

Sunday 24st May 2020

“Life without Compromise”

Daniel 1:1-8

As I was growing up in the Methodist Church if you asked a group of kids in a Sunday School or Bible class who their favourite Bible character was, there's a name that would come up multiple times. Names like David, Moses or Jonah, would probably come up as well, but there's one character in the Bible that received a great deal of attention from Bible class teachers. That name is Daniel.

Now when I say the name Daniel, what instantly comes to mind? If you're like most people when I said the word Daniel, you probably thought of a lion's den. Back when the majority of kids went to Sunday School or had RE in schools, little kids from Perth to Melbourne all knew the story of how Daniel was thrown into a den full of lions for praying to God three times a day.

But what most kids, and even many adults didn't know is that there's far more to the account of the life of Daniel than him being thrown into a lion's den. What I want to do is to see what we can draw from Daniel's life, his whole life, and apply it to our lives today.

Daniel's story is the story of an exile. He was an unwilling immigrant who moved from his homeland of Israel, across almost 1600 Km of desert, probably roped or chained to several other Israeli's, possibly after witnessing the death of his parents when the Babylonians conquered the nation of Judah in 606 B.C.

The Book of Daniel is a book of bible prophecy; It is a book about Kings and Kingdoms and powers. It is a book that demonstrates God's power in world history, world events and the world future.

The book talks about the Kings that reigned in the time of Daniel. In fact Daniel served with distinction in the office of Prime Minister under five kings. This is a remarkable success story unique in the history of the world. It is a book about a young man *“who purposes in his heart to live for God”*.

But it doesn't stop there, it also deals with Kings who will reign in the end times. It is the Old testament counterpart of the book Revelation. It deals with issues from Daniel's day right through to the second coming of Christ.

Background:

A few generations earlier – the nations of Judah turned away from God. They backslid and followed other Gods. So, God judged them and allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer them. Ancient Babylon is modern day Iraq. They spent 70 years in captivity. Saddam Hussein when he was alive was quoted as saying he is the modern-day King Nebuchadnezzar.

A lot of the young men were taken back to Babylon. Daniel was one of them.

V4 *“young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans”*.

While we can't be certain, most scholars would put Daniel in his early teen years when he was taken to Babylon. So, we likely have a teenage boy who is abruptly removed from his hometown and taken to a foreign nation to serve an idolatrous king. Quite an overwhelming event for a boy of that age.

Daniel, however, wasn't shaken. Note; In chapter 1, v5 - 6 that King Nebuchadnezzar provided these Jewish captives with a daily supply of food, delicacies and wine. However, v8 ...

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he wouldn't defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore, he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” KJV

“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way”. NIV

1. Daniel wasn't willing to compromise his standards V3-8

Look at v8 again. It says that Daniel **purposed in his heart** not to eat the food Nebuchadnezzar had provided. The phrase "*that he might not defile himself,*" suggests that the food King Nebuchadnezzar was serving was a kind of food that the Jews weren't allowed to eat. Remember that the Jews had many dietary restrictions of foods that were declared unclean.

Here's my point: Daniel didn't have to uphold his Jewish standards. He was away from home, in a foreign idolatrous kingdom, without his parents around. He could've eaten the food without a second thought. A modern-day example of this would be if a child goes to a friend's house and they're playing a video game or watching a movie they aren't allowed to watch. Since parents aren't around, this child can easily get away with playing the game or watching the movie.

Same thing going on here. Daniel didn't have to maintain his Jewish standards. But he did. This teenager had had the advice of God – as well as integrity – so instilled in him, that it mattered to him whether or not he pleased God. It didn't matter what everyone around him was doing.

According to the text, only Daniel and his three friends refused the king's food. All the other captives ate whatever the king was offering. This didn't matter to Daniel. He wasn't going to compromise. This is an extremely important lesson for young people (and adults) to learn. Peer pressure is a powerful thing. It's been the cause of many young people losing their faith.

As followers of Christ we have to decide up front, just like Daniel, that we're not going to compromise our biblical principles no matter what. Just as Daniel **purposed in his heart**, we must also determine that whatever comes our way, we're not going to forfeit what we know is acceptable in the sight of God. Because the pressure will come.

Somehow, somehow you're going to get negatively influenced by your peers, co-workers, etc. But if pleasing God and living according to His will truly is important to you, as it was to Daniel, it'll be easier than you think. Decide right now that if something comes up you know is contrary to God's word, you aren't going to participate or condone that behaviour.

No one would argue that we live in a world of compromise. In fact, compromise is often touted as a virtue; it's diplomatic and reasonable. On the other hand, those who hold fast their integrity are viewed as difficult, stubborn, and unconcerned about the common good. You can understand how the world thinks that way, but as followers of Jesus we are called to be like Jesus, and not be conformed to the world.

In the world, we will be pressured to conform or adapt to that way of thinking. Whether it is a company, school, or some other institution, we will be asked to change our thinking. The pressure on Christians to change their thinking today comes from the print media, movies, and television as well as from teachers. The world will try to conform you into their mould. In other words, they will brainwash you. These Hebrew young teenagers were being brainwashed into a Babylonian worldview. There are different ways they try to do this. The same pattern employed by Nebuchadnezzar to draw Daniel and his friends away from the Lord is employed all around us today.

Note the four ways the world will use to try and pressure us to fit in to its **WORLDVIEW**:

a) Isolation

In the first place, they were isolated from the influences that would mould their lives and characters in the ways of the Lord. In Babylon, they were separated from the regular public worship of God, from the teaching of the Word of God, from the fellowship and wisdom of the people of God, and from the daily illustration of what it meant to be a citizen of Jerusalem.

b) Indoctrination

They were taught "the language and literature of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 1:4). That might seem harmless enough. After all, there is surely nothing wrong with God's people studying foreign literature. The aim of this course in Chaldean language and literature, however, was not merely academic. It was to retrain their minds to think as Babylonians rather than Israelites.

c) Compromise

The Jewish youngsters enrolled in Nebuchadnezzar's school were given "a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank" (Daniel 1:5). What Daniel perceived (correctly) in this food allotment was an effort to seduce him into the lifestyle of a Babylonian through the enjoyment of pleasures he had never before known. The good life that Daniel was offered was intended by the king to wean him away from the hard life to which God had called him. It would encourage him to focus on himself and on a life of enjoyment. It would lead him to think of himself no longer as a serving Israelite but as a distinguished courtier.

d) Confusion

The fourth element in the process of weaning these young men from the truth was the changing of their names. What is certain is that anything that reminded them of their origin and destiny was removed in the change of names given to these teenagers.

The culture changed their names to honour the culture's worship practices. The fact that we remember Daniel's Hebrew name and not his Babylonian name Belshazzar (meaning Bel is my judge) speaks to the ongoing influence of a name. You and I will be tested in a similar way. We need to know that that pressure is there. We will also receive pressure to change the way we live out our faith.

Ezekiel 14:14 Gives examples of three very righteous men, it includes Job, Noah, and Daniel.

We now fast forward several years. Nebuchadnezzar and his son have both died and a new king Darius is ruling the Babylonians.

2. God was THE centre of Daniel's life

We find out in the 6th chapter of Daniel that part of his daily routine was to kneel towards Jerusalem from his window and pray to God three times a day. Of course, this became the reason he was thrown into the lion's den. Everything in Daniel's life revolved around God.

We can learn from this example. Many have heard the analogy of a wheel on a bike. The case for far too many Christians is that instead of being the central part that all the spokes revolve around, God is merely another spoke. He's merely a part of their lives! Right along with sports, academics, hobbies, etc. This wasn't the case with Daniel, nor should it be the case for us in our Christian walk today. He should be the fundamental, most important part of our lives, with everything else revolving around Him.

Unfortunately, it's easy for God not to be on the forefront of our minds most of the day. Sometimes He simply enters our thoughts every now and then when we pray before a meal or when we sit through a church service. This isn't the way we should treat someone whose incredible grace saves us each and every day. We're supposed to love God with ALL of our hearts, souls, and minds. Don't push God back to just being a *part* of our lives. As shown in the life of Daniel, He needs to be the *central* part of our lives that everything else revolves around.

3. Daniel used his influence

As Christians living in Australia, we are influenced by so much every single day. Some negative and some positive. Consequently, we also have the power of influence. The people we come in contact with, whether it be our neighbours, the shop assistants or our family and friends, we all influence in some way.

Sadly, many Christians don't use their influence to further God's kingdom. Not all people are brought to Christ through direct evangelism. It starts with an example. If people can't tell Christians apart from the rest of the world, we're missing the first major step. Just look at Daniel. In chapter 2, after he interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the king proclaimed, "*Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings...*" (v47). How incredible that would be! Daniel used his influence to influence the king of Babylon! This isn't the only time however. In chapter 6, v25 through 27, after King Darius sees Daniel was spared from being eaten by the lions, he decrees that no one should worship anyone but the God of Daniel.

Again, Daniel used his influence in an extremely positive and powerful way. While we as Christians today may never be able to have influence in changing laws like Daniel did, our influence can still be used for God's glory.

4. Daniel didn't waver when hardships arose

Most people who know the story of Daniel know the reason he was thrown into the lion's den. The other administrators working under King Darius were exceedingly jealous of the king's favouritism towards Daniel as well as his renowned success as governor (6: 3-4). So, they tried to find something they could charge Daniel with, either in his ruling skills or his personal life that would diminish his influence with the king. But according to v4 of chapter 6, they couldn't find any error or fault in Daniel because he was faithful.

So, these satraps and governors trick the king into signing a law basically forbidding anyone in the kingdom to worship anyone as God, besides Darius. Chapter 6 of Daniel, v10 reads, *"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."*

It wasn't like Daniel wasn't aware of the new decree. He was completely aware, but that didn't matter to him. Again, pleasing God was the most important thing to him. This is an example of political hardship, but the Bible makes it crystal clear that if we're following Christ the way we should, we are going to suffer persecution (John 15:20). It could be political; it could be personal. Either way, it's crucial that we don't succumb or yield to the enemy's advances. We're to put on the whole armour of God so that we'll be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16). Just like Daniel, our first priority should be whether or not we're serving and honouring God.

There are many lessons we can learn from the life of Daniel that go far beyond him being thrown into a lion's den. He was a faithful servant of God who didn't waver or compromise when hardships arose. He put God first and foremost in his life and he was blessed for it. We can apply many of Daniel's principles to our lives today.

If you've fallen into a pattern of compromise, confess it as a sin to the Lord. Repent and look at Daniel as an example of unwavering integrity. Maybe you have experienced a crushing life blow. The pain may be overwhelming. But you don't have to stay in that place of depression and pain. God has a purpose and a plan for your life. Go to Him in prayer and purpose in your heart to live purposefully, with righteous action, in constant communion with God. You will be amazed at what will unfold before you.

Next time you hear the name Daniel; I encourage you to reflect on his continuous examples of faithful service towards God rather than just to the picture of a guy sitting with lions!

Prayer.