

Relying on a Real God **Daniel 6:1-28**

Some of you like the TV series *24*. Some of you have never seen it. The main character is Jack Bauer. He's an agent in the Counter-Terrorist Unit in America. His job involves him in many dangerous situations. His job also results in many other people being taken into dangerous situations. Two words often on the lips of Jack Bauer are *Trust me*. What's he mean by that? What's it mean for someone to trust Jack Bauer?

- It means they listen to what he says.
- It means they do what he says.

Can you trust Jack Bauer and not trust what he says? Can you trust any person and not trust their word? Can you say you trust God and not do what God says? Can you trust God and not pay attention to His word?

The Scheming Politicians

Three weeks ago, we looked at the narrative of Daniel's three mates being thrown to the fire. There are many similarities between that and today's passage:

- In both, the Jewish exiles have attained positions of influence and power in the foreign empire.
- In both, kings issue edicts that conflict with the religious scruples of the Jewish exiles.
- In both, their enemies denounce them and insist the king execute them.
- In both, the kings ensure there is no way of escape from certain death.
- In both, God intervenes and delivers His people.
- In both, pagan kings end up proclaiming the greatness of the one true God.

Yet, there are also some significant differences:

- The Babylonian Empire is now over and the Persian Empire has begun.
- In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar took the initiative in building his statue and issuing his edict; here, Darius is manipulated into his edict.
- In chapter 3, those who accused Daniel's mates simply took advantage of the situation; here, Daniel's accusers actively plot against him and cause the situation to happen.
- In chapter 3, the test of Daniel's mates is tied up with public religion; here, Daniel's test relates to private prayer.
- In chapter 3, the test was about what they were required to do; here it's about what Daniel's *not* allowed to do.
- In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar was enraged at their defiance of his edict; here, Darius is worried and tries to find a way around his edict.
- In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar's confident no god can deliver these men from their fate at his hands; here, Darius hopes Daniel's God can deliver him.

The whole way Daniel's problem comes about is quite different. It's very typical of the games people play in their political schemes – as they try to get ahead and advance their own position and climb over other people on the way. We see this stuff in the political arena every time there's a leadership challenge – and we've certainly seen plenty of them over recent years. But exactly the same sort of thing happens in the office, the factory, the schoolyard, the sporting team, the social club. Someone has the position – the authority. Some others below them don't like that.

- Perhaps they resent the other person.
- Perhaps they're jealous of their position.
- Perhaps they think they're more important.
- Perhaps there's some other reason.

They start plotting. They look for incompetence. They look for weakness. They look for dirt. They search for some way to bring this person down – some way to get rid of them so they can take their place.

We're not told the motivation of these guys.

- Maybe they had some crooked scheme going on the side and they're worried Daniel will discover it when he gets the extra authority.
- Maybe there was something racial about it – they hint at Daniel's origins in verse 13.
- Maybe they just object to Mr Goody Two-shoes – that Daniel's abilities and goodness and integrity threaten the inner core of their beings.

Whatever the reason, they scheme together to bring Daniel down.

But, search as they may, they can't find anything against Daniel. The second half of verse 4:

They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

I want to pause on that for a moment. In the New Testament, Paul writes:

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

Peter writes:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong,

they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

As God's people, our lives should stand out as being different and good. We're foreigners in this anti-God world – just as Daniel was a foreigner in Babylon. While we reside here temporarily, it's not our real home. Our real home is God's kingdom. We're to live here like members of God's kingdom. People should be able to see the difference.

- Daniel was trustworthy. You gave him a task and he got it done. He didn't come back with excuses. He didn't come back with a half-finished job or work poorly done. You could rely on him. He was willing to put in the hard work. He persevered.
- Daniel wasn't corrupt. This year, several politicians have stood down because of some corruption in their lives. It was the same last year. At one level, we expect it. That's what this world's like. People are more interested in serving themselves and their own pleasures. God's people should be different. Integrity's important to us because it's important to God. It should be more important than closing a deal or getting a new status symbol or pursuing some personal pleasure.
- Daniel wasn't negligent. How often do we get in trouble because we're careless? We neglect to properly investigate something before diving in – and then get caught by the fine-print. Or we neglect to plan for our own weaknesses and find ourselves in a situation of very strong temptation. Or we neglect God's word and think we know better and go ahead with something He forbids.

If we're not standing out as different, what's changed?

Are the people around us so God-fearing and so righteous that we're no longer noticed? Or have we stopped fighting our sinful desires?

Anyway, these guys can't find any dirt on Daniel – but they don't let a minor detail like that stop them. They come up with a plan. They don't start some false smear campaign. Nor do they plant fake documents in Daniel's house. Instead, they use Daniel's strength to trap him. They come up with a scheme that forces Daniel to choose between God and Darius. Under this scheme, Daniel's very integrity will cause his downfall.

So, off they go to Darius and present their scheme. Well, not all of it – they leave out the bit about this being a trap to get rid of Daniel.

- They approach the king with all the proper protocol – O King Darius, live forever.
- They refer to their collective wisdom as his advisers – we've all got together and come up with this marvellous suggestion.
- They appeal to the king's own position and power. Darius rules this great Persian Empire. Any petition made within that empire should come to him – well, at least for the next 30 days.
- They may have even pointed out this would be good for the stability of the empire – it'd focus allegiance on Darius himself.

Darius was convinced – and so he makes it law.

There are, of course, a few holes in this scheme.

- Why make it for 30 days? If Darius is such a great king and has that much power and ability, why not make it a permanent law?

- And that points to the really gaping hole: Does Darius really have the ability to grant the requests his people usually take to their gods? Surely, one of the major reasons for having gods is to deal with matters beyond us mere humans.
- The other big hole is the relationship between the law and Darius. If Darius is this great all-powerful king that everyone's got to bring their requests to, why's he subject to the law? Why have this thing he can't control and can't escape from?

One of the great ironies in this is the way great king Darius is manipulated. What's this law all about? It's about Darius being the most important person in his kingdom and everyone bringing their requests to him. What's the purpose of this law? Its purpose is to make Darius their puppet – to get him to do their dirty work for them.

The Trusting Victim

Anyway, the law's passed and the scheme's put in place. Will it work? How will Daniel react? Verse 10:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

He takes the bait – hook, line and sinker.

What would you have done in Daniel's situation? I can think of all sorts of good reasons not to pray.

- It's different from Nebuchadnezzar's statue. I'm not being told to do anything wrong. I'm just being told not to do something right.
- And it's only for 30 days. There's nothing in the law that says I must pray every day. A 30 day

holiday won't do any harm.

- And we wouldn't want to get legalistic about this stuff. The gospel's all about God's grace. I could use this not praying for 30 days as a practical reminder that I'm saved by grace and not by religious practices.
- And God's put me in this important position so I can be an influence for Him in the Persian court. I wouldn't want to risk losing this great opportunity over a minor religious practice.
- Perhaps I could still pray but not make it obvious. After all, I don't have to go to my prayer room to pray. I don't have to be on my knees. I don't have to say anything out loud. I can just pray in my head as I go about my normal business.

And so it goes on.

I think it's important to think through that sort of stuff. It's too easy to read this and think: Yep, Daniel did the right thing. This challenge was laid down and he faced it head on. This goes to the heart of his relationship with God. God's got to be number one. God's got to come first. This law was a direct challenge to God's priority.

But we see that clearly because it's in the Bible. Do we see it just as clearly when we face these sorts of issues in our own lives? Let me try to put it in terms of some very practical examples. I want to stress that I raise these as questions. I'm not giving definitive answers. I'm not working through all the intricacies of each issue. I'm not condemning you if you do these things. I just raise them as examples of situations where we may face this type of challenge today. If you're in one or more of these situations – and I know some of you are – it's up to you to

work out before God whether this is a point where you should draw the line.

- Suppose your employer says: You're not allowed to talk about anything religious while you're on work premises – not with me, not with the other employees, not with the customers; not while you're working and not during your lunch break.
- Suppose your non-Christian parents said to you: We're having your brother's birthday on Sunday. I want you to stay home from church to join us.
- Suppose your hospital employer says: You're not allowed to pray with any patients – not even if they ask you to.
- Suppose your adult non-Christian children said to you: We're coming up to visit on Sunday. We'll arrive around 10am.
- Or suppose your foreman said to you: You're working too hard. You make all the other guys look slack. If you don't go slower, there'll be problems.

I can come up with all sorts of reasons for not doing the religious practice on this occasion – or for changing my work habits in the last example. My guess is you're just as good at coming up with those reasons. The question is: Are they just excuses? Are they relegating God to second place? Or does truly honouring God mean I'll submit to the other person on this occasion? The Bible warns our hearts are deceitfully wicked – and so we don't always find it easy to work out.

Daniel knows what's right. Jeremiah 29:10-14 says this – and we know from Daniel 9 that he'd read Jeremiah.

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Daniel's obeying that. He knows the 70 years are close to up. And so he prays to God as it says he's to do. And he prays to God in line with God's promise and God's plans.

And the way he does it fits with God's word too. Back at the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed:

When they sin against You – for there is no one who does not sin – and You become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with You in the land of their conquerors and say, "We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly"; and if they turn back to You with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to You toward the land You gave their fathers, toward the city You have chosen and the temple I have built for Your Name; then from heaven, Your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. And forgive Your people, who have sinned against You; forgive all the offenses they have committed against You, and cause their conquerors to show them

mercy; for they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace. (1 Kings 8:46-51)

That's the point of the window facing Jerusalem. Daniel follows God's instructions as given in Solomon's prayer.

It's not likely that it's an open window so people could see what he's doing. All windows were open at that time. They didn't have glass panes or roller shutters. Windows in Babylon were usually high up – to let out the heat and to make it harder for thieves to climb in. The point is that this window is open towards Jerusalem.

Daniel keeps praying the same way as before. He doesn't make a fuss about it. He doesn't change his habits. He knows the law Darius signed. He knows the penalty for breaking that law. He knows God's word. He knows what God says is right. He honours God above the king. He trusts what God says.

The Trustworthy God

And so what's God do? What's the result of Daniel trusting God's word?

- Does God give all these scheming politicians heart attacks and take them off the scene?
- Does He cause their GPSs to malfunction so they can't find Daniel's house?
- Does He provide Darius with a clever lawyer who finds a loophole in the law?

No. God allows them to carry out their scheme. They find Daniel at prayer – we're not told exactly how. They then denounce him to Darius. Darius tries to find a way out, but can't. He can't even succeed in answering his own petitions – in getting what he wants for himself.

What chance does he have with all the subjects of his empire? These scheming politicians have him over a barrel. Daniel has to go into the lions' den – just as his mates had to go into the fiery furnace. It's all sealed up so there's no way for anyone to get in and no way for anyone to get out.

And then God intervenes. He stops the lions tearing Daniel limb from limb. Indeed, he stops the lions harming Daniel in any way at all. Daniel trusted God and God rescued him. But God did it in His way and at His time. What's the result? Two things. First, the pagan king Darius acknowledges and praises the living God who endures forever and rescues and saves His people. And he tells the rest of his empire to praise this God as well. And secondly, Daniel makes that great list of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. Verse 32:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

How do you show you trust God – you have faith in God? You trust His word. And how do you show you trust His word? You rely on it. You act on it. You obey it. You base your life on it.

- Even when you think you know better.
- Even when it's tough.
- Even when your very life's at stake.

How would I have gone in Daniel's shoes? At what point

would I have stopped trusting God and taken matters into my own hands?

- When Darius' law came out?
- When I was denounced before the king?
- When I was at the mouth of the lions' den?

Or what if God hadn't intervened? What if God had allowed the lions to take a bite or two out of Daniel? Would Daniel then be justified in not trusting God? No. For that passage in Hebrews goes on to say:

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword.

Even though they were killed, these people still trusted God. It's not a simple commercial transaction – if you do this, then you can get God to do what you want. That's not the point. God is God. God works out His purposes. Those purposes may include your death. But God will ultimately triumph – and not even death defeats His purposes for you.

In the long run, it boils down to the question of whether God is trustworthy. Does it make sense to trust God? Is it more sensible to trust myself and how I view things? How do God and I compare?

- I'm a finite human being. My knowledge is limited. I can't always do everything I want to do. I make mistakes. I mess things up.
- God, on the other hand is infinite. He knows everything. He has more power than I can imagine. If He sets His mind to do something, then it gets done. And He created the world and knows how He made it to operate. He created me and knows how He

designed me to operate.

There really isn't much comparison. God has far more ability than me.

But will He use that ability for me? It's one thing to say He's this great big powerful being who can do far more than I can imagine, but can I be sure He's got my best interests at heart? There's not much point trusting Him if He's my enemy and working against me. God shows His incredible commitment to me in Jesus. Even though I'd declared myself His enemy, He sent Jesus to die in my place to make me His friend – more than that, to make me His son. Could there be a greater demonstration of His commitment to me and my good than that? I deserved His eternal judgment. Instead, He freely gives me His eternal blessing in Jesus.

And so it's appropriate to trust God – more than that, anything else is stupidity and also sinful. We must maintain a God-centred perspective – focus on His plans and His purposes – and trust Him that through those He works for our best. That's where the temptation comes – to think He doesn't work for our best.

- It's what the serpent said to Eve in the Garden: God's holding something back from you.
- It's what Satan continues to whisper to us: God wants to deny you this pleasure or that comfort or this experience or that whatever.

Remember that the living God is for us and He can be trusted.

Paul came to a point in his life where he didn't know if it was God's will for him to continue on earth. He was in prison, facing trial. The trial could go either way. In that

situation, he trusted God. He tells the Philippians:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (1:21)

If God rescues him from prison, he'll continue to serve Him on earth. If God rescues him through death, he'll be in glory with Jesus. For him, death was the better option – it would transport him to paradise. Yet, he submitted himself to God's will. If God had more work for him on earth, he was pleased to do that.

The challenge for us is: will you continue to trust God? All of us face the temptation to take things into our own hands – to think we know better than God. It comes at us in so many ways.

- To think a small lie will get us out of a big problem.
- To think we're mature enough to handle the questionable shows on TV.
- To think that going along with the crowd will get us out of feeling different and out of place.
- To think we can dabble with a bit of greed without being hooked by materialism.
- To think our personal comfort's a good excuse to do something to avoid ridicule.

How do you know you trust God? You do what God says – even when it's hard, even when it goes against what you want to do, even when it costs you your life. When you take a stand for what's right, there are no guarantees in the short term – but ultimately God will triumph. We await a Saviour who will transform our earthly bodies. We await a King to whom every knee will bow. He died for us. We can trust Him. Don't give up.