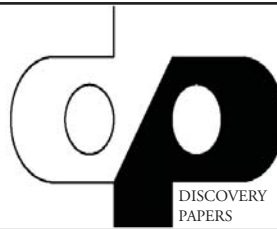


# WHEN FAITHFULNESS IS FREEDOM

SERIES: WHEN KINGDOMS COLLIDE



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Daniel 6:1-28  
7th Message  
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One of our partners as a church is an organization called International Justice Mission or IJM. We receive their monthly newsletters and the latest one contained an interview with Sanjay McWan. He described a recent rescue operation on a known brothel. They arrived at the brothel to find it empty with the owners claiming no knowledge of any girls or anything.

After 45 minutes of searching the building, one of the investigators discovered a hollow sounding wall and they pried it open. Inside they found six young women, trapped and forced to serve as sex workers. One woman said, “I was dead. The last three months I was in the brothel without seeing the sun or being outside, but somehow I was surviving.” After being rescued, she concluded, “Now I have my life back and can live.”

It’s a privilege to partner with an organization like IJM. We’re actually in the process of exploring more ways that we, as a church, can participate in what they’re doing specifically in Mumbai, India. We’ll have more information about that as it develops.

One of the reasons that IJM’s work is so compelling is that they are involved in bringing freedom to people. Few things are worse than when freedom is taken away. Not much is more exciting than when freedom is restored.

Most of us here don’t experience the kind of bondage that IJM deals with. But we still value our freedom. And frequently we don’t feel as free as we want to. We might experience physical freedom, but we often feel trapped by internal struggles, pressures around us, and circumstances outside of our control. What would it look like to really be free?

## When Faithfulness Is Freedom

Today we are continuing our series in the book of Daniel called *When Kingdoms Collide*. For the last seven weeks, we’ve been walking through the first half of this book noticing how it resonates with our experience of living in two kingdoms. On the one hand, there is the

kingdom of man that dominates our daily lives. But if we believe in Jesus, there is also the kingdom of God—the unseen reality that we profess faith in. Values and truths that go against the grain of our world. A way of living that stands out.

There are times when I have felt like following Jesus limits my freedom. Trying to live in the kingdom of God means that I can’t do some things that I would otherwise be able to do. It sometimes seems like if I were only interested in the kingdom of man, I’d be freer to do as I please. At times, faithfulness to God can feel like chains.

This morning we are looking at the last of the stories in the book of Daniel. The first half of this book contains six stories that highlight times when the two kingdoms come into conflict. This morning we’ll finish up that section. The second half of the book contains a series of visions and prophecies about the future coming of the kingdom of God. Next week we’ll take a break from Daniel for Scott to lead us through the Book of Jonah. Then we’ll come back and look at these prophecies during Advent as a way of anticipating the return of Jesus.

Our story today is one of the most famous stories in the Bible—Daniel and the Lion’s Den. It’s a story of great faithfulness and great courage. But it’s also a story of freedom. It’s an incredible picture of a man who lives in freedom because of his faithfulness. The story describes a time *When Faithfulness Is Freedom*.

We’re going to start by hearing the whole story read. I’ve asked members of the band to read the story according to the various characters in it. Pay attention to the various characters in the story. After we hear the story read, we’ll come back to three different characters to think about how they did or did not experience freedom.

Here’s Daniel 6:1–28, the story of Daniel in the lion’s den.

**Narrator:** <sup>1</sup>It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; <sup>2</sup>and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. <sup>3</sup>Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup>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 for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. <sup>5</sup>Then these men said,

**Schemers:** We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

**Narrator:** <sup>6</sup>Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him,

**Schemers:** O King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup>All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup>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.

**Narrator:** <sup>9</sup>Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. <sup>10</sup>When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. <sup>11</sup>Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. <sup>12</sup>Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction,

**Schemers:** O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?

**Narrator:** The king answered and said,

**King:** The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.

**Narrator:** <sup>13</sup>Then they answered and said before the king,

**Schemers:** Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.

**Narrator:** <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king,

**Schemers:** Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.

**Narrator:** <sup>16</sup>Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel,

**King:** May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!

**Narrator:** <sup>17</sup>And a stone was brought and laid on 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. <sup>18</sup>Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. <sup>19</sup>Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup>As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel,

**King:** O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?

**Narrator:** <sup>21</sup>Then Daniel said to the king,

**Daniel:** O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup>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.

**Narrator:** <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

**King:** Peace be multiplied to you. <sup>26</sup>I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and 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. <sup>27</sup>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.

**Narrator:** <sup>28</sup>So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This story is familiar to many of us. We know about Daniel's bravery. We know about the miraculous intervention of God. But what we want to look at this morning is the question of freedom. To do that, we're going to look at the main characters of this story.

First, we'll look at the high officials and satraps who conspire against Daniel. I call them the schemers. Then we'll consider the king. How is he presented to us? We'll finish up by looking at Daniel and thinking about his remarkable decisions. We'll see how his faithfulness to

the kingdom of God didn't restrict him at all. In fact, it was exactly the opposite. His faithfulness gave him freedom.

My hope is that we'll see that our faithfulness to the kingdom of God can do the same thing for us. Faithfulness can lead to a sense of freedom that is more powerful than anything we have known. It's the kind of freedom that everyone wants to experience.

## The Schemers

The problem Daniel faced was that he was becoming tremendously successful in the kingdom of man. The same thing had happened when he served under King Nebuchadnezzar and it was happening again. Daniel's unique skills were being recognized and he was being promoted. First, he was appointed to be one of the three main officials over the entire kingdom. Then he was doing so well in that role, that he was going to be elevated to be in charge of the other two. Daniel was about to become the second most powerful individual in the kingdom.

The schemers were motivated by jealousy.

Can you relate to that? How do you respond when someone else at your workplace gets promoted instead of you? How do you feel when the achievement of someone else is being praised? Be honest. Do you ever wish that that person who can't do anything wrong would just mess up for once? Don't you sometimes want to bring people down that you think are making you look bad?

This is what the schemers decided to do. They came up with a great plan to bring Daniel down. They realized that the only way to do that was to leverage his relationship with God. So they manipulated the king to write a worthless law. They had Daniel watched. They turned him in. They manufactured a tightly controlled, complicated scenario to serve their interests.

Aren't there times when we do that?

There was a time during seminary when I desperately wanted to change jobs. I thought I had a new position all lined up. I had already worked out all the details. I had even made a new budget based on my new salary. Everything was in order.

Have you ever been fixated on something like that? A job? Or someone you want to date? Some idea that

has to be accepted? When we get fixated on a single outcome like this, we usually do exactly what the schemers did. We try to control everything around us. It's exhausting, but we have to do it because we need things to work out our way.

You may have guessed that I didn't get that job. Things didn't work out. Of course, the same thing happened to the schemers. They wanted to bring Daniel down and they devised a terrible fate for him. But in the end, their scheme backfired and they were the ones who suffered that terrible fate.

In fact, the account in the text is over-the-top. Not only the schemers, but their wives and their children are thrown into the den of lions and are consumed before they even hit the ground. The point here is that their efforts didn't just cost them—it cost the people around them. They tried their best to manipulate their situation, but they ended up bringing disaster to themselves and their loved ones.

The plans of the schemers backfired. They became the victims of their own plot.

We've heard this story before. In the book of Esther, an evil man named Haman builds a massive gallows to hang his enemy Mordecai on, but in the end, he dies on the gallows instead. When Solomon's son takes over the kingdom of Israel, he decides to tighten down and demand they produce more. His effort backfires. The kingdom ends up splitting into two rival nations that would have civil war for the next three centuries.

The same thing happens today. There was a video going around the internet this summer of a motorcyclist who got really mad at a car driver, so he leaned over and kicked the car as he sped past. And he immediately fell off his motorcycle and crashed to pavement.

When we try to take things into our own hands, the situation often backfires.

The schemers felt this powerful internal reaction of jealousy. They tried to manipulate everything around them. They ended up losing everything. This is not a picture of freedom. These are guys that are in bondage to their own selfish desires and insecurities. They are trapped by them.

Their selfish striving limited their freedom.

Is the same true for us? Do our desires and our insistence on things working out according to our plan enslave us? Is our freedom actually taken away by our need to have things go our way?

This past summer we studied the Ten Commandments. The last commandment reads, *You shall not covet*. When Scott preached this, he helped us to see how breaking this commandment can lead to breaking all the others.

The schemers help us to see that coveting is a type of bondage. When we are driven for something and it becomes our singular focus, things rarely work out well. When you first read this commandment, it might sound like God is restricting our freedom. He's telling us not to do something. "What if I want to covet?" you might ask. Isn't God taking something away from me?

Yes, but what he's taking away are chains. Imagine if you were actually able to keep this commandment. Imagine the freedom you'd feel if you could celebrate other people's successes, feel true joy when they received some gift, and were able to rest in a sense of gratefulness for what you have. Wouldn't that be freedom?

This is what the schemers lacked. Our first characters in the story are far from free.

## The King

The schemers weren't free, but is it just because they aren't the ones in charge? Does power make us free? Let's consider the king. There is a lot of debate as to who exactly Darius refers to. I think the most likely scenario is that this is a different way of referencing Cyrus of the Persian Empire. In any case, he is an incredibly powerful person. Doesn't being king mean that you can do anything you want?

Let's look at his actions and find out. We first meet the king when the schemers come to him with their plan. They come to him and say, *All the leaders of your kingdom agree that you should do this*. Then it gets even stronger. They finish by saying, *Now, O King, establish and sign*. Here are the leaders of the empire telling the king what to do. That's not really how it is supposed to work is it?

We don't even hear the king's response. All we hear is, *therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction*. He simply did what they told him to do. It's an incredible way to portray an Ancient Near Eastern king. He seems completely impotent. He is acting like a yes man to the whims of his advisors.

Then it gets worse. In Hebrew narrative, the first thing a character says is especially significant. After the king signs the law, he regrets it because he didn't really want to kill Daniel. The first words we hear him speak are, *this thing cannot be changed*. The first thing we see him do is obey his subordinates. The first thing we hear him say is an admission of his own powerlessness.

Finally, when he does throw Daniel into the den, he hopes that someone else will save him. As the lion's den is being closed, he says, *May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!* Darius has recognized his own inability to save Daniel, so he wishes for the intervention of someone else.

This is a pitiful picture of a king. He does what someone else tells him to do. He is incapable of preventing disaster for his trusted advisor. In the end, all he does is wish for someone else to intervene and clean up his mess.

If the schemers were trapped by their own internal needs and desires, the king seems to be a slave to the circumstances around him. All of the external forces that surround him force him to act in ways that it seems like he'd rather not. He can't control his advisors. He can't control legal precedent. He can't control his own decisions. The situation is out of control.

As much as we can resonate with being trapped by our internal struggles, I think we can also resonate with being trapped by all the external situations in our lives: deadlines, expectations, demands, debt, an unexpected crisis at work or school, a misunderstanding that spins out of control, people who come to us with their needs and their problems and their expectations for how we are supposed to act. We sometimes make decisions and then immediately regret them. We feel incapable to control all the things happening around us.

The king is controlled by the people and circumstances around him.

What's going on here is idolatry. It's putting someone or something else at the center of our lives, allowing it to dictate what we must do. And idolatry is simply slavery. It's bondage to a ruthless master.

I suggested that breaking the last commandment can lead to breaking all the rest of the commandments. In the same way, keeping the first one lays a foundation for the kind of life that we want. Exodus 20:3, *You shall have no other gods before me*.

Again, the purpose of this commandment isn't to restrict us. It's not like there are other gods out there that give their followers a better life. The God of Israel warns his people against other gods because he knows that every other god is a merciless master. They are false idols with empty promises that only lead to death and destruction. They turn their followers into mindless people enslaved to the forces around them.

That's exactly what the king looks like in the first part of the story. He's driven by all the pressures that he faces and trapped by them. Mostly he's worshipping the god of his own power and his kingdom, and that means that he can't do anything to threaten either of those.

The schemers are enslaved by their internal struggles. The king is controlled by what's going on around him. Then we get to Daniel.

## Daniel

By this point, Daniel is an old man, likely in his seventies or eighties. He has served a long time in the court of a foreign empire. Even though Daniel is clearly the main character in this story, he is silent for most of it. He only speaks one time and that is to tell the worried king that he has been saved by the miraculous intervention of his God because of his innocence.

Daniel is silent, but everyone else is frantic around him. The king wants to promote him. The schemers want to destroy him. The king has to punish him even though he doesn't want to. First, the king is worried about Daniel. Then he is overjoyed that Daniel is OK. The schemers are upset. Then the schemers are destroyed.

It's a fascinating portrayal of a main character. This story is full of drama. Everyone around him is worried or angry or frustrated or upset. But Daniel is at peace. It's like one of those scenes from *The Matrix* where bullets are flying through the air, but Daniel walks through them peacefully. This is no longer the brash youngster looking for opportunities to stand up for himself. This is a man at peace in the midst of turmoil.

Daniel isn't controlled by internal fear. He isn't manipulated by the people around him. He is free, like no one else in the story. The really surprising part is the reason he is free. It's because of his stubborn insistence to stick to a rigid prayer schedule. His faithfulness gives him freedom.

The reason is that this daily prayer is more than just a legalistic schedule. Over four centuries earlier King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem by praying over it. In 1 Kings 8:29–30, he asked God to *listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.*

The temple was a unique physical location on earth where God manifested his presence in a powerful way. But the temple was gone. The Babylonians had destroyed it. It was nothing but a pile of rubble. Despite that, three times every day, Daniel stopped what he was doing, oriented himself toward that place and bowed in prayer.

Daniel was acknowledging that even though the temple was destroyed, God was still there. He was making a statement about how real the kingdom of God is, even if, to the casual observer, it just looks like a pile of rubble. He oriented himself toward the kingdom of God, even if no one else could see it, even if it looked like nonsense to everyone around him.

This is what made Daniel free. His faithfulness oriented him toward the kingdom of God. And it gave him this incredible freedom in the kingdom of man. Freedom that is so attractive. Everyone wants to live this way.

How do we orient ourselves toward the kingdom of God? What does it look like for us to show this kind of faithfulness?

Daniel's freedom didn't just benefit him. We already talked about the king: how impotent he was throughout the story. But at the end of the story, something changed for him. In fact, it happened immediately after Daniel said his first words. Right after Daniel explained that God saved him, the king jumped into action.

He commands that Daniel be brought up. He punishes the schemers. He issues a decree about Daniel's God. It's as if the king has woken up. Seeing what happened to Daniel completely changed him. He finally acts like he is free.

This picture of Daniel has strong echoes in the New Testament. Centuries later, there was a man who was unjustly accused. A crowd of people came to arrest him in a place of prayer. He was silent before his accusers. His execution sentence came despite the reluctance of

the one in charge over him. He was sealed in the ground when a large stone was rolled over an opening. It was sunrise when he was discovered to have been delivered. Finally, his deliverance wasn't just for himself, but was for the whole world. The faithfulness of Jesus offers freedom to all who follow him.

Do you see what that means? If we follow Jesus, we are free like Daniel was free. We don't have to be driven by our internal desires because God transforms us and takes away our sin. We don't have to be driven by the people around us because God gives us a new identity where only what he thinks matters. And we don't have to be slaves to our circumstances because God is in charge.

You are free. Free.

Sometimes we forget that we are free in terms of the kingdom of man.

Last Sunday evening we hosted a theological discussion related to same-sex issues in our culture. It was an interesting discussion about a controversial topic. But it reminded me of an attitude that we can sometimes have as Christians. It is an attitude that can creep up in discussions of any topic related to our culture: same-sex marriage, prayer in schools, public education curriculum, changing social values, or any of the other dozens of things that are going on today.

Sometimes Christians look at what is going on in the world and fear that the kingdom of man is going to win. You hear when people talk about what might happen if this law gets passed or that trend becomes more prevalent. We can be worried that the world is going to take over and Christians will suffer because of it. When we feel this way, we become defensive, always trying to protect ourselves from the evil world around us. And then we get tired of being defensive, so we go on the offensive. We fight back, trying to bring down the powers of the world. All because we feel threatened by what's happening in the kingdom of man.

Daniel didn't feel threatened. He is a great model to us of the freedom that we have because of Christ. The kingdom of God isn't threatened by anything that happens in the kingdom of man. Even if our kids grow up in a pluralistic environment, even if they make prayer illegal, even if churches have to go underground, even if the worst thing that you're scared of ends up happening, the kingdom of God will prevail.

That's why Jesus said this in John 16:33, *In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

That's the kind of freedom Daniel had. They can conspire against him. They can falsely accuse him. They can throw him in a den of lions. But God is above all of that.

This gives us incredible freedom. It allows us to engage with the world without defending ourselves from it. We can watch whatever direction culture is going and love the people caught up in it. Honestly, I'm not sure it would be an entirely bad thing for Christianity to lose some of the power it has in America. Historically, the gospel has been most effective when it is preached from a position of weakness, not power.

This is the freedom that faithfulness to God gives us. We have the freedom to live in the world without worrying what it can do to us.

## Conclusion

Most of us don't know the kind of bondage that some people around the world experience. But Jesus came, as the prophet Isaiah says, *to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of prison to those who are bound.* The central message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is freedom, whether you are locked in a brothel in India or enslaved to the frantic achievement culture of Silicon Valley. The gospel offers freedom.

We've thought about three different characters in this familiar story of Daniel in the lion's den. The schemers were fixated on one thing because of their deep internal struggle. Their selfish striving took away their freedom. They were controlled by their desires, jealousy, and coveting.

The king was controlled by the external forces around him. He buckled under peoples' expectations, he couldn't act because of the restrictions of his circumstances, and he was unable to put into practice his values. His need to please others took away his freedom.

But Daniel showed us a different way. He was faithful to his internal relationship with God. He didn't change

anything when external forces tried to change that. His faithfulness meant that he wasn't threatened by the kingdom of man, or afraid of what it could do to him. He knew that God was in charge and his kingdom would prevail. Daniel was free.

Don't let coveting control you. Don't let other people or circumstances manipulate you. Don't worry about what the world might do to you. The kingdom of God will prevail. As the apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:1, *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

Be faithful to God. Let your faithfulness grant you freedom.