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No, friends, this chapter is a great encouragement to us as it foreshadows the great hope that we have as Christians in the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder if you noticed as we read through chapter 6, if you noticed the similarities in this chapter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew writes in his gospel, now the chief priests and the elders and all the council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none.

[34 : 49] Think of Pontius Pilate and how he tried to set Jesus free or wanted to set him free knowing him to be innocent, but he didn't. A great stone was rolled over the tomb of the Lord Jesus.

And think of the woman who went to his tomb early in the morning to anoint his body and they were met by the angel declaring, he is not here, he is risen. But friends, unlike Daniel, the Lord Jesus Christ was slain.

He suffered the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, so that man might be brought back to God. Friends, this is the great hope that this chapter speaks to us of.

That we can faithfully live for God all throughout 2018 by standing on the power of Christ alone and standing in his finished work alone. Not that we will be delivered from death in the lion's den, but that ultimately we will be delivered from death as the Lord Jesus Christ has already tasted death on our behalf.

Friends, that is the gospel. We will sing in our final hymn, No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me home.

[36 : 06] Here, in the power of Christ, I'll stand. Friends, that's how all of us can live consistently for him throughout all the new years we shall ever face and right to the very end of our lives.

Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand in the power and the promises of Christ alone. Dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known.

That's what it means to be a Christian. As we enter this year of grace, 2018, May God grant us his grace, his power, and his strength to do this.

Let us pray together. Our Father, as we begin this new year together, we thank you that our ultimate and last enemy, death, has been defeated by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ alone.

We pray that you would strengthen each of us with this truth, Father, as we go into this new year and into this world with all its laws that are against you, your word and your ways, Father.

[37 : 25] That you would use these things to strengthen us, to know that we can indeed live consistent lives for you in this land that is not our home. We pray especially for those amongst us who are in the last 50 meters of the race.

Please strengthen them, Father, in this the hardest part of the race, that they may finish the race and finish it well by standing in the power and the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.