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Daniel 1:8-21 “The Cost of an Uncompromising Life”

Intro. In our last message we read of a number of Hebrew youths who were captured as hostages and deported to Babylon. Babylon was the center of idolatry in the ancient world. It had become the dominate political and military power of that entire region. But at least some of these captives were fully dedicated to the God of Israel. It was inevitable that a conflict would result between the godly Jews and the ungodly world of Babylon.

Even so, we Christians must realize that we face a similar conflict. The world is becoming increasingly ungodly and hostile toward Christian principles. Even in the U.S., which was at one time known as a Christian nation, increasing numbers of people have become hostile toward Christians. For example, police and military chaplains have been ordered not to pray in Jesus’ name. Some have resigned as a result. Christian teachers are being forced to call what is clearly a male “she” just because he declares that he is a she! The cancel culture is going after Christians and Christian viewpoints. There is a clear conflict between the values and desires of the world, and the values and desires of true Christians. We can add to this problem the rise of Islam, even right here in America. Islam will not peacefully coexist with any other religion wherever they become dominant. Some of the most persecuted Christians of our world today are in countries dominated by Islam. Now we are facing a conflict with Marxist ideology in various forms, much of which is coming from taxpayer funded universities.

We can deal with this conflict in one of two ways. We could compromise our convictions, and become like the world, at least outwardly. With such an approach we would try not to appear to be different in beliefs and practices. The right way is to take a stand for Jesus Christ, and trust God to take care of the negative consequences that may come.

Even so, Daniel chose the later alternative, and we will see what happened to him. Daniel proved to be an inspiration to three other Hebrews, and he can be an inspiration to us, that we may stand true to God in an ungodly world.

Now the first thing I want you to do based on this text of Scripture is this:

I. MAKE A COMMITMENT TO STAY TRUE TO GOD

That’s what Daniel did. Let me give you some background to this decision. The king wanted these captives to be weaned from the God of their fathers, from the worship of their homeland, and from the love of their faith. So they were to be introduced and indoctrinated into the religion and the idolatry of the Chaldeans. So in vv. 4 & 5 the master of the eunuchs changed their education, seeking to brainwash them into the Babylonian philosophy and education, to make them Babylonians inwardly and outwardly. In v.7 we read that he changed their name. And now, in v.8, the king has proposed to change their diet. As we saw last week, this was intended to make them enjoy being in the king’s service and training and to make them loyal servants of the King. So through all of these steps, they were supposed to eat like Babylonians, dress like Babylonians, and think like Babylonians.

So the first thing that caused a moral problem with Daniel was the King’s command concerning their diet. That was because what the king commanded was directly and clearly

contrary to Old Testament dietary laws. Would Daniel go along with the King, and sin against God? Or would he stay true to his beliefs and convictions?

What moral and spiritual dilemmas are we facing today that could cause us to lose a job or face persecution? I have given a few examples already. [Discussion]

Well as we think of what the four Hebrews were facing, notice first of all:

A. The Difficulty of the Decision - This decision would be difficult indeed for your average Jew of that day for a number of reasons. First:

1. Because of the *King's* Command – We read in v.5, “And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank...” The king had ordered this menu; therefore, the order was a law. One of Daniel’s supervisors certainly feared the consequences of not obeying this law. In v.10 we see that he was afraid that his own head was in danger of being cut off by the order of the king. After all, King Nebuchadnezzar was not known for being a nice guy. In chapter 2, v.5 he threatened to cut his wise men in pieces, and turn their houses into an ash heap! In chapter 3 you can read about Nebuchadnezzar casting Daniel’s three friends into the fiery furnace, just because they would not bow to his golden image! Life was cheap in Babylon and subject to the whims of the king. If the king said, “Off with his head”, there would be no judicial appeal. His command would be carried out almost immediately. The chief, therefore, did not want to be caught changing the king’s orders in regard to the diet of the captives.

2. This would Spoil Chances of Advancement - These Hebrews were being trained for a fine government position in Babylon’s dealings with the nation of Israel. Along with that position would come honor, prestige, and even wealth. Any kind of rebellion would jeopardize chances for a favorable position.

I wonder if anyone here today has ever lost or quit a job because you stood true to Christian principles? Perhaps you refused to lie or cheat. Perhaps you blew the whistle on corruption. Would you stand for what is right if it could mean that you would lose your job? What if it meant laying down your life as a martyr? Millions of Christian martyrs and have died rather than deny their faith.

Another factor that would make this decision difficult was the fact that:

3. The King’s Food Was Good in Taste – You can be sure that the King had the best food in Babylon. His diet probably included the best of pork, like pork tenderloin and ribs. Jews were not allowed to eat that, or certain kinds of fish or seafood. Instead, Daniel chose to eat vegetables and water (v.12). That was a tough choice for anyone who loved to eat!

4. Their Parents Were Not Around - Their parents were probably back in Judea, hundreds of miles away. Either way, they were not there to correct them if they did wrong. The true character of a young person is seen in how they act when their parents are not around. Many young people are put to the test when they get old enough to get away from mom and dad for a while, especially when they are off to college. Alcohol abuse and sexual immorality are terrible problems on many college campuses.

So the decision that Daniel faced was difficult indeed. The consequences for saying “No” to the king’s food were great.

This points out a lesson for us. Why is it that we compromise our Christian convictions today? It is because we are afraid of the consequences. We are afraid that someone will make fun of us and call us a name. We are afraid that our chances for promotion at the job will be hurt. Or we might be afraid of losing a friend when we take a strong moral stand for God.

But in spite of the difficulty, let us examine:

B. The Decision of Daniel - In v.8 we see that Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the King's food or wine. Literally, it reads, "Daniel placed upon his heart...." He placed this decision on his heart, thus putting himself under full obligation to act according to it. Our convictions should come from the heart. If you do right only under outward pressure, then you will also do wrong under the wrong kind of outward pressure.

Daniel made a firm commitment here. Daniel did not vacillate when it came to the absolutes of the Law or the Word of God. When it comes to obedience to God's Word, we should not need time for a decision. We should simply obey God regardless of the cost involved. One great moral guideline for us today is found in Roman 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Daniel and his three friends refused to be melted down into Babylonians in heart. They would rather die than fail the faith or turn aside from obedience to their God. They could change their names but not their nature.

Do you have such a commitment to the Lord? Are you allowing certain sinful practices to defile your life?

C. The Reasons for Daniel's Decision - Why did Daniel take such a strong stand on this issue? Many would see nothing wrong with eating the king's food and drinking his wine. They might argue, "If the king does it, it must be OK!" And when Christians take a moral stand today, many will object and say, "What's wrong with having a few beers? What wrong with premarital sex if you love each other?" And I could give many other examples. Well, you should know what you believe and why you believe it.

So what were the religious reasons for rejecting the King's food? V.8 says that he rejected the King's food that he might not defile himself. That meant that he objected to:

1. Unclean Food - God made it very clear to His people in the Old Testament what they were to eat. We read in the book of Leviticus what was and was not allowed in their diet, to teach God's people to be a holy and separate, to learn the difference between holy and unholy, between right and wrong. Now even though Hebrew diet allowed the eating of many kinds of meat, Daniel decided to avoid meat altogether. He knew that forbidden meat would be included in the King's food. Also, the food provided did not meet the requirements of the Mosaic Law in that it was not prepared according to Jewish regulations, such as draining the blood.

2. Dedicated to a Pagan God - The wine, as well as the meat, was probably dedicated to their gods, supposedly to insure to the eaters the favor of those gods. Nebuchadnezzar, like other kings, would have insisted that all food coming from the royal kitchen be so dedicated, that his government might be benefited. Even in New Testament times Christian struggled with the issue of eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol.

So in his dedication to God, Daniel decided to avoid meat altogether. Instead, he would only eat "vegetables," as we see in v.12. This literally refers to food grown from seed, including grains of various sort. Thus breads would be included. Furthermore, he became a teetotaler! Even though wine was generally permitted for Jews, Daniel wanted to live by a higher standard. For example, God set a high standard for the priests. They were not to drink wine when they were ministering or eating in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:8). Now with the New Testament we are all priests unto God, and I believe it is a good practice to drink no wine or any kind of alcohol. Furthermore, Prov. 31:4 says, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine...." Daniel himself may have come from a royal family and would have been taught this important principle to which he may have already committed himself. Daniel lived by the highest standards. He wanted to avoid the very

appearance of evil. In contrast, too many Christians live by the bare minimum requirements. They attend church just barely enough to consider themselves an active attendee. They live on the edge of Christian morality. An uncompromising life like Daniel's will not play on the edge of what is right, but rather will choose that standard which is the highest, the noblest, and the best.

Now the point for us is not that we should imitate Daniel's diet. While a vegetarian diet may be more healthy, it is not more holy, as long as meat is eaten in moderation. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:25: "Whatsoever is sold in the meat market, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." We are not under Old Testament dietary laws today. But we should imitate Daniel's commitment not to defile ourselves with other things. I want to call upon our young people and others to purpose in your heart that you will not defile yourself with drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, sinful movies, and so forth? Or have you already compromised, and allowed some of these things to defile your spiritually?

So we have seen that Daniel and his 3 Hebrew friends made the difficult decision to resist the pressure of the world, and instead obey God. Now let's consider:

II. THE REQUIREMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

Now Daniel seemed to be facing a choice between staying true to God, and some terrible consequences. He could face imprisonment or even death. But let me tell you the good news. If you stay true to God, often the consequences are not nearly as bad as you might expect. In fact, God can bless you, and make things turn out even better in the long run if you will stay true to Him, even in this life. So notice what Daniel did to face this dilemma. The first principle is:

A. Make a Gracious Appeal to Authority - Daniel could have strutted in and said, "I think this Babylonian food stinks!" But instead, he sought a way to obey His God without manifesting a rebellious spirit. So he first made appeal to the chief of the eunuchs. Notice in the last of v.8 that "he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." But that official was caught between a rock and a hard place. He was afraid to grant Daniel's request, so in v.11 he appealed to the man with the title of "Melzar", a chief steward, and higher authority. Daniel offered to undergo a test, to permit an alternative diet. The point is he seems to have a sweet, lovable, and gracious attitude in his approach. It is a tragedy that the men who are the most fundamental are also frequently the most caustic and ungracious in spirit. Too often great devotion turns into cantankerousness.

Remember what Jesus said in Mt. 10:16, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Daniel exemplified that kind of approach.

B. Exercise Great Faith – It does not specifically say so, but I believe that Daniel had faith to believe that God would somehow see him through this difficult trial. Being a man of prayer, I believe he committed this matter to God in prayer. After all, God had promised in Isa. 43:2, 5a, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.... Fear not; for I am with you." Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe."

Now here in v.12 is where his faith was at work. Was ten days enough time for such a test? I would think not, but Daniel trusted God to so improve their appearance that this man would be

convinced of the propriety of their chosen menu. Besides, following Hebrew dietary law has been demonstrated to be a more healthy diet by modern science.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF GOD UPON SUCH A PERSON

Following Daniel's commitment in v.8, it's only a matter of time until we read in v.9 that God intervened to help. We see that God responds to such commitment. God will not let you down if you put your trust in Him. Daniel's life repeatedly portrays what God will do for the person who is faithful in obedience to God's Will.

Based on Daniel's experience, we can say that generally:

A. God Will Grant You Favor and Blessing – We read in v.9, “Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.” It's axiomatic that even if people disagree with your convictions, they admire you for sticking to them. People do not respect someone who vacillates about everything. Too many are like water-soaked sticks washing back and forth under a pier. But that is not the main reason Daniel had favor with the chief. The text indicates that God *caused* Daniel to have favor with the chief. God was working on Daniel's behalf, even as He worked in the life of Joseph down in the land of Egypt. Prov. 16:7 says, “When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” God may have used the attractive character of Daniel to win this favor. It pays to build good reputations. Now look at v.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.”

Now there is a lesson for us here. We may think that we will get along best in this world by compromising our commitment to God. But when you try to please men instead of God, you lose the blessing of God working on your behalf. Your responsibility is to please God and let Him control men's hearts. If you want to get somewhere in God's Kingdom, you don't have to play politics—just don't compromise, trust God and let God put you where He wants.

B. God Will Improve Your Character – We read in v.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.” The credit for the advance of these young men is properly given to God. Notice, God gave them:

1. Advance in Education - The “knowledge and skill in all literature” that God bestowed on the four were not given apart from their own diligent effort. I'm sure they did a lot of reading as part of their assignments. But God gave them the desire and learning capacity. Babylon was the center of knowledge in that day, and these 4 young men could talk intelligently with anyone in Babylon.

Before I committed by life to the Lord, I was just an average student overall. I was better than average in math and music, and worse than average in any subject that involved much reading, especially English literature. But especially the summer before my senior year in high school, I committed by life to the Lord. As soon as I began my senior year in H.S., my grades greatly improved. I became more diligent in my studies. God helped me to overcome a problem with reading comprehension. I just about made straight As that year, and that transformation continued through college and beyond, where I graduated with honors.

Young people, study as unto the Lord. Be diligent. And God will grant you a significant improvement in your education.

2. Wisdom - This is also indicated in v.17. Wisdom has to do with the proper application of knowledge to life situations, especially in the moral and ethical realms. Wisdom also considers the long-term consequences of a course of action. In addition to that, look at v.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.” Nebuchadnezzar talked with those four boys and found they were geniuses, and so he gave them good positions in his kingdom. Oh, how God will bless such a person with wisdom and understanding!

3. God May Endow You with a Special Gift – According to the last of v.17, “Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” He was given special interpretative ability as to vision and dreams. This gift was entirely of God. This gift would be used later, as we shall see in following chapters.

God can endow you with a special gift as well. In fact, we read of spiritual gifts in the New Testament [give examples].

C. Such Uncompromising People are the Ones God Really Uses -

1. In Being a Great Witness – Daniel became a great witness for the Lord to a number of people. No doubt he was a witness to the chief of the eunuchs, as we see in v.9. His name was Ashpenaz (v.3). He was impressed with Daniel. He also was a witness to the steward that we read about beginning in v.11. No doubt Daniel was also a witness and a great influence to his 3 Hebrew friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. It seems that Daniel took the initiative in standing true to God, and leading the other three in so doing. But later in chapter 3, when the other 3 faced an even more difficult test, they stood true to God and would not worship a graven image. In 3:18 they said, “But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

Finally, Daniel may have had an influence on the nations of Babylon and Persia. His influence could have been responsible for the wise men that came from the East centuries later at the birth of Christ. They probably came from the area of Persia, where Daniel served as Prime Minister.

Not only did God use Daniel in being a great witness, but He also used Daniel:

2. In Long Service – We read in v.21, “Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.” He outlasted the Babylonian empire! He served through at least part of the administration of the Persian King Cyrus, who conquered Babylon (10:1). Daniel survived many attempts to replace him by jealous people in the courts of various kings.

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976); John MacArthur, Jr., *An Uncompromising Life* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1983); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); John F. Walvoord, *Daniel The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1971); Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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