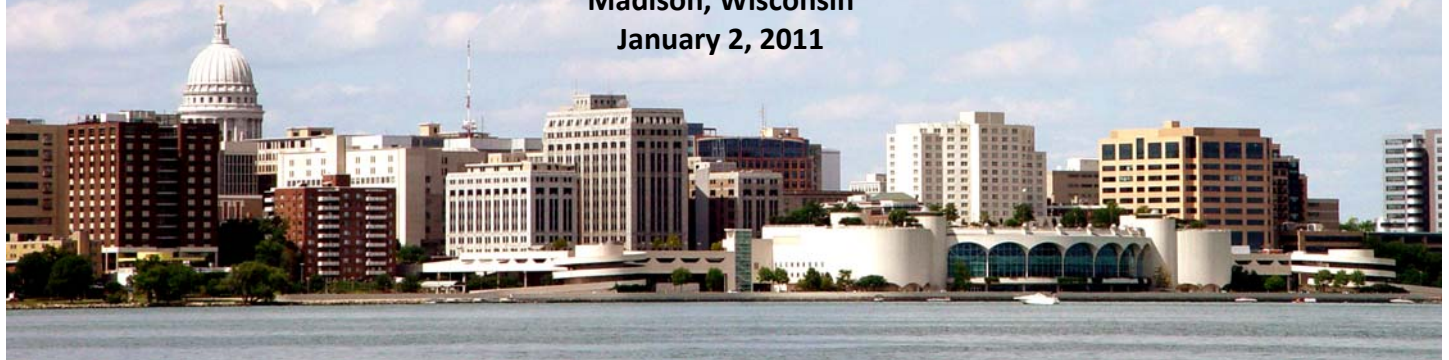


“No Compromise”

Daniel 1

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Introduction:

Most of us would probably agree that we are living in a society where it is getting more and more difficult to live the Christian life without compromise. In fact, our society tells us that what may be true for you may not be true for me and that all of us are entitled to our own truth. And so the pressure on us as Christians to compromise our firmly held convictions is intense, and those who refuse to compromise are ridiculed. This morning, as we encourage each other to stand firm on what we believe, I would like to ask (at the beginning of this new year) that we consider a character from the Old Testament, a young man who was taken nearly a thousand miles away from home as a prisoner of war and yet refused to compromise his firmly-held belief in the word of God. I am referring, of course, to the young man Daniel.

By way of background, we know that Daniel was born into a Jewish royal family. He was a young man with a bright future, and yet as he was perhaps a young teenager, the city of Jerusalem was attacked, and all of the best and brightest young men were taken away to the city of Babylon to be brainwashed (to be reprogrammed) to eventually serve in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. And although the attack on Jerusalem was God's punishment on the nation of Israel, Daniel (as a very young man) had personally done nothing wrong to deserve this. In this particular raid, the temple was looted, and the most promising young men of Israel were basically kidnapped. These would have been the valedictorians of their classes, those who were gifted not only academically but also athletically. These are young men who were already training to take over the next generation of leadership in Jerusalem, the children of royalty. And yet when they were taken to Babylon, they were given new names to honor the Babylonian gods, and history suggests that the young men were also castrated. If so, this would have been the direct fulfillment of a prophecy, the result of a warning made by the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah many years earlier. In Isaiah 39:5-7, the Bible tells us that Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ***“Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,” says the LORD. And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials [that is, “eunuchs”] in the palace of the king of Babylon.*** God's people, therefore, had been warned, but they did not listen, and now these innocent young men were paying the price. And yet as steep as that price might have been, it was all a part of God's plan, as we will see in the opening chapter of the book of Daniel.

As we look, this morning, at Daniel 1, I would like to divide our study into three parts: First of all, a reminder that Daniel had some very strong convictions. Secondly, the idea that Daniel stood up to some intense pressure. And finally, the example Daniel set for us as he trusted God for the outcome.

- I. **But first of all, I would like for us to notice in the first 8 verses that DANIEL (even as a very young man) CAME INTO THIS SITUATION WITH SOME INCREDIBLY STRONG CONVICTIONS.**

If you will, please look with me at Daniel 1:1-8...

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials [lit., eunuchs], to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. ⁶ Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego. ⁸ But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.

Please notice in verse 2 that all of this was the Lord's doing, "***The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah***" into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar then looted the temple and brought those vessels back to Babylon along with the smartest and most athletically gifted young men of Israel, the most promising young men from the royal family. They were snatched from their homes and most likely never saw their families again. Several weeks ago I went on Google Maps and tried to figure out how far it is from Jerusalem to Babylon. The old city of Babylon is about 55 miles south of Baghdad. Well, Google basically said, "Don't do that!" That was amazing to me, because Google can get you almost anywhere. Sometime this afternoon, I would encourage you to go home and use Google Maps to figure out how to get from Japan to the United States. It's funny, because it will give you directions from downtown Tokyo to the ocean, it will then tell you to kayak 3,789 miles to Hawaii, go across Hawaii, and then kayak another 2,756 miles to the continental United States. Well, if they could get me from Japan to the US in a kayak, I thought for sure they could get me from Jerusalem to Baghdad, but no! Apparently that trip is too dangerous. I went to Bing Maps, though, and they gave me some directions, not on foot, but in a car (the next best thing), and their estimate was that the trip from Jerusalem to Babylon would be 745 miles. The point is: Daniel and his friends were ripped away from their families and were taken a long, long way from home.

And then when the young men are finally delivered to Babylon, they are placed under the care of the "***Chief of the Officials,***" or more literally, the "***Chief of the Eunuchs.***" Let's just say that if you are a young man and are kidnapped, you do not ever want to end up as the responsibility of anyone with that title, and yet that is what happened to these young men from Jerusalem.

Not only that, but these young men were given new names, names that honored various Babylonian gods. Daniel was a Hebrew name meaning, "God is My Judge." His name was changed to Belteshazzar, meaning, "Bel, Protect His Life," a reference to Bel, the chief Babylonian god. Hananiah, meaning "The Lord Shows Grace," was changed to Shadrach, meaning, "Under the Command of Akuk" (the Sumerian moon-god). Mishael, meaning, "Who Is What God Is," was changed to, "Meshack," meaning, "Who is What Aku is?" And Azariah, meaning, "The Lord Helps," was changed to Abednego, meaning, "Servant of Nego," another Babylonian god.

Now at this point it would have been very easy for Daniel to get pretty disillusioned. I mean, imagine being in his position: I have been ripped away from home, these people have done this to me, they have even changed my name. How can I believe all of these old stories about God being the Lord of heaven and earth? How can I put my trust in God when God has allowed all of these horrible things to happen? He could have said this, and yet we find how Daniel actually responded in verse 8 where the Bible says, ***"But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself."*** He ***"made up his mind"*** that he would not ***"defile"*** himself with the king's food. That is, he made a decision in his heart, and that is where it starts. For whatever reason, Daniel knew that to eat the king's food would be wrong in the eyes of God. The word ***"defiled"*** refers to something that is polluted. So, perhaps the food was unclean under the Law of Moses. Maybe we are talking about bacon and lobster here. These things would have been unclean under the Old Law. Perhaps the king's food had been offered and dedicated to various pagan idols. Perhaps the meat was from animals that had been strangled; that is, maybe there was blood in it, another violation of the Old Law. We are not told what the problem was, but we know that it would have been wrong (for whatever reason) for Daniel to eat the king's food. Of course today, we do not have those food restrictions from the Old Testament, but our world still tries to get us to do things that will defile us, things that will make us polluted. Our world says, "You need to wear this! You need to eat this! You need to spend your money on this! You need to watch this! You need to go to this website!" And yet as a result of being offered the food (even though it might have seemed like a little thing), Daniel made a decision in his heart not to do it. He ***"made up his mind."***

I should point out here that his decision started with some level of knowledge of God's word. In other words, in order to know that it was wrong, Daniel had to know the word of God. We remember the words of Psalm 119:11, ***"Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You."*** In a similar way, Daniel (like King David) also had the word of God in his heart. And because he knew the word of God, the decision to do the right thing really had already been made. And you know, if we wait to make a decision until we get pressured to do something, chances are it will not end well. If we wait to get into a compromising situation before deciding whether we will be faithful to our spouse, for example, it will probably not end well. If our young adults start dating and THEN decide what kind of behavior is appropriate and how far they will go, it will not go well. The same goes for pressure on the job, or pressure at school, or pressure at college. And so like Daniel, we can make up our minds to do what is right well before the pressure gets too intense.

One other thing I should point out: We notice here that Daniel was not rude with his request, he was not demanding, but instead the Bible says that he ***"sought permission"*** from the commander so that he might not defile himself. He was not judgmental. He was not condescending. He was not demanding. He did not organize a student protest. He did not go downtown and break out some windows. But he ***"sought permission."*** And what a great lesson for all of us here today! When we are encouraged to do something we know is not right, we do not need to be rude or arrogant, but we can follow Daniel's example by very politely making a decision not to participate.

There's a time coming this week when most of us will be alone. Each of us will have our choice of music. Each of us will have our choice of friends to hang out with. Each of us will have our choice of websites to visit. Each of us will have our choice of what to eat and what to drink. And like Daniel, we can decide right now to do the right thing. As one old preacher has said, "Daniel might have been in Babylon, but Babylon was not in Daniel," or as we might say here, "We may be in Madison, but Madison should not be in us." First of all, then, Daniel came into this situation with some very strong convictions.

II. As we move on into the second paragraph of Daniel 1, we notice something else, and that is: DANIEL STOOD UP AND DID THE RIGHT THING UNDER SOME VERY INTENSE PRESSURE.

If you will, please look with me at the next section, Daniel 1:9-16...

⁹ Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials,¹⁰ and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."¹¹ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.¹³ "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.¹⁵ At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

And with this, we see that the pressure gets even stronger, and the tug of war continues to be focused on something as seemingly insignificant as food. Food is the battleground. Several weeks ago in our Wednesday evening class, we looked again at those ways Satan tempts us: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. I don't want to read too much into this, but it looks like Satan is at it again. The young men are presented with what must have been a very appealing option, to eat the king's food. Most of us, when given the choice of a juicy prime rib or a plate of steamed broccoli, most of us would take the prime rib. And so perhaps in a similar way, it must have looked good, it must have been very appealing and very tempting, and it represented a great honor, the honor of being accepted by the king. The pressure was intense!

Not only that, but we have the pressure of the king himself. You can see the tension here all the way down the chain of command. We have the king, and we have prisoners of war, and we have pressure coming down from the top and going all the way to the bottom. And we know that King Nebuchadnezzar was not to be messed with. Nebuchadnezzar was a man with a temper. Nebuchadnezzar was known to fly off the handle. We remember the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. We remember how he had the furnace heated up seven times hotter than normal. And so we know why Nebuchadnezzar's own commander was terrified to deviate from the plan. In verse 10, the commander was afraid that he would lose his head over this issue. But in spite of the pressure, Daniel pushes it even a little bit further and proposes a little test: Let us eat only vegetables and water for ten days, and then let us just see what happens, and as the Bible says, the commander finally gave in and agreed to the experiment.

But the point for us this morning, the way this applies to us is this: The pressure on us to conform to this world is also intense! We think about Nebuchadnezzar. His goal was to pressure these young men from Jerusalem into becoming Babylonians. In the same way, this world wants us to be like them. Satan pressures us to convert, to give in, to change—especially when we are young, as Daniel was. In middle and high school, our fellow students try to get us to give in to their way of thinking. We go off to college, and we have professors who dismiss the word of God as nothing more than a myth. When we go looking for a job, the pressure continues. I have told you before about how I had one job for a full five minutes. I was a teenager at the time and had applied for a summer job at a local grocery store. On the application and in the interview, I let the manager know that I would work at any time of day or night (even on short notice if needed), but that I would not be able to work on Sunday morning from 9 to noon or on Wednesday evening from 6-9. Other than that, I would do just about anything. I told the manager that I would work holidays; I would work in the middle of the night if he needed me to do it. Well, he said, “You’re hired,” and then he took me over to the giant calendar on the wall, and he said, “This week we need you to work on Sunday morning.” And I said, “Did you not hear what I just said and what I put on my application?” And he said, “But all new people need to work on Sunday.” And I said, “Then I think you made a mistake.” And I left. It was hard. I needed the job. But, you know, my life didn’t end. I was hired and quit within five minutes. It was not a pleasant experience. The pressure was intense. But standing up under pressure makes us stronger. And that is the way it was with Daniel. Such a small thing! He could have eaten that food, and his parents never would have known.

And that is the way Satan works. He doesn’t always bring the persecution, he doesn’t stand there on our front porch with the horns and the flaming pitchfork, but he often brings the pressure. These guys were not tortured into eating this food. It was just there—a nice lobster, or maybe some fried catfish, or maybe a little bacon-wrapped scallops—delicious food, but food that would have been wrong for them to eat according to God’s law at the time. And that is the way the world works. It tries to nudge God out just a little bit at a time. The world tries to make us so busy that we no longer have time for God. And the things we are busy with are not bad, it is not bad to have a job at the mall, it is not bad to get involved in karate, or band, or whatever, but it all creeps in so easily and suddenly we grow up and we realize that we no longer have time for God. The pressure to conform to this world, the pressure to slowly move God out of first place is intense.

Imagine being at a party with your date. You are all down in the basement watching a movie at a friend’s house, and slowly all of the other couples start to leave and go off to various bedrooms in the house. You know what they’re doing. And there you are left alone with your date. That is an awkward moment, and the pressure is intense. Imagine being out with a bunch of friends at a bonfire out in the middle of nowhere. And as the night wears on, someone breaks out the Jack Daniels and starts passing it around the circle. Everyone takes a drink or two, and then it gets to you. What do you do? The pressure is on. Or think about the pressure to cheat in school. It seems like almost everybody cheats these days. Everybody is downloading term papers off of the internet. Everybody is lifting huge chunks of text, just cutting and pasting it into their own papers. How do we handle that? The pressure to cut corners is so strong. When the guys at work start talking about filthy things as we are standing right there, how do we handle that? The pressure is intense. And we have learned this morning that Daniel understands. Daniel knows what that is like—something as insignificant as a meal, but it meant so much to Daniel, and Daniel had the courage to stand up to the pressure.

I would encourage all of us (especially those of you who are young) to make coming to Bible class and worship a priority at this point in your life. Put that Christian fellowship at the top of your list, and make sure that nothing takes God out of first place. Do you know what you are doing on January 9, 2011? I do! I plan on being right here worshipping with God’s people. What about May 22, 2011? I know where I’ll be. And I don’t

mean, “Unless something better comes up.” I don’t mean, “Unless I’m out late with my friends the night before.” I don’t mean, “Unless one of my kids has a field trip.” I mean that if I am alive and healthy enough to move, I know what I will be doing on May 22. What about June 14, 2015? What if that’s the day my son graduates from high school? Well, that decision has already been made in our family. For me, that decision was made all the way back on March 18, 1984, the day I was immersed in water for the forgiveness of my sins. Twenty-six years ago, I knew where I would be this morning. Not only that, but I married a woman who made the same decision back on November 13, 1983, 27 years ago. What about September 18, 2033. If I’ve done my math correctly, I will be 61 years old in 2033, but on September 18 of that year, I plan on worshipping with God’s people. And the same goes for January 5, 2059. If I make it that long, I will be 86 years old, but I know right now that I have an appointment to worship with God’s people on that day. The point is: All of us need to make the decision (just as Daniel did) to do the right thing regardless of the pressure. We don’t need to be offensive or abrasive about it, but we need to do the right thing. I remember a worker at the GM plant down in Janesville many years ago. He was some kind of specialist who came in for a year or so, but I remember how he got permission from his supervisor to arrange his morning break, his lunch break, and his afternoon break all together to give him the hour or so to worship with God’s people on Sunday morning. Because of the work that he did, he had to work a lot of weekends, but he made it work.

Today, there are so many things we can do to remind ourselves that we are different. I know a Christian young woman who in high school got pretty angry at all of the money that was being wasted on prom—hundreds for the dress, and the tickets, and the tux, and all of that—and so she and her date decided to skip it and to use the money they would have spent on the prom to feed the homeless instead. They bought a bunch of food, they took the train downtown Chicago, and instead of going to prom they used that money and that time to hand out food all night long. I might not recommend that for everyone, but it is an example of one Christian who made a bold statement that she was refusing to eat the king’s food. She was different and refused to be squeezed into the world’s way of thinking. In a similar way, Daniel, then, not only had strong convictions, but he also stood up to some intense pressure.

III. As we close, I would like for us to look at the last paragraph of Scripture in Daniel 1, and I would like for us to consider the fact that DANIEL TRUSTED GOD FOR THE OUTCOME.

If you will, please look with me at Daniel 1:17-21, the result of Daniel’s experiment...

¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. ²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. ²¹ And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

And so we see that God did not miraculously free Daniel from slavery. God did not miraculously transport Daniel hundreds of miles back home. God did not give back what the Babylonians had taken—there was no miraculous healing for Daniel and his buddies. However, God did make sure that Daniel and his three friends excelled far beyond their peers, and God put them in a position where they were able to do good for many years into the future. In the years to come, Daniel would face more tests, but he would end up as one of King Nebuchadnezzar’s most trusted advisors. Verse 21 is significant, “And Daniel continued until the first year of

Cyrus the king.” Cyrus was not a Babylonian; he was a Persian. In other words, verse 21 tells us that Daniel would live long enough to see the end of the Babylonian Empire, he would live at least several years into the new Persian Empire, and he would live long enough to see his fellow Jews start to make the journey out of captivity and back to Jerusalem. And in so many ways, Daniel’s usefulness in God’s plan all started with a seemingly small decision not to eat the king’s food.

Conclusion:

As we close our lesson on Daniel 1, I hope the application to all of us here this morning is obvious: Like Daniel, we should also take a firm stand to always do what is right, no compromise, no matter what—regardless of the cost, regardless of the consequences, and regardless of how insignificant the decision may seem at the time. Either we are going to be owned by the Lord or we are going to be owned by this world.

If you are not a Christian, the first step in taking a stand for God is to believe in His Son. That right there makes us different from most of the world. Once we believe, we must come to understand what sin is, how bad it is, and what it means for us—it means that we have offended God, and that we deserve spiritual death for what we have done. We must then turn away from our sins, and then we must demonstrate our love for God through our obedience to His word—we must allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions about God’s plan, we hope you will let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com