

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

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Bible Text: Daniel 1:8
Preached on: Sunday, October 19, 2008

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Take your Bibles and turn back to the book of Daniel with me again, Daniel 1. In five days it's going to be Glen & Lisa heading down to the Caribbean and getting married on this, is it Friday? This Friday. Isn't that great? Praise the Lord. I think they ought to take a chaplain along down with them to the Caribbean. It's 20 degrees up here and they're going down to the Caribbean. God bless you. We're happy for you. Congratulations.

Daniel 1:8, the Bible says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart," actually, let's read this verse together, would you? Would you read it with me? Verse 8,

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

I entitled the message "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." Let's pray together.

Father, I ask that you would bless this message this morning. Lord, I yield myself anew to you, I present my body anew. I ask that you would fill me with your Spirit and that you would speak to our hearts and have your way in this message. In Jesus' name. Amen.

It's good to have my dad down. Whenever he comes down I start thinking of stuff years ago and when I was a child, my parents were very cruel to me. They sent me to summer camp every summer. Now, don't tell anybody this, alright, but I hate summer camp. I could not stand it and when I was in Bible college I got an opportunity to work as a counselor at camps and I said I'd rather have my eyeballs poked out than work as a camp counselor. I despised it and I know they're a good thing and they have great influence on a lot of young people and I think all young people ought to go to camp, amen? But they sent me to summer camp and though I didn't like it, it had a positive influence on my life. We would sing mostly choruses as a Christian camp, we would sing mostly choruses and a lot of them were good songs, many we sing to this day. There is one song we sang that is actually a very powerful song. It's in our hymnbooks. We sing it occasionally here and it's the song,

"I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

Though no one join me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back."

The key word in that song is "decided. I have decided to follow Jesus." In chapter 1 and verse 8, the Bible says Daniel purposed in his heart. You could write in the margin of your Bible, you could write down "decision." He decided that he was not going to defile himself with a portion of the king's meat.

Decisions. Making right decisions is important. Do you agree with that? I don't think anybody would disagree with that. Making right decisions is important regardless of what your age is. Sometimes folks will talk about young people and, "Well, they made stupid decisions as a child. You know, young people, they just..." Hey, you know, regardless of our age, it's important we make great decisions, young people or old people. Do you know what? Decisions have consequences, don't they? We make a decision.

The Bible is very clear. I don't understand why folks have a difficult time with this. The Bible is very clear we have a free will. We freely can make what decision we want but we cannot choose what the consequences are, right? I can choose what my decision will be but I can't choose what's going to be a result of that decision and so that makes making decisions very very important.

The decision about salvation, it's a very important decision and God doesn't save anybody without them making the decision to trust Christ so a person chooses. Maybe there is someone in this service here this morning, you've never been born again, you've never genuinely sincerely trusted Christ as your personal Savior, this morning you have an opportunity to make a decision. You can make the decision to rectify that and trust Christ and be born in the family of God, get your sins forgiven and go to heaven, or you can make the decision, "No, I'll not do that right now." Now, whichever decision you have a free will to make, whatever decision you make, then you live with the consequences, right? If a person chooses not to trust Christ and they die in that condition, the eternal consequences are horrific. If a person chooses to trust Christ, then the consequences of that ultimately are wonderful.

So decisions are vitally important, the decision to whether I trust Christ or not. I thought of the decision whether to dedicate my life to Jesus Christ as a believer is an important decision. Listen, just because a person is saved doesn't mean they're dedicated to the Lord. You don't have to read far in the Bible to find people who are saved but were not dedicated to the Lord. You don't have to look very hard in the Bible to find that and you don't have to look very hard in many churches to find that also. So once we're saved, we can make the decision, "Alright, God has forgiven me, he's saved me from sin and hell, he's given me new life in Christ, I have a home in heaven," now I can decide if I'm going to live for him, live my life for his glory, to please him with my life, or I'm going to live

as a Christian, I'm going to live for myself. I'm going to live for my own will and my own desires and my own plans. That's called being a carnal Christian or a worldly Christian, a spiritual Christian is one who lives for God but it's a decision I make whether to dedicate my life to Christ or not. And by the way, both of those decisions have consequences.

I think one of the most miserable people in the world is a Christian out of the will of God, even moreso than an unsaved person, because if a person is saved and they decide to live for themselves rather than the Christ that died for them, then they become under the chastening hand of God. They don't have the blessing of God on their life and become very miserable and as a result of that decision not to dedicate my life to Christ and I live with that, a person chooses to dedicate their life to Christ, it doesn't mean it's going to be an easy life, it doesn't mean you're not going to have heartache and opposition, in fact, you'll have moreso than what the undedicated Christian has, but you'll have the presence and power of God in your life and you know you're pleasing the Lord.

So the point I'm trying to make is decisions have consequences and the spiritual decisions we choose to make or not to make, whichever way they go, they have eternal and spiritual consequences and so they're very important. By the way, our decisions affect others. Somebody says, "Well, it's my life. I'll choose what I do with it." You're free to do that but what decision you make is going to affect people around you in a positive or negative way. So decisions are important.

I believe it's vitally important for a young person to make important decisions. Now, as I said, it's all ages but I think particularly a young person. Some folks have this idea, "Well, eh, young people, you know, they're just kind of knuckleheads and they don't think and they just do things, but that's just a phase they go through. They just have to sow their wild oats and some day they'll come around." Do you know what the problem with sowing wild oats is? You reap wild oats and, as I said, decisions, even dumb decisions, can have devastating consequences. So you have a young person that doesn't think, doesn't seek the Lord, doesn't go by the counsel of God's word and they make some decisions and for the rest of their life they have to live with the consequences of those foolish decisions they made as a young person.

So we come to Daniel. Daniel is a young man, probably in his early to mid-teens, and he thought things through and he made a clear-cut decision for the Lord. Daniel purposed in his heart. This was not just a good intention. The Bible says Daniel purposed in his heart, it's not the idea that, "Yeah, boy, I'm gonna do right. I'm going to." No, it was a matter of establishing it in his heart. It wasn't an idea of intention, it was a decision. It was a heart decision.

I think it was last week's message we talked about good intentions and how good intentions are really meaningless. "Well, you know, it's the thought that counts." You're drowning in the lake and, "I thought about rescuing you but, you know, it's the thought that counts." Daniel's decision here was not just some good intention. "You know, when I get to Babylon, they get me in Babylon, boy, I'm gonna take a stand for the Lord." No, no, no, it was more than that, it was a heart decision.

I'd like for us to notice, first of all, the trials of our decisions. When we make a decision, we need...whenever we make a decision for Christ, you can count on it, mark it down, you make a decision for Christ, it is going to be tried. That decision is going to be tried. Do not think for one moment you make a decision for Christ, whether it's salvation, dedication, baptism, whatever it may be, don't think for one minute when you make a decision in obedience to Christ that I'm going to purpose in my heart that I'm going to do what Christ has said, don't think for one minute this world is going to lift you up on their shoulders and sing, "He's a jolly good fellow." It's going to be tried. It's going to be tested. You cannot show me one place in this Bible where it tells me that living for Christ is easy. It is not. It is hard. We are living in enemy territory. We are living in a world that is going the opposite direction of what Christ intends for us to do and here's the sad thing: it's gotten even in the church opposition to doing right. The churches have shifted. Rather than traveling upstream against the principles and values and pleasures of the world, the church has simply absorbed the world and is floating right along with it and if somebody stands up and says, "No, I'm going to purpose in my heart we're not going to defile ourselves," and brother, trials come, opposition.

Daniel faced it. He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. Verse 10, "And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king." And immediately there was opposition. We can mark it down. Any decision we make for Christ will be tried. Young man, young lady, middle aged, senior citizen says, "I've decided I'm gonna follow Jesus," and they are immediately going to face trials.

It was true for Abraham. We're not going to take time to turn there but we could go back to Genesis 15 and God promised Abraham that the child that he fathers and that Sarah conceives would be the promised child through which the nation of Israel would come. Abraham, he's trying to deal with this, he goes, "Well, I've got a servant here and maybe I can father a child through...you know, maybe they could be my..." and God says, "No. Your seed." So then you get over to chapter 16 and immediately his wife Sarah tests Abraham. The Bible says in chapter 15, the Bible says that after God told him that, the Bible says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. God says, "Abraham, you're going to have a child. You're 100 years old but you're going to have a child. It's going to be your seed that produces that child. Not a servant, not anyone else, it's going to be you and Sarah. Your child." Abraham discussed it a little bit, God insists on it, finally Abraham says, "Alright, I believe you." He makes a decision, "I believe God. What God has said I believe will be true."

You get to chapter 16, Sarah shows up. Sarah says, "We can't have kids. I'm beyond the bearing age. You're an old man. I know what God said and I know what you believe but we can't do that." And Abraham's faith in God is immediately tried. His decision to believe what God told him is tried by his wife and Abraham fails the test and he abandons his decision for Christ. He believes his wife and he has heartache the rest of his life. Remember the story?

Our decision to trust Christ is going to be tried every time. Our decision to follow Jesus, our decision to do right is going to be tried. I think of Job. The Bible says, Job 1, he was a just man; in all his ways perfect and upright. He prayed for his kids. He offered sacrifices for his family. He is prosperous, hard working, honest, a man of integrity, respected, a man of character. Satan gets wind of him and God asks Satan what he thinks of Job and he's immediately what? Tried severely. In fact, you get down there and Job's situation is the same, his wife, "Curse God and die. Why don't you just abandon this decision to do right. What are you holding onto your integrity for? Listen, I know you've made this decision to follow Jesus but look what has it done you? What good has it brought us? Our kids are dead. Our possessions are gone. Just curse God and die!" I'd like to report to you, Job stood the test. He said, "You speak like one of the foolish women," and he would not abandon his decision, though it was tried sorely.

Remember the story of Balaam? Again, for sake of time we'll not turn there to Numbers 22 but Balaam was a prophet of God of sorts, and Balak shows up and he says, "Hey, there are these people out there, they're a bunch of Israelites. They came out of Egypt and they're invading our land. We want you to come and curse them." Balaam says, "Oh well, let me see what God has to say about that." He went and sought the Lord and God said, "Don't you dare curse my people." And Balaam comes back and he says, "Hey, God says nothing doing and I'm going to do what God says, nothing doing." Now, that's the Dennis Leatherman version of it but, "Nothing doing." So he made a decision, "I'm not going to say or do anything that God does not want me to say or do." Is that a good decision, yes or no? That's a great decision. Would to God we had more people that would say, "I'm not gonna do anything or say anything that God does not want me to say or do."

So it's a good decision but his decision is immediately tested and Balak says, he sends his servants back, "Alright, tell him this time, we're going to give him an honorary doctorate, we're going to give him a diamond ring and we're giving him a nice bank account." That's all in the Hebrew, if you study it carefully. And Balaam says, "Hm, maybe I'll come and check this out after all," and he ends up going. Remember the story, the donkey talking to him and running him off the road? And Balaam's decision to do nothing or say nothing other than what God said to do is tested and he fails the test. He goes back on his decision.

Are you still in Daniel? Turn over with me, if you would, to chapter 3. I can't tell if you're listening or sleeping out there. Daniel 3, look at verse 17. How many people remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Anybody remember that story? What a great story. I like to always point this out, you've heard it, people that have been around here, you've heard me say this 100 times. I went to a little Bible college in Philadelphia, not real little but a Bible college in Philadelphia. My first year of Bible college and it was inner city and they had a black preacher from Texas and he got up and he preached on this passage and he said, "This morning," and he had the accent and everything, he said, "This morning I'm gonna preach on Shadrach, Meshach and one bad negro."

Look at verse 17, actually let's come up to verse 12. Let's get the setting here. Actually, come up to verse 10. "Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick," I think it was rock music personally, "shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," that one bad negro there, "these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." It sounds to me like they made a decision, doesn't it? They made a decision, "We're not gonna bow down to this thing. We worship God and God alone. No idols. No false gods. No statutes. We bow to God and God alone."

So they made a decision and the king said, "Oh, that's fine. They can do whatever they want. Not a problem." Right? Wrong. "Then Nebuchadnezzar in his," what? "Rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." Can you imagine what they thought when the guys showed up, "Take them to the King." Imagine what's going through their heart, the fear. I mean, these are just young men and the fear that grips their heart, the government is against them.

Now come down to verse 16, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." In other words, "You know, this isn't a hard decision for us. This doesn't require effort on our part."

"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." They were pretty confident, sort of, but then verse 18, "But if not," in other words, even if God does not deliver us from this burning fiery furnace, "be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." They made a decision and Nebuchadnezzar at this point says, "Hey, listen guys, I didn't really mean the fiery furnace." No, he carries through with his threat.

"Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed." I mean, this guy is so enraged his face changes, "against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," he's going to make an example out of them, "and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot," look at this, "the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." I wrote in the margin of my Bible: you'd better not throw innocent people in the fire. They got killed.

"And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." The point I'm trying to make here is: if a person makes a decision, "I'm gonna do right. I'm gonna be faithful to the Lord. I'm gonna obey God in the areas he has planned for my life." That decision is going to be tested. There are people who have come through those doors, knelt at these altars, trusted Christ, made decisions to trust Christ, made decisions to live for the Lord, made decisions to dedicate themselves to the Lord, they walked out the back doors, a trial hit them and the decisions fell by the wayside and you don't see them again. Right or wrong? It happens all the time everywhere. It's biblical. It has happened since man began making decisions.

So our decisions are going to be tried. I want us to consider, second of all, not just the trials of our decisions but the triumphs of our decisions. I suggest to you that making the right decision is easy, it's following through that decision that's hard. People make decisions all the time but they never amount to anything. If our decisions are going to stand, certain things must be in place. I make a decision, I kneel at the altar or whatever, I make a decision, God spoke to my heart, I make that decision, now if that decision is going to carry through, that's the easy part; if that's going to carry through, I have to have certain things in place. Making the decision is the easy part.

In John 4, we're given the experience of a woman by a well and Jesus approached her and he began...she was a Samaritan woman and Jesus began speaking to her of spiritual things, he was dealing with her soul, he was trying to win her to himself and see her saved, and in the process of him dealing with her and I believe he was trying to get her to see the fact that she was a sinner, the truth comes out that she was not married to the man she was living with. In fact, Jesus points out to her that she was actually married five times and the man she was living with was not her husband. Now, that's an interesting statement there. That tells me a little bit about that woman. She was very good at making decisions but she was terrible at keeping decisions. Five times no doubt she took a vow that she would not forsake this man, that she would love him and cherish him til death do us part, five times she took the marriage vows and five times she forsook the marriage vows. She was very good at making decisions but she was not very good at carrying out the decisions. Hey, getting married is the easy part. Amen? It's the rest, it's the next 50 years that's tough.

Decisions. By the way, marriage is a decision in what we make. I'll tell you what, one of the saddest things in my mind is that even in the church, our marriage vows have become meaningless. God's people. Just meaningless. I finished reading through Jeremiah in my devotions and we preached some messages through it and I think it's in Jeremiah 5, the Bible says Jeremiah is rebuking the southern kingdom of Judah, he's rebuking them severely and one of the things he rebukes them for is he says and I'm putting it in my own words here, he says, "Every man like a horse in heat neighs after his neighbor's wife."

And he's talking to God's people. Their decisions, their marriage decisions, the very bedrock of society, oh, they make the decision but it didn't carry through. Boy, some other little filly goes by, bats those eyes and they start neighing after her. Another one at the office and, boy, she's got the looks and he starts neighing after her.

Listen, making the decision is easy but following through and carrying out that decision, certain things have to be in place and I think we find them in the life of Daniel. The first one I notice is there must be genuine commitment. Come there in chapter 1, look again at verse 8, "But Daniel purposed in his heart." I already touched on this but the fact is this was not just some flippant decision he made. It wasn't just, "Yeah, okay, I'm not gonna eat that." This wasn't some type of patronizing thing, "You know, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are there. What are they gonna think of me if I eat that? You know, we were told we should have a strict Jewish diet and I'd better do it for their sake because they'll think bad of me." That wasn't it at all in Daniel's heart. His decision not to defile himself with the portion of the king's meat was not based on what anybody thought. It wasn't based on some...it wasn't an unthinking decision, it was a heart decision.

He purposed in his heart. That word "purpose" is a very important word. It means this: to plant down, to establish, to fix onto an immovable object. He had made a decision of genuine commitment that this was not going to happen and it didn't matter if anybody else followed his decision, it didn't matter if they run him out of the palace, it didn't matter if he would die. He was not going to do this and God, give us some Christians in our churches, in our homes, in our youth groups, in our ministries, behind our pulpits, who say, "I will not disobey my God and they can throw me in jail and my family can leave me and my church can abandon me but I will not do wrong against my God." That was the attitude. That was the depth of commitment that Jeremiah had.

Purposed in his heart. He was living in a hostile territory. This wasn't Sunday night testimony meeting where everybody is for you and you can stand up and say, "Well, I just want everybody to know I made a decision. I'm going to live for God and do that." And everybody says, "Amen! Praise the Lord!" That wasn't it at all. This was, this isn't even close to it but this is like standing up in a public school and saying, "Hey, I believe in creation. I believe the Bible is the word of God. I'm going to live for God no matter what anybody else does." He's in hostile territory and he is able to triumph in his decision. His decision actually carries through and accomplishes something because it was a genuine commitment of his heart. I don't see him consulting with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I don't see him calling home. I don't see him taking a publicity vote. I see him purposing in his heart, "I am committed to this."

So number 1 there must be, if we're going to triumph, if our decisions are going to triumph, there must be genuine commitment but I noticed something else: there must be some strength of character. Look with me, if you would, at verse 9. "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs." That's interesting. There was something about Daniel that these pagan men, these men with authority, there was something about Daniel that was real. There was something about Daniel that had some depth. He was a young man that had character and it showed and it

was evident and these men observed that and they said, to put it in our own words, they said something like this, "You know, this kid's got something. There is something to this boy. This guy is not just talk. This guy is not just putting on a show, one thing in church and then something completely different out with his buddies in the community. This young man has some character. This young man has some depth to himself. This young man is real." There was something about Daniel that demanded their respect. He wasn't cocky. He wasn't being loud-mouthed about this. It was a heart decision he made and they saw that there is reality behind this young man.

Many people make decisions, we have and I don't mean this, I hope you don't misunderstand what I'm trying to say here, we have probably a couple hundred salvation decisions a year out of our church in various places, knocking on doors and different things, but we don't see a couple hundred people getting baptized and joining the church, do we? So he says, "Well, they're just not real." I grant that some of them are not real, there is no doubt about it. Some of them just go through, do what we ask them to do and make the profession and that's all it is. I won't dispute that. I do know this: everyone who genuinely calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. If they're genuine, if they're for real. But here's where the problem breaks down: people make decisions but they don't have character. There's no depth to what they are and so as soon as that decision requires some effort, as soon as carrying through or following up on that decision requires effort or maybe my schedule has to be changed or something, you know, I have to apply myself in some way, suddenly that decision is laid aside and I don't want to do that and that is a symptom of a lack of character. That is a symptom of a shallow character. "I don't want to put the effort. I don't want to pay the price to carry through the decision I made." A lot of people make decisions but many times they have no character to carry it out.

So number 1: there must be genuine commitment. Number 2: there must be strength of character. Number 3, and by the way, before I say that let me point out Jesus had disciples who made decisions to follow him but you get to chapter 6, particularly I think it's down around verse 66, somewhere around there, suddenly they said, "Boy, his sayings are hard," and they did not follow him anymore. They said, "Wait a minute. This is not what we bargained for. This is costing us more than we anticipated. I know we left all to follow you but, man alive." The Bible says most of us, in fact, it was so bad he approached his 12 disciples and said, "Are you guys leaving me too?" I mean, he's down to the 12, from thousands to 12 and he's not even sure, humanly speaking, whether these guys are sticking with him. So a lot of people make decisions but often they don't have the character to follow through.

There is a third aspect I see here that is necessary if our decisions are going to triumph and that's this, number 3: we must die to self. Die to self. No doubt Daniel would have enjoyed some of that wine, huh? Fleshly, humanly speaking. This was the king's table. This was good stuff. This was better than Outback Steakhouse. He could have enjoyed that steak, that meat and that wine. No doubt it was good tasting stuff but do you know what Daniel had to do? He had to die to self. "Yeah, that would taste good, that would be very enjoyable but I'm God's and I'm gonna please God so I'm gonna die to self and I'm gonna follow through my decision to follow Jesus, to not defile myself."

To die to self. Dr. Lee Robertson used to tell the story and I've told it here. How many people have ever heard Dr. Lee Robertson preach? Anybody here ever hear? Actually you all have at one time or another, I've preached some of his sermons...not really. But he used to tell the story there where they had the one auditorium, it was the second church building that they built before the big auditorium and they called it the Chauncey-Gould, it was named after some teachers. And it was huge, it seated I think if I remember correctly 3,000 or more people and they had a bottom balcony and then they had a balcony that went down the side, across the back and across here. I mean, it was ten times the size of this building. It was huge. If you've ever been there, it's amazing.

And there was one lady who always sat in the one balcony aisle, I don't know where it was, up in a certain spot on an end pew. She always sat there. Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. That was her spot all the time and one Sunday morning she came in and there was, lo and behold, visitors in her seat and she had to sit somewhere else and she was angry. Dr. Robertson said afterwards she came storming up to him and she said, "Dr. Lee Robertson, I want you to know I am never coming back to this church again. I've attended here Sunday morning, Sunday night for so many years and I'm never coming back again, somebody sat in my seat!" Dr. Robertson in a very tactful way said, "Ma'am, you need to die to self." Phew. She stormed off. He said he thought, "Well, she's gone." He said, "No, the next service, I looked up and there she is sitting beside, people are in her seat and she's sitting in another seat smiling away, just singing." And afterward he caught her and said, "What's going on?" She said, "Dr. Robertson, you were right. I just needed to die to self."

And that's what we need. If we're going to carry through our decision, we need to say, "Hey, my decision to do right, to follow Jesus, to live by the principles of God's word is more important than whether I enjoy this...whether I have this pleasure or whether I enjoy this thing or I have this seat. Getting my way is incidental to doing what God has told me to do." So we die to self.

The trials of our decisions. You make a decision for Christ, I'm telling you, we've had people here trust Christ and family turn against them. I'm thinking of one young lady in particular, family turned against her, called us every name in the book. She stood faithful to the Lord. Our decisions are going to be tried. If we're going to have triumph in our decisions, if they're going to stand and actually go forward, we've got to have genuine commitment, there must be strength of character, we must die to self, last of all, I want to end with the testimony of the right decision. What happens when we make a decision and we stick to it, we don't violate it, we're committed, we have character about it, we've died to self, we carry that thing through, what happens?

Look at verse 15, "And at the end of ten days their countenances," Daniel's and the three boys', "appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." You see, there's proof that God wants you to be fat. "I want to obey the Lord. I made a decision I'm gonna obey the Lord." No, not really. The implication here if you read this, it says their countenances, what is their countenance? That's their face,

their appearance. Their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than the children. Do you know what that tells me? They were happy. They were rejoicing. Daniel and his buddies when they made the decision to do right and they stood the test and the trials and the threats and they stuck to it, when it was all said and done, they were the happy ones. Their countenances were fairer. They looked better. They were more pleasant to be with. They were rejoicing what God had blessed them.

We live in an upside down world. We live in a world that says right is wrong and wrong is right. We live in a world that says when you do wrong, you're happy, and if you do right, you'll be sad and it is the absolute opposite of the truth. Let me introduce you to some unhappy people. Christians who have gone back on their decisions. I can take it to their homes. I know them. Some of them I led to the Lord and they made decisions, some of them sat in my office and said, "Preacher, we are gonna live for God," and when it got tough and when they didn't carry through and they didn't have the character or they lacked the commitment or they refused to die to self, whatever it was, they gave in and now she lives here and he lives over there, and he's living with this floozy and she's living with that whore-monger and they're miserable.

They're miserable but the world says, "Hey, do your own thing. Yeah, we know you've said this and we know you made that promise but come on, it's your life." These guys were happy. Their countenances were fairer and fatter in flesh. I like that, praise the Lord. The reality is the world is miserable. The reality is the world is paying a heavy price for their sin and it's the obedient Christians that know the joy of the Lord. Oh, we might not live in the big mansions, we might not drive the fancy cars, we might not have all the jewelry that the world has but I'll tell you what, the obedient child of God has a joy this world does not know and this world cannot take away. So there is rejoicing. If you make a decision for the Lord, you stick to it, you pay the price, take the heat, and in the end there is rejoicing.

I noticed something else here. Look at verse 19, "And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah," that's their previous names, "therefore stood they before the king." Hey, none of the others that were in this program stood before the king, only the ones that purposed in their heart not to defile themselves. They stood before the king.

"And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." In other words, he was in the rest of this administration. So they were rejoicing, their countenances were fairer, their faces were fatter. I mean, there's this happy booster. But not only that, because of their stand God honored it and not only was there rejoicing but they had respect and no one else in that program stood before the king except those who purposed to do right, made a decision, stood the test, came through and they earned the respect of the king and his court.

I'll tell you what, I talked about this in Sunday school: the world may not like an obedient Christian and they will mock obedient Christians. Can I get a witness? Anybody here ever experience that? They'll mock. A Christian that takes a stand, does right, purposes in their heart, the world will mock that Christian. They will not like them but I'll tell you one thing, they will respect him. You get a young lady determined she's going to be pure, she's going to do right, no guy is going to touch her, she's saving herself for her husband, she is going to be pure, I'll tell you what, she is going to take heat. She'll be respected.

I got saved, I told the Sunday school class that I kind of got to the end of my message in Sunday school but I worked at a meat-packing plant and I started there when I was 16, I worked until I was 20. I got saved at 19 and went off to college at 20 and I was a disaster and everyone that worked there was equally or worse disaster than I was: ex-cons and drug addicts, adulterers. I mean, you just name it. We were there cutting meat and doing all this stuff and I get saved and I'm telling you, not everybody, God doesn't do exactly the same and everybody gets the same way but it doesn't all pan out exactly the same way, do you know what I'm saying? When I got saved, my life was changed drastically immediately. Like I said in Sunday school, ask my dad, he'll tell you. I mean, it was like flipping a switch. Everything was different and I showed up at work Tuesday and, man, immediately they all said something's different and I told the one guy, "There is something inside me. I need to tell people." One guy who I was working next to, Jim, I said, "Hey, man, I got saved last night." He said, "What's that?" I said, "I'm not sure. I asked Jesus to come into my heart." "Oh great, Leatherman got religion," just spread through the place. "Leatherman got religion." They said, "Oh, are you gonna come in and shave your head and sell roses?" I shaved my head but I don't sell roses.

I'm telling you, for the next year I took heat. I had a guy, one guy Bob, threaten my life. I was just trying to be a witness. I mean, he just went off. Called me names. Stick stuff in my locker. Nasty things. Then the Lord led for me to go to Bible college and I'll never forget, I told the Sunday school, I'll never forget my very last day and I enjoyed the work, it wasn't that, but the last day and I head to my locker and we're all cleaning up and I got my locker emptied out and every one of those guys on that floor came up to me and said, "Leatherman, I wish I had what you got." The guys that called me some of the filthiest names you can think of, "I wish I had what you have." They didn't like me. They thought I was an idiot but I'll tell you one thing, they respected me and to God be the glory. Amen? You understand what I'm saying.

God is at the camp. My abusive parents sent me to camp for a whole week. I've been bitter about that all these years but they taught us a song, would you sing it with me?

"I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;

Here's the key,

"No turning back, no turning back."

Father in heaven, I pray you'd bless us and help us.