It's great to see everybody. I have to admit to you today that I am a little tired. I spent yesterday morning watching over and over and over the royal wedding, right? And so Prince Harry and I have a couple of things in common. First of all, Harry and I both got our princesses, right? The second thing Harry and I are a little different on is the $43 million bank on the wedding, right? Yeah. Pretty crazy, isn't it? It just goes to show, if I would have invited George Clooney to my wedding, I probably would have upped the ante, but didn't get the opportunity, right?

Well, hey, take your Bibles and turn to Daniel chapter 6, we are going to get right into it today, I think one of the epic stories of the Bible. I think if we traveled around the world and could poll people and say, what are the biggest stories of the Bible, Daniel and the lion's den is probably in the bucket list, right? It's one of the big rocks. As you turn to Daniel chapter 6, there is a Bible in front of you if you don’t have one, or take your smart phone and turn to Daniel 6, I have a question for you this morning. Why is it now that after three kings that Daniel is being sought after? Why after three kingdoms is Daniel still being promoted? The guy is 80 years old now on the scene. After three kingdoms, he could have been put in the archives and said, he was one of those guys that helped the king a few generations ago, but after three kings, Daniel is consistently being promoted and sought after.

In Daniel 6:3 the Bible says it this way, that Daniel distinguished himself among others. How? Because of his excellent capabilities. In other words, Daniel continually kept the top priority of his life, the name and the fame of God. He wanted to honor God above all things and had this courageous conviction to stand for what is right. And how do we know this? Because in 2018, over 4,000 years past the time that Daniel was walking this planet Earth, we are still talking about the guy today because he had excellent capabilities. He did his job with excellence. And again, I think if there is one themed verse that can thread throughout the book of Daniel and especially in Daniel 6, it's the wisdom of Solomon that says in Proverbs 21:1, In the Lord’s hands, the king’s heart is like a stream of water, and He channels toward all who please Him. And you are going to see in Daniel 6 this King Darius rise to power, and he begins to watch Daniel's life, and he begins to watch Daniel’s God, and you are going to see a transformation begin to happen in the chapter of Daniel 6, because in the Lord’s hands, the king’s heart is like a channel of water.

Pray with me. Father, I pray today that You would open our eyes and our mind and especially our heart to Your words today. They are reliable. They are true. So bring that truth to us today, and change our lives as we read the book of Daniel together. Father, we thank You for this man’s life and the principles of his life, that he had a courageous conviction to honor You. Amen.

So in Daniel 6:1, the Bible says this, it pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom. With three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. So 120 people were under Daniel. Daniel was seen somewhat as a prince under King Darius. The satraps are made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities, that the king planned to set him over the entire kingdom. Now in Daniel 6:2, there is a statement there I want us to lean in on and understand, “so that the king might not suffer loss.” It's an interesting statement. It does not mean loss of money or personal bodyguard or make me look good. Now that's all included in this text, but it was anything that would bring harm to the king and his kingdom. Daniel and the other two administrators were being asked to help the king and his kingdom succeed.

Now understand the context of where Daniel is at this time. At 80 years of age, where he is, he’s thriving in Babylon. He’s consistently being promoted. The kings are seeking his advice, but listen, this isn’t the church that Daniel’s a part of. It’s not a parachurch organization that Daniel’s a part of. It’s not even the Jewish government. Daniel is being asked to help a king and a kingdom succeed that is not following God. In fact, Darius was seen as a god, as one of the gods of the Medes and Persians. And Daniel's not working for God’s people at all, but being tasked to help them succeed, and he does it so well that he’s being promoted. A couple of years ago a TV. show came on the scene, it was called “Undercover Boss.” Anyone watch that show? It’s a great show. In the end, it makes a grown man well up with tears, right? But essentially what it is, is this, high level corporate executives leave the comfort of their offices and window views, and they secretly take low-level jobs within their company to find out how things really work, and what their employees truly think of them.

Isn't that amazing? Wouldn't that be fun to do? Maybe, right? Especially if you have one of the low-level jobs and you find out you worked with the exec for a week? If you are an executive to find out what people really think of you down on the lower levels, right? The CEO of a huge hotel in Vegas, Las Vegas, decided to do just that. He takes the challenge of undercover boss, so he goes undercover and they disguise himself and put
different hair and a moustache on him, and he gets hired in at the lowest level, and he begins to work with people doing the same monotonous job day in and day out, and he begins to work with a particular woman, and he begins to hear story after story of this woman named Rita. What's interesting about Rita is this. She works hard, was always positive and had tremendous influence with other people that she worked with.

She did the job with excellence, and after he attempted to poke fun at her boss, just to see kind of what she was made of, he kind of comes in and starts being cynical and sarcastic against this big ginormous hotel in Vegas, right? But she would not take the bait. She continued to do her job with excellence and do what was right, time and time and time again, continually doing what was right and with honor. What he discovered was that Rita's job was this, after years and years of doing this in day and out day, she would take the bedding off of hundreds of hotel rooms, wash the sheets and remake those same beds, day in and day out, day after day. She had done this for years, not complaining, with excellence all the while making a positive impact on those around her.

As a result, the CEO of this huge hotel gave Rita her first promotion in years and put her overseer over the entire housekeeping department in this large hotel. Why? Because she distinguished herself, and she had excellent qualifications with her employees, and that is the theme of Daniel 6. That Daniel honored Darius with excellence, and because of his work ethic, his pursuit of God, his influence grew. You see there is a principle here. When we honor others with excellence, it will often lead to an increase in our influence. When we honor excellence, with no strings attached, it often will lead to an increase in our influence. Think about this, what if we pursued excellence to those in authority over us? You were known as the best employee in your company. You were known as the best student in your school, the best neighbor in your cul-de-sac, the best athlete, the best friend that people in authority over you had ever heard of, to honor them with excellence. Think of the lasting impact you would have if you were known as that employee in your company. Look at verse 4.

At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel and his conduct of government affairs, but were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, guess what? We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with his faith. Unless it has something to do with his law of his God. The question I have for us this morning is this, what if my courageous conviction to Jesus Christ was the only thing people could use against me? Allow that to sink in today. In your company, with your friendships, as a student in your school, with your coaches, with the people you interact with, maybe in your family, what if your courageous conviction to Jesus Christ was the only thing people could use against you? But I believe at times in my life and in most of our lives in this room today, it's not about our courageous conviction to Jesus Christ that has hurt us.

It's been our lapse of integrity and competence. We were criticized. We were written up. We were put on probation. We weren't able to run out with the team or maybe benched, and yes, even let go from our companies because we were poor employees. We played the Jesus card, and we felt like we honored Jesus, but guess what? Somewhere in our equation of life, we became sarcastic. We became cynical and we did not do our jobs with excellence, and so there was fault found in us. We were outspoken for Jesus Christ, but we were a poor employee. Imagine the leverage we would have in our company, and our schools, with our families, with our coaches, with our teachers, with our neighbors, and even our friends if our allegiance to Jesus Christ was the only thing they could use against us.

You see folks, listen to me today. In the eyes of the world, in the eyes of the world, it is not our relationship with Jesus Christ that matters. It is our resemblance of him. As people watch our life, and we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, there should be a drastic difference in what we do and how we do it. How we treat our spouses. How we treat our kids, doing our jobs with excellence so the only thing they can use against us is our relationship with Jesus Christ. Is that said of you today? Is that said of me today?

In verse 6 the story goes on. The administrators and satraps went as a group to the king, and they said this, may King Darius live forever. That has now been said three times in the book of Daniel at each different king when they are trying to plot and set up Daniel, right? The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed, we have all signed off on this, king, that the king should issue this edict, and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human during the next 30 days, except to you, oh king, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the den of lions. Now, Your Majesty, issue this decree and put it in writing so it cannot be altered and in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians which cannot be repealed, so the King Darius put the decree into writing. Ah the amazing work of the art called flattery, right? King, we have all lined up and we believe that you are the greatest king over the nation of Babylon. You do things exceedingly well. King, we honor you. We love you. We love being a part of your cabinet, and King do this for us because you are seen as like a god to the Medes and Persians. Create this law that if anybody does not worship you, if anybody does not pray to you alone, let's throw them off the map. Let's throw them in the den of lions.

You see, when we listen and accept flattery, it will compromise our convictions, and that's exactly what happened in King Darius' life. I believe that King Darius got all of the governors, and satraps and all of these nobles in the throne room, and they began to honor him and flatter him and say, oh, king, live forever. You are the best king, and Darius began to feed into that flattery, and began to accept that flattery, and the law was placed down in front of him. He took that pen and signed it. You have the picture of all of those nobles, right? And then he put that pen down, and I believe it hit him what he had just done. He just destroyed his best employee. The guy that was sought after, after three kingdoms. The guy that he knew about of Daniel, right? He had just put a law into effect that would destroy his life. Now I don't know if Darius was full of pride or insecurity. We don't know that, but what we do know from the text is that he was listening and accepting flattery. You see, understand the
Then these lions would attack them and devour them. And the second form of persecution for Christians or people that we want against the
-- thousands and thousands of people would come and watch these gladiators fight, and then they would put the Christians into this arena, and
of people would come out for entertainment, kind of like a college football game, right, but people would actually walk away, but they would
that went against the government, or went against the kings, or were thieves or burglars, they would put them in this arena, and then thousands
The first one is kind of like the movie “Gladiator.” If you have seen the movie “Gladiator,” right? They put Christians in this big arena, or people
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so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Again, the law of the Medes and Persians, once the king set that law into motion, history tells us,
the source of our strength, and that’s what Daniel is doing here. The Bible goes on to say this, then the men went as a group to the King Darius and
You see, Daniel’s private dedication fueled his public courage. And I want to ask this morning, what are you doing in private that is fueling your
public courage? Are you spending time alone with God, reading absolute truth of the scriptures, and renewing your mind day in and day out so
that you have that public courage to stand and not compromise your convictions? That’s how we thrive as followers of Jesus Christ in this

But Daniel, listen to this, as a follower of Christ, our face needs to be pointed towards Jesus, his ways, his words, and we enter each new day in
faith. Daniel had walked with God for more than 80 years and knew He would not fail him now. God helped him stand when everyone else bowed
under King Nebuchadnezzar. God saved his life by interpreting a dream for that same king. God delivered his best friends from being torched in
the furnace, and if you look ahead to Daniel 9:2, it says something pretty profound in that verse, that Daniel had with him the prophesy of the
prophet Jeremiah. He had the Old Testament scriptures of the prophet Jeremiah in his hands. So Daniel, guess what, read the scripture that said
this, I am The Lord, the God of all humanity. Is there anything too difficult for me? A courageous conviction knows that private dedication will
fuel public courage.

You see, Daniel’s private dedication fueled his public courage. And I want to ask this morning, what are you doing in private that is fueling your
public courage? Are you spending time alone with God, reading absolute truth of the scriptures, and renewing your mind day in and day out so
that you have that public courage to stand and not compromise your convictions? That’s how we thrive as followers of Jesus Christ in this
world where there are convictions being compromised all the time. We stand because we have a courageous conviction to rely on God’s Word as
the source of our strength, and that’s what Daniel is doing here. The Bible goes on to say this, then the men went as a group to the King Darius and
said to him in verse 15, remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law that you set in motion, the law of the Medes and Persians, no decree or
edict that the king issues can be changed, so the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion’s den, and the king said
one last statement to Daniel. Daniel, may your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you. It was kind of his last statement to Daniel before he
sent him off to be executed.

Verse 17, a stone was brought and put over the mouth of the den, then 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. Again, the law of the Medes and Persians, once the king set that law into motion, history tells us,
it could not be changed. There was no way a human, it was humanly possible now to go against that law the king returned to the palace and spent
the night without eating and without entertainment brought to him, and he could not sleep because he knew that it was now humanly impossible
to change what was set in motion. It was done. It was over. Humans had done everything they possibly could, and there was no way to save
Daniel. You see, history would tell us that there are two types of ways to torture people with lions.

The first one is kind of like the movie “Gladiator.” If you have seen the movie “Gladiator,” right? They put Christians in this big arena, or people
that went against the government, or went against the kings, or were thieves or burglars, they would put them in this arena, and then thousands
of people would come out for entertainment, kind of like a college football game, right, but people would actually walk away, but they would
-- thousands and thousands of people would come and watch these gladiators fight, and then they would put the Christians into this arena, and
then these lions would attack them and devour them. And the second form of persecution for Christians or people that we want against the
government or kings of that day, they would use the pit of lions. It was actually a deep pit. If you would look down into that pit, there was two sides with a stone wall between: one side was where the food would be kept, and the other side was where the den of lions would be kept.

And they would take those lions, and they would torture those lions and beat those lions and most of the time not feed them until someone was put on the other side or food was put on the other side to make those lions intentionally ferocious and angry. So when that food was dropped into the other side of the wall, and the stone wall went up, those lions devoured whatever was on the other side. And so as Darius walks back to his palace that night, he begins to hear that stone wall being brought up, and he knows the outcome of the story. He knows that in a matter of moments, his good friend, his top employee, the person that had helped his pedigree of kings, was going to be destroyed. In fact the Bible says it this way if you look in Daniel 6:24b, and before they reach the floor of the den, what happened, what the lions do with the people, the lions overpowered them and crushed their bones, and Darius knew that’s what was going to happen, and so he said one last time, Daniel, I’m so sorry, and I hope your God can rescue you. There is nothing more I can do.

And look what happens in verse 21, or excuse me verse 19, at the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lion’s den. When he came near the den of lions, he calls out to Daniel in an anguished voice, oh Daniel, servant of the living God, in essence, are you still alive? Daniel, has your God whom you serve continually been able to rescue from the lions? Daniel, are you still there? And I believe following behind King Darius was all his nobles and satraps and governors, following along and they are kind of hitting each other, and they are thinking, I don’t know what he’s screaming about. This deal is over. Like, this guy was devoured. All we are going to hear is some purring of some cats, because they got a great meal in this guy named Daniel. It’s done. It’s over. I don’t know why he’s yelling. And in verse 21, his God comes through. May the king live forever, Daniel answered. My God sent His angel and He shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in His sight. Nor have I done anything against you, oh king, Your Majesty.

Can you imagine now the governors and satraps and the nobles and everyone following the king, once they heard Daniel’s voice they went, “oh, no. This isn’t going to be good.” And sure enough, what happens? The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the pit, and when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound, no scratch was found on him because he had trusted in his God, and at the king’s commands, the men that had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lion’s den along with their wives and children. This was such a big deal no one was going to be left in that family, no pedigree, no legacy was ever going to be left of the people who had stood against Daniel and stood against Daniel’s God, and ultimately stood against Darius. We are going to wipe the entire family out, and they threw them all into the lion’s den, and before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all of their bones.

And again we see, in Proverbs 21:1, in the hands of the Lord, the king’s heart, the core of his being, is like a stream of water. Look what Darius does. And the king wrote to all the nations and people of every language in all of the Earth, may you prosper greatly, and in verse 26, I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom, people must fear and revere the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, and He endures forever. Psalm 92 is pretty much a parallel right there. He is the living God, and His love 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. So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

You see God can cause unbelievers to acknowledge His greatness, by how you and I honor Him, and how you and I honor others. Darius’ life was like the stream of water in the hands of the Lord, and his life began to change over the course of Daniel 6, and he began to revere and follow God at the end, to acknowledge that Daniel’s God was the true God, and if we could say one thing about Daniel 6, it would be this, that we thrive when we have a courageous conviction to honor God and to honor others. We thrive. We will thrive in a culture that is more and more increasingly coming against the ways and the works of Jesus Christ. We can thrive in that when we have a courageous conviction to stand for what is right, even when the trumpet sounds, everyone else begins to fall and bow toward Babylon, we as followers of Jesus Christ will point our faces toward Jerusalem and say, I will follow Jesus Christ regardless of what our culture says. I will stand for what is right. I will stand and do my job with excellence because people are watching my life, and I will not compromise my convictions, and we can have a courageous conviction through the power of the Holy Spirit, to honor God and to honor others.

A season is coming here in the fall, one of my favorite seasons, it’s college football. Can’t wait. The only two -- really, the only three things we have in Nebraska are the Huskers, Warren Buffet, and the college world series. So, college football is a big deal for us, and a number two, kind of close second of the Nebraska Cornhuskers, is Clemson University, Dabo Swinney. Here’s a couple of things you may not know about Dabo. Dabo’s obviously the football coach of the University of Clemson. There he is holding his beautiful trophy. In 2016 he was the National Championship Coach, and here’s what’s amazing. He has a truly crazy story. He is the product of a broken home with an alcoholic father. He was a teenager when his family lost their home to foreclosure, and during his freshman year at the University of Alabama, while walking on to the football team, Dabo’s mother had to come with him to campus.

Not to visit, but to live with her son. You know why? She no longer had a home. She had no place to go, and so Swinney was sharing his room with his mom and another student in a tiny apartment because she wanted her son to experience his dream of playing college football. He earned a scholarship to play for Alabama and was part of the ’92 National Championship Team. Soon after he began a coaching career that ultimately put him at the helm, in 2008, of one of college football’s storied programs, and oh, by the way, Dabo Swinney is a very, very outspoken follower of Jesus Christ.
Just a few years ago during which he established himself as one of football’s elite coaches. Guess what? His faith and his job at Clemson University came under extreme attack. He landed in the crosshairs of an anti-religious organization that threatened lawsuits, his job, and began personal attacks against not only he, but his wife and his kids, and against the University of Clemson. Clemson, they wrote a letter to Clemson University and the anti-religious organization said this, and I quote, “Your coach must cease, he must keep quiet, and he must re-train his coaches and his athletes against things that are unconstitutionally religious activities.”

He must re-train. He must keep quiet, and your coach must cease or we’ll continue to put pressure on him until you fire him at Clemson University. But guess what? Dabo held firm. He prayed hard, and what is amazing, Clemson University, a secular public university, did what? They backed him. Why? “Coach Dabo Swinney, they said, has done nothing wrong. The accusations are false. Beyond the game of football, he continues to do the right things over and over and over again. He continues to teach and lead our student athletes with excellence and is an outstanding employee for the University of Clemson.” You see, we thrive when we have a courageous conviction to honor God and to honor others. Pray with me.

Father, may it be said of us someday we’ll stand before You. We will stand and see eye to eye with You, and Daniel will stand and see You face to face, and King Nebuchadnezzar will see You face to face and Belteshazzar will see You face to face, and King Darius will see You face to face, and God, in that moment, when our eyes meet, we want to hear the words, good job faithful servant. You have followed me with excellence. You have honored our God. May that be said of us today. Amen.