

Tempered By Trials

Sermon # 7

Daniel: Learning To Lean On God In A Crisis

Daniel 1, 2, 6

“Crisis gives notoriously little warning before it bursts into your life. It doesn’t call ten minutes before it arrives. It refuses to knock politely and wait for an invitation. More likely, it simply rams the door off its hinges and there it is. Unannounced, unexpected, unwelcome and unwilling to go away. Now... what do you do with it? Does it stagger you... or strengthen you? Does it ruin you... or refine you? Does it plunge you into despair ... or draw you closer to the Lord?.. Important questions. Important not just for you, but for others as well. The way you handle sudden crises has a lot to say about the reality of your faith in Jesus Christ. You may talk about faith but the way you move through stressful situations in your life reveals to every watching eye the actual fibre of your faith.” [Bruce Wilkerson & Larry Libby. Talk Thru Bible Personalities. (Walk Through the Bible Ministries, 1983) p. 145]

Daniel’s life was seemingly one crisis after another. We see this play out in his life from the time we are introduced to him as a teenager until well into his eighty. Daniel is a man whose life proves his faith.

First, In Crisis Daniel Chose Commitment

When trouble comes we react – sometimes with courage, sometimes in fear. Occasionally when the pressure is on we know instinctively what to do. At other times we flounder. But to a great extent our reaction has been determined before the pressure arrives. Daniel 1:8 is the key to understanding the character that Daniel exhibits. *“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.”* Underline the phrase *“he purposed in his heart.”* What we see displayed in Daniel life is the difference between beliefs and convictions. *“There is a vast difference between holding a belief and entering into a conviction. One is a matter of intellect and the other is a matter of the will. One says, “I am convinced.” The other says, “I am committed.” A man may argue for his beliefs, but he will die for his convictions.”* [Wilkerson & Libby. p. 150]

Let me tell you what will happen when you make a decision to stand for your convictions. First of all, it will be a hard decision. I promise; it will be hard. Do you know why? Because of peer pressure. Everyone else was eating the king’s food, drinking the king’s wine, and Daniel was willing to be different. That’s peer pressure, and folks you will experience it all of your life. But the other side of that is – when a man or woman takes a stand for his or her faith in Christ, people will sit up and notice. Many people may ridicule this “narrow-mindedness,” others will try to find fault. But all the same they will be watching and wondering.

The good news is that God will always honor that kind of decision. After ten days of eating that kind of food, those guys looked wonderful (1:20). They looked strong and healthy.

Daniel's decision was more than for health considerations, it was a spiritual commitment for Daniel, It was a commitment God honored in Daniel life. The decisions you make about the small matters of your life pay off great dividends in your future. The bad choices you make lead to miseries, but the correct and good and pure choices that you make lead to blessings. When you choose to stay pure—then God gives you the power to stay pure. But it's your choice. God says, *"You be faithful to me in the little choices of life, and I will honor you and I'll be faithful to you."*

In Crisis Daniel Chose Commitment and...

Secondly, In Crisis Daniel Chose Communion (Daniel 2)

In Daniel chapter two the king has a dream and he commands his Wise men to give him the interpretation, but they could not. The king tied their hands by refusing to tell them the content of the dream; he demanded that they tell what the dream was and what it meant. When they could not we read in chapter two and verses twelve and thirteen. *"For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. (13) So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them."* Uh-oh. You know what? Daniel and his friends were part of this group of wise men.

"It has been said that the true character of a person is revealed in time of crisis. Daniel faced a great crisis when the royal executioner stood at his door to carry out the decree of the king! The response of Daniel is an example of how God's children in any time should react to crisis. ... He is clearly shown as a man of sterling character who has learned how to trust God." [Donald Campbell. Daniel: God's Man In A Secular Society. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1988) p. 26]

· WHEN WE FACE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS WE NEED TO RELY ON GOD

You and I may face situations that we consider to be humanly impossible. That's what Daniel faced. That's what these Wise men faced. The king said, *"Tell me what I dreamed, tell me what it means."* They said, *"That's impossible."* And it was.

Now, what about you? You may be right now, going through an impossible crisis. It may be that the storm relates to your marriage, it may relate to your finances, it may relate to your health; but it does relate to some problems that you're going through, have been through, or are headed into, that seems totally impossible. You just need to know sometimes we do face impossible situations. Daniel did and we do. I want you to see what Jesus said in Mark 10:27. *"Jesus looked at them and he said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God.'" Do you realize that every time you see the word impossible you can say,*

“That is an opportunity for God to do something in me and through me that is humanly impossible.” That’s a great truth to remember, “Nothing is impossible with God, keep trusting him!”

In fact God may use difficult situations to force us to rely on Him alone. Because as long as you think you can handle that problem by yourself, as long as you think you can deal with that impossibility by yourself, you’re not going to call upon God. Sometimes we get in such desperate situations that we can’t get out of and it’s only when we depend utterly and totally on God that we find the victory.

In verse sixteen we read, *“So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation. (17) Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to ... his companions (18) that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”*

When Daniel faced this impossibility, he went to God and depended on God just like we need to do.

· WHEN YOU NEED WISDOM, PRAY!

That’s what Daniel did. They didn’t have his friends come together and have a strategy meeting. “Say let’s fabricate some story that’s feasible enough that the King will say, ‘That’s kind of what I dreamed about.’” No, he said, “Let’s pray.” He called his friends to pray with him. The best thing you can do when you face difficulty is to pray, and not only that, but get others to pray with you.

In James 1:5, it says, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.”* When you’re facing impossibility, the first thing you do is pray. Prayer shouldn’t be your last resort. You know what we do sometimes when we face a problem? We try to solve it and then when we can’t solve it, we say, *“I guess I’d better pray about it.”* That’s absolutely opposite of what we should do. When you face a problem, the first thing you do is pray then God gives you wisdom to know what to do about it.

The result was that we read in verse nineteen. *“Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.”* Now I want you to notice, before we go on. Daniel said, *“My prayers have been answered.”* Did you know what? It had not yet been proven that his prayer had been answered. That wasn’t going to happen until he stood before Nebuchadnezzar and said, *“Nebuchadnezzar, here’s the dream. Here’s the interpretation. Am I right?”* In other words, folks, he was acting on faith here when he was praising the Lord for the answer to prayer because he only had the assurance the prayer was going to be answered. He hasn’t seen evidence of it.

· WHEN GOD ANSWERS YOUR PRAYER DON'T FORGET TO PRAISE HIM.

Praying in faith always produces praise. That's what Daniel did. He prayed and when God gave him assurance of the answer, he started praising the Lord. Sometimes our prayers are nothing more than a shopping list that we lay before the Lord. "Lord, this is what I need: I need this, I need this, I also need that and this and this and that." And sometimes we don't even stop and thank him when he answers the prayers.

Prayer without praise is ingratitude. God always answers prayer. It may be yes, it may be no, it may be wait, but he always answers prayer. Now when you face a problem, are you going to pray about it or are you going to worry about it? Because if you pray about it, you can't worry about it and if you worry about it, you can't pray about it.

Look what the Bible says here in Philippians 4:6-7 from "The Message" paraphrase. *"Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It is wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."*

Daniel is perhaps 17 or 18 years old at the oldest when he stands before the most powerful man on earth, in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven. *"The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" (27) Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king."*

I want you to underline the first part of verse 28. Here it is: *"But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets..."* There it is. There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. *"... and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these."* In explaining the King's dream Daniel is going to predict the next 400 years of human history. But for now I want you us to see tonight is the king's response in verses forty-six and forty-seven. After Daniel tells the dream and interprets it, *"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. (47) The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret."* In other words God is the one who got the credit and the honor for what Daniel did.

In Crisis Daniel Chose Communion and...

Third, In Crisis Daniel Chose Consistency

(Daniel 6)

If there is any story from the book of Daniel that most people know it is the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Most of you know the story, so let's just read the highlights to review the details of this great story and then let's talk about its application for us as believers today. So turn with me to Daniel chapter six and verse one, *"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; (2) and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. (3) Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm."*

Daniel not only survived the fall of Babylon but quickly rose to a position of prominence. But Daniel's rise to power under Darius did not rest upon his remarkable accomplishments of the past. We are told Daniel *"distinguishing himself"* among the other officials of the King (v.3). I believe Darius recognized not only Daniel's wisdom but his integrity and faithfulness. Here was a man he could trust in a leadership position who would not cause him to *"suffer loss"* (v.2). Recognizing his unique abilities, Darius planned to promote Daniel, placing him in charge of all the commissioners and the satraps.

What made Daniel's such a success?

The first basis of his greatest is a positive outlook – Daniel is a wonderful example of the appeal to stay Positive – no matter what your age. The word translated *"excellent spirit"* means that even though he was an older man (in his eighties) he still had a positive pleasant attitude about life and his job.

The second basis of his greatest is his consistent integrity. The last part of verse four says that when his enemies tried to find fault with him *"... they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him."* He saw his job as a platform upon which he could demonstrate his faith in God. Twice in the King's words to Daniel he remarked how he served God with, *"whom you serve continually"* (vv. 16, 20).

No matter how hard they tried they just could not scrape up any dirt on Daniel. Yet it is those very character qualities that brought him into conflict with his contemporaries. Daniel's godliness was a threat to the other officials because they used their positions to enrich themselves at the king's expense. They knew that Daniel could not be bought nor could he be expected to be silent.

His enemies first scrutinized his professional life, then they scrutinized his personal life, and their conclusion was that no charge could be brought against Daniel unless it pertained to his religious life (v.5). Therefore, they are going to have to draw a conflict between the king and Daniel's religion.

The conspirators appealed to the King's ego and Darius fell for their scheme. They convinced the King to pass a law that elevated himself to the position of deity, and prayer was to be offered only to him (v. 7).

Anyone not offering prayer through the King is to be thrown to the lions.

So what is Daniel to do? Verse ten says, *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home."* While the king may not have thought through the implications of this new law, Daniel most certainly did. The law when passed in effect made Darius the mediator between all "gods" and men. In the privacy of his room Daniel no doubt struggled with all the excuses he could make to get around this new law.

What are the alternatives that Daniel faced when he learned of the new law? He could obey the law and take all his petitions to the king. He could appeal to the king to change the law. He could stop praying for 30 days. He could change his custom and pray elsewhere. Or He could pray silently as he went about his other duties and no one would be the wiser.

Verse ten continues by telling what Daniel did, *"... And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days."*

Perhaps the most important part of verse six is found in the last six words, *"... as was his custom since early days."* For Daniel prayer was a regular consistent habit. Daniel's prayer life was so consistent that his enemies could literally pick the time to gather outside his window to "catch him in prayer." Then as you very much suspect to happen verse eleven reveals, *"Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. (12) And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree.... "*

We should never be afraid to pray in public, but make sure you aren't doing it for show, and make sure it arises out of a faithful, consistent, private prayer life. That's what Daniel did. He went to his room and opened the windows toward Jerusalem, that is, he wasn't ashamed to be seen or heard praying. They were there, and they caught him praying. His prayer, even though it was against the law, made a powerful statement about his devotion to God.

The conspirators no doubt approached the king carefully with their news. It is never a good thing to accuse one of the king's inner circle. So they began by asking the king if the new law has gone into effect (v.12). He replied that indeed it was now law. Only at this point did the conspirators shock the king with the announcement that Daniel has been found violating this very law (v. 13)

The king at this point no doubt knew that he had been had. The king was distressed, I believe he was both angry at himself and those who had tricked him and he spent the remaining daylight hours trying to find a way to deliver Daniel from the lion's den. Reluctantly the king gave the order for Daniel to be brought and thrown into the lion's den (v. 16). But

before doing so Darius speaks words of encouragement to Daniel, "... *But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."*

The king's final words to Daniel are a commendation of his faithful and constant obedience to his God. Verse seventeen, "*Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.*" Now let's not underestimate the danger here. A male lion can grow to over ten feet in length, including his tail and can weigh over 500 pounds. A grown lion can kill a 150lb. gazelle with the swipe of one its paws and then jump a three foot fence with that gazelle in his mouth

In verse eighteen it appears that the King actually suffered more than Daniel, "*Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.*" Dawn brought an end to a long a fitful night for the king. Quickly he made his way to the lion's den, where in verse twenty he called out to Daniel, "... *Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (21) Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! (22) My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."*

It is with pleasure that the king orders Daniel removed from the lions den (v. 23) and with almost equal anger that the king gives the order that those who had maliciously accused Daniel, be thrown in turn into the lion's den (v. 24).

The end result was that the king issued a decree in verse twenty-six, "*I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. (27) He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*"

The decree, acknowledges that Daniel's God is a far greater king than he, and that God's kingdom is much greater than his earthly kingdom. He is the one who delivered Daniel. By inference, He is also the One to whom men should rightly address their petitions. Since God had done what the king could not do in delivering Daniel, God is the One whom men should worship and the One to whom their petitions in prayer should be made.

In Crisis Daniel Chose Commitment!

In Crisis Daniel Chose Communion!

In Crisis Daniel Chose Consistency!