

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on November 2, 2014 on Daniel 6:10-12; 16-23 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Legacy

Today's Focus: Fidelity

“What’s Really ‘To Die’ For?”

Every single one of us is leaving behind a legacy. What’s yours going to be? That’s the big idea behind what we’re going to talk about over the next four weeks.

Now a quick disclaimer. This isn’t just for those of you who have kids or grandkids. I mean it’s easier perhaps to think about the concept of a legacy if you’re a parent because you’re always thinking about your kids and you can’t understand why other people aren’t all the time!

But this idea of leaving a legacy applies to all of us because we’ve all grown up in this world. Each of us is part of a generation that has received a legacy—some of it’s good, some of it’s perhaps bad. And each of us will also be passing on a legacy of our own to others. And even if you don’t have a family of your own right now, we’re part of a church family that has a responsibility to pass on a legacy to the next generation. There are things that God wants us to hold onto and to leave behind for others. The only question is, What legacy are we going to leave behind?

The portion of the Bible that we’re going to learn from today comes from the Old Testament book of Daniel, chapter 6. It’s very relevant history that we want to apply to our lives today as we start this series called *Legacy*.

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. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

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¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When he came near the den,

he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

²¹ Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! ²² 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. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Now certainly the outcome to this dramatic story so full of intrigue is a positive one. Daniel was miraculously delivered from the lions’ den. God be praised! And that’s how the king felt too. Incredible, huh?! But underneath the storyline is this question, “What was Daniel willing to die for?” Certainly Daniel had stronger convictions beyond what people mean today when they casually say that something is “to die for.” I did a quick Google search and you know you can buy swimwear that’s “to die for” and you can discover a new hairdo that’s “to die for” and you can find dip recipes that are “to die for.” But Daniel was actually willing to die for something that money can’t buy. He was willing to die for his belief based on sacred Scriptures that there is one true Creator God who demands exclusive loyalty. So Daniel—just like his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were once thrown into a fiery furnace—would worship no man, no idol, no false god. He was willing to die rather than compromise his faith conviction.

Friends, what are you willing to die for? Now perhaps that’s not a question you’ve ever even thought about. Maybe you’re just focused on today, tomorrow, getting through this week. Or maybe you’re like, “Hey, I’m young. I’m strong. I’ve got the future ahead of me. No need for me to be thinking about dying, Pastor Ben. I’m just looking forward to being able to really start livin!” Or maybe you feel like that’s just too heavy a question for a Sunday morning as you sit in those comfy movie theater seats.

But here’s the thing. I understand it’s a tough question. Yet since none of us knows when or how we’re going to die, it would be wise to think about that question while we are still alive, wouldn’t it? I mean think about Daniel for a moment. Daniel lived his entire adult life as an exile—a Jewish man taken captive when he was a teenager. So literally Daniel was just going through life like a lot of us. He was a talented teenager dreaming about the future when Nebuchadnezzar came with the Babylonian army and kidnapped him and his friends. Daniel was taken far away from home to a foreign land where the whole culture stood against his religious beliefs.

Yet somehow Daniel found a way to live faithfully to his God even while serving foreign kings like Nebuchadnezzar in the government. When the time came Daniel was ready to take a public stand on what he believed to remain consistent with his private faith. He knew he had to remain faithful to God even if he was all alone in a godless place. He had this faith conviction based on God’s Word. He had to think through the implications of what a damaging message he would be conveying if he were to compromise. He had to think about what he was willing to die for never knowing if and when he might have to face a bunch of hungry lions. How about you? What are you willing to die for?

Very quickly for me my children come to mind. I would die for them. What good father wouldn't? Likewise I promised the very same to my wife when I vowed that I would be faithful to her, support her, cherish her in sickness and in health as long as we both shall live. When my father knew that I was planning to ask Sarah to marry me, I remember it clear as day, he asked me, "Ben, are you willing to die for her?" Boy now that makes you think!

But when he heard me say Yes, then he knew I was ready to get married because that's the kind of commitment God seeks in marriage. It's also the kind of commitment he seeks from all of us towards him and his Word. The Apostle Paul once told a young man named Timothy: "*Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses*" (1 Timothy 6:12). In other words this is going to take some true grit, some determined effort to continue steadfast in our confession of the clear truth of Scripture and to endure all things even death rather than fall away from it. Friends, what are you willing to die for?

Daniel was simply trying to do his best to serve as a competent administrator in the upper levels of government until some of the people serving beneath him conspired against him. Daniel was just trying to live consistently to what he believed and others were jealous of him and hated him. They knew of his faith because Daniel didn't hide it and so they tried to use it against him. Some of you know what that's like too, don't you? You're just trying to be an honest, loyal, hardworking employee wherever you work yet living out and sometimes speaking your Christian faith and values...and not everyone likes that. It angers some people. It makes some people jealous. It causes some people to make fun of you or accuse you or dump stuff on you.

So for Daniel it was a set-up from the start. Motivated by jealousy, other government officials gunning for his job plotted a strategy against Daniel to manipulate the king by appealing to the king's vanity and desire for political power. So they said, "How's this sound, King Darius? Whaddya say you give everyone across the empire an opportunity to honor you for an entire month—recognizing your vast power and godlike qualities? Our plan is to enact a law that says no one can pray to anyone or any other god but you. Sound good?" And Darius thought, "Hmmm you know, that would be kinda beneficial if everyone thought of me as godlike. I could kind of get used to that too." So he said, "Go for it guys." And with the king's approval he set in motion that string of events that led to Daniel being faced with a choice: Stand firm in his faith in God and be willing to die for what he believed or compromise his faith in order to live.

Yikes. It's a choice I certainly pray that you and I never have to face. Yet it's a choice that Daniel and many faithful believers in the Lord have had to make: to stand on clear teachings of Scripture or compromise the truth for personal security. It's important to know history because there's nothing new under the sun. What has happened before will happen again (cf Ecc. 1:9). When the early Christians were a minority group in the broader Roman culture, they were persecuted by the government. When reformers of the Christian church in the Middle Ages spoke up for the clear teaching of the Bible over against the false teachings of the majority Roman Catholic church, they were excommunicated and burned at the stake as heretics.

This is why Martin Luther in 1521 feared for his life as he stood before all the most powerful people in the Holy Roman Empire at a special meeting of church and state. He went there hoping to have a peaceful debate over an open Bible about the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead there was a table with his writings on it. This would be no debate. He was only asked the question, "Will you take back or recant everything you've written?" To which question Martin Luther...like so many Christians before him, like Daniel in the Old Testament, and like persecuted Christians today in the Middle East who are being told to convert to Islam or die...he said, "Unless you can show me from Scripture where I have erred, I cannot and will not recant. May God help me." Friends, what are you willing to die for? Last year the news agency Reuters reported that the number of Christian martyred for their faith doubled. In 2013... 2,123 Christians chose to die rather than renounce their faith. Heaven was worth more precious to them than earth.

Now for most of us, persecution like that probably isn't in our future. And thank God for that! You or I may never face a den of actual lions. Yet persecution will find you when you're faithful to God's Word. Jesus himself said it would. And so maybe the question isn't always "What are you willing to die for?" But also "What are you willing to lose or let die in order to be faithful to God's Word?"

Are you willing to lose a relationship to remain sexually pure in the face of pressure to give in because the world says you're supposed to put out? Are you willing to lose a friend in order to stand alone on something you believe in even if means you end up being mocked by the crowd? Are you willing to lose a promotion or a career or a diploma because of what you believe is true based on God's Word? Are you willing to let an old lifestyle die in order to align your life more and more with God's will? Are you willing to take a stand in order to pass down a legacy of faith?

I think about what some Christians in the Middle East face when threatened by terror groups like ISIS and I wonder...what would I do? How many of you would still come to church if your lives were threatened? How many of you would identify as Christians if you had a special tax imposed on your income or if your business was blacklisted by the government? How many of you would remain confessional Lutherans if the government said we all had to belong to a state sponsored church that forced you to compromise on what you believe is true? Right now if you live in China, to be a church leader, it basically means choosing to live a life of poverty. You cannot advance socially and economically if you are a church leader in China.

Friendly, what's worth letting die? What's truly worth dying for? You know Jesus had to consider that question too. And you know what answer he came up with? You are. Like Daniel, it was a set-up from the start. Jealous leaders with some political clout conspired against him to have him murdered through a judicial process that was a mockery. But Jesus had done nothing wrong. All he had done was faithfully serve his God and Father. All he had done was demonstrate his faithful love, never compromising his values or his virtues, not even once. He spoke the truth—granted a truth that even then many people did not want to hear and still do not want to hear today. Yet he lived up to what he said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). And so he was beaten, mocked, crucified...and he died. God's Son died being mocked by a crowd surrounding the cross like a gang of hungry lions.

But why? So that our sin debt could be paid in full. So that our guilt of all our compromises could be removed. So that our sins could be forgiven. So that our shortcomings could be covered. So that just as Jesus then triumphantly rose up from the pit of death, we too could have the confidence that no matter what happens to us...no matter what situation we encounter... matter what kind of death we face and when...at that moment Jesus will deliver us safely to his heavenly kingdom. Just as Paul said in the lesson we heard earlier today: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom* (2 Timothy 4:18).

Friends, there's a local radio station that I like to listen to while I'm in the car driving along because they plays all sorts of fresh, new music. They're also big into a making a difference in the community which is great. They raise awareness on issues and stuff like that. But there's this slogan they've got that bugs me. In fact the DJ will almost always introduce it by saying, "And most importantly, above all things, y'all stand for something, otherwise you'll fall for anything." Have you heard that? Well that sounds nice, doesn't? "Y'all stand for something, otherwise you'll fall for anything." It's the perfect phrase for postmodern people. But I hope you see that it's meaningless. After all ISIS stands for something. They rape and kill and force people to renounce their beliefs at the tip of a sword. Should you stand for them? Of course not. Don't just stand for something. If you just stand for something, you will fall for anything.

Instead be like Daniel. Stand for the sacred Scriptures. Stand for the truth of God's Word—the precious Gospel message of Jesus Christ. It won't make you popular. It won't make your life smoother. But it will deliver you from sin, death, and the devil and it allow you to leave a legacy of faith to save others.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that the Apostle Peter in the New Testament describes the devil as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). Martin Luther once said, "The devil wastes no time on vacation or sleep." What the devil loves to do is to offer substitutes for the way to get to heaven to tempt us away from the true faith so he can devour us. But we take our stand on the true gospel of Jesus Christ by grace alone, ours by faith in Christ alone, made clear by Scripture alone. That's worth trying living and dying for. Amen.

My Next Steps:

Tension: What in this world is worth dying for? Daniel was ready to die before he'd pray to an idol. Luther was willing to die to uphold the truth of the Scriptures. Why? What are the things in your life that you would consider worth dying for?

Connect: Jesus considered you worth dying for. He died to pay for your sins. He died to pay for the sins of all people. Understanding this truth is the difference between eternal life and eternal death. That makes it imperative to hold on to and to pass this truth on to those who will come after us.

Treasure to Share: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* (2 Timothy 4:18).

Challenge: See the directions for creating a personal/family crest on page 19 of the worship folder. Then create your crest on page 20!