

<sup>6</sup> So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: “King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup> All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup> Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” <sup>9</sup> Therefore King Darius signed the written decree. <sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. ... <sup>16</sup> So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. ... <sup>19</sup> Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup> And when he came to the den, ... the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.” <sup>23</sup> Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Text: Daniel 6:6-10, 16a, 19-23 A 6-7-26 Romans 8:28-39 Luke 5:1-9 Ps.: 86 Resp. Ps.: 73  
Hymns: 775, 347, 444, 400

## GOD COMES FIRST

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Today from God’s Word we’re going to hear about keeping God first in our hearts and lives.

Our text is part of the story of Daniel in the lions’ den. Darius was the king of Babylon. Daniel was one of King Darius’ advisors. A number of the king’s other advisors were jealous of Daniel. They tricked the king into signing an irrevocable decree that anyone who petitioned any god or person except the king would be thrown into a den of lions. We’re told, “*Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*” Knowing that he would be thrown into the lions’ den, Daniel nevertheless put God first and kept openly worshiping Him. The king couldn’t go back on his own law, so Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den.

That was a terrifying thing, to be thrown into a den full of hungry, man-eating lions (cf. Dan. 6:24). Daniel had to remain among the lions for a whole night. Daniel could have avoided that if he temporarily stopped his open worship of God. But Daniel kept on worshiping God.

The First Commandment is, *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Ex. 20:3). None of us is going to argue with that. God says it, so that settles it. It’s easy for us to agree with this when we’re not facing any bad consequences over it. But if we’re going to be thrown into a den of lions for faithfully following God, that really puts our faith to the test.

Comparing himself to the other disciples, Peter told Jesus, *“Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble”* (Mt. 26:33). Later, when Peter’s life was on the line, three times he denied that he was a follower of Jesus. Afterwards, Peter was terribly sorry for what he had done. And Jesus forgave him. (Mt. 26:69-75; and Jn. 21:15-19)

While we don’t make excuses for Peter, let’s not make excuses for ourselves, either. Is God always first in our hearts and lives? Are we ever hesitant or afraid to speak up for God and His Word? Are we ever afraid of what someone might think of us or do to us if he or she knew that we’re Christians who believe that all of the Bible is God’s Word? We don’t want to make trouble for ourselves. At the same time, we need to stand up for God and His Word, whatever the consequences. *“Jesus, who gave Your life for us, help us to live our lives, every area of our lives, for You.”*

The king was very worried about Daniel. Daniel had proven himself to be an honest and trustworthy advisor. When the king came to the lions’ den the next morning he called out, *“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”* Daniel replied, *“My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”* We’re told, *“No injury whatever was found on [Daniel], because he believed in his God”* The lions hadn’t hurt Daniel at all.

Daniel hadn’t known if he would live or die. But, placing his trust in God, he kept God first and kept worshiping and serving Him. It turned out that God miraculously rescued Daniel. Daniel’s faith had been put to an extreme test. *“Dear Lord, strengthen our faith so that we keep worshiping and serving You, especially when it’s really hard.”*

When God commanded, *“You shall have no other gods before Me,”* He prefaced it by saying, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (Ex. 20:2). God had rescued the Jews from their slavery by sending the ten plagues on Egypt, and then parting the Red Sea. God’s Old Testament people had been helplessly enslaved, but God miraculously delivered them from their slavery. They should show God their love and gratitude by obeying His Commandments.

Jesus rescued us from something even worse than human slavery. Jesus rescued us from our slavery to sin. We are sinful. We can’t pay for our sins. We can’t make ourselves stop sinning. Jesus paid for our sins with His death on the cross. Jesus made us His believing people, moving us and enabling us to serve Him (Philip. 2:13). Jesus says, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (Jn. 14:15). We show our love for God by obeying His Commandments.

*“You shall have no other gods before Me”* is the First Commandment. This is very important to God, so it’s very important to us. When we think about it, failure to obey the First Commandment leads to failure to obey the other Commandments. Failure to keep God first in my heart and life leads to failure to do what He tells me to do. Whenever I break any of the Commandments, it starts by breaking the First Commandment. I put myself and what I want before God.

When we read what the Bible says about Daniel, we see that he faced serious temptations to have other gods before God. We heard how Daniel was tempted to stop worshiping God. King Darius and other kings of Babylon put Daniel in a position of great power. Daniel was offered much wealth. Daniel was tempted to make money and things, control over others, and other such things his god. But by the grace of God Daniel didn’t let anything take God’s place in his heart and life.

God commands us, *“You shall have no other gods before Me.”* We’re tempted to think, “I don’t worship other gods, so I guess I’m keeping the First Commandment.” Whatever we trust in as much as God or more than God is a god to us. We’re tempted to place our trust in many things other than God: ourselves, our reason, our feelings, another person or other people, those we love, money, things (our “stuff”), power, what we do for a living, who we think we are, our reputation, and more (Ps. 62:10; Prov. 5:5; Mt. 6:24; 10:37; Lk. 5:5; 1 Cor. 4:7; 1 Tim. 6:10; 1 Pet. 5:5bff.; etc.). God lets us go through financial struggles, health struggles, and other struggles and challenges to teach us to put Him first and keep Him first in our hearts and lives. Exodus 34:14 says, *“You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”* God isn’t jealous for selfish reasons. God doesn’t want to lose us. God knows that if we lose Him, we’re really lost.

Jesus tells us, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (Mt. 22:37). Martin Luther explains the Ten Commandments by saying that we should “fear and love God” that we obey them. We heard several times that having no other gods before God means putting God first in our hearts and lives. God commands us to obey Him. Doing what God says is part of obeying Him. Doing what God says from our heart is the other part of obeying Him. Our flesh doesn’t want to obey God. Our flesh doesn’t want to obey God willingly. We wouldn’t have disobeyed our parents, using the excuse, “I don’t feel like doing what you said.” We are to obey God. And we are to ask God to give us a good attitude to willingly, happily obey Him. Paul says, *“It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”* (Philip. 2:13)

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was *“in all points tempted as we are, yet [remained] without sin.”* Jesus was tempted in every way to disobey His Father, yet Jesus perfectly obeyed Him. Jesus set a good example for us to follow. When God tells us something in His Word, it’s not our place to question God or debate with Him or rebel against Him. God knows what’s best. Always. You and I are to do what God tells us to do. We say with the psalmist, *“Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart”* (“give me an undivided heart”) *“to fear Your*

*name*” (Ps. 86:11). “Dear Heavenly Father, Your way was the hard way for Jesus, yet Your way was the right way, the good way, the only way; and we’re saved. Help us to follow Jesus’ example and do what You tell us to do.”

Jesus is so much more than just a good example for us. Jesus is our Savior. Galatians 3:10-11 says, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’”* If we had to earn our way to heaven, we would have to perfectly obey God. We can’t. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place, earning heaven for us. We can’t save ourselves by trying to be good enough. We’re saved by faith alone in Jesus. *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law”* – Galatians 2:16.

“Lord, help us to put You first in our hearts and lives, and keep You first. Thank You for being our Rock, leading us through life. Help us to humbly, willingly follow You. Lead us to our eternal home in heaven.” Amen.