

Dare to Be a Daniel!

Daniel 1:8-21

A favorite and famous American hymn is the title of our sermon today. The song goes like this:

Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone!

Dare to have a purpose firm! Dare to make it known.

Daniel's stand doesn't happen later when he faces a lion's den, but begins here in chapter 1. Martin Luther wrote:

“The first chapter sets before us a fine example of the life of Daniel: how holy, how God-fearing he was, and what a great and courageous faith in God he had. In the midst of such wild and barbaric living, and the many dreadful aggravations that he had to have seen and heard daily in Babylon, he still remained firm and patient, having overcome everything in his heart. For this reason, soon afterwards, it follows that God shows such great mercy to him, at first honoring him spiritually with wisdom and understanding above all other people. And then God exalts him in the world, doing nothing but mighty and great miracles and works through Daniel. In doing this God shows us all how much He loves and values those who fear Him and trust in Him. With such a great example, He [heartily] calls us to the fear of God and faith in Christ Jesus.”

We studied last time the temptations Daniel and the three had to face and endure. We come today to their resolve, and to dare to be like them.

The more we look at this opening chapter, the more we are convinced this is not mere introductory material before coming to the good stuff in the rest of the book. If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom – then we have just such a good beginning right here. This is the ground-work of the great book of Daniel; this is the foundation without which the rest is out of balance.

This willingness to stand true and suffer no matter the consequences; this willingness to serve in this setting but not participate in sin; the gift of wisdom, the elevation of these young men to such a high post, the express gift of interpreting dreams and visions like a second Joseph arisen in Israel, and even the last verse indicating Daniel's prolonged service – these all set the table for everything else that follows!

See then how sometimes great things hinge on small matters, small decision, small commitments. What seems small – a test over food – demonstrates much deeper matters. It was our Jesus who said to His followers: *Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.'*

We see here then that what we said last time about their abstaining from food and wine is correct. Look over at 10:3 (read). This is not a purity matter, since wine was not forbidden to the Jews. This is not an idolatry matter, since even the vegetables were offered to the gods of Babylon, to Bel and Nebo. No, this is a matter of too close a fellowship in paganism, in worldliness, which went too far.

With this introduction, let's begin with Daniel's bold heart-commitment, as he set it in his heart (1:8), or purposed here within. He would not defile himself with such worldliness at the beginning here of his sojourn.

EJ Young notes the beautiful blend of steadfast devotion with courtesy and respect to authority. He is neither fanatical nor rude. Those are the marks of the ignorant and proud. Indeed, see her his excellent **kingdom living** – where the kingdom is not a matter of meat or drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Daniel is honest and polite to his heathen commander, and the commander, in turn, is forthright and frightened about the outcome if they appear unhealthier than the other youths being trained.

Here is Daniel's wisdom oozing out. He turns to this pagan man for help. This forms a pattern we can follow today. Avoiding worldliness does not mean leaving the world and unbelievers behind. There was a pastor who moved to a new neighborhood, who went to all of his neighbors, introduced himself as a Christian and a minister, and invited them to help him live for Christ. That if they ever saw him slipping, to come and speak to him!

I believe that the loss of the commander's head in verse 10) is not to be taken literally. We use figurative language like this to this day, saying "heads are gonna roll" of people being fired. But it does speak of the great responsibility on him and the troubles if the Israelites looked sick, or raggedy.

One also wonders what Daniel was thinking in recommending this test. Some believe he had a supernatural insight that this diet would work. But it seems better that this is actually a real test of their faith.

So Daniel heeds the warning of the commander, and then persuades them to test them for ten days. And what happens? The Lord wonderfully blessed the integrity of heart, respect to authority, and honor to God in all of this.

The authorities grant permission, and the four apply this unique diet, but it is the Lord ultimately who shows favor and blesses their efforts. The same God who sovereignly gave Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar back in verse 2, gives fatness to these men seeking to keep their robes of holiness and sanctification undefiled from the world.

Now it needs to be interjected that this is not an endorsement of vegetarianism. It is even further from how our Saddleback friends are taking it – as a diet to lose weight! Isn't this is diet to gain wait?!

As George Schwab puts it: “Daniel inspires great faith in great trials, great hope before great opposition, and great confidence when worldly wisdom counsels despair.” (Repeat)

After the ten day period, they are examined, and all is quite well. In fact they appear better and fatter than their fellows dining at the King's table. And this encourages the overseer to continue.

Then after verse 16, the Holy Spirit brings another addition – they are noted for their advancement in all forms of knowledge in writing and in wisdom. They had already been praised as showing intelligence in

every branch of wisdom and gifted with keen understanding and discernment – verse 4. This led them to Babylon University.

Here we see them excelling – taking their natural gifts and advantages – and making even more out of them. But note, once again three key words, pivotal to this chapter: “GOD GAVE THEM.”

They are steeped in all the forms of knowledge and understanding in the land. They are to serve the king in all his many pursuits. That nation is awash in astrology, superstitions and dark idolatries. The magicians and conjurers of verse 20 trade in the occult and Babylonian sorcery.

Here they not only learn these things well – through and through – but do so head and shoulders above their classmates. Not that they would be practitioners of the dark arts. But they would have to know them, understand them, in order to disarm and debunk them. There’s a lesson for us as well.

Then Daniel is contrasted with the three, and is given, not the prophetic gift of visions and dreams, but of interpreting them. Way back in Numbers 12, this is how the Lord described how He would reveal Himself to man, in dreams and visions. False prophets made similar claims to dreams and visions. Daniel is called a prophet in Mt. 24, but it seems better to see him a statesmen who had a prophetic gift.

Of course, it will not be long before Daniel is called on to use this gift in chapter 2, right? See how God gives us talents, not to be buried but given away.

This brings us at last then to their presentation to the King.

This is a momentous event, as they are brought in to be examined and considered for this high post and dignity. The king himself enters into conversation with all the candidates, and finds none like the four heroes of the faith. So they are chosen for personal service and begin their calling before the greatest throne in the world of that time.

Three other points are added:

1. In 20-21, tells us of the completeness of their wisdom and understanding. They are not mere specialists in some areas, but in all fields they are faithful and excellent.
2. Likewise, the superiority of their knowledge and understanding. Theirs is far above the other magi, or wise men, of the land. It does not seem necessary to take 10 times literally. We use the same hyperbole today – ‘The Cavaliers are 10 times better than the Warriors.’
3. Then, thirdly, see the long life of their service, especially in Daniel standing through at least three very different administrations – under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius – after Cyrus the Great takes over Babylon in 538.

What a marvelous beginning here then do we find in chapter one. This is a beginning of tall integrity, careful prudence, faithful diligence, rich reward, full usefulness, and high honor.

Let us conclude with some applications then to ourselves, as they touch on our stance as Christians, as believers, as followers of the Lord. Let us consider what Bob Fyall has pointed out in his commentary, ‘Daniel: A Tale of Two Cities.’

Consider **first** of all the Christian and the Lord

This chapter teaches us – for all of the twists and turns, the commitments and ambitions, the gifts, strengths, and self-denials –that first and foremost God’s place must be first in our lives, in both the great and the small affairs of life.

Three times – vv. 2, 9, and 17 – the Lord gave, God granted favor, God gave knowledge.

The Lord’s control over every square inch of your life, of our past, of your present, of your physical dimensions, to your mental sharpness, to when we were born, how we were raised, and all of the world we live in – is such an important feature of a true, robust, healthy Christian worldview.

Why? Because we are sanctify Him, His Name, sanctify the Holy One of Israel, above all this life, this world, this time.

What kind of a worldview would suffice which said the Lord was not in control in Babylon, in such sad times, in bondage and temptation?

Oh, let us all – especially you young people – bow the knee to King Jesus, and confess Him as Lord each and every day; He is your King, your Boss, your Master! Pray, “Lead me to follow you in every way!”

If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord AT all! You are not your own; and it is good that you are not so!

Secondly, after the Christian and the Lord, is the Christian and Knowledge.

We see the necessity of wisdom, of understanding, of knowledge, which only the Lord can give.

Here are the natural gifts of intelligence, and now added diligence in study and application, and even when the subject is not all that desirable. Would you like to study mythology? Do I need to apply this to you students who whine over some subject, like math or history?

On the one hand, let us say without reservation that learning is a sacred trust. We take it for granted in education-soaked America. But not everyone has this blessing. Christians above all should count it a privilege to sharpen our minds to know God's world.

On the other hand, God is the One who gives such gifts and blessings. He is a God of knowledge; a God of light and truth. There is no room for intellectual pride, then. Knowledge should humble us rather than puff us up, since it is a gift.

But of course the most important knowledge and learning is that of the Word of God. Daniel was given the interpretation of dreams and visions. What have you been given? You have the Holy Spirit, who illumines your mind to read and understand the finished vision of God – the Bible. The Scriptures are the true spectacles through which we can look and see ourselves, our God, and our world aright.

How blind we are without the Bible! And how blind we are even if we have the Bible open but our hearts are filled with earthly and sinful pursuits! Only the Spirit can shine forth the Word of God. "Love God with all your minds," says the Lord Jesus to you.

Thirdly, the Christian and Culture follows the Christian and the Lord and Knowledge.

This passage stands in stark contrast to what some believers have taught regarding the world. In order for us to serve *in* the world, and

not be *of* the world, we must understand the world to some adequate degree.

Yes, there is evil in the world that goes beyond the limits of our sanctified interest. There are things you should never be studying. And there are things unworthy of investigation, unless you are a policeman, maybe. There are studies of sin which are sinful.

But there is common grace in the world too. Not all in the world is good; and not all in culture is bad. Because not all is good, we must be on our guard against idols. And because not all is bad, we should know how to properly make the most out of this present age; to ‘plunder the Egyptians’ as Exodus 3 tells us.

These believers lived in Babylon, and made the most of it. You live in 21st Century America – make the most out of it!

Neither running *away from* the world, nor running entirely *with* the world, is a safe path. It is engaging the world, as the salt and the light, to which we all have been called. You are His witnesses, as those who were once of the world yourselves, and now are not so, but you are in it.

There is a battle to be engaged by every Christian, which begins in your very heart. What part of Babylon is there around you – against which you must take a stand? If we retreat, the enemy gains free ground, without a fight. If we press forward, with God’s blessing, we may be useful for the Lord, as these 4 young men were.

But remember – the outcome is in God’s hands. It turned out well for these men, but it does not always appear that way. You are to be faithful to what you have been given, regardless of the consequences.

Things could have turned out differently for these young Hebrew men. But the important thing is to be found faithful. Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of your Lord, **knowing** that your labors are not in vain for the Lord. God will reward, God will bless, either in this life or in the world to come.

Also, don't excuse yourself if you look at these men and say, 'I don't have their gifts, or opportunities, or advantages.' Really? You're going to say that? With the advantages you have in this paradise of America? But, so be it – let's say you feel little, small, and worthless. What does God say? He will judge you, not according to what you don't have, but what you do have. You have at least one talent, one gift. Don't bury it.

You do this, not in your own strength, your own wisdom, or with your own resources. God help you to look to Him; to believe Him, to hope in Him, and to trust upon Him wholeheartedly. God make you to shine in a dark world, to be as subtle as serpents in a dangerous world, and to be as harmless as doves in a sinful world. Amen.