

FRUIT NO. 7: FAITHFULNESS

(Daniel 6)

3.3.19

INTRODUCTION

Going into the final third of the nine “fruits of the Spirit.” We start today with “faithfulness.” Three things to keep mindful as we continue:

First, Jesus is the great example of what all these fruits are going to look like. As He Himself said to the disciples: ***“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” — Jesus Christ, John 13:15.*** If you want to know what the fruits look like in the real world, study Jesus.

Second, unlike spiritual gifts, which tend to be unique to every individual dependent upon how God has created their gift mix, spiritual fruit is God’s expectation for all His children. As Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, his expectation was that Christians would ***grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ — Paul, Ephesians 4:15b.***

Third, for fruits of the Spirit to accomplish their intended purpose, they need to be able to be seen by the people around us. We are here to provide a glimpse of Jesus through our lives, that the way people see us live would make them inquire as to what’s behind it. Paul encouraged the Philippians believers to live ***blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation*** so that they would ***shine among them like stars in the sky as [the Philippians] hold firmly to the word of life — Paul, Philippians 2:15-16a,*** a wonderful reference to the Old Testament book of Proverbs, where Solomon wrote: ***[T]he path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day — Proverbs 4:18,*** as well as some of the final words the prophet Daniel was given by an angelic messenger: ***“[T]hose who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” — Daniel 12:3.***

One final word before going into our story today: These last three fruits divide out this way:

Faithfulness (today) addresses our relationship with God.

Gentleness (in two weeks) addresses our relationship with each other.

Self-control addresses our relationship with ourselves.

TEXT: DANIEL 6 (SUMMARIZE STORY)

Context — Daniel came as a captive from Jerusalem who was brought to Babylon in King Nebuchadnezzar’s first incursion against the nation of Judah in 605 BC. Babylon remained the most powerful empire in the world for the majority of Daniel’s life.

In chapter 5, the “writing on the wall” that told Babylon that their kingdom was ending. Taken over by the Persian empire (October 539 BC). Most immediately, the ruler of Babylon was a man named Darius.

Daniel, estimated to be about 15 years of age upon his arrival in Babylon, was now thought to be around 82 years old.

Daniel was carryover from Babylonian administration due to his perceived integrity and wisdom. Darius set up an administration that includes 120 “satraps” (“princes” in the Hebrew) whose job it was to govern large provinces in the empire as a representative of the king. Over those 120 rulers he assigned three administrators whose job it was to supervise the work and rule of those 120

princes. It was a matter of accountability and to ensure *that the king might not suffer loss* — **Daniel 6:2b**. One of those administrators was Daniel.

Daniel so distinguished himself with his skills and integrity that Darius considered setting him over the whole kingdom. It's almost the same picture we got when Joseph assumed his prominence in ancient Egypt; Pharaoh elevated him to a place that, as he himself said: *"Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you"* — **Pharaoh, Genesis 41:40b**.

It was not job performance that wound up getting Daniel into trouble; it was his character — a character so sterling that his opponents had a difficult time figuring out just how to get rid of him. They come to learn that Daniel places God's law above human law, so it is that perspective they decide to attack. The idea that the entire administration has agreed to this proposed law is a lie; Daniel is a part of that administration and obviously would never have been a part of such a plan.

Historically we know that Persia did not view its rulers to be deity. It is possible that their idea is that Darius would be seen as a "mediator" to the gods. At its most basic, it is essentially a loyalty test that Darius, now ruling a much larger but still multiethnic, multinational empire, would probably see as a viable tool. And of course, these guys include the punishment of a lions' den for anyone who disobeys this law, obviously trying to put some "teeth" into its enforcement.

Now in case you were wondering, there was an Asiatic subspecies of lion that actually did roam the ancient biblical lands (Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia) until about the 14th century AD. We know historically that some kings hunted lions for the sport. At least one Egyptian pharaoh had a pet lion that accompanied him on military campaigns. The Persians captured lions and kept them in large parks where they were fed and taken care of. They were also, as in Daniel's case, sometimes used as a means of execution. Persian kings were notorious for using some horrible forms of execution.

Now the law is completely a trap. This is not about determining loyalty to the king. It's one and only purpose is to get rid of Daniel — forever and ever, amen. If the king has not thought through all the ramifications of a proposed law and goes ahead and makes it law, he ran the risk of being trapped by his own ruling. It is and he does!

But notice Daniel. What's cool is that the text never says that he was ignorant of what was going on. Quite the contrary: *Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published (making it an official law of the land), 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* — **Daniel 6:10**. What a testimony! He doesn't begin to pray when times get hard, nor does he cease his praying because times may get dangerous. He just prays, he continues his relationship, just as he always had. As far as Daniel was concerned, the law hadn't changed anything. He was in continuing service to God; that was his life's commitment — end of story! No circumstance could take priority over that.

The king is so upset by Daniel's being caught in this law that he delays its enforcement to try to think of some way to spare him. The instigators of the law actually have to return to the king to remind him of his legal duties.

Note that Darius recognizes that Daniel serves God "continually," in the Hebrew meaning that Daniel serves God permanently, in an enduring relationship. With that relational connection, Daniel sees no alternative to the words that Peter and John would speak centuries later before the

Sanhedrin: ***“We must obey God rather than human beings” — Peter and the apostles, Acts 5:29.*** Daniel keeps his attention on the eternal God, not his temporary circumstances.

Once Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, a stone (likely a very large rock) was placed over the opening to the den and then the king sealed it, not only with his own signet ring but also with the rings of his nobles. Each one of those rings had a design or inscription that identified the ring’s owner. The ring would be pressed into the soft clay of the seal and thus would be an ID. With all of this in place, the assumption was that no one could tamper with the stone to allow Daniel to get away, if even for a moment.

The king runs to the den at first light to see if Daniel’s faith in his God has been validated. Daniel being able to speak to him immediately confirms the answer the king asked. In the ancient Middle East, it was thought that surviving such an ordeal such as what Daniel did indicated the innocence of the accused. And Daniel gave immediate credit to how his salvation had been accomplished: ***“My God sent His angel, and He shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in His sight” — Daniel 6:22a.*** And sure enough, that’s what the king found when Daniel was pulled out of the den: ***[W]hen Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God — Daniel 6:23b.***

Though God rescues Daniel, unfortunately the same can’t be said for his accusers, who were dumped into the lions’ den along with their wives and children and killed ***before they reached the floor of the den — Daniel 6:24b.*** King David certainly took note of the guaranteed ending for those who seek to attack God’s children: ***The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden — David, Psalm 9:15.*** And David’s son Solomon wrote similarly insightful words on the destiny of those who oppose God and His servants: ***They ambush only themselves — Solomon, Proverbs 1:18b.***

And suddenly what looked like doom turned into praise, as Darius was moved by this incredible display of the power of God to write to his entire kingdom: ***“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures forever; His kingdom will not be destroyed, His dominion will never end. He rescues and He saves; He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions” — Daniel 6:26-27.***

So, Daniel prospered — Daniel 6:28a. THE END!

APPLICATION

Faithfulness = choosing God above all others, without regard to consequences.

God’s faithfulness to us: ***Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness — Jeremiah, Lamentations 3:22-23.***

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? . . . The Lord is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation — Psalm 118:6, 14.

“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” — Joshua 23:14.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble (distress and persecution). But take heart! I have overcome (conquered) the world” — Jesus Christ, John 16:33

If God is for us, who can be against us? — Paul, Romans 8:31b

[T]he one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world — I John 4:4b.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal — Paul, II Corinthians 4:17-18.

MARRIAGE TALK:

From the vows: “forsaking all others.” The ring — no beginning, no end: a picture of both of our love and our commitment.

SLAVE TALK:

[Y]ou are not your own; you were bought at a price — Paul, I Corinthians 6:19b-20a.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come — Paul, II Corinthians 1:21-22.

EXAMPLE OF JESUS AS SLAVE:

“I did not speak on My own, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me to say all that I have spoken. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say” — Jesus Christ, John 12:49-50.

“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” — Jesus Christ, John 5:19. “[N]ot My will, but Yours be done” — Jesus Christ, Luke 22:42b.

ULTIMATE QUESTION: Who is God? Who is the “God” we live with every day? How is that God defined by our lifestyles, our responses, our attitudes? What’s He look like? What can He do? How much do we need Him? [NONE OF THIS DEFINED BY “SUNDAY SCHOOL ANSWERS” BUT BY HOW OUR FAITH IS LIVED OUT IN THE REAL WORLD.]