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Daniel 1 "Serving God on Hostile Grounds"
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Shall we open our Bibles this morning to the book of Daniel Chapter 1.

It's a hard thing for high profile people to finish their careers unscathed. If you've been around for a while, there's been plenty of folks politically, even religious leaders, falling under the scrutiny of a relentless kind of media spotlight and they fail. It's usually worse when we see a believer or who we think is a believer take a nosedive.

Man has a way of setting high standards for others while trying to lower the bar for himself. But here's a guy, Daniel, who lived an honorable life from beginning to end, which is amazing, because he came from a country, Israel at the time, that we've been studying, before the Babylonian captivity with Ezekiel and Jeremiah. They weren't doing very good, but he was doing well.

Secondly, he was on public display for nearly 80 years. Much like Joseph, he is called a man that God greatly loves. In fact, that little phrase "greatly loved by the Lord" is used three times in this book about Daniel. He didn't once leave the public stage. He had a highly visible place of authority and influence. Yet there's not one record, like Joseph, of a failure in his character and in his walk with the Lord.

I can't relate to these guys at all. I like Peter and the other guys who do nosedives. But these guys are phenomenal. Daniel is certainly someone that has lived in the public sector from early teenager until his 90s, that he did so without stumble.

The benefit of studying this book is you get stories of his life with great detail, especially the first six chapters of the book which talk a lot about Daniel's walk with the Lord and how God used him. The second six chapters are more prophetic. We used a lot of them when we went through the Revelation study on Wednesday night. If you are interested in going through this whole book in-depth, we have those

studies in the bookstore today, and two weeks from now. But we're not going to be doing that. We're kind of picking and choosing our lessons through the prophets just to kind of ask the Lord to show us how we can grow from their example.

But needless to say, Daniel is a guy that's under tremendous attack in the world because he's so specific in his prophecies hundreds of years earlier, and more, that the people criticized him and say, "Well, he couldn't have written this book. How would anybody know those kinds of details?" And yet in the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24, Jesus said this book was written by Daniel, which is good enough for me. But he literally did speak of a Medo-Persian Empire before it existed who would overthrow the Babylonians. He spoke about a Greek world dominance when the Greeks had no dominance whatsoever. He pointed out when Alexander the Great died, that the four generals under him would divide the earth and try to rule the world like that. He does it blow by blow and king by king. Phenomenal in the insights which the Lord gives him.

But we're going to spend some chapters and maybe a couple chapters on the conversion of a heathen king, Nebuchadnezzar, as well on Sunday mornings. It's a great place to learn how to walk with God. I think Daniel has a lot to stay to us.

Let's start at verse 1 of Chapter 1. We read, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, who was the king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. He besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim the king of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, with some of the articles from the house of God, which he carried to the land of Shinar," another word for Babylon, "and placed in the house of his god; and he brought the articles in the treasure house of his god. The king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendant and nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and having a quick ability to understand, who would serve in the king's palace, whom they might teach the language and the literature " of the Babylonians, or "of the Chaldeans."

Four words starting with C this morning, starting with the word "captivity." The book starts on a pretty sad note. Daniel was taken by the Babylonians in their first siege of Jerusalem in 606. We know that because this was the third year of Jehoiakim, the king. Most everything in prophecy has dates attached to it so that you can follow along. But

anyway, in 606 in came the Babylonians. They would come back in 597, come back and level the place in 586. I think we've told you that 100 times now on Sunday morning.

But Daniel was taken in that first group. Jeremiah Chapter 52 tells us there were 3,023 people in all that were taken from wealthy families, well-to-do, well-educated families, if you will. The intention of the king was to take these young men and train them to be emissaries between Israel and the Babylonians, they would do that by taking these refined lives and pouring into them the life and the culture and the language of the Babylonians.

These were God's men. They were called to service. We told you Daniel was in the king's house, Ezekiel was out in the fields with the farmers and the captivity, Jeremiah was back in Jerusalem making warnings. God had His people surrounded.

Notice in verse 2 that it was the Lord who gave up the Jewish king to Nebuchadnezzar. God was in charge. He gave him over. He took some of the treasures out of the temple, took them back home, put them in the temple of his god. That was a typical practice for the heathen. It was kind of like "my god is bigger than your god. We got your stuff and my god has it." For now God allowed it to be so. He had been warning the people for generations about their continued idolatry and disobedience, and about this complete overthrow that was coming.

From verse 3 and 4 we are told of Nebuchadnezzar's intention. He wanted to target these young people from Jerusalem, especially from the house of nobility. He wanted to train them in the ways and prepare them to be liaisons and all. And he planned to take the whole city.

As a background it's something that I'll just throw in for two seconds if you're all right with that, years earlier King Hezekiah, you might remember, got sick, and Isaiah came to Hezekiah and said, "Your sickness is to death. You are going to die. Get your house in order." When Isaiah turned to leave, Hezekiah rolled over on his bed and said, "Oh, Lord, I'm not done with the work that you've given to me. I don't have a son. I really want to finish the work that you've given to me. I need some more time." Before Isaiah could get in his chariot and ride off, the Lord said, "Isaiah, go back and tell him he has 15 more years." The Lord healed Hezekiah. From around the world people sent, well wishes to him, glad you're doing better and all, but the Babylonians,

who weren't really a force at the time, sent an emissary, what Hezekiah did was he said, "Come on in and let me show all that God has given to us." He opened everything. He showed him all the treasures, the gold, the things that the Lord had given to His people. When Isaiah heard about it, Isaiah it's in II Kings, actually, Chapter 20 lost his marbles. He asked "What are you doing? You can't just put that stuff on display. These aren't people that are happy God has blessed us. These are people that want what we have. They're going to come back and get us." Ninety-five years later, sure enough here in Daniel, they came back to get what they had seen.

Here's Jehoiakim, a wicked guy. Jehoiakim, by the way, from history, biblical history, tore up God's word and threw it in the fire and said, "I'm not going to follow this." When Jeremiah said, "You're going to answer to the Lord for that," he threw Jeremiah in prison.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the world; right? When Babylon ruled the world, nobody could challenge him anywhere. He was an all-powerful guy. It was the center of idolatry in the world at the time. He was a tyrant. He would get saved in an Old Testament sense, but it would be a while.

Then we have King Jehovah. The word "the Lord" there. The sovereign king who rules in the affairs of men.

For now Nebuchadnezzar wanted the cream of the crop to train. The word "children" here is a word for teenagers in Hebrew. Daniel was probably 14 or 15 years old when he got yanked out of his well-to-do lifestyle, forced to go 700 miles away, and had no hope for a future. Nothing he could have done when the king of the world took him from his home. Like Joseph as a young man, Daniel didn't know where he was going or what would happen to him. He had the Lord, which is interesting, because most people in Judah did not. But Daniel maintained a relationship with the Lord, like Joseph, that was good enough for both of them.

The king was looking for, like I said, a trainable, good-looking, smart, refined backgrounds that could stand with poise and grace and be his representatives.

That was the captivity. Here's the second C, "crisis." Verse 5 tells us that "The king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies, of the wine which he drank, then three years of training for them, so that at the

end of that time they might serve before the king. Now among those who were from the sons of Judah were Daniel and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to whom the chief of the eunuchs gave new names. He called Daniel, Belteshazzar; he called Hananiah Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego."

The crisis. You're a 14-year-old kid, you love the Lord, you've been yanked out of your home, and now the king says, "Now you live with me." The provisions were pretty good. They had free room and board. They had the best food that the world's most powerful nation could provide. They were invited to go three years to a graduate program at the University of Babylon. But the king's plans weren't so kind. These were nefarious plans, as he pursued the classic kind of brainwashing technique. Let's change their minds and their outlooks and their understanding so that they can represent us in the years to come.

Verse 4, they were taught the language and the literature of the Chaldean way of life. It was a very godless society. In fact, history tells us that the Babylonians worshipped 70 main gods. 70 main gods. How many less-than-main gods? I don't know. But there were 70 main gods that they would have learned about. They were ahead with astrology, which they taught as superstition. Let's just say that the boys, for all of their love for the Lord, were being pulled in an absolutely different direction from everything they had learned. There was a crisis of authority. Who's now going to be authority in my life?

There was a crisis of morality. Notice that as they were well fed and taught for three years, they would be tested on the king, that they had to decide who they were going to give their allegiance to.

I think there's a similar kind of picture for us today in the sense that the church today lives in a very godless world, and there isn't much there in the world to encourage you to walk with God. What is there is the invitation to develop your appetite for worldly things, to be self-confident and not God-confident; to invest yourself and your interest in the temporal things over the eternal things. Just like Daniel and the boys faced being thrown into this worldly culture while being desirous to serve the Lord and the only God who was alive, the real God. They faced what I guess we do as well today. Now there's a crisis of our life. How are we going to serve the Lord on hostile ground? This was

hostile ground. This wasn't a friendly place.

Notice from verse 5 that the king's purpose was to groom these young men as his slaves. Win them over to his ways of life, feed them what they ate, teach them what they knew, help them to speak as they spoke, understand the culture, the background, the idolatry and the wickedness so that they could accurately represent this ungodly king to the people of God that were now being brought, as time would pass, from Jerusalem 700 miles away.

I saw a shirt a couple of years ago I really liked. On it, it said very loudly, "I'm a fool for Jesus." I kind of liked that. But when I walked by I looked back, and on the back it says, "Whose fool are you?" I thought, what a great question, because everybody's somebody's fool, you know? I would rather be a fool for the Lord than a fool for what the world has to offer.

Daniel kind of stood there as well. Notice this crisis involved an identity crisis as well. Certainly, the purpose of changing their name had nothing to do with making them more appealing, if you will. In fact, this was the king's way of stealing from them just a little bit more of their background, of their heritage, of the things that they had been following.

All of the boys' names, by the way, had a name that spoke of God. Daniel, "God is my judge," but it was changed to Belteshazzar, which means "Ba'al's prince," and Ba'al was one of the 70 chief gods of the Babylonians. They had to find themselves now as a people of God being changed to the culture in which they lived. Hananiah means "I'm beloved of the Lord," and yet his name was changed to Shadrach, which means "I'm illuminated by the sun god Ra." Not exactly a name you pick for your children. Mishael, "Who is like our God," became "Who is like Shach," another deity of the Babylonians. Azariah, "The Lord is my Helper," changed to Abed-Nego, "A Servant of Nebo," yet another Babylonian God.

I thought about when Joseph was captured, they changed his name as well. Joseph means "God has added to me." But they gave him that really weird name, Zaphnath-Paaneah or something, very long, long name there in Genesis, which means "the treasury of glory." It has nothing to do with God at all. Esther, when she was captured, they changed her name from Hadassah. There's something about the world that wants to label you as something you're not, when you really want to keep that label, if you will, as God's child.

Here they had good food, nice living quarters, easy way of life. All they had to do was lose their outward identity with God.

Now, a lot of this stuff was out of these boys' hands. There's no way they could have controlled their environment. Sometimes, though, they would have to make intentional choices to be sure that they stood their ground and maintained their walks with the Lord. Sometimes those choices were very difficult to make. They were bold choices. They were daring ones. Other times they were pretty easy. I think, again, that's us. You're going to walk out of here this morning into a world that you're going to have to make lots of choices. You can either stand with the Lord in a world that doesn't want anything to do with Him, or you can stand with the world and hide yourself amongst them, and then find yourself really not in a place that God can use you. Some of those choices are fairly simple. Some of them are tremendously difficult. It is hard sometimes to keep your identity with the Lord when the world around you wants to just kind of set you aside.

That's the battle we face, and that was the battle they faced. And imagine their position, young teenagers. I was thinking about that the other day. A lot of our decisions we have to make, we make fairly young. Most people decide where they're going to go to school, what they're going to do with their lives, what their career choices are going to be, who they're going to marry. By the time you get to be 30 you go, "Man, if I could go back. I've made so many choices, important ones." But the most important one that you can make and that these boys made was that they were going to stay devoted to the Lord no matter what.

Daniel early on has this huge decision to make. He is virtually alone. He is far away from home in a foreign land. He is under the authority of a world-dominating, wicked monarch. It will be a crisis time. It isn't the first one. In Chapter 2 it'll be his witness before the Lord. In Chapter 3 it'll be his worship. There's always this pressure to just give up on something that he had in the Lord. But these guys were awesome, we could use some men of faith like this this morning.

The crisis. What are we going to do? Well, here's the choice that Daniel makes, the third C. Verse 8 says, "But," in all of that, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he wouldn't

defile himself with a portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore, he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."

I like the words "Daniel purposed in his heart." I don't know too many teenagers who are 14 years old who will say of themselves, "I purposed in my heart." I think most kids at that age are willing to follow the crowd with little personal conviction. That's not true of all of them, but it's usually interest of I'd rather be liked than right. I'd rather be a part of the group than lead. We're all called to raise our children in the ways of the Lord, but you never really know how well you've done until they get to make decisions without your pressure on their lives. It can be an anxious time.

But Daniel's did good. Daniel's heart was right with God, even at his young age. They could capture him, drag him from his home, change his name, tell him lots of lies, but they couldn't change his heart. That was personal. Nobody was getting to that. I like that a lot, because the Babylonians in power, world power, would have mocked Daniel. They would have said to him, "That God you serve, by the way, we took stuff out of His temple the other day, the king put it in the house of our god. You want to go over and take a look at it? Who's god is the best? Must be ours. I don't know what you're doing worshipping a god that can't even defend His own temple." Yet Daniel stood strong.

Reminded me of Joseph because they're so alike in the Bible, when Potiphar's wife kind of hit him up and said, "Hey, you want to sleep with me?" Joseph said to her in Genesis Chapter 39, "There's nothing held back from me by the master of this house except for you. He trusts me with everything. Why would I sin against the Lord and do such a great wickedness?" What kept him from sin wasn't his youthfulness, because that might have enticed him, but his heart's commitment to God. "I've got to do the right thing and please the Lord." Daniel was one of those kinds of guys. He was just committed to do things God's way. There's no going with the flow for this young man's life.

I think as you read through this, this is an issue of food and the law, a Jewish boy, what he should and shouldn't eat; the kosher laws, if you will. Some people might argue, well, this is a minor point. Dude, you're causing trouble here for the wrong reasons. Just eat what's put in front of you, the Lord will understand, let's live to fight another day, but to Daniel it meant bowing his knee to a god who he wasn't

willing to serve. It was all about his conscience and his faith. It had to do with his heart. He wouldn't do it, because this was personal. His heart, he purposed in his heart.

I don't know what you purpose in your heart, but if you purpose in your heart to serve the Lord, you can pay a lot of dues in this world. You can lose a promotion, you can lose a grade, you can lose a friend. There's a lot of things that you can lose, but you'll never lose putting the Lord first.

Daniel knew that God's word demanded this obedience, he was unwilling to bend on this part.

By the way, all of this meat offered to idols was what showed up on your tables anyway.

For Daniel it was based on faith, and he wouldn't acknowledge a false god and disobey the Lord. I love Daniel's desire to just stand fast. There's that scripture in Psalm 119 verse 11, it says, "I've hidden God's word in my heart, so I wouldn't sin against the Lord." Daniel stood fast. Here in hostile territory, a young man who stands fast. We need people like this today who will just stand fast, especially in the world.

The request, notice in verse 8, was for himself. It's written in the first person. However, when the eunuch responds he says in verse 10, "What about your faces?" Then he says in verse 12, "You are his servants." It does seem like Daniel might very well have been speaking for himself, that's the way it's written, but he immediately had an influence upon the guys that were with him. I think that's important, because if you say yes to sin, there's a lot of people you'll stumble. They'll go with you, man. They'll follow you right down the wrong parts. Yet if you say, "No. I'm going to serve the Lord," though it may bring you some difficulty, it will also bring you followers, disciples, folks that will be moved by your example, and they'll begin to walk with the Lord.

Daniel was a great influence, even in the midst of this choice that he had to make, and he was convinced it was the right thing to do.

I would point out to you in verse 8 the word "requested," because it's a very mild word in Hebrew. It literally means to speak softly is literally what it translates. Daniel, he requested with great humility and graciousness, "How about

we don't eat that? We don't want to eat that. It's just not on our diet. It isn't something the Lord wants for us." He doesn't come across as obnoxious.

I don't know if you've ever met Christians who are convinced of something, but in order to practice it, they got to be obnoxious, They come across as rude and kind of loud in their devotion to the Lord, which isn't really a witness at all.

My dad said a lot of stuff, I remember a lot of stuff my dad said, but one of the things I remember that I like, he said, "If you're right, you don't have to yell." If you're right, you don't have to yell. I think that's what Daniel was. He was right, he was not going to yell. He's just going to ask.

In verse 9, the Lord had given to Daniel favor and goodwill amongst the chief of the eunuchs, the guy who was over them. Daniel's faithfulness had brought God's blessing. The chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my Lord the king" and he was smart to fear Nebuchadnezzar. Dangerous man " he's appointed your food and your drink. Why should he see your faces look worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." God keeps Daniel as Daniel keeps the Lord first.

Notice in verse 10 that this man in charge does what most people do in charge: They make decisions in light of what's good for them. "I don't want to get in trouble. I don't care about what you want. I don't want to lose my head, get this king mad." Good reason, good argument.

Daniel said in verse 11 to the steward, in whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over the four of them, "'Please then would you test your servants just for ten days, let them give us the vegetables to eat and the water to drink. Then let our appearances be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, you can so do with your servants.'" And he consented with them in this matter, and they tested them for ten days."

Daniel had a vision. He was humble about it. He came up with some solutions for it. He didn't try to just be defiant. He tried to make peace. He said, How's this for a reasonable suggestion: Give us a test. Just ten days to see the difference. If we look worse, all right, then we'll eat what you give us. If we look better, then maybe we can continue not having the wine and the meat that you give us. Notice that

the overseer at that point just thought that that was a great idea.

We read in verse 15, "At the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in the flesh than all of the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies." The steward took away their portion, the wine and all, and he gave them the vegetables that they wanted to eat.

A little test, worked out good. Here's the lesson for me from verse 10, and I like it: Whom you serve will show on your face. I don't know if you've ever run into somebody that you just saw and you go, I think they're Christians. You don't even know who they are, but you could just see it in their face. Maybe you've had that happen to you. There was a lady that was here first service, she came up and she said, "That happened to me last week at the store. Some guy came up and goes, 'You look like a Christian.' I said, 'I look like a girl.'" I said, "What did you do?" She said, "Yeah, I told him I'm a Christian. He said, 'I need Jesus in my life.'" She got to pray with him. Just came out of nowhere. You look like a believer.

I'll tell you what, if you know the Lord you should have a face that says so. No guilt, no emptiness, no wear and tear. Maybe life is wear and tear, but there's something about your spirit; right? The joy of the Lord in your heart.

Here's four sparkling faces showing the will of God was the way of blessing, and from now on they were getting their kosher food. They were going to eat in a way that would please the Lord.

Which brings us the fourth C, the consequences. Verse 17 says this: "As for these four young men, God gave to them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. The king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them to be ten times better than the magicians and the astrologers who were in all of his realm. Daniel continued to serve until the first year of King Cyrus."

There in captivity God had blessed these boys; granted them divine abilities to serve, gave them wisdom in their learning, skill in literature and wisdom, in language and discernment, ability to keep the things that were true from the things that were not, gave them special gifts that would help them to serve the Lord there. Then the boys get called in after three years for an oral exam before the king of the world. I think that might have made me nervous. Their future was at stake in what the Lord wanted. But four of them, they finish top four of the class.

I really think that these four young men would be the reason why in a few chapters from now we will read about the king of the world giving his life to the God of the Jews. Just absolutely broke him. I'm sure it was their position and their walk with God that did that.

Notice verse 19, they would serve the king. They were given prominent jobs in the imperial government. They were, I'm sure, the only four believers in the entire world secular stage. As they began to serve they stood out, verse 20, from amongst the demon-driven astrologers and magicians of the day that Babylon depended upon. Each time that conflict is between the two of them, you will find that God's people stand out, amazingly so. God's hand was upon them.

Here's four guys, had the ear of the king, was able to give direction and wisdom from the Lord to the king, these men were on the scene before the majority of the people would arrive.

We ended in verse 21 with this just kind of a note in passing that Daniel would serve here in this position during the entire Babylonian rule. Now, it started in 606, so this was 603, three years later. 67 years he would serve the Babylonian powers that be. Then the Medo-Persian kingdom, which didn't even exist, would come and challenge them, take over the world, and the first king that would come out of that was a fellow named Cyrus, who Isaiah mentioned by name 200 years before he would be born and said, "He'll be the guy that lets my people go home." But even there in his 90s, Daniel would see that accomplished as well. In fact, Daniel would pray, "Lord, I've read in the book of Jeremiah that we're going to go home pretty soon. What can I do to help?" He was pushing 95. God used him well faithfully all of those years.

There's a crisis, there's a captivity, there's a choice, and there's a consequence. You and I as God's people, this

generation, are sent to serve Him on hostile ground. It's really a waste of time to complain about the society in which you live. There isn't a good time to live on the world and in the world, but there's always a good time to serve the Lord. This is the generation you're supposed to reach, we're supposed to be praying for. Is it easy? No. But it wasn't easy in Daniel's day either.

We can make a difference. We can live for the Lord. We can stand up and not be ashamed. We can make the choices we need to make. We can be Daniels and be an example and a witness for the Lord for this generation and for the one to follow. Be a Daniel. It's not easy, but man, I'm telling you, he got his own book in the Bible.

Shall we pray.