

An attack on prayer!

Evil will do whatever it takes to prevent us from praying.

Scripture Readings: Daniel 6:1-9 and 1 Peter 5 : 6 - 11

Sermon Text: Daniel 6: 5

Introduction

An attack on prayer is what Daniel 6 warns against!

The enemy of Christ and of his people never gives up in its attempts to stop us from praying.

Over and over again we see in the book of Daniel that there is a war raging between Christ and the Antichrist, between good and evil and between those who serve God and the servants of evil. In chapter 3 the attack takes the shape of a golden statue that everyone is expected to bow before. And in chapter 6 we see an attempt to outlaw prayer.

Satan is known for his perseverance. Time after time he attacks Christ and his people, because although conquered on Calvary, his objective to prevent people to worship the one true God never stops. He broke down communication between God and Adam, he tempted Jesus to worship him, tried harsh persecution to persuade the church during the first centuries to stop worshipping God in Christ and use materialism and post modernism today to make it “not cool” to confess that Jesus is the only way to God.

Satan is defeated! Christ reigns over all! Yet, the devil keeps trying. God's people should be aware of the age old struggle and be prepared to resist the devil, as Peter urged us to do and as Daniel did in humble dependence on God!

The devil used powerful civil servants to try to stop Daniel praying.

Daniel 5 ends with the death of Belshazzar, the Chaldean king. Darius the Mede took his place. The opening verses of chapter 6 indicate that Darius despises anarchy and values good order, sound governance, proper administration and was intent on routing out every form of corruption and dishonesty.

(Dan 6:1-2) It pleased Darius to appoint 120 powerful administrators to rule throughout the kingdom, with three senior cabinet ministers overseeing their rule. These governors were made accountable to the three, to ensure that the king might not suffer loss. Quickly Darius realized that Daniel was a gifted, skilled, intelligent and honest man. The king therefore considered to promote Daniel to the position of prime minister in order to ensure sound governance in not only a third of the empire - what across the empire as a whole.

This planned promotion provoked opposition from the other administrators and ministers and the reason was obvious: Daniel did too good a job in protecting the king's interests and preventing him from suffering loss. Daniel tried his best to stop government waste and corruption. His job, after all, was to keep the king from suffering loss.

These civil servants had the habit of increasing their income by keeping some of the empire's tax monies for themselves. Once Daniel assumed the position of prime minister, the administrators and other ministers knew that no theft or other form of corruption would be possible anymore. Daniel was not the kind of man they could make a corrupt deal with. He carefully defended the king's rights and interests and the healthy governance of the great empire. His careful oversight became an irritating thorn in their flesh! His godly sense of responsibility and work ethics, in their view, simply had to be stopped!

So they tried to think of ways to get rid of this annoyance. They watched everything Daniel did to see whether they could detect something false or dishonest, some lack of skill, disloyalty or mistake in Daniel's work. Perhaps he charged personal trips to government expense. Perhaps he cashed

parliamentary air tickets in for cash. Perhaps his vice was gambling, pornography, drugs, alcohol, prostitution?

Daniel was living in a glass house. Everything he did was examined under a microscope. Not a single act or word of his went unnoticed or unheard. Yet, they could find nothing against him!

What did Daniel's enemies find? Verse 4 tells us:

(Dan 6:4) ... the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

Nothing could be found to hold against Daniel!

If your life and my life were put under a microscope what would the enemies of Christ and his church find? They love nothing more than finding dirt; they love nothing more than finding hypocrisy; they love nothing more than finding a way to discredit the Gospel.

The best we can do is what Daniel did: live for the honour of God, put godliness into practice, be more than a Sunday Christian. Be a Christian under all circumstances and in every situation - also at work, in politics and when we play!

Daniel was not sinless. He was an ordinary man. He was aware of his human weakness. Yet in the midst of pagan Babylon he continued to love and serve only the God of Israel.

Why was he able to remain faithful when so many others were faithless? In the NIV translation, verse 3 speaks of the "exceptional qualities" that existed in Daniel. The Hebrew word is "ruah" which is better translated as "spirit." There existed in Daniel an "excellent spirit" or an "exceptional spirit." This excellent spirit can only be the Holy Spirit of God.

This is why Daniel was found to be honest, trustworthy, and blameless. This is why Darius found Daniel to be faithful and a man of integrity! The Spirit of the Lord was at work within him. Daniel lived out his faith, practiced what he preached and did his day to day work for the king as faithfully and willingly as the angels in heaven serve God himself. This was his testimony of whom the God of Israel really is! This is how he showed his pagan colleagues what being part of Gods people really meant.

Does those caught up in the worldly lifestyle, in the Babylon of our day, see the ways of the New Jerusalem in our daily conduct? Do you submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all you do, including your daily job and responsibilities?

Some Christians say that in an evil world they cannot help but follow the ways of the world sometime. Others simply say "Business is business", as if the standards of Christ and his church do not count when it comes to making money. And others are looking for unethical, ungodly fun as if Christians lead joyless and boring lives. So-called Christians often surrender to heathen customs, practices and values. They may be in church on Sunday, but you would never guess that there is an "Excellent Spirit" in them.

Daniel lived out his faith. He practiced his faith. He did so as a 13, 14 year old boy in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's court. And he did the same as a 90 year old man in Darius' court. Oh, if all God's people could be like Daniel! Think of the testimony we would make to the world! Think of all that we could accomplish in the name of Christ!

By now the governors and cabinet ministers had a huge problem. They wanted to get rid of Daniel. But because he lived out his faith, there is not a single charge they can bring against him. Therefore

the decision was made to use his religion against him; to use his obedience to God's commandments against him.

Their plan is simple: "Let's find a way to outlaw prayer."

It was easy to persuade the king. All they had to do was appeal to his vanity and to the unity of the empire. A command was issued: for 30 days everyone in the kingdom was to pray to the king; for 30 days there would be one empire and one religion; for 30 days the king would play god. Whoever prayed to any god or man other than the king was to be thrown into the lions' den.

After watching Daniel they knew he would never last 30 days without prayer to God. They didn't know Daniel as well as they thought. To say that he would not be able to hold out an entire month is an injustice to Daniel. We know he wouldn't last a single day, for he went down on his knees 3 times every day to pray to God, confessed his sins and interceded of the works of Gods Kingdom.

The attack on prayer

There is another and more important perspective on this than that of the greed of the corrupt officials. In Daniel 6 we see the age-long struggle between Christ and the Antichrist, the church and the world, light and darkness. The administrators wanted to outlaw prayer so that they could get rid of Daniel. The devil, however, had an entirely different goal in mind. He did not care at all about Daniel. Whether Daniel stayed in power or not, was not the point! The devil wanted to outlaw prayer because he wanted to stop the worship of God. At all costs, Daniel must be prevented from praying. At all costs, Gods people must stop praying!

Satan tried the same with Jesus. Remember the third temptation!

(Matt 4:8-9) ... the devil took (Jesus) to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. (9) "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Satan did not care whether Jesus became a king or not. What he wanted was to stop Jesus from worshipping God. Earthly kings who do not pray offer no threat to the devil's cause!

The devil attacked prayer even more than he attacked Daniel. And this attack continues today. Using men and women as puppets, Satan has succeeded in outlawing prayer in public buildings, public meetings, even parliament! What we have is a continuation of Satan's plot against prayer. Yes, in our own country Satan managed to outlaw prayer! Earthly kings and administrators who do not pray are no threat to the dark kingdom in any way!

In the NIV the heading of chapter 6 says, "Daniel in the Den of Lions." This is a proper title for this story, provided that we remember that lions did not only appear at the end of the chapter. Even before Daniel was put in the lions' den, he faced a fiercer, more dangerous lion. The apostle Peter writes:

(1 Pet 5:8) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Do not think our biggest challenge is the lions' den! Much more dangerous is the lion that destroys the soul and prevents us to depend on the grace of God! Much more dangerous is the lion from hell who eliminates us in the age old struggle between God and his enemies! Much more dangerous is the evil lion who attacks prayer as a strategy to make us strangers to God and divorce us from the house of the Lord and the worship of God!

So, watch out for the devil. Be self-controlled and alert or else he will pounce out and get you and destroy your relationship with God! He may promise you kingdoms and wealth, but he robs you from heaven's treasure!

Consider what Peter taught us!

1 Peter 5: 6 - 9: Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith!

The greatest miracle we read about in Daniel 6, is that Daniel was able to keep on praying. To be alert and self controlled, we must pray. We must pray, resisting evil not in our own strength or because being a Christian makes you stronger than the devil - that is heresy!

We can only stand firm in the faith because the mighty hand of God lifts us up! We can stand firm, because God cares for us! Daniel feared God more than man. Daniel expected everything from God and nothing from himself or others! That is why he could not live without praying - not even for a single day!!

Prayer is the secret

Why was and is Satan so intent on putting an end to prayer? He is not afraid of soldiers in full battle dress, but he trembles before men and women who know they are weak and therefore battle on their knees in prayer. Satan knows that the strength of God's children is found in prayer. He knows that the life and future of the church is dependent upon prayer. He knows that God gives his grace, his Spirit and his gifts to those who unceasingly ask for them and gives thanks for them in prayer. That is why Satan hates the sight of hands folded in prayer and of knees bowed before an almighty God.

If there is one thing of which we should be much more aware, it is the power and importance of prayer.

It's frightening how many Christians live with hardly any prayer. Start with yourself and your own family and add up the number of minutes spent in prayer. These numbers usually are not too impressive.

The failure to pray is the deepest cause of much of the misery in the church and in the lives of Christians today.

Closing

Daniel was a man of prayer. In prayer he leaned upon the Lord and his strength. He could stand against the devil and his attacks. He could resist the attack on prayer!!! He could carry on praying even in the lions' den!!

It is such a simple solution! It really is not that hard to kneel before God, praying for his mighty hand to lift you up - you, your spouse, your children, you grandchildren, your church, your country! If we were given a harder task, more might have believed that it makes an eternal difference! But this is God's plan and his strategy and it is your calling as a member of the people of our conquering Lord! Why not submit to his will and accomplish in God's strength and through his grace his purpose with your life!

What was true of Daniel is true of you and me! Are you, like Daniel, a man and woman of prayer? Do you, in prayer, lean upon the Lord and his strength? Do you still pray every day, in spite of evil's attack on prayer? Do you pray, casting all your anxieties on Christ and conquering the challenges of your life in the power of the risen Christ, because his Spirit guides you to the glory of God, our Father?

This is the word of God.

Amen.