

Tested and Found Faithful

Daniel 1:3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles,

4 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.

5 And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not 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.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 "Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants."

14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies.

16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

A little while ago, I went down to the Twin Lakes Church Planting Conference, and while I was there I had the pleasure of hearing Dr. David Wells, the author of several excellent books like *God in the Wasteland* and *No Place for Truth* speaking on the subject of reaching the unbelieving with the Gospel in our own age, and as he was doing that he unpacked some of the differences between our culture today, and the culture today and the culture of bygone years. It was a fascinating lecture, and one of the things that he noted that particularly struck me was that as a culture we have made a transition from wanting people who have *character*, to wanting people who have *personality*.

Now what does that mean? Well in years gone by the societal ideal that people were supposed to strive for was to be a man or woman of genuine character, a person of virtue, integrity, and faithfulness. So you wanted people who really were *honest* or *courageous* or *pure of heart*. What you were essentially looking for was people whose essential *character* was an embodiment of that which really was Good.

That isn't the case today. Today, the emphasis is on personality. Personality isn't so much about who you really are inside, but how you project. For instance, dynamic, magnetic, funny, exciting. That is the kind of person we want. So for instance, in a singles ad very few people say they are looking for someone *courageous and pure of heart* – instead they have “must be upbeat and fun with good sense of humor.”

Let me give you an example of what I mean, and understand that this example has nothing to do with party politics, having lived in Washington I've seen this on both sides of the aisle, this is just a more obvious example. In many senses Bill Clinton was the triumph of personality over character. Here you had a man, who almost everybody found charming, and witty and captivating, and funny. But in terms of genuine character, it just wasn't there. It was all image, but in a day and an age when image is everything that works. Well's quoted newsman Daniel Schorr on that point, “*in our business you have to be sincere, and if you can fake it, you've got it made.*”

You don't have to look to politics to see that principle in action, even in the church, far too often *personality trumps character*. I remember a few years ago being involved in a very sad case where a Pastor had obviously been guilty of multiple cases of infidelity, and yet a large part of the congregation *did not* want us to do anything about it. They kept pleading with us saying things like “**you don't understand how effective he is, how he attracts people.**”

I hope you can tell then, as we read this text what kind of person Daniel is. Because this story reinforces for us the critical importance of believers having genuine, steadfast, biblical character. And remember the place where character is tested and proved, isn't in easy circumstances, Christian image will suffice there, its in trial and adversity that the genuineness of a Christian is tested. If I can use Christ's example, anyone can build a house, the test of whether it is built on sand or whether it is built on solid rock comes when the flood breaks against it.

Now what is going on here? As we said last week Daniel and his friends, have been taken as captives at around the age of 14 to be intensively trained for three years to become members of the Babylonian civil service. During that time, they were treated extremely well. Nebuchadnezzar was no dummy, he knew that you get more flies with honey than vinegar, so they were treated like princes and even received the same food that came to the king's table.

Of course, that is where the problem lies. Daniel, unlike so many of his other countrymen, has determined in his heart to remain faithful to God. Daniel loved the Lord so much, that even if all other men forsook him and served idols, he would not. So he will not eat the king's food. Now the reason for that wasn't that the food wasn't Kosher, that it would have included the unclean animals prohibited in the Levitical law. If that was the problem, he could have at least drunk the wine. The reason was that all of that food and wine was offered to idols before it was drunk. Nothing could be eaten and drunk until it had been dedicated to the pagan gods, and those who then ate, were considered to be partaking in the worship of those deities. Daniel realized that, and therefore he resolved that there was no way he could eat food from that table.

So Daniel and his three friends go to the Eunuchs who were in charge and ask for permission to just eat fruits and vegetables, and to drink water. And back then, that was not considered health food, it was considered a peasant diet. Initially the stewards are hesitant to fulfill the request, after all they figure these young men are bound to look more and more unhealthy and pasty, and that the stewards will be the one's who get the blame and are punished, and possibly the comment "it'll be my head" in verse 10 literally means they'd get the chop. But God had been working in the hearts of the stewards and they thought very highly of Daniel.

Daniel then proposes a test, feed us salad for Ten Days and see what happens, they agree to that probably also figuring that it was long enough to see a difference, but short enough that none of the royal officials would spot it.

Now this is not a story about how to eat healthy, at the end of ten days they looked fitter and fatter because the Lord was with them in this time of trial, and it was His purpose that these four young men would be rewarded for their faithfulness – "those who honor Me I will honor" as the Lord puts it in 1 Sam. 2:30.

So they continue those three years on their simple diet, and the Lord not only prospers them physically, he blesses them with brilliance. I have seen that happen before, I have met a lot of smart men and I have met a lot of well-educated men, but I have met very few men who combine outstanding intelligence with learning and that most elusive of all qualities – wisdom, and in every case those men have been humble and pious Christians.

So at the end of their Babylonian University education, they are brought in for their final exam, and it's an oral examination before the king himself, and he found them to be not just better than the others, but 10X better even than the men who have been working for him for years.

Now I want to suggest 3 ways in which the example of Daniel and his friends teaches us how to have that genuine kind Biblical Christian character we should have.

1) ***The first way is to be scrupulous in living out your faith:*** A lot of fellow Jews in Babylon at the time, probably would have said of Daniel, *who does this guy think he is, putting on airs, being so precise in his religion!* Hey plenty of us have eaten from the king's table, it just makes sense to go with the flow, after all just eating a little food isn't a big deal, it's not like actually going to the temple and bowing down to an idol. What are you Daniel? Some kind of Old Testament Puritan?

A lot of people might call it *legalism* today, and yet it stemmed from a desire to honor the Lord and obey him even in the small things no matter what the cost. As Spurgeon put it, Daniel was simply determined that he was willing to **die but not deny**. And it is the universal experience of Christians that if we are consistently unfaithful and willing to compromise in the small things of the faith, we won't suddenly be faithful in the big things. As it turns out, it is *only* these the men who were unwilling to eat food sacrificed to idols in chapter 1 who were unwilling to bow down to an idol in chapter 3. Make a habit of compromise, and you'll be a compromiser to the end, make a habit of standing fast, and God will honor that commitment and enable you to stand against the wiles of the devil.

2) ***The second way is to be winsome and self-sacrificing in living out your faith:*** A lot of people manage to get the scrupulous part down, but they figure it's ok to be angry, rude, arrogant, and

demanding as they go about being scrupulous. We as Reformed folk can develop an angry siege mentality that is unchristlike and makes us brittle. Daniel is exactly the opposite, he is able to make his request because he already has a good reputation with the stewards, and when he does make it, he makes it as respectfully as possible. I like how E.J. Young put it: ***“Daniel exhibits himself as a true gentleman. He never yields in devotion to principle, but he does not permit devotion to principle to serve as a cloak for rudeness... he was a true hero of the faith.”***

Children, as we read through this book, I want you to hear how respectfully Daniel speaks, and how helpful he was and how he was a model citizen. We as Christians should be good citizens and good employees up until the very moment when we are asked to do something that goes against the commands of Christ. At that moment, we should immediately say I can't do that.

Notice also that Daniel is willing to deny himself to serve the Lord, he doesn't go to the Eunuch's and say "take away this Babylonian trash, and bring me some good Kosher food!" He says, we are willing to live on just vegetables and water. A lot of people wouldn't sacrifice a thing for the faith, in fact they are willing to sacrifice the faith because they think its what they have to do in order to get ahead in some worldly sense.

3) The final way is the most critical, ***you must depend upon Christ in living out your faith***: Daniel's success was not a result of Daniel's effort or natural ability, it was the result of his faith in God and in His promises including His promise of a redeemer. Again and again, we will see he and his friends praying, trusting in God, and depending upon the mercy of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, if you depend upon your own strength to live out your faith, you are going to find yourself constantly failing. Your confidence needs to be based on his blood and righteousness and not your own. It is only if your character is truly built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ that it will stand in the Storm. The qualities that make up a genuine Christian character are the outworkings of a genuine faith in Christ, and come from the work of the Holy Spirit in us. I cannot stress this point enough, that faith and dependence upon Christ and the means He has provided for building us up, alone will avail.