

DANIEL - LESSONS ON HOW TO ABIDE IN CHRIST FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT SAINT

Studies in Daniel 1, 3, and 6 - Part two - Sunday, July 20th, 2014, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1744
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KEEPING YOUR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY IN A DARK WORLD (continued)

Daniel 1:1-8 - “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [2] And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. [3] Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, [4] youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. [5] The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. [6] Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. [7] And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. [8] But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.”

Last week, under our third teaching point I began listing the various ways Nebuchadnezzar began **undoing** the work of God in Daniel. He was taken into captivity at age fifteen. And he was being groomed for service in a culture opposed to his faith in his God. Today we continue unfolding these tactics. Continuing with last week’s numbering, this is the third sub-point of teaching point number three (so it’s **3c**):

Point **3a** was Nebuchadnezzar first **isolated these young men from the influence of their previous convictions**. He takes them **away** from Jerusalem. Before any else can be **formed** in these young lives he **removes the sources of nourishment in their previous convictions**. Point **3b** was Nebuchadnezzar captured their minds with the teachers and values of the Chaldeans. He makes the values and ideas of Babylon seem more realistic than their Jewish background. He makes all they had been raised in seem irrelevant.

- c) **Third, Nebuchadnezzar fills their lives with the pleasures of his new kingdom - Daniel 1:5** - “The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.”

In other words, they weren’t being treated like **slaves**, they were being groomed like **princes**. They ate the king’s food. They drank the king’s wine. They learned from the best educators that could be had in the whole land.

There are different ways of **numbing the edge of God’s call on a life**. Nothing is as effective at turning the heart away from the Lord as a full plate of this world’s goods. **Distraction** is far more effective than **persecution**. That’s because **persecuted people are forced either to consciously renounce their faith, or defend it and face the consequences**. But, either way, the issue of **choosing their side** is shoved in their face - whether they like it or not. That’s what persecution always does.

Distorted people are never forced to consciously choose anything. Life for most North American believers just drifts by quite comfortably. And that is the greatest danger of all. The most effective ploy of the spirit of our age and its manifestation in our culture through the media is to make Christian convictions appear unnecessary and meaninglessly restrictive.

If you're tortured for your faith, you know if you give in and you know if you stand strong. The persecution itself ***sharpens your edge.*** If you're ***lulled asleep*** by the attractions of the world, you just lose by default without thinking about it or knowing when the battle was lost.

That's why, in the Scriptures, when people are ***seduced by the pleasures of the world around them - when they've grown blind spiritually - they don't know it:***

Revelation 3:14-20 - "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. [15] "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. [17] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, ***not realizing*** that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. [19] Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." [20] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

The enemy's plan is to turn all my attention ***inward and downward by fixing the bulk of your attention on the satisfying of my immediate desires.*** The plan is to make these all-consuming. All the delicacies are tailored and packaged to set my love on the present attractions of the world. Just like Daniel and his friends, the plan is to take our eyes off of what we've been called from and what we've been called to in mission and service. The plan is to make your calling in Christ blurry and distant.

Just on the side, this issue, more than anything else I know, goes directly to answering the age old question, ***"If God is good and loving, why does He allow so much pain and suffering in this world? Why are there hurricanes and earth quakes that sweep away the innocent? Why do babies die?"***

Theologians and philosophers try hard to come to terms with those questions. Of course, the fall of man has much to do with those kinds of events in this world. Also, man himself, in his sin and wickedness, causes so much suffering in this world. We blame too much on God.

But neither of those reasons goes to the heart of the issue. The real, and frequently forgotten point is this - ***it's because God is good and loving that terrible things are allowed to come into our lives.*** But His is a ***long-range goodness and love.*** Because God is a good and loving Father, He refuses to allow His children to live with the delusion that this is heaven yet. Pleasure makes us earthbound. It takes away our desire for His new creation and the kingdom yet to come.

And then a loved one goes to be with the Lord - perhaps very unexpectedly. And I've heard people say, ***"I thought I had everything I needed for my happiness and fulfillment. Now God's showing me how lightly I must hold everything in this world! It's all so temporary and slippery. How foolish it is to live for this world!"***

Fallen nature being what it is, ***nothing makes us remember our Scriptural status of pilgrims and strangers in this world like the removal of earthly comfort.*** And God loves us enough to occasionally do that.

So Nebuchadnezzar spreads the table in every way for these young men to make them forget they ever were happy back in Judah. ***And*** he spreads Babylon's table to make them forget they might have a ***ministry and calling to serve the Lord even while in Babylon.***

Your ***calling*** and your ***purpose.*** Both are more easily snuffed out in the lap of abundance. Never forget it.

- d) **Fourth, Nebuchadnezzar changed their names - Daniel 1:6-7 - "Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. [7] And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego."**

Most of us never consider the significance of these name changes. They're full of Babylonian intent. "***Daniel***" means "***The LORD is Judge.***" This is changed to "***Belteshazzar,***" which means, "***Baal's Prince***" "***Hannaniah***" means "***The LORD is gracious.***" This is changed to "***Shadrach,***" which means, "***Great is Aku***" (a Babylonian God). "***Mishael***" means "***Who is like the LORD?***" This is changed to "***Meshach,***" which means, "***Who is like Aku?***" (Babylonian God). And "***Azariah***" means "***The LORD is my helper?***" This is changed to "***Abednego,***" which means, "***The servant of Nebo***" (son of Baal).

Without being overly dramatic, if there was ever a picture of how this world desires to take every person who names the Name of Jesus, ***and especially young people like Daniel*** - fourteen and fifteen years of age - who come out of a family and a church that labors to establish and affirm your identity in Christ - all that you have been given and all you have been called to in Christ - ***this is exactly the battle for your heart and mind every day!***

Never forget that ***this world is ruled by a real devil and is energetic and creative to both undo and remake you in its own image.*** Your future is up for grabs, depending on your awareness of this battle and your resistance to the unquestioned values and ways of living and thinking in the world around you.

Let's just consider Daniel and his name change as one example of what I'm talking about:

"Daniel" - "God is Judge." Now here's Daniel, trying to "sing the Lord's Song in a strange land." What keeps him strong when all sorts of other people caved in to the Chaldean system's pressure? Even after they changed his name, he remembered and held on to what he was called by his parents. There's such an irony to his name in the middle of his circumstances. ***Why were the Jews in this mess in Babylon anyway?*** Well, they were being ***judged by God.*** They didn't think that this judgement would ever come. But God was true to His Word and character.

I wonder how many times Daniel, being human like the rest of us, was tempted to turn allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and the powers and gods of Babylon. I wonder how many times he thought of his name and remembered, "***God is judge.***"

I wonder how many times he remembered not only that the Jews were being judged for a season, but that God was now requiring him to remain true to God and not waiver in faith

and devotion. I wonder how many times that truth helped him keep the big picture and remember his vow to the Lord - the true judge of all the earth.

4) HOW DANIEL KEPT HIS LIFE PURE AND DEVOTED TO THE LORD

Daniel 1:8 - “But Daniel *resolved* that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.”

There is nothing in the text to suggest that there was something in the nature of the king's food itself that would have been defiling for Daniel to eat. There is nothing in the text that indicates that this was food offered to idols. There is nothing in the text to indicate that wine was against Daniel's religion.

That's not what this passage is about. The best interpretation, just on the plain face of the passage, is that **Daniel knew what the king was up to**. He knew they were being buttered up. He saw the **plan** behind the **food**.

This is important. Daniel's wise probing goes far beyond the shallow “**why can't I do this - where does the Bible say this is a sin?**” reasoning so common in the church today.

Listen, we should be growing up in Christ. It's not that every single thing in this world is going to send you to hell. I can't tell you what shows and what downloads and what movies are allowed and which ones aren't. I can't tell you which friends are holy and which parties you can or can't go to. I can't tell you which deals are ethical and which ones will just whittle your soul away with compromise.

And the church shouldn't **have** to tell you. But I **can** tell you what the spirit of this age is up to. I can tell you his plan for your own self-destruction. And you should live every minute of every day thinking about that.

And it's right at this point that I want to wrap up this message. Daniel's example **spotlights two footholds to spiritual purity in a dirty environment**:

- a) **Take the first opportunity that comes to make your stand for Christ known.** It will always be difficult to do so. The world lives to intimidate expressions of Christian commitment.

But here's the important point. **It only gets harder to make your stand visible the longer you wait.** If you sit silently through two or three situations where you really should have spoken up, then, when you **finally do** speak up, you know you have to justify **why you weren't faithful enough to the Lord to speak up earlier.**

In other words, speak up right away and they know you're a Christian. Immediately give yourself something to live up to. Speak up two or three opportunities later and everyone will know you're a Christian who is afraid to let his flag show. And nobody respects a person like that.

- b) **Plan now how you will respond in future compromising situations.** Notice the wording of that eighth verse - “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself...” The KJV says that “**Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...**”

Either way, the message is the same. Daniel was wise enough to know that he was not

going to leave his commitment to the Lord vulnerable to a spur-of-the-moment decision. He had understanding, ***not only of what the king was up to, but what he himself was going to do in response.***

“Dare to be a Daniel (“Daniel” - “God is Judge” - ***remember to Whom you ultimately answer***)

Dare to stand alone (***know your calling and refuse to be intimidated***)

Dare to have a purpose firm (“**Daniel purposed in his heart**” - Have a planned response to compromising situations)

And dare to make it known.” (**Take the *first opportunity* to fly your flag and make your stand known**)

It's a pretty good little song after all. Line by line, it will keep you clean until Jesus comes again.