



October 14, 2007

Daniel and the Covenant

Over the last six weeks we took a journey through righteous living. It was and is a tough journey because the Bible is very clear about how we are to live. The standards are high and it is hard to achieve. Even Paul himself expresses this in Romans 7:19 when he says, "For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do this I keep doing." Paul had a hard time but we see that he becomes a pillar of faith and we see him transform by the power of God into a mighty missionary. I would have to say that it is stories or histories of people like Paul that most Christians love to hear from the Bible. We love to hear the accounts of how the patriarchs, prophets and apostles lived their lives. It is an inspiration to see these normal living extraordinary lives. Their lives give us hope that we too can be like them. Their lives are also an example of how we are to be. So today we begin another journey a journey that give us a view of some of God's servants in action. We will see their trials; their triumphs and we will see what motivated them to be the examples that they are for us today.

Our first journey will take us to Daniel. In our Old Testament reading this morning we saw that Daniel was taken into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was taken from Jerusalem, as a young man now a young man would be a teenager. He was taken because he was of noble birth and was handsome, smart, able to learn, strong and "qualified to serve in the king's palace." He was taken to Babylon, which is modern day Iraq where we read, "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." A teenager, who's country has been defeated, his parents probably killed, is taken away and forced to go to school in a

foreign country, to serve the victorious king and on top of that he is given a different diet to eat. This is Daniel's trial. And these are not the makings of good relationships or a happy story with a happy ending. I questioned our youth about how they would feel in this situation and I heard things like, angry, resentful, filled with revenge. How does Daniel react what's his answer to this trial?

We see in Daniel 1:8, "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine." Why? Well there are four reasons. First of all the food was contaminated and that its first portion or tithe had been offered to the Babylonian pagan Gods. Secondly, a portion of or tithe of the wine had also been poured out on the pagan altars. Thirdly the meat was from animals that were considered unclean by the laws of Moses. And fourthly the animals that were clean were not prepared in a kosher manner and were therefore unclean too. Now when I shared this little bit of information with our youth and also shared with them Nebuchadnezzar's pensioned for torturing and killing those who didn't follow his commands and asked what they would do their response was quite predictable "BBQ is actually pretty good Pastor Duerr, pork fajitas aren't too bad." In other words "I would eat instead of being killed." Yet Daniel resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine. Why did he do this?

Our first key is in the word defile. An angry individual may decide not to go along with his captors and this would be totally expected its not unusual to be defiant but when it says defile Daniel is making this resolution because to eat the foods would be offensive to God and it would make him, Daniel, unclean in God's eyes. Daniel's decision is strictly based on his religious convictions this is made apparent by the next half of the verse, "And he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way." There is no defiance if you are asking for permission.

The second key is in his motivation what motivated Daniel to take such a strong stand in the face of such terrible and severe consequences? The answer is quite simple he was a child of the covenant. The covenant you might ask? Yes, that two-way promise that began in Genesis between God and Abraham and Abraham's offspring as outlined in chapter 17. God told Abraham in Genesis 17:1, "Walk before me and be blameless." This was what Abraham was to do for his half of the covenant. God's part of the covenant was in 17:7, "I will be your God." Being Abraham's God meant that god would bless him, make him the father of many nations, give him

the promised land, give him a son and the savior would come from his family tree. And this didn't just apply to Abraham the covenant applied to all of his offspring as long as they would abide by the covenant. Jeremiah summed it up this way, "I will be their God and they will be my people", Jeremiah 31:33. This exact same covenant is repeated the exact same way in Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Zachariah 8:8. Moses records this covenant in a little bit of a different way in Leviticus 11:44, 45, 19:2 and 20:26 Moses writes it like this, "Be holy because I am holy." Holy means set apart, devoted. God is saying set yourself apart devote yourself to me and I will set apart, devote myself to you.

Daniel knew he was to be totally devoted to God. He knew that Joshua records in 24:19, "God is a holy God a jealous God." He knew God devoted Himself to His people as a groom does to his bride as a result God is not willing to share His people with anyone or anything else just as a husband won't share his wife. This is what is meant by jealous. He is jealous of our love and devotion He does not want to share it we are His. Daniel made the commitment knowing God would make it back to him and God did. Daniel triumphed. He was allowed to eat a kosher diet and at the end of three years was found to be ten times better than all the other students as well as all his teachers. It's a great story a difficult trial, outstanding motivation, awesome triumph but does it really apply to us today? Absolutely.

I'd like you to consider three New Testament Bible verses Romans 12:1 tells us that we are, "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God." We're supposed to give ourselves and separate ourselves, devote ourselves, consecrate ourselves to God. 1 Corinthians 1:2, "We are called to be holy." You might be getting the hint we too are called to be holy or set apart, devoted, consecrated to God but in case there's any doubt I saved the best for last see if this sounds familiar this is from the New Testament. 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy because I am holy." How holy was God and how holy is God to us? Peter summed it up in John 6:69 today when he told Jesus that Jesus was "the Holy One of God." You see, in the New Testament God has made the first action totally in the covenant He says I'm your God I'm set apart, I'm devoted to you because I've given you my son. Just like the people of the Old Testament we live under a covenant he is our God and he's proved it we are His people. May God fill us with His Spirit so that we may be as devoted as Daniel and that we may live as children of the

covenant and set ourselves apart, devote ourselves, consecrate ourselves in all ways to God.