

## Compromise

Message #2 in the series "Daniel – More than a Lion's Den"

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As we prepare for God's word, would you join your hearts with me as we go before the Lord in prayer?

*Gracious Lord, open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us, Lord,*

*what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Father, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*



I don't know about you, but the images on the news this past week of what's going on in the Ukraine has really challenged me. Seeing the images of individuals, especially women and children marching, marching, marching out of their homeland away from their homes, especially homes that had been destroyed homes all of the things that were at one point important to them. Everything that they knew, everything that they valued. Gone. There was one individual, a young man who was being interviewed, his English was actually quite good, and he was describing everything that had happened to their family. And he helped his mother and grandmother and siblings onto a van to be transported away and said to the camera, "I'm staying, I'm staying to help fight." And the reporter asked him, "Can't you go back home?" And he said, "My home is destroyed."

Living as an exile, living as a refugee, even within your own home country, has become now the new normal for this group of individuals. Our sisters and brothers, we have Christian family all over this globe, both in Russia and in Ukraine. This is no longer something that we can simply push aside and ignore. There is a clear picture that God wants us to unite and prayer for our brothers and sisters. The reality is that we are called to be a people who live in exile. What we learned last week as we began the series on the Book of Daniel is that the Old Testament pictures that whole concept of exile as a negative thing. The Babylonian captivity that is the historical context for the Book of Daniel and the Book of Jeremiah. That historical context tells us that exile was bad being uprooted from everything that they knew. By the time we get to the New Testament, especially when we reflect on the words of First Peter and the words of the Apostle Paul, we hear that we, as Christians need to see ourselves as exiles. That in reality, regardless of whether in today's language, whether you are a Democrat or Republican, whether you live in the United States or in the Ukraine or in the Russian communities or Europe or Africa or wherever it is that you live, you are living within Babylon. That's what the New Testament wants to portray. We are living as aliens in a foreign land, and that is a good thing.

What the Bible, especially the New Testament, portrays over and over again that becomes even more relevant for today's world is that we are to be exiles. Our citizenship is not of this world. But if a kingdom that surpasses this world, that in fact we are to live within the culture of this world because we are called to be ambassadors of hope and new life and of forgiveness and of grace, of the message of the gospel that is critical for us in our world to not only represent but to invite others into. That's the testimony of the New Testament scriptures and has been for the last two millennia. Why is that important for us? We in our culture, in America and also in our culture globally, we are experiencing a culture shift, as we discovered last week that shift feels negative. It feels like the shift is

moving away from everything that we value within the Christian faith. But the good news is that's not strange to history. That is the environment within which the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter and the Apostle John and many, many other early Christians were living in when the gospel was taking root and growing. And guess what? That gospel and its impact now resides in the palm of our hands and our generation. And what we learned last week is that culture shifts when people act differently than the way they used to. When people act differently.

So, are we as church people acting differently than the way we used to? Are we as followers of Jesus acting differently than those who are not followers of Jesus? That is the question. And what we are committed to doing in this series on Daniel is to learn the way of the exile that it is actually possible for us to not only survive in Babylon, but to thrive because we are choosing to live faithfully in following Jesus, taking up the mantle of our job, regardless of what we see happening around us. The context is irrelevant because the context is expected. People who are not followers of Jesus do not have the same values as those who are followers of Jesus. That's why we're to be light in the midst of darkness. So how do we do that? That's what we're launching into starting today. As we open up the scriptures of the Book of Daniel, we will discover something very important. And I have to really check myself on something I shared last week, somewhat humorously. I have to admit that I was wrong. I know it's hard to believe, right? I'm human, after all. I shared with you last week that the Book of Daniel is really a story about four young men. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I need to clarify. Really, the book of Daniel is not about these four young men. Daniel was a book about God, and very specifically, it's a book about the sovereignty of God. Why is that important? Because the entire the entire book of Daniel in modern language has one main lesson, and it's a very important lesson for us for today.

Here it is. God will not share his glory with anyone or anything. God will not share his glory with anyone or anything. Guess what? This is the theme not just to the Book of Daniel, but the entire Bible. The entire Bible is an invitation for us to draw into the reality that God is God, and we are not, hold on to your seats, I know that's a challenge for many in our world today, God is God, and we are not. And so repeatedly in the Book of Daniel using the contexts and the storylines of four young men, we see that testimony played out. God will not share His glory with anyone or anything. And so, as we go into the pages of this incredibly wonderful and powerful book in our Bible, I want you to hear that as the ultimate thread going through weaving itself through every facet of these stories. It's an invitation to not only see God as God and us humanity as not being God, but an invitation for us to trust this God. Because at no point will anything happen that is apart from God's sovereignty.

At no point, I think God is not up there going, "Oh, I didn't see that coming. Hey, Michael, did you see what they did? Oh my gosh, that was a total shock for me." No, God. God is not surprised. He is not surprised by what's happening in our global world right now. He is not surprised. And even in this situation, we need to change our perspective. What is the lesson? God will not share His glory with anyone. So, we launch into Daniel Chapter One. I invite you to use your Bible follow along. You may have a different translation, but together, I think we will hear the message that God has for us. If you're following along on following us online, I invite you to turn to your Bible or Bible app as well. Let's let's turn our hearts to what it is that God is teaching us. I'm going to go through pretty much the entire chapter. Some words are some important takeaways for us. And then I'm going to pull it all together and give us a very important application. An application process that's going to carry us through this entire series. We jump into Chapter One Verse One. This is what the word of the Lord says,

**"In the third year of the reign of the Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." [Daniel 1:1 NIV].**

Let me pause there and just tell you that, like any good book, that first opening sentence really sets the stage. Anybody here, a lover of literature? I love a good book. Right? That's what this is. It's launching and drawing the reader in. You know, sometimes we don't necessarily get what that first sentence is really all about, whether we read from the Bible or from a novel. That first sentence is actually setting the stage here. And what it's telling us is it's giving us a historical context. That historical context, got to tell you, among some Bible scholars is hard to date because there's always a few Bible scholars that say, "Well, it couldn't have been written here, there's such and such happening here, and there's such..." you need to know that when you read from the Old Testament, most not all, but most of these books were not written as history books. They were written to tell history from a theological or spiritual or lesson-oriented place, not necessarily from an historical accuracy. But it's pretty darn close if you ask me. And what this first sentence is telling us, whether you realize it or not, is that this occurs roughly around 605 B.C., so roughly 600 years before the birth of Jesus. That's when all of this is playing out. Why is that going to be important? Hold on. By the end of the chapter, I will tell you why. 605 B.C.

**"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." [Daniel 1:1-2 NIV].**

This is so precious writing. So basically, what's happening here is Nebuchadnezzar, who's the king of Babylon, is coming into Jerusalem, and he basically ransacked the temple in Jerusalem and takes some really critical, good, good elements of worship from that temple. It would be the equivalent of stealing all of the stuff on our communion table, plus anything else that was of value in the sanctuary. And he takes it to Babylonia and puts it into the temple of his gods, right? That's the equivalent back then of that king saying, "Haha my God is bigger than your God." That's what he's doing. This is an act, of not only arrogance, but it's an act of narcissism. Keep that in mind. The other thing about this that's really important is notice the phrase the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. At no point, from the very beginning of Daniel, do we get the sense that God is not in control of this. This act of invasion was done by God. At least that's what it says. Do you hear that? At no point does God step off God's throne. All right. Let's keep reading verse three.

**"The king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility - young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace." [Daniel 1:3-4 NIV].**

This was, by the way, the standard that our local Pastor Parish Relations Committee used in selecting our pastors. Right? Just say or probably every pastor other than me. So, what's really important here, the capture is that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, which we'll meet officially in just another couple of verses, are privileged. They're privileged. You know these guys come from wealthy royal families. This is an important thread to hold on to when we're going into this study. They are privileged kids. Something else that you need to know, that's really important that I find fascinating here, from what the biblical scholars were able to track, Daniel, at least, because we have more information about Daniel through other historical records, Daniel was born roughly 15 years prior to this moment.

So, Daniel and potentially his other friends are teenagers, roughly about 15, 16 years of age, who says the young people cannot lead us? Hmm. All right. So, they are clearly qualified in physical and mental capacities. Last sentence he, the chief of his court officials, was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. Verse five,

**"The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service." [Daniel 1:5 NIV].**

What do we call that? We call that assimilation. You know, there are two primary ways for higher competitive, narcissistic kings to enslave other people that they capture from other lands. One is to beat the crap out of them and make them submit in whatever possible destructive way. The other way is to entice them. Nebuchadnezzar is enticing these four guys and all of the other compatriots that they have brought into captivity, great specimens of people, and he is luring them in by laying before them everything that is palatable and good. They get to eat the food from the king's table. You know, the phrase using a carrot instead of a stick? That's what he's doing. He's trying to assimilate them in a very unique way. But it doesn't stop there. Verse six,

**"Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego." [Daniel 1:6-8 NIV].**

Why is that important? OK. In Hebrew, Daniel literally translates as God is my judge. They change his name to Belteshazzar. Azariah literally in Hebrew means Yah or that's the abbreviated form of Yahweh, the name of God. In Hebrew, Yahweh is my help. They changed his name to Abednego. Hananiah, which means Yah or Yahweh, has been gracious. They changed to Shadrach and Mishael, which literally in Hebrew, means who is what God is. They change his name to Meshach. So, all of these guys, their names in Hebrew, have something to do with the sovereignty of God Almighty. And what the Babylonian court official does is he changes their names, renames them after the gods of Babylon. Once again trying to say, in this assimilation process, "our gods are supplanting yours. You are now called something else."

When you read the history, the horrible history of what white people did to black people in slavery, you will see that many times new white owners forced black slaves to take on new names. They were breaking spirits. This part of assimilation is very important. Throughout the story of Daniel, these names get interchanged because the culture was very relevant. But then there's verse eight. Verse eight says,

**"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." [Daniel 1:8 NIV].**

Three words that set the course for the entire book of Daniel, "but Daniel resolved." He's 15. Keep that in mind. He resolved. I want you to notice something that is especially relevant for our day today. The word resolve is not the word rebel. What is the difference? Rebellion is actually a reaction to someone else's agenda. When we rebel, we are actually, whether we realize it or not, we are giving authority to someone or something else to determine our emotional response. When we rebel, somebody else is still in charge, no matter how much we try to figure out that we're the ones who are calling the shots. Rebellion still acknowledges that somebody else has power over us. But when we resolve, resolve is

about self-definition. That in spite of or because of we're in the midst of our circumstances, we are choosing to live differently.

Notice, Daniel, he resolves, he defines himself and then within his culture. He asks permission to not eat the food that is presented to them. What's that mean for us? A life of faithfulness has built one act of obedience at a time. And what Daniel teaches us that is so incredibly important for us today, is that you can change behavior without ever changing a person's heart, but without changing a person's heart, you never get true loyalty. So critical for us today to remember where your heart is, is more important than where your body is. Verse nine,

**"Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel "I'm afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." [Daniel 1:9-10 NIV]**

"Daniel then said to the guard --" now there's a different person involved. He couldn't get his permission from the high court official, so now he's going a step down.

**"Daniel then said to the guard who the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So, he agreed to this and tested them for ten days." AT the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So, the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. [Daniel 1:11-16 NIV].**

I just want to go on record as saying, this is not justification to make your kids eat their vegetables, and if you're expecting that you're going to end up looking healthier and more suave just because you eat only vegetables, that ain't a diet that's gonna work. This is a story about God's intervention, not about what they ate, right? Story continues...

**"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds." [Daniels 1:17 NIV].**

That's setting the stage, foreshadowing what's coming in the rest of the book.

**"At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. [Daniel 1:18-19 NIV].**

What does that mean? They started at 15 years of age, now, three years have passed. It is now 18-ish years of age when these young boys are now in the king's service. Verse 20...

**"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom." [Daniel 1:19 NIV].**

Ten times. This is the story of God. You getting the theme? God is doing this in spite of their circumstances of exile. Verse 21 and here it is...

**"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." [Daniel 1:21 NIV].**

What does that mean? Here's what it means. We start in 605. B.C. with Nebuchadnezzar. The empire is Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar dies. His son, Belshazzar steps into the throne. Then Babylon is conquered by the Medes and Persians. "Darius" (in quotations primarily because Bible scholars and historians can't figure out who that actually represents) there is a Dariusz, but he comes later on. This is a leader that probably is building a bridge until Cyrus and the Persian Empire conquers all of that region. Guess what, that means that Daniel was in captivity for 69 years because the reference here, the first year of King Cyrus is 536 B.C. He's in leadership for 69 years.

God used him, and what he had to face was the challenge that we all face. It's the challenge of compromise, namely, are we going to start looking like our host captors in Babylon and lose our identity as followers of God? We have that same question before us today. Are we going to become so absorbed in what Babylon is in our culture that we forget who we are in Christ? Culture shifts when we act differently than the way we used to. So, if in fact a life of faithfulness is built one act of obedience at a time, how will we live differently as followers of Jesus? We have to do what Daniel did. Daniel took on a new name. Daniel took on a few other things, he gave up his home. He's living in a totally different culture. But at no point did he change his heart. You can change the circumstances and never lose who you are. Daniel resolved. What do we resolve? What's your non-negotiable? What's your non-negotiable?

Will you pray with me?

*God, we thank You. We thank You for the gift of Daniel and for the story that that reminds us that You are in charge, that You are Sovereign, that everything that we're going through actually is an opportunity for our lives to point people to You. Lord, where we're scared or anxious doesn't mean that we don't fear our circumstances, but in the midst of our culture, Lord, help us to choose to resolve, to not lose our identity in Jesus. Thank You for what you're doing in us and through us as we pray in Jesus' name. All God's people said Amen.*