

Take a Stand for the True and Only God!

By Ian Wildeboer

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Daniel 1
Preached on: Sunday, November 12, 2017

Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church

99 Scott Street
St. Catharines, ON L2N 1G8

Website: www.trinityorc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/trinityorc

The text for this sermon is the reading that we just read so we're going to go right into the sermon now from Daniel 1.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, as a parent, have you ever told your child when they were leaving the house or going out to do something, "Remember who you are," as the door slammed behind them? Or maybe you said, "Remember who you belong to. Remember who identifies you, my child." As Christians and as children born into the covenant of grace, we belong to Christ, we confess his mark and his emblem we bear. We belong to him.

I want you to imagine now even with tears, the parents of these four young boys, probably the ages of 15 through 17, we're not quite sure of their age, young, when they were taken away from their homes and taken away from the care of their parents that you could almost feel the burden on the parents' hearts for their sons and for them to call out after them, "Remember who you are. You belong to the God of Israel. You belong to Yahweh. He has claimed you." The parents knew very well that as their boys were taken away, that Babylon would try to make them their own. They would be indoctrinated with the wisdom and with the poetry and the culture and even the worship of the Babylonian deities, and the question would be, "Will you remember who you are, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael? Will you remember who you are or will you be swallowed up in the new identity?" Beloved, our children do not need to go to Babylon to be indoctrinated by her false worship and her false gods. No, beloved, Babylon has entered into our homes through countless media and social media options that we have available to us in our 21st century, and the modus operandi of the devil is the same, to make our children identify with Babylon; to make our children not identify with Christ and his church. Then we head them off into college and university and we cry out after them, "Remember who you are. Oh please God, help them not to forget."

That's why this chapter is so relevant for us this morning, beloved, and we return in this chapter and we ask in this chapter what can we learn from these four young men? What is the Lord trying to instruct us here in the 21st century in a very post-Christian, secular, humanistic, pluralistic world that we live in? Do we learn anything from this young man, Daniel, who said, "I will not eat of that food, and give me vegetables and water instead"? Can we learn anything from him in his stand for God? The question then becomes how

did he stand? How did these four young men stand in faith to the God of Israel, to their God, and not conform to this Babylonian mindset, this Babylonian identity, how did they stand? You respond to me and you will say this to me, you will say they stood by grace, by grace alone. But by the grace of God, go I. I'm sure one day if you meet Daniel in glory, he will say, "It was all God's grace to us, his providence to us. He protected us there." And that's true. That's very true but then the next question needs to be asked, how did that grace function in Daniel's life? How did God allow that grace to take shape and securing that they did not become like Babylon but they held onto their identity that they belonged to the God of Israel, the God of their fathers? How did that happen? What was the way that that happened? And I think it happened in this way, that Daniel and his three friends knew their God. That was the gift of grace to them, that they knew who the God of Israel is or was and they knew three things about the God of Israel, their God, the God of their fathers, they knew three things and this is basic theology for us this morning. Nothing complex. Nothing too hard but three things that will help us stand up in our age, in our Babylonian age where it's knocking on our door or has invaded our homes. Three things. The first thing that Daniel understood and what we need to understand in this dark age is that God is sovereign. He is in full control of what's happening inside and outside our home. He's sovereign over everything. The second thing that we need to remember in this dark age is that God is holy, uncompromisingly holy. And the third thing that we need to remember, and Daniel did, is that God is merciful. God is kind in the dark places of our life, in the hard places. So we're going to unpack that this morning: God's sovereignty, God's holiness and God's kindness. One of these points would take a whole sermon but we are trying to stick with this text this morning.

The year is approximately 605 BC, the year that Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar sent his first army or his military machine to Jerusalem to invade. They didn't destroy the city then, they only took some of the vessels from the temple and they took some of the noble and the royal class to Babylon. Then what they did after he was trying to expand his empire, he wanted to build up the empire from that youth up, from the grassroots up, he took young men from different parts of the empire now from Jerusalem and said, "Take these young men who are of good appearance, who are intelligent, who are able to stand up on their feet, and I want you to indoctrinate them. Teach them our culture." But I want you now to kind of walk in the shoes of Daniel and his three friends as they enter Babylon because the pressure is beginning to build.

As they entered the city, one of the first things that they would have realized is that the city that they were entering was staggeringly more beautiful and more opulent and stronger than Jerusalem, than the Jerusalem they knew. The city walls, according to the Greek historian Herodotus, was probably somewhere in the area of about 80 meters high. Now I think that's a bit of an exaggeration but whatever, these walls were extremely high. They were about 90 kilometers in perimeter and 24 meters wide. Chariots were running back and forth in opposite directions on these walls. They had towers, 250 towers that surrounded the city.

As you walked into the city, you went to the Ishtar Gate and they have a replica of this Ishtar Gate in Berlin and you can see it online. On this big gate of 45 meters wide, they

had about 550 carved images of their various deities and gods that they were worshiping. It was an opulent, beautiful gate. As you walked through this gate, they would have seen in the distance in this big city what they call a ziggurat, a huge tower that looked like what they thought the Babel would also look like that would have gone up to about 300 feet at least, maybe more, 500 feet, they aren't sure, probably even higher. They called it the foundation of heaven and earth. Maybe it was much higher than 500 feet. And as they walked through past this huge ziggurat, the foundation of heaven and earth, they saw this glorious castle or this glorious palace. It had terraces all the way up and these beautiful walls and all these walls were covered by hanging gardens. That's why Babylon, the ancient Babylon, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was because of the Hanging Gardens. Nebuchadnezzar's wife was a gardener and Nebuchadnezzar, of course, had access to lots of plant material, for all you gardeners out there. Lots of exotic plants and it said that they pumped water from the river to these terraces through a hydraulic system. We don't know how but these gardens were well watered. They were spectacular.

The Babylonians were brilliant. They were engineers. They loved astronomy, probably astrology as well, we know that, but one of the things the Babylonians figured out is their engineering feats, is that the number 60 was the best integer for calculating time, and so you can thank the Babylonians for your watches this morning. Sixty is a pretty good number. We've used it for many years since.

So they would have realized very early on that God had blessed Babylon. They hardly had chariots anymore in Jerusalem and the question that Daniel and his three friends would have inevitably dealt with is this: why is God blessing this heathen nation so spectacularly that he is hardly blessing us and we are his people? And when those questions come when God seems to bless the heathens and his own people are struggling with the very basic necessities of life, the question that inevitably can come is where is God in all of this? Where is God? And here is the grace given to Daniel: Daniel does not question God's existence or God's care over their life as they walk through this palace or through this city. We know this because right at the very beginning, Daniel has a deep understanding of who God is and ultimately what God is doing.

I'll read verse 1, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." Now for the materialists in this world, those who defend evolutionary theories of naturalism, they would say amen to this. Here we have a superpower named Babylon, and king of that superpower is Nebuchadnezzar, and we have a small nation here, a small city state here and a superpower comes and demolishes that and the evolutionists would say, "Of course. That's the survival of the fittest, the strong over the weak. This is history 101." But read verse 2. Daniel understood from the very beginning that God is in control here. It says this, "And the Lord gave." The verb in Hebrew is "nathan." "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God." It wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's power and ability and wisdom and strength, it was God's purposes being fulfilled. The Lord gave them into their hands. It was very easy for God to stop this superpower because before an Almighty God there is no earthly superpower.

No, he gave them into his hands. God is orchestrating the nation states and how they are functioning even to this day, and Daniel understood that but this wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's plan, this was God's plan because God's people had broken covenant with him and the curses of the covenant, which you can read in Deuteronomy 28 and 29, were being enacted now, they are being fleshed out.

But Daniel continues to understand this and he continues to seek God behind everything and I think this is very important for us this morning to realize that not only is God working on the macro level in this universe, in this world, in the countries and the states that we see around us, he's also working at the very micro level. Verse 9 reads this. Now they are in the courts and they have been in there in the college for a few days, probably months, we don't know, "And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs." God in his infinite love and mercy was making the heart of Ashpenaz tender towards Daniel and his three friends. God is not only working on the macro level, beloved, he is working in our hearts as well, even in the hearts of those who oppose us. He's in control.

And Daniel also finally understood that all of their gifts also came from him. Verse 17, the verb "nathan" comes up again, the verb "gave" comes up again in verse 17 and it says, "As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom." From the first to the last, beloved, our giftedness, our wisdom, our knowledge, our ability ultimately comes from God's hand. This is why Jesus can say, "To whom much is given," same verb, given, "To whom much is given, much will be required," and he's not talking just about voluntary wealth, he's also talking about gifts, talents, abilities; and Daniel by God's Spirit, understood that.

What's the take-away for us this morning? Understand that Daniel understood something of the sovereignty of God in bringing them into Babylon. I think there are two things. The first thing you all know this to be true is that God is steering history to its close. There are various players in history, various people rising up, various leaders ruling nations, but it's all fulfilling an ultimate purpose of bringing history to its close for our sake for the final return of Christ. There is great comfort in that, that God's purposes are being fulfilled in the macro level, in the micro level, as he continues to bring history to its ultimate close. So we can confess in all of our struggles, in all of our burdens, in all of our trials, that we know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love him, that God is fulfilling a purpose.

There's something else here and I think this is also important for us to realize, that we can't sell God short, beloved, just because we don't understand exactly what he is doing with our life or with our nation or with this world. We have very limited knowledge on the defined decrees, the divine counsel of Almighty God. Limited knowledge. Even Daniel at this point in his life in Babylon, is unsure of at least one thing, how long they were going to be there. He may have been a little bit unsure of exactly why they were there as well, and we know this because in Daniel 9 God reveals to him something more of his plan through his word. Daniel 9 reads as follows, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the

Chaldeans," listen to this, "in the first year of his reign," so this is after Nebuchadnezzar, well after he has passed away and his son has passed away, in the first year of his reign, "I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." Now after many years, God revealed to Daniel that the duration in Babylon was a 70 year duration, but you back up a number of years before that and Daniel is not questioning God's purposes here, he's trusting them. That, beloved, is a lesson for us. We have such limited understanding of why we go through the things that we go through in this life but the call out to the church of Jesus Christ in our limited understanding is not to check God and say, "No, I don't trust you anymore, God," it's actually to say, "God, I don't understand but I know, I know that you are sovereign over this and I trust you." Daniel realized, and his three friends, there is not a lot of interaction about these questions, they are just assumed that God is in control and he trusts the God of his fathers.

The second thing he understands about the God of his fathers is that the God of his fathers is a holy holy God. Daniel would have grown up with the knowledge that God is holy but also that God expects his children to walk in holiness. He understood that just when you are in this sanctuary and you are listening to me preach and you are receiving the blessing of being here in a sanctuary where God is being glorified through song and through prayer and through the preaching of the word, it doesn't mean that when you leave the sanctuary you can check the holiness or your holiness at the door, or when you leave your home, you can check holiness at the door. No, holiness encompasses all of our life. Daniel could not check that holiness in Jerusalem.

Some of the texts that may have been ringing through his mind as a young boy and needs to be ringing through our minds, is a text from Leviticus 11 and Leviticus 19 which says, "Be holy because I am holy." That theme runs like a thread throughout all of Scripture and Peter claims this theme and understands this to be something for the new covenant people, us in the New Testament. He says in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy because I am holy," quoting from Leviticus. That's what defines us. Just as white defines snow, holiness defines God's people in every sector, in every sphere, in every part of our life.

Daniel was 15 years old, he understood that. How do we know that? How did he know that he understood that God is holy and desires holiness in every part of our life? Daniel was put into a place of temptation. When he entered the king's palace, he realized quite quickly that he was entering into a buffet that would blow the mandarin out of this world. I don't know if you have the mandarin here in St. Catherine's but we sure have it in Hamilton. I don't like the food. That's why this cuisine would have blown it out of the world. There was exotic food there and plentiful.

He was eating from the king's table, a portion from the king's table, and he was 15 years old. I don't know if you have a 15-year-old son or a 16-year-old son, they are generally ravenously hungry all the time. They eat like bears and wolves. So you have a bunch of young men looking at all this food before them and not having their parents'

guardianship over them at this time, no one holding them to account, and what they do is they look at this food and say, "We can't touch that. Give us vegetables." Children, "Give us vegetables and water." I think a lot of young men of 15 or 16 when they have access to alcohol wouldn't say that too quickly. There was abundant wine flowing.

"Give us vegetables and water." Why? There are at least three things that are running through Daniel's mind at this time, I think, from Scripture. The first thing that was running through Daniel's mind is that God had claimed already in the old covenant, in the Torah, and he was part of the old covenant, so in the Torah what foods were clean and unclean. You can read about this in Leviticus 11. The food, the unclean food and the clean food, it's all clearly written out for you and, for example, pork you know was unclean and so Daniel would have seen lots of pork on that table. So he can't eat that. That's forbidden. And that's the first reason why I think Daniel would say, "No, we can't touch this food because do not want to be unclean in the eyes of our God, we want to follow God and do his will in obedience, and that part of obedience is to say, 'I can't touch that food.'" But that's not the only reason, I think. Some of this food in the history of the world, some of the food would have been sacrificed to idols and because it was sacrificed or given to idols, it would have been unclean, it would have been defiled. We read about this also in Acts 15, don't eat food sacrificed to idols. But there could have been one more reason and I think this other reason brings us into the picture of bit more because we can eat pork today, that maybe Daniel did not want to become a slave to the trappings of a Babylonian world. You and I know in a very affluent society that we live in, a very affluent culture, that both food and alcohol can enslave a child of God. So with alcohol, we have alcoholism, drunkenness, and with food we have gluttony.

And I think Daniel would have learned many of the Proverbs as well. He seems to be well informed in Scripture and it says this in Proverbs 30:8, "Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me," listen, "with the food that is needful for me." I don't need this whole buffet. "Feed me with the food that is needful for me lest I be full and deny you and say who is the Lord?" What the author here in Proverbs is saying is, "Lord, guard me. Protect me. Protect me from a compulsive, affluent idea that I can consume as much as I want and keep consuming and keep purchasing to my heart's content because that will make my heart grow cold to you." It's not a very safe place, beloved, to be in a position of great indulgence, of receiving so many blessings that you begin to ask the question, "Who is the Lord?" And that question means, "I don't really need you. Like, who are you to me? I've got everything." It's very dangerous. It seems if we put all these three together that Daniel did not want to have a heart that was beginning to become satisfied in the things of the Babylonian culture that he began to ask the question, even at a young age, "Who is the Lord?" And he did not want to defile his name with unclean or defiled food.

I am very very moved by this, beloved. I am moved by the grace given these young boys to stand up against that pressure and you come away with the conclusion as you read this chapter that it's possible. What's possible? In God's grace to us, which is abundant, it's possible to withstand the wiles of Babylon in our social media infested age. It's possible to say, "I will not conform to this world. I will not join it." It's possible to say no to conforming to your friends' desires and then being transformed by the renewing of your

mind, Paul talks about in Romans 12; to be renewed, to be transformed in the renewing of your mind, it's so possible to say no to that. You see, in an age of rampant secularization and growing hedonism and sexual perversion and relativism, the church of Jesus Christ needs a generation of young men like Daniel and his friends to say, "No! I stand for the one true and only God!" That's what we need in this generation. We need a generation of young men and young women who are willing to deny themselves and say, "It's all for Jesus. It's all for my Lord. This is my life. I surrender it to you." Or with the song, "All I am and have and ever hope to be, all of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. All of my ambitions, hopes and plans. I surrender these into your hands." And that's the generation of young men and young women also from Trinity that we, the church, needs for the glory of God. And here's the ticket, beloved, if possible: God's grace is no less abundant today and it's more clearly demonstrated now through Christ and the Holy Spirit, that we have what we need to stand strong, and when you think you have, be careful lest you fall. Keep going back to him.

There is a word to the parents as well here before I move to my third point and the word to the parents is this, that Daniel and his three friends were not hatched in Babylon, and all the children say, "Amen." You all know that none of us were hatched, right? If you don't, you need to talk to your parents. None of them were hatched. No, they grew up in homes, they grew up in homes where God's sovereignty was obviously taught to them. The Torah was explained to them. The Proverbs were expanded to them. They grew up in homes like that. Beloved, I'm a parent of five children, I know this is hard but we as parents have to make our homes sanctuaries of holiness. We have to protect that haven. They need to be sanctuaries of holiness and they need to be theaters of praise to God for his sovereign Lordship over our lives and his work of redemption in Christ. That's what our homes should be characterized. As to the church, a sanctuary of holiness and a theater of praise to Almighty God, and that begins in the home, beloved, so we can start nurturing in the hearts of our children so that they can go out into this world and stand by that knowledge and that grace against the world that is trying to conform each one of our children to be like it.

One of the great scourges on the church, beloved, one of the great scourges in our homes is pornography. It's the greatest diabolic scourge on the church today still, and the devil is finding genius ways to desensitize God's people to its hell-stricken effects. "It's okay, just watch a little bit of nudity. It's okay to watch somebody else get in bed with somebody else on TV. It's okay. It's okay. Everybody is seeing this stuff. It's just so normal." It's not normal. It's profane. It's perverted. It's licentious. It's dark. It's demonic. No, by God's grace and in much prayer and striving in his strength, we need to make our homes sanctuaries of holiness and we need to guard our own hearts, beloved. We need to guard our own hearts and then we need to nurture and guard our children's hearts to grow up in an environment that hates them for loving Jesus, but we love them and we want to teach them to stay strong even as this environment continues to take its fingers and try to entangle us.

This brings me to my final point, beloved, that God is kind. Not only is he sovereign and not only is he holy, he is so merciful to us. We are not alone in this world. We are not

fighting this evil in our own strength, even. Daniel got to know that God was kind to him because he says in verse 9 again, "And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs." Daniel would have figured out pretty quickly that Ashpenaz was tender to them and that's why it's in Scripture. We get a picture of God working in the heart of somebody and that action is an action of love to Daniel. Daniel understood that.

That's the subjective level. Sometimes in our Christian walk, not always, sometimes we go through very dry desert life, parts of our life in the Christian walk, but often in our Christian walk we can actually experience God's tender mercy on our life; how he is just gently guiding us, leading us, opening our eyes, walking with us, making things work out in our life and we say, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. You have been so kind and so merciful," and we realize ultimately that that happened at the cross and we say, "Thank you, Lord, for the cross." But there is also something objective about this text, that God's kindness and God's mercy is a subjective reality. I believe it is. We know that to be true. But it's also an objective reality. It's a fact that God is kind. And I think the objective reality comes in the names of these four young men. The parents of these four young men understood God to be merciful and just, because Daniel's name means "God is my judge." He is a just and righteous judge. The three other names point to his mercy now. Hananiah means "Yahweh is gracious." Mishael means "who is like God?" There is no one like him. And Azariah means "Yahweh is a helper." Their names were objective reminders of who the God of Israel was to them and to his people.

But beloved, listen to me here: Babylon loves to change names. The world, you see, does not want us to identify with the God of the universe. The world does not want us to say we are Christians. Their contempt toward us is growing by the day here in Canada and the reasons why they don't want us to be aligned with Christ in the Scriptures is because the demands are too holy, they are too high, they are not progressive enough, and they call sin, the Scriptures call sin a sin and the world does not want to hear that word "sin" anymore. So Babylon in this time, in Daniel's time, did not want a name that drew attention to the uniqueness of God. They wanted them to forget God and so what they did, they created these parodies on their names. Daniel became Belteshazzar which means "may Bel," one of their gods, "protect his life." Hananiah became Shadrach which means "the command of Aku," and Aku was the moon god. Mishael became Meshach which means "who is what Aku is," who is what the moon god is. And Azariah became Abednego, "the servant of the god Nabu," another one of their deities.

They tried to change their names but there is more here. The names that the parents gave Daniel and Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael not only point to the uniqueness of who God is but actually they point to what God is doing for them. In so many ways, these names point to the reality that there was going to come a Messiah for these young men and for God's people. Each of them shows something of what God had to do to secure their eternal identity. Their names point beyond them. Their names point to something bigger, something that will secure them not only in Babylon but for the eternal day of the Lord, that day when they will be with him forever. Something is pointing bigger than them because on account of Jesus, God is their eternal helper. On account of Jesus, God is their

judge who does not judge them but judges his own Son on their behalf. On account of Jesus, they have a gracious Father who will accept them for the sake of his Son and their sins are atoned for. Those four names point to the reality of Christ. In a word, you could say Jesus secures their identity and Babylon tried to change it, and what Babylon changes, Jesus can still secure. He secured their eternal identity.

What does that mean for you, beloved? What does it mean for me? This is where I'm going to finish. The world which has Satan as its prince of darkness, the world is trying to make us their own. That's a fact, but this also is a fact and that is why we are here this morning, beloved, that's why I'm standing in front of you this morning, beloved, this is a fact, that Jesus says, "If you believe in me, you do not belong anymore to the world, you belong to me." That's a fact and we confess this fact, we say, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" And the answer, we know that I am not my own. I don't have dominion over my life. I am not my own but I belong both in life and death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ who has purchased me, who has bought me with his precious blood. I belong to him. I am bought. I am redeemed. I am ransomed. I am forgiven. I am his and you are too.

I don't know if Daniel had access to the scrolls of Isaiah when he was in Babylon. I like to think he did because somehow he got the scroll of Jeremiah and Isaiah was written before Jeremiah. If he had the scroll of Isaiah at his disposal, he would have read Isaiah 43:1 which says, "Fear not," this is God's word to his people and it belongs to us as well, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name," and then God says this, "you are mine." Mine. Not theirs. God is saying, "I know who you are. I have called you each by name." If he can number all the stars and call them by name, he can sure call us by name. "I have called you by name. I identify you with me," God says. It doesn't matter what the world is trying to do, they can't take that away from us. Our identity is founded in the blood of Christ ransomed on a tree for us.

So for all of you, beloved, who are struggling in different parts of your life and your walk with the Lord, and this life is hard, there are very dry seasons in our spiritual walk. Some of you are struggling with anxiety. Some of you are struggling with depression. Some of you are struggling with loneliness. Some of you are struggling with a persistent sin that you're trying to win and you keep fighting it and it keeps knocking you down, but you keep falling at the throne of grace. Some of you are struggling with grief today. I know that but I proclaim to you, beloved, with all the authority of heaven and a faithful Savior who came on your behalf, redeemed you, ransomed you, forgave you, I proclaim with all the authority of heaven that Christ knows you by name and he says to you this morning, "You are mine. You belong to me and nothing can snatch you out of my hands. Nothing." And he who has claimed us and knows us by name and purchased us on that tree at a cost immeasurable to us, is sovereign, is holy and is unfathomably kind. So as you leave this morning, beloved, remember, remember who you are. Amen.