

Theme: Faith in Exile

Title: When They Say I Can't – Daniel 6:1-18

Aim: Exhort to saying yes to God & no to the world.

Intro: What if someone told you you couldn't pray? I was told that once, even tho I had been previously asked to pray at a certain event, & I did. It would be hard to ban prayer altogether, because we can pray w/our eyes open & mouths closed. Prayer was banned in school years ago, but that doesn't stop it, especially when there are pop quizzes & final exams. What if they told you you couldn't read the Bible, or even own one? Did you know there are 52 countries in the world where it's illegal to own a Bible or those who do are severely persecuted. On this map, there are countries in color & the rest in gray. Of those shown in color, the lightest color represents those countries in which it is dangerous to have a Bible or difficult to obtain a Bible. The next darker color represents those countries where it is illegal to own a Bible &/or highly restricted. The darkest color represents those countries where Christians have to hide their Bibles & meet covertly only. There are reportedly at least 59 countries in the world where Christianity itself is illegal, restricted, dangerous, difficult or practiced in covert ops only (underground church). 42 countries restrict conversion from one religion to another & in at least 5 countries conversion is illegal & evangelism is prohibited. Recently read an article in which the author stated that Christians should not be allowed to seek to convert anyone to be a follower of Christ – that was an American author. What if they told you you couldn't go to church? Couldn't practice evangelism? Would it make any difference to you? Would it change your practice? Theme: Faith in exile. If we are in Christ, we are exiles in this world that's not our home. How do we live in exile? We must do so by faith, but faith is not faith if it is not put into action. We can learn much from the example of Daniel, who in his old age was told he could not pray to God. Daniel 6:1-18 [READ]. We can make several key observations from this text.

I) **Daniel, under new leadership, continued to do his best to the glory of God.** The Medes & Persians, under Darius' leadership, conquered

Babylon & took the kingdom. Darius set in place his own system of governance: he appointed 120 satraps (governors) over as many provinces/states. Then he appointed 3 “high officials” over the 120 satraps. Daniel was one of those. And then Darius appointed Daniel over the other high officials. Evidently Daniel, who was probably 70+ by this time, had continued to serve the country & government where he was, doing his best for the good of Babylon & Babylon’s kings (tho now it was not the Babylonian Empire, but that of the Medes/Persians). His reputation & loyalty had transferred seamlessly to the new regime. God was w/Daniel & Daniel was faithful to God. It is written that Daniel had “an excellent spirit” w/in. Not only was Daniel a gifted & wise leader but he had a very right spirit/attitude. “The king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” No matter what our circumstances, you & I need to make it our effort to “do all to the glory of God” (I Cor.10:31). Our attitudes should be of humility & grace – Christ-like. That’s how we are to live in exile. Is that how you come across to those around you? II) **Daniel lived an exemplary life, in work & worship.** The other high officials & the 120 satraps were jealous of Daniel & the promotion he was given. They “sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel,” like political candidates today w/their teams trying to find dirt on the other candidates. But they couldn’t find any skeletons in Daniel’s closets; “no error or fault was found in him.” I’m sure Daniel was not faultless, but his weaknesses were not obvious. If others were looking at you/me w/aim of finding fault, would we be like Daniel? I’m afraid I wouldn’t! I don’t want others looking too closely at me. “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,” said Oz. Those opposing Daniel realized they had to think of something else. “Can we find fault w/his worship of the Jewish God?” They decided to set a trap for Daniel in relation to his faithfulness to God. They appealed to King Darius’ pride. They came upon him as a group, hoping he would see how important & honoring their request was. “King Darius, you should be worshipped. We’ve been thinking about this very thing & we all agree that you ‘should establish an ordinance & enforce an injunction’ that for the next

30 days everyone in your kingdom should pray to you, & if they pray to any other god, let them be thrown alive into the lions' den." That sounded pretty good to Darius. It was good to be king. It would be good to be worshipped. And it was just for 30 days, what harm could come of it? So Darius signed the document, which couldn't be changed once it was signed. He didn't realize he would be caught in his own edict. III) **Daniel was being told he couldn't pray to his God, the one, true God, Jehovah.** So what did he do? He got word that the document had been signed by Darius. He knew what would happen if anyone disobeyed the edict. So he went home at the same time he did every day, opened his windows which faced in the direction of Jerusalem & the Temple, & prayed – just as he did 3 times every day. He didn't pray to Darius, but to Jehovah. He wasn't being stubborn; his wasn't an "I'll show them attitude." Nor did he shrink into hiding, shutting the windows so no one could see. Rather, he was faithful Daniel, doing what he had done for the 60+ years he had been in Babylon. The way we handle cultural pressure is always a witness to the world (positively or negatively). In order to stand strong in trial we need to have stood strong in our day-by-day life. Daniel was caught in the act. That same mob followed Daniel home or camped near his home in order to find him guilty of faithfulness to God. You know the rest of the story. They reported Daniel to Darius, who hadn't thought of that possibility. He was "distressed" & tried to think of a way to deliver Daniel, whom he liked very much. But it was too late. So Darius, bound by his own ordinance, ordered that Daniel be thrown into the lions' den. But he also said this to Daniel: "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" That night Darius was a sleepless wreck. As soon as it was day break, he himself went to see what had become of Daniel. "Are you ok, Daniel? Has your God delivered you?" To his relief, Daniel replied, "My God sent His angel & shut the lions' mouths." Darius was overjoyed & he commanded that Daniel be brought out & replaced by those who "maliciously accused" him. The lions, being denied throughout the night, devoured them quickly. Darius then sent a message to all the

kingdom that Daniel's God should be revered & worshipped. Twice the disciples were ordered not to speak of Jesus or in His name. They boldly disobeyed & went right on preaching. They trusted God & were willing to face the consequences, just like Daniel. What will you do when they say you can't pray to God or worship God or share the gospel or talk about Jesus at work (as teachers are told) or call certain things sin because the Bible calls them sin? It's happening in many parts of the world & it's coming here. Like Daniel, we'd better make up our minds now & then follow through. Chris Hodges, who wrote The Daniel Dilemma, noted that Satan has a 2-pronged attack: 1) Exalt humans above God. Live your own truth, do as you please w/out regard to God; 2) Stop the worship of God. That's being lived out in the world around us. Living countercultural takes faith – faith in exile.