

HAZARD EVERYTHING TO STAY PURE!

Daniel 1: 1-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

One of the great blessings of being up here each year at Snow Camp is going out at night when there are no clouds and looking up. You may think there are more stars up here in the Uinta Mountains, but there are just as many stars back in Sweetwater County—in Rock Springs and Green River. So why is the black sky so full of pinpoints of light, with stars glimmering in an amazing display? The reason there seem to be more stars up here by Meeks Cabin in the Uinta Youth Camp is because it gets darker up here. In Rock Springs and Green River, there are many other competing lights at night. This keeps many of the stars in God’s heaven from being visible. In the absolute darkness of Snow Camp up here in the mountain, with no city lights to diminish the darkness, the stars shine unhindered. Tonight, I want to tell you that it does us no good to curse the darkness of our world that is getting darker every day. But I tell you, if we find out this year who we are and who we can be with the light of Christ inside us, we can quit cursing the darkness, and we can become lights in our dark world for Jesus.

Let me ask all of you a silly question. How many of you argued with your parents, or with your spouse or with one of your friends this past week. If all of us who argued were to be on one side and all those who didn’t argue a bit this past week with anyone, if we had a snow ball fight, the one or two or three people who haven’t argued might feel like they were being stoned with snow balls by the rest of us. All of us are sheep, and we all go astray. When we argue, and stick up for ourselves—trying to prove we are right, yes, that means when we defend our positions, our lights are dimmed before a watching dark world. Paul wrote about this in Philippians 2: 14, 15, “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, without murmuring and disputing, without arguing and defending your position, that you may be blameless and harmless, innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.” Arguing puts a dimmer switch on our light for Jesus.

What’s different about Christians? Sadly, for many young people that come to faith in Jesus, as well as for adults, we can all too often look and sound and act much like the world. According to DivorceRate.org. 50% of all marriages in America end in divorce. On September 25, 2012, Professor Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, explained from his analysis of people who identify themselves as Christians, but rarely attend church, 60 % of them have been divorced, even higher than the national average. But he found, that of those who

attend church regularly, and practice a daily walk with the Lord, the divorce rate stands as of 2012 at 38 %. Now that's still way too high, but it does pay when we shine our light in the darkness. From MSNBC, I found a few other statistics. 30% of Americans abuse alcohol and are alcoholics. They defile themselves with the king's meat and with wine. That's a high figure! But the statistic that floored me most and it makes Snow Camp 2014 so critical, so pivotal is from a book entitled "You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith." The author is David Kinnaman and the book was published three years ago in 2011. Here's the statistic that makes me want to weep. "Only three out of ten teenagers who grew up with a Christian background, (who claim to know Jesus) one 3 of 10 stay committed (to the Lord Jesus Christ) and to faithful attendance in church and walking true to their faith after they graduate from high school." That means if we are 20 youth, 6 youth will keep living for Jesus, if 30 youth, nine of you will keep living for Jesus. If we are 40 youth, 12 young people. Do the math. How many youth are up here? Multiply that number times .30 and you will face the stark and startling facts in America today. Well, we can curse the terrible growing darkness, or we can learn to risk it all to be a Daniel. That's our theme for these four messages. Take good notes. Let's break the statistics in our group, not in the power of our flesh, but by God's grace and help, by the power of God.

It was a bleak time for four teenagers in Jerusalem. There's a good chance their parents were killed when Nebuchadnezzar made his first of three attacks on their capital city of Jerusalem. If their parents and brothers and sisters weren't killed in this first attack in 606 BC, then it probably happened in the second attack in 597 BC and the final fall of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC. What a change happened to them, as they were captured, along with the king Jehoiakim, King of Judah. King Nebuchadnezzar took some of the golden vessels from the house of God, the temple in Jerusalem and he took some captives, among them, four young teenagers, probably between 13 at the youngest to 18 at the oldest. Then Daniel 1: 2 tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar carried these teenagers to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god and he put the golden vessels in the house of his god. The lights went out, the lights of hope for these four teenagers, as the trip was long from Jerusalem in Judah to Babylon. Everything in these teenager's lives changed, it seemed, on this long trip. Most likely, these four teenage captives were in a caravan of camels traveling 450 miles across the Arabian Desert. What changed for these four teenagers? **(1) They Had A New King--Nebuchadnezzar.** Notice, it wasn't King Jehoiakim, king of Judah demanding their allegiance. He was captured like they were, bound in fetters—II Chronicles 36: 6. They were the possession of **King Nebuchadnezzar** and he was making them part of a grand experiment, his guinea pigs—to see what he could make of teenage Hebrew captives. Could he make them part of his wise men? **(2) They Had A New Master, Like A New**

Daddy. Notice Daniel 1: 3, “Then the king commanded **Ashpenaz**, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family, and of the nobility, youths/teenagers without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. **(3) They Had A New Home—The King’s Palace.** So how does this new home sound so far? Bad, not so bad, awful, terrible, beautiful. What do you think? One thing is certain. The changes were going to start to add up to a chance for these four teenagers to get their spiritual lives derailed. That isn’t any different from what all of us face back home in Sweetwater County. Our culture does present us with some tough problems. These teenagers had been brought up in Jerusalem, being taught to memorize the scriptures, especially the first 5 books of the Bible. They had often been to the temple and seen the sacrifices there to the Lord. They had been taught by priests, scribes and they had probably heard some of the prophets-especially Jeremiah. Compromise was possible in Jerusalem, but now it was a new temptation in Babylon. **(4) They Had New Knowledge Being Taught Them, Which Included Knowledge Of Babylonian Gods Or Idols.** This exposure to falsehood and peer pressures wasn’t too different from what we face today, with pressures to drink and get drunk, take drugs, participate in pre-marital sex, listening to lots of swearing and cursing, being exposed to homosexuality. **(5) They Had A New Diet Prescribed For Them.** Notice verse 5. “The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated (with this new diet) for three years and at the end of that time, they were to stand before the king.” **(6) They Were Given New Babylonian Names—**names to match new gods, and not allowed to go by the godly names their Hebrew moms and dads gave them.

Now the teenager’s new master—daddy for three years, Aspenaz decided he never liked the Jewish names of these teens all names after the Lord God of Israel. Notice verses 6, 7. Daniel’s name meant –“God is my Judge. a. Daniel - God is my judge—so Daniel got the new name of Belteshazzar, meaning “Bel will protect.” Hannaniah’s name meant “God is gracious,” and his name became Shadrach, meaning “The inspiration of the Sun or Sun god the Chaldeans worshipped. Mishael whose name meant “God is without equal” got his name changed to Meshach, meaning “Belonging to Aku,” another false god like Bel. The last of the four teenagers, Azariah’s name meant “The Lord is my helper.” He got his name changed to Abednego, meaning Abednego which meant, "Servant of Nego," one more false god. **(7) They Were Given A New Leader By The Hand of Almighty God.** Notice that God raised up one of these teenagers, the man who wrote this book, Daniel, God raised up Daniel to be the leader of the four teens. He had a deep resolve in his heart that was shared by all four of the teens. This sets up the

entire book of Daniel and our message tonight—**HAZARD EVERYTHING TO STAY PURE.** Tonight, I want to share three ways Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego hazarded, they risked it all for the Lord, to stay pure. How does God want us today in 2014 to stay pure and overcome the intense peer pressure in our world to conform and blend in with our culture? Here are the three lessons:

THE LESSON OF INTEGRITY—MAKE UP YOUR MIND WITH GOD’S HELP, NOT TO DEFILE YOURSELF WITH THE WORLD’S BUFFET. (I.)

Look at verse 8. “But Daniel resolved, he purposed in his heart, yes, he made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that King Nebuchadnezzar drank. Haven’t we all known of guys and gals who made promises to God or to each other to remain pure, virgins until marriage, even wearing purity rings. Then the moment of temptation came and their mind wasn’t made up, the resolve didn’t stick, the purpose in their hearts was thrown away. What is this Hebrew word, resolve in verse 8? It is **suwm** or **siymm**. Do you know what this word means? Suwm means to set up a standard or a wall that cannot be penetrated or knocked down. It means to place something so strongly on the heart that it is fixed like the stars in the heavens. By the way, never forget that virginity for a young man or a young woman cannot be taken from them by force. If you are ever forced against your will, remember that virginity is given away by choice, a divine choice in marriage. It cannot be taken from you. This word suwm is not the same as a vow, but is just as powerful as a vow. It is like building a guard rail next to the Grand Canyon and refusing to walk on all the little trails that meander precariously outside the rails—where hundreds have slipped, falling down to their death. Daniel and his three teenage friends made up their minds that eating the king’s meat, drinking his wine were on the other side of the rail. Words and vows alone are not a wall, a standard. Make up your mind.

Paul wrote about this in I Corinthians 10: 20-22. “What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” This was a test of integrity. Now you may say, “What’s wrong with rising to the top, having privilege, getting top education, eating good food and drinking good drink, and having one of the top jobs in the kingdom? Who can argue with that? Daniel and his friends didn’t argue with the new education, the new training program and the future to serve as wise men in the king’s court. They didn’t even reject their idolatrous names. Where did they draw the line? They drew the line where God’s Word drew it. They couldn’t eat the king’s meat or drink his wine. T-bone steaks and vintage wine—these perks of serving in the palace came with a price-tag. The beef steak and lamb chops had been offered to

Babylonian gods, prepared by Babylonian standards, were outside God's written Word They had memorized Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy.

"Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank" (Dan. 1:8). Those enticing morsels and vintage wines--perks of the king's service--had been ritually dedicated to Babylon's false gods. Whatever portion of that food and drink was offered to idols was impure, outside the Levitical law of Moses which said that only certain parts of the sacrifices made only to the Lord could be eaten—no blood, no fat—for that soul would be cut off by the Lord from His people. (Leviticus 7) Pagans served blood in from all sorts of clean and unclean animals and made succulent dishes and they ate the fat. It was a test of integrity for Daniel and his friends. God had spoken. They knew where to draw the line. I ask each of us—Do we draw the line, saying—“This far and no further!” Is marijuana okay? Is smoking okay? Is bitterness okay? Is gossip okay? Is pride and unforgiveness okay? Is going to parties with drinking okay? Are R and X-rated movies okay? Is making out okay? Are we eating and drinking from the world's buffet--looking at pornography, using vulgar language, disobeying and disrespecting our parents regularly? When I was a teenager around 17, Ricky Nelson sang a popular song in 1962. He was asking his girlfriend to make up her mind and marry him or break up. “Make up your mind, and do what you're gonna do. Well you know how I feel, so I'm leaving it up to you.” God never forces us to live for Him. Have we learned the integrity lesson?—Will we risk it all and dare to be a Daniel? 2ndly,

THE DISCERNMENT LESSON—MAKE UP YOUR MIND WITH GOD'S HELP, TO USE THE UNDERSTANDING AND DISCERNMENT HE HAS GIVEN YOU TO WIN HIS VICTORY. (II.)

Notice verse 4. These four teens were more than sharp intellectually. They were “endowed with knowledge.” This Hebrew word is **yada**. Yada is a loaded word, which means to know by God's gift, by experiencing, observing, reflecting, thinking, seeing, and by discipline and training. This word means to have an intimate personal knowledge of God. Knowing God personally is the greatest endowment—the greatest divine gift of all. Knowing God is an endowment that makes seeing beyond Satan's false fronts and twisted lies. Knowing God means you don't have to join the world to play with fire to know it is hot. These four teens didn't balk at learning worldly Babylonian literature. There is value in secular education, if you know the Lord and how to integrate it into your life. There is one more interesting phrase, “understanding learning or the NASB says, discerning knowledge. This is a form of yada, which is **madda**. It means listening to instruction with a grid inside of a deep knowledge of God. Learn what the world teaches about evolution, but know God so that the education the world teaches doesn't shake your faith, or shape your faith. No, you

have yada and madda, but if you don't listen to God's Word or your parents, like many youth in America, if you haven't memorized His word and learned to listen to His inner voice, you are in deep danger. When you think you know more than the Bible, more than your parents, then you are tragically on the broad road to destruction. I cry when I hear young people say, I know I am doing wrong, but I intend to do it anyway. Without knowing God and knowing His Word, there is no victory ahead. I John 5: 4 declares, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith," our yada, and madda. Have we learned the discernment lesson of personal knowledge of Jesus, understanding, & discerning His will. Thirdly, lastly,

THE TRANSFORMING LESSON—MAKE UP YOUR MIND WITH GOD'S HELP TO USE HIS WISDOM TO STUN THE WORLD. (III.)

Verses 9-21 are the saga of a wise, shrewd plan God gave Daniel—a plan to put the Lord to the test. Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to change the identity of these teenagers and hopefully, to reshape their way of thinking. But wonder of wonders, though he could educate them for three years and change their name, he could not change their character. He tried to conform them into his mold, but they were godly young men of integrity who knew the Lord and had godly discernment. They refused to forget who they were, whose they were and whom they served. Young people, and all of us, we must never forget who we are. We are the born again children of God when we receive Jesus. The devil will continue at every turn to make us let down our guard, and conform to the world's standards, but as with Daniel, God will give us a way to escape—He provides a way—I Cor. 10: 13. By guarding what we take into our lives, instead of leaving us gaunt and skinny—God brings us to the other side of our tests victoriously, and will help us pass the tests with higher grades than those who defile themselves with the world's meat and drink. v. 17-21.

As we close, it's our turn now. We have come to our own decision time in our lives. Will we learn the integrity lesson, the discernment lesson and the transforming lesson so we are willing to risk and hazard it all for the One who died for us on the cross? This was decision time in their lives. They had a choice to make. It is decision time for us too. Will we go with the flow, compromise, and face eternal consequences for forgetting God? If those teenage men had compromised, we would never have even known their names. Verse 8 shows us their dedication. Verses 9-14 show us their desire that God amazingly honored. Vegetables and water left them in better shape than the king's defiled buffet. Verses 15-21 show us the four men's faith, obedience to God's way of escape and amazing results. Remaining true to our commitment doesn't mean we aren't polite, or that we demand. No, we respect authority, but we persist in following Jesus. We are willing to put our faith in God to the test—He does the rest. Will we learn the transforming lesson so we can risk it all and dare to be a Daniel?