

Sermon – 01/07/2007 pm

Daniel's Test

Study Text: Daniel 1:8-16

Daniel was long way from home. He was away from his family and away from his place of worship. How would he live in this foreign land? A Hindu man once told me how he had enjoyed meat pies when he was in America. By religion he was a vegetarian and would never have eaten meat at home. But in this far away place who would know. Some who call themselves Christians live by the same thinking. But not Daniel!

Daniel had been uprooted and carried of to this strange land. The king selected him and his three friends for a re-education program. He was to become a special servant of the king. He had a bright future in this new land. All he had to do was learn the way of living in this new land, a way of life centred upon idol worship. Would Daniel conform, or would he live as a man transformed by faith in God?

Decisive Daniel

Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with food and wine from the king's table (1:8). From the very outset Daniel made a solemn resolution not to eat food from the king's table. Such a decision was potentially dangerous for this young captive. It was disobedience but not open defiance as we will see. It was personal resolution not to defile himself in the sight of God not a crusade towards martyrdom.

'To defile himself means more than ceremonial defilement because sinning in the matter of idol – meat would be more than an outward shortcoming' (Leupold). The Hebrews had strict food laws. If they ate 'unclean' foods they would be become ceremonially unclean. They were not permitted to eat with non-Hebrews or Gentiles. Food became a major issue in Judaism. It is a major issue in many religions. Some Christians also make a big issue of food and drink.

Daniel did not object to being given a new name or to learning about other gods. Why did he object to the food and drink he was given? Did he want to make the point that he was a Hebrew; that his religion was different to the Babylonians? Was his religion mainly about what he ate and drank?

Whilst the food that Daniel would have been given was probably not 'kosher' or ceremonially clean, defilement meant more than this? For Daniel it was a matter of conscience, a matter of the heart, a matter of faith. The food that came from the king's table would have offered to idols before eating. For Daniel eating this food was tantamount to worshipping such idols. He determined not to defile himself or sin against his conscience in this way.

Have you ever faced this problem that Daniel faced, the problem of food sacrificed to idols? Probably not but young Christians in India do. When Hindus have festivals in honour of their gods they take holy food called 'Prasad' and offer it to everyone including Christians. In colleges and in the work place Christians have to decide what to do.

Before you start thinking about what you eat and whether it has been offered to idols, consider what the apostle Paul might have done in Daniel's place. Although Paul says it is wrong to join the pagans in their feasts (I Corinthians 10:21), he also says that no food is unclean in itself (Romans 14:14). Idols are nothing he says and so he was ready to eat anything (I Corinthians 8).

Yet Paul recognised that it was a matter of conscience for some believers and their conscience must be taken seriously. Faith in God means the conscience is illuminated. We have a spirit-illuminated conscience and we can sin against our own conscience. This is a difference between faith and religion. Religion is about rules, but faith is about a good conscience towards God (I John 3:21). *The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17).

Daniel's decision was not a matter of legalism but a matter of conscience. In the light of Scripture he purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Paul would certainly have commended him for not sinning against his own conscience. More importantly the Lord honoured Daniel's decision for it was taken from faith in God. *Whatever is not from faith is sin* (Romans 14:23).

What have you purposed in your heart before the Lord in order to honour him in your life? Are you a Christian who lives like everyone around you? Believers and unbelievers living in the same way – can this be so? I ask this question with care for we must not start thinking legalistically. We are talking about transformation, about renewing of the mind. We are talking about glorifying God not about glorifying ourselves.

Another problem faced by believers in India is that of bribery. Is it a fee or a bribe? If I don't pay a bribe nothing will get done? Such questions arose. To take a stand against bribery meant personal hardship – but honour to God. You may be confronted by gambling. Many think nothing of a school raffle – how terrible to offend the children they say. I heard of a compulsive gambler who traced his problem to such a thing. What stand do you take? What stand do you take on swearing? What stand do you take on sexual immorality? Daniel took a stand – will you?

Daniel took a stand at the very beginning. He did not say 'when I am in good with the king I will take a stand'. He did not say 'when I have lots of friends I will take a stand'. He did not say 'when I am well established in my job I will take a stand'. He purposed in his heart from the start, from day one. It is much easier to stand up for righteousness and truth now than it will be later.

Humble Daniel

Daniel *requested the chief steward that he might not defile himself* (1:8). He did not bluntly refuse to eat the food; he did not demand to be given other food, but quietly and humbly asked to be excused from eating food from the king's table. He treated the chief steward with respect. Daniel's decision was to honour God, not to antagonise heathen men and make himself a martyr. Daniel responded to his situation with spiritual humility and respect.

Even though he liked Daniel the chief steward was not prepared to take the risk of letting Daniel and his friends become pale and drawn looking. The word translated 'looking worse' is literally 'to look worried or excited'. The king of Babylon had absolute power. Anyone

who failed in their duty or simply displeased him could be executed. The chief steward was duty bound to prepare Daniel for the king's service.

Daniel did not get upset – nor did he give up in despair. He wisely went to the next man down the ladder. Human wisdom says go to the top if you want something done. Daniel went to the bottom. He asked this steward, *Please test your servants for ten days* (1:12). Again humility and respect mark Daniel's request.

A friend of ours runs an orphanage in North India. She maintains good relations with the local authorities who are not Christians. A new Christian group was looking for a place to worship so she gave them a corner of the orphanage for meetings. The pastor of this church went into the town preaching the gospel. In doing so he mocked and condemned the Hindus. They became angry and came throwing stones on the orphanage.

'To be able to stand firm and hold Biblical convictions modestly is a great grace that for too many of us attain' writes Sinclair Ferguson. Does he know about the Free Church! Are we more noted for the things that we condemn as a church than for the things we believe? When I was growing up young people were condemned for their long hair and the clothes they wore. I still hear the young being condemned for their dress, or their noise in church, or some other thing. Where is the grace demonstrated by Daniel, and not only Daniel but Jesus Christ?

Ferguson adds – 'is it because we are over concerned about the fact that these convictions are our own and too little concerned for the glory of God in them?' Daniel took his stand for the glory of God, not to display his own religious convictions.

Hopeful Daniel

Daniel suggested to the steward that he test them for ten days, giving them only vegetables to eat and water to drink. 'Vegetables' literally mean 'sown things', so included pulses. It was a vegetarian diet. Daniel wisdom shows forth in this request – as does his faith in God. Why ten days?

Ten days seems a short time to test a diet. Did the Holy Spirit suggest this time to him? God did honour Daniel's faith. *After ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies* (1:15). If Daniel had suggested a longer period the steward may not have been willing to take the risk.

It was not the food that made Daniel and friends look healthier, it was God. If you went vegetarian for ten days who would notice? God was with Daniel as he was with Joseph. *God brought Daniel into the favour and goodwill of the chief steward* (1:9). Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. He determined to honour God and God honoured him. *Those who honour me I will honour says the Lord* (I Samuel 2:30).

Remember wherever you are you are a child of God (Psalm 139). As a child of God you are to live in a way that brings glory to God. If you purpose in you heart to do this God will uphold you. Learn from the Word of God how you should live and humbly hold those convictions. The Lord promises to give you the strength to do so.

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