

Daniel 1:8-21

17th September 2017 11:30am

Folks, we are carrying on from last week's introduction into the book of Daniel. And if you were not here last week, don't worry, the talk is on our Facebook page. Essentially we introduced Daniel as this teenager who has been stripped of his home, he's been taken captive and sent to a foreign land and culture called Babylon, which is today Iraq. He's been stripped off his manhood, stripped off his culture, his language, and even his name.

Now for most people in such a situation I think we would all agree that there would be a lot of protesting going on. But in these opening verses of Daniel's captivity, there's nothing said. Isn't that a bit strange? To have your name changed from something that once was giving glory to God, and now have a name that lifts up a pagan God. Maybe you are thinking, well like any teenager, they just don't care. They just got on with it. It's one of those moments that any of us who have had teenagers will remember as being a 'whatever' moment – maybe they just don't care. Maybe Daniel just doesn't care about all these things.

So at what point is Daniel and his companions going to say, right that's enough? Well as we are going to see, it's not long in coming. And the verse that we started from this morning, gives you an idea of the turning point. Verse 8 says, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself." Other versions say that he was determined, or that Daniel purposed in his heart. So this next decision is going to be one that will radically change his whole life. It's funny as I watch Josh grow from being a little boy, and now to a teenager, that he is starting to make decisions for himself. There are times where I will advise him on what he needs to do, and he comes back to me saying, "no Daddy, I'm going to take this route." That's a very hard thing for me to hear, because I'm realising that whilst he respects me, he is now at a stage to decide what path he is going to choose. Does he fully realise the implications? Maybe not, but he's soon going to find out.

This next decision by Daniel is actually going to affect the next 60 years. And immediately that needs to ring loud in our ears as a Church. It's known that the majority of Christians today make that decision to follow Christ in their formative years – the first 25. After that, the curve dips. So for us, what are we going to make sure that our young people's lives are influenced in the right way so that the decisions they make influence positively the next 60?

I wonder what it was then that finally made Daniel realise that now was the time to do something about his captivity? If he has submitted in every other way to the Babylonian regime, what's the big deal with the food? After all, teenagers would never turn down food, ever mind royal food. As you know some of the guys from our church family have left this weekend for University, and on Friday I popped round each home to pray with them before they would leave. In amongst all the packing that was going on, I noticed in one house a cookery book called Easy meals for students. And it was packed with things that anyone could make, and also what they could afford to buy with a student loan. You can be sure there was no recipes for sirloin steaks or chateaubriand in there. And I'm sure 3 years of eating Spag Bol every night will soon seem unappealing. And so here in Daniel's situation,

he's faced with either eating the scraps handed over to his people, or a chance to dine with the King eating the best of meals.

But why did he stop and say no? Well, there's possibly three reasons why he had a problem with the food served at the King's table. Firstly it wasn't prepared according to Kosher laws of the Old Testament. It would have been considered unclean. Secondly, as I said last week, it would have been previously offered to the pagan god. But thirdly, I believe sharing at the king's table represented sharing with the king's values. Today whenever we get together to eat around a table, it implies friendship, support, endorsement and shared values. And so for Daniel, yes he was willing to serve the king, but he couldn't pretend to be his friend. Eating the food was implying more than he was willing to do. This is hugely important because it teaches us that you can't corrupt a person from the outside. Yes you can change a culture, but you can't change the character of the person. Daniel might have looked like the rest of the pagans, but on the inside he was very much a servant of God.

Obviously that was bound to be a massive risk for Daniel. It probably sounded rebellious to the King, and would have placed him at risk of death. He was also spoiling any chance to advance in the King's house. If he keeps his head down and says nothing, eats the food, he's going to have a much easier time. But this choice was going to raise his profile in a very public and negative sense. In the public sector now there is protection for whistleblowers. On the UK government's website, it says this "As a whistleblower you're protected by law - you shouldn't be treated unfairly or lose your job because you 'blow the whistle'". Now personally, I'm too cynical to believe that things will be ok. Yes you will not be treated unfairly or lose your job, but will it be easy for someone to stay on with their job? For Daniel, once he raises the issue of food, he can kiss his future goodbye.

So once Daniel had made his mind up, it goes on to say this in Verse 10 – 'Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel'. Can you see the way this happened after Daniel's decision and not before? There are times in life where we might wonder why God has not stepped into a situation we are facing. After all we have prayed and sought him, but still there seems no resolve. What Daniel teaches us here, is that sometimes we need to make that step and declare our faith publicly and who we rely upon in all things, before God reveals the next steps. Doesn't that verse in **Psalm 37 confirm this that the steps of a righteous person are ordered by God**. The person already is in a right relationship or right standing with God, for God to then order his next steps. And so for each of us, God will at times expect us to stand up for our faith in him, so that he can then order what comes next.

And so the official had favour and compassion on Daniel, and so allowed Daniel in a period of 10 days to only eat vegetables and water. This was so counter to what the King wanted of these young men. He wanted them to be muscled up with lots of carbs and workouts, he wanted them to look so different to the state they were in post-war in Jerusalem. So you wouldn't think such a diet would work would you? Verse 15-16 tells us that at the end of the ten days the four teenagers look better on their vegetables and water diet than the fellows who had been munching away on t-bone steaks at the King's table. They looked so good that the guard let them continue with their strange diet indefinitely.

And so before we think briefly about the application for our own lives, it's important to not go away thinking that every time we stand up for our convictions, we will be immediately rewarded by God. This passage proves that sometimes it does happen that way, but as we for example begin to develop stronger links with Release International and the persecuted Church, we ought to remember that God's timings and ours can be very different. In many parts of the world, our brothers and sisters in Christ are paying with blood for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ. It's not our call to stand up for God so that we expect a reward back in return. Instead our call is to be faithful, knowing that in the end, whether on earth or in heaven, no one will regret standing up for Jesus Christ.

And so folks, such a decision that Daniel would make as I said, would affect the next 60 years. Verse 21 tells us that Daniel remained in the court of Babylon until the first years of Cyrus, which was 539 BC. That means he served as an advisor to a whole series of Babylonian kings for at least 60 years more. And all this because Daniel said no.

So briefly, what can we learn as we live in a world today that does not honour God? Are we willing to say no to its pull?

Firstly, the world continually tries to reprogram us into a different mindset

Today's younger generation are bombarded with influences through social media, and these nasty little things (hold up your phone). But the attack also comes to all of us in subtle ways everyday. We might be offered a promotion in our work, which in turn means we are away from home a lot more, and not able to be part of the weekly home groups in our churches. Through our inclusive society, we are subtly influenced into believing that equality in marriage for the LGBT community is an important step for our society. Never mind the battle in our minds going on every day in the media which says that all religions are equal. Some of us are losing the battle because we don't even know there is a battle going on. We just go with the flow and wonder why we end up looking and sounding just like the Babylonians.

Secondly, we've got to determine our minds that we will be loyal to God's Word

Daniel drew a clear line in the sand, which he was never going to step over. For each of us we have got to draw a line somewhere, sometime. You've got to think ahead and decide what you won't do, so that when a situation arises you are already resolved in your heart. Where you draw that line however has to be based on what God's Word says not on what the world says. You can't just decide based upon your moral values or opinions, because remember that they are slowly being corroded around us. If you start making decisions without asking what does God's Word say about this, then all you are is a good upstanding member of the public. The Christian life is more than that.

And the world will try to slowly corrode away at you from the inside, which is why sitting on God's Word daily is so important. I've had this orange sitting here all the time we've been chatting. It looks incredibly nice, ready for eating. But watch as I cut it open. In the inside it has become very corrupt and black. The same thing happens when we refuse to stand our ground for Christ. Every time we compromise, something bad happens in our soul.

Eventually the little decisions add up and we become hollow on the inside even though we may look great on the outside.

I told you in the beginning that this was the crucial event of Daniel's life. It may not have seemed important at the time, but his decision not to eat the King's food shaped the next 60 years. We talk about Daniel 2,500 years later precisely because of this decision not to eat the food. If he doesn't make the right choice, the rest of the book never gets written, and he becomes a forgotten Jew in Babylon who looked and acted just like everyone else. Each one of us have similar choices to make which will affect our story. Your story and mine in today's society will be determined by the choices we make. We will either be known as a Church community that stood up for what it believed, or we will be forgotten in the Annals of time. If we recognise that the spiritual influence we make on our young people now will affect their whole lives, then I ask you, are you ready to properly invest in them as a church so that their story impacts theirs and the generation coming after them?

The world has changed since Daniel's day, but God has not changed. God's Word has not changed. And the world still tries to seduce us. The good news from Daniel 1 is that it is possible to live for God in our schools, as the guys travel today from here to Uni they can be a witness there, for many of you at work, and in your career. Daniel has shown us the way to live counter culturally. Let's go from here today determined in the Godly choices we need to make every day.