

Get Ready (Afternoon Message)

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Preacher: Anne Calver

[0 : 0 0] We're going to look at Daniel chapter 1 if you want to open a Bible in front of you. And the reason that we're going to look at Daniel is because I really believe that we are in an interesting time right now in 2018.

It is, as we know, an unstable world, isn't it? With what is happening across the continents, you cannot turn the news on and not be rocked by what you're hearing.

You cannot ignore the reality of the government decisions that are being made. We cannot ignore the reality of the refugees in their millions fleeing from their homelands.

We cannot ignore the persecution that is happening amongst Christians. And you know what? I just, I'm not saying that out of a yikes fearful thing.

But out of, I really believe that the Lord is moving by his spirit in this time. And something significant is happening and is changing. So although we are in a challenging, unstable time, I really think it's a moment for us as the church to say, Lord, what are you saying to us in that?

[1 : 0 6] What are you wanting for us to do? How are you calling us to respond to what you want us to do? And as I was kind of jogging, I do jog.

I try and kind of regularly jog every other day. Depends on the children, to be honest, and Gavin's availability. But about October 2016, I was jogging in the fog.

And it was six o'clock in the morning. It was pitch black. And I was terrified. I just, it was one of those moments where I just thought, what am I doing? It is thick fog. I cannot see like literally a meter in front of me.

And here I am going for a jog. What am I doing? And in this place of kind of fear, I just went, Lord, I'm really scared like right now. Please will you just come and minister your presence, your comfort. Just make me aware that you're here, that I'm not alone. And as I continued to run, instead of having kind of like a warm, fluffy glow, which was kind of hoping would come, I began to hear the word of the Lord.

[2 : 0 6] And I haven't had many of these moments in my life. So don't think I'm some, this is always the case. But it was just very, very clear as I was jogging. And when I got back from my run like 40 minutes later, yeah, I wrote it all down and remembered it word for word.

Another sign to me that it had to be the Lord. I don't remember anything. So I kind of, I wrote it all down and this is, this is what came. My child, I'm raising up an army.

I am not raising up an army that carry weapons of destruction, that hold in their hands clubs and knives. I'm raising up an army whose weapons are my word and spirit.

I saw a man sharpening swords and felt the Lord was saying, I'm sharpening my people. I'm sharpening the tools in their hands so that the truth can cut deep into the hearts of many.

Then I saw a child's face and a light like this huge flame torch came near to this child's face and lit this child's face up. And I felt the Lord saying, my royal priesthood, my holy nation, they're being set apart.

[3 : 2 6] And I'm setting their faces like flint to walk into the darkness. And it was like, Lord, what is, what's that, what does that mean, flint? And I just felt him saying it's a determined thing and it's like, no matter what, we are going to do this.

We are going to do this and walk into the darkness. And then I saw this huge, mighty procession of people, just as far as the eye could see, just walking into the darkness.

And they were carrying like these huge flame torches, every single one of them, into the night. And I heard the words again, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

We know that scripture, don't we? And I just believe by his holy spirit, he will shine on those living in darkness. I'm raising up an army, I'm raising up an army.

And I just kept hearing him saying this. And I just carried on jogging. And it was like almost in step with my feet, like I'm raising up, I'm raising up, I'm raising up. And it was just this really deep sense of, and you're not doing it.

[4 : 31] It's not you, it's me. I'm doing it. I'm raising up an army. And it's an army who are prepared to lay down the ways of the world to follow the way of the Holy Spirit.

And I just knew really clearly that word and spirit were just, we just had to get hold of both. It was like, these are the weapons. Get hold of both of them.

Not one, not the other. Both together. Get hold of them as the church. And be prepared to go into the darkness with those tools. And I just, everything in me went, oh, I don't want, I don't want to have to do that.

You know, when I hear these guys talking about their incredible charity, that's what some of the darkness looks like. It's hardcore. Like, I, it's, it's difficult. Some of the darkness that the Lord is calling us into is really, really challenging.

And yet he is saying, you know, the way that the world is right now, my children, I need you to go where I'm telling you to go. I need you to see it and act on it.

[5 : 36] And so let's turn to Daniel chapter one. And we've got some nice long words for me to try and read in this. Perhaps I should have got a reader, shouldn't we, really?

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashvanaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

Young men without any physical defect. Seriously? Isn't that impossible? Anyway, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand and qualified to serve in the king's palace.

He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years and after that they were to enter the king's service.

[6 : 50] Among these were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names. To Daniel the name Belshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abednego.

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel. But the official told Daniel, I'm afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink.

Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you. Daniel said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Please test your servants for ten days.

Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.

[7 : 57] So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. Guttled. Guttled. To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

And at the end of the time set by the king to bring them in the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

So they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. I love Daniel. Isn't that amazing? What an incredible bit of scripture.

[9 : 04] And what an amazing, amazing man. And the reason that I want to look at him this afternoon is because he was willing to be set apart for God. He was willing to be raised up as one of God's key people at a key moment in history.

And he was willing to sacrifice what he wanted and what he maybe would naturally choose for the sake of doing what he felt was right. And he massively speaks to me.

I feel like he was willing just to be set apart. You know, they talk about him, some of the scholars, as like a heavenly angel among mortals. Now, wouldn't that be great?

But I just, that's a really difficult thing. And yet here he is, when we look at his actual life, he's carted off into exile. He's a slave to the king of Babylon.

And he is brought into the palace as one of these men without defects. And he has some choices to make about how he's gonna live and what he's gonna do.

[10 : 04] And the reason I've kind of called this Get Ready is because I think in here we've got some key tools for how we can get ready for what God has for us.

And I wanna give you this afternoon just four quick Ds, four Ds that I think help us in some of our journeying when we leave this place. What are we gonna do for God? What is he leading us into? And how are we gonna work that out in the next season of our life? The first thing is this. I think Daniel was discerning. Daniel was massively discerning.

If we look at chapter one and verses three to five, you know, he realized that he was being shown favor. He realized that he was gonna be well fed, that he was being brought into this community that was gonna look after him.

And in actual fact, if you imagine doing that, if you imagine coming into a palace and being fed and watered and clothed and surrounded by great people, wouldn't you just be sat there going, wow, I have got this made.

[11 : 08] This is looking good. But in actual fact, Daniel doesn't do that. Daniel somehow takes a step back and he's able to see something different.

He's able to recognize what the king is trying to do with him and his friends. He realizes that he is being asked to take food and drink from the table to woo them and to make them drunk and to lead them down this kind of route of beginning to lose their identity because his goal is that they will not be Israelites anymore, but they will be Chaldeans or Chaldeans or however you even say that word. But he's changing their names because he's trying to change their identity because he wants them to take up new identity, to lose who they were and become who he wants them to be.

And he's trying to woo them and change them and teach them things, teach them new things so they have little in common with their own people. And I find as you begin to delve in, you can see Daniel kind of going, oh, hang on.

This is their perspective. This is one perspective. But what is yours, God? What is your perspective here? What do you see that I need to see? And that's why I put up this picture. I don't know how many of you can see both faces.

[12 : 30] How many of you can see both angles? It's weird, isn't it, that picture? I looked the first time I looked at it, I was like, whoa, because you just, it flips, doesn't it? Does it flip for other people in the room?

It's weird, that. But it really challenged me because I was thinking, how often am I just looking at things one way and God is saying, I need you to see this?

Because I think for a lot of those men going into the palace, they would have just thought, yes. And actually Daniel goes, no. No. I can't do this this way.

I cannot follow what it is that I feel like is being put on me. And you know, I think we're living in a culture and a time right now where the enemy would like to play the role of the king.

The enemy would like to suck us down a route that looks really nice and really comfortable and really suits me and pleases me and makes my life look good.

[13 : 28] And the Lord God is going, I need you to see this for what it is. I need you to be set apart. I need you to step back and look again at what is happening in culture and not allow culture to sweep into the church so we lose our identity as children of God.

Because we are called to look different, sound different, smell different, and be different. The fragrance of Jesus in the neighborhood. And if we become Chaldeans, then we lose that identity as Israelites.

If we become like the rest of the world, we lose who we are as children of the living God. And I just think God is saying, my children, what marks you out?

What marks you out as being children of God? What is it? Can you discern what it is that I'm doing in the culture? Can you discern what it is that I'm saying? What are you seeing?

What are you seeing as you look out in your street, as you look out in your neighborhood, as you read the newspaper, what do you see? What is God showing you that isn't good for society?

[14 : 35] And what is he calling you to act on and pray into and move out and do something about? Because I love that Daniel doesn't just sit there and go, it's okay, yeah. I'll just lose my identity. I'll lose my identity. I'll lose my roots. I'll lose who I was and go that way. He goes, no. Daniel is discerning. There's a lad in our church who's just amazed me recently. He's 20 years old. He was into his second year of university and he decided to come home and back to the church. And he came back and honestly, the reaction's been fascinating because there's been quite a few people who've just gone, what are you doing, giving up your education and your career to come home?

And Zach is sitting there saying, do you know what? I really believe God's told me to do this. And it might look crazy, but I know God's taking me another route.

And he's kind of, he's thrown himself into loads of ministry with us at the church, which is amazing actually, having a 20 year old lad, just giving it loads of energy. But it's just interesting to watch what God's doing because almost that, he's discerned that the path that he was on was not the path that God had for him.

[15 : 48] It might've been the path that he should have walked, but it wasn't the path that God had for him. And as he stepped away from that, we're watching something else unfold. And I'm really excited to see where that leads him and what he ends up exploring and doing.

But I just think God is saying, wake up, wake up to what I'm doing, wake up to what I'm saying and begin to move out in ways that I want to show you.

It's challenging, isn't it? The second thing about Daniel is that he was distinct. He was distinct. He resolves, we read in verse eight, he resolves not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. And he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself. You know, I think it's interesting that the king was asking for men who had no defects to be brought in to the palace.

Because almost in that place, you're thinking, how then am I supposed to be set apart if I've already got no defects? But God says, there is a way. There is a way that I can use you.

[16 : 58] There is a way that you can still be distinct. You think maybe you're being distinct enough. You think maybe you've seen enough. No, let me show you something else. Let me show you how else I might be calling you to be distinct.

And it's not that Daniel permanently chose not to eat from the king's table. This was a season of his life where God was showing him, not now, Daniel.

Just step back from that for this season and see how I will use that. And there might be things that we're doing or we're involved in, and God is just saying, stop doing it.

Stop doing that and watch what I will show you when you pull back from that, when you move away from doing that, when you stop living like that, when you stop speaking like that, when you stop living like that.

Last summer, I was out in France. Gavin and I do some ministry. It's quite a nice thing, actually, to do ministry in France. And we absolutely love it. The kids love going out there. But I was having a hard time because every single night, I was going to bed, and I would wake up in the night with this picture of this dead branch across my mind's eye.

[18 : 06] And it was just this black branch, black and grey and peeling and so dead. It was horrible. And I just kept, literally, night after night, just kept seeing this branch.

And then it started to plague me during the day as well. And I just was, you know, sometimes something was happening and you were just trying to ignore it and trying to pretend you're not seeing anything and it's not happening.

But I just couldn't anymore. It was like, ugh. So one night, I said, it was about two o'clock in the morning, I was like, Lord, what is this? I was so mad about it. It was like, I could stop in me sleeping.

It was driving me mad. And I really wrestled trying to figure out what it was in my life. And I knew that I knew that I knew that there was something that I was doing or something that was happening

that needed to be cut off.

There was something that was dead in my life that was producing no fruit. And God was saying, if you stop that, watch the fruit that will come as a result.

[19:07] And so Gavin and I prayed into that. I won't kind of bore you with the full story of it. But there were some decisions that we made about some of our life choices. And honestly, it's been incredible.

The branch disappeared immediately. And some of the fruit that we've begun to see has been interesting. Not stuff we would have expected to see. But there was a sacrifice in the choices that we had to make to be distinct, to be set apart for God.

And sometimes he just says, you know that thing that you're doing? It's not okay. You know that thing that you're thinking about or you're watching or you're saying? It's not okay.

And you've kind of rationalized it with, you know what, but this is the way that I relax and this is okay in small doses. And God's going, no, because there's more that I want to do through you.

And if you'd stop that, watch what I'll do. Hard, hard stuff. And I think God is just saying to us, you know, what snares are there in front of you?

[20:10] What is it that the enemy has planted in front of you that's just such a draw? And you just really want to do it and you really want to be involved with it. But he's just saying, no, God's saying, no, my child.

How can we be discerning and distinct? And the third thing about Daniel is he is determined. He's determined. And I, what have I got?

Oh, yeah. Oh, forget that. It's brilliant, that, isn't it? Yeah. He's determined. And I love that.

And I don't know about you, but there's sometimes in your life when you sort of sense something's not quite right in your journey or not quite right generally. And then you kind of feel like, okay, that's maybe what I need to do about it.

But you still don't do anything about it. Does anyone know what I mean? And maybe it comes around to sort of Lent time and you think, okay, now's the time that I'm going to stop watching that show every night of the week. Or, you know, and you do it for a season.

[21:10] But the thing is that we can easily ignore those promptings from the Holy Spirit and not act on what we sense God is saying to us to do.

And Daniel is determined, puts his helmet on, and he makes a decision. So he goes to the royal official, the guard who's appointed him, and he boldly says, test us for 10 days.

Test us and see. Try us and see what might happen. And he doesn't know the outcome of that. He doesn't know what's going to happen. But he's like, let's just give this a shot.

Let's just see what happens. And he gets on and has a go. And I think sometimes, you know, we have these areas of weakness and we think, they're all right.

It's not a big deal. But the thing is with a little tiger is it grows into a big tiger, doesn't it? And a big tiger kills. A little thing that seems all fluffy and cuddly and lovely in our lives grows big and nasty and unpleasant if it is not handled when it needs to be handled.

[22:17] And I've really challenged that Daniel doesn't ignore this in his life. And you know what? I think he knew the temptation that lay in his way. I think he knew that that was tempting to eat from the king's table and be wooed into that life.

I think he could sense the temptation and he made a decision. No, hang on. Hang on. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to live like that. I'm going to choose another way.

And this is because the society would say to us, I think, how close can you walk to the line and get away with it? How close can I walk to the line and that be okay, Lord? That's okay, Lord, isn't it?

God's saying, I want you to be set apart. I want you to look different. I want you to glow with my presence. I want you to radiate with me and look like me.

How much do we want God's way over the world's way? How much are we prepared to say, Lord, I want you as number one? Nothing else but you will do. And God, I need your strength to help me walk down that road.

[23:19] I've been so challenged, and just even then in worship by the presence of God just in the last few years. It seems to me that there's this incredible thing when we really press in and worship the Lord and his presence comes.

It's like, I don't know about you, but it's like this holy, awesome sense, isn't it, of the Lord just here amongst his children. And you know, most times in scripture when they sense the holiness of God,

they have different reactions.

But some of the main reactions are this fear, and they fall to their knees. And like when Isaiah encounters the holiness of God, he's like, holy, holy, holy, the angels sing.

And he goes, woe to me. I'm a man of unclean lips. I'm a man of unclean lips. I'm unclean. I'm filthy, God. And there's something I think that God wants us to see.

You know what? This is the awesomeness of me. Don't make me a cuddly pet on your shoulder.

Don't make me this all loving and not fiery and not holy, God, because I'm both and.

[24 : 25] You know, and I think we've lost some of the holiness of God and the awareness of the holiness of God and how that causes us to respond as his children. We worship him.

And we say, Lord, cleanse me. Lord, help me to serve you. Help me to find what you have for me.

And Lord, I don't want to be afraid of you, but I want to follow you with my whole life.

The whole world, it seems to me, is consumed with fear. Like the mental health thing is off the planet, isn't it? Mental health issues. The fear that is gripping society is unbelievable.

That's not the fear of God. The fear of God leads to wisdom and calling and a sense of purpose.

And it is a beautiful, powerful thing.

And when we sense the presence and the holiness of God, we bow down and say, whatever, Lord.

Whatever you want. Wherever you want. And however that looks.

[25 : 25] I'm going to draw it into a close in a minute. I was just thinking about before last Easter, I was going out to do a conference and I'd sort of said, Father, please will you give me a picture of something that I can share with this group of people that I'm going to be with.

You know, something uplifting and encouraging would be amazing, Father. And I was really prayerful over it and really prayerful over the people, thinking I'm just going to give them something lovely. And anyway, I had this picture.

It was awful. Of this really large person, and I mean massive person, sat in a chair. And they were sat in this chair and they were consuming and consuming and consuming and consuming.

And I thought, whoa, what is that? And they just kept eating and eating and eating and eating and eating. And they got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. Until the point that they couldn't move from the chair that they were planted in.

And they just were oblivious to the fact that they couldn't move and they just carried on consuming.

And I was just, you know, when you see something, I was just sat there going, this is just horrible.

[26 : 38] What? This is not you, God. I don't believe that's you. That's just horrible. And I began to pray into it. And as I began to pray into it, I said to the Lord, is this you?

And if it is, what is it? And I felt him say, and honestly it brought tears to my eyes, this is what some of the church looks like, Anne. And I just was stunned.

This is what the church looks like, God? We look like that? And I was just, yes, Anne. We're just consumers, Lord. We're just sat there getting fatter.

Yes, Anne. And I was just, I ended up on my knees and in tears and just repenting and just saying, Lord, you have to do something. You have to do something to change this, Lord, because we don't know how long we have and we don't know what it's going to look like as we journey forward, but you have to help us, God.

And I felt like when I was down on my knees that he gave me this reminder, and it was such a beautiful reminder, and this is what I love about our Lord, is he doesn't abandon us and he doesn't say, okay, yeah, that's how it is, but I'm done with you.

[27 : 47] Because there's always redemption and there's always forgiveness and there's always a journey through. And I felt him give me those words, you know, in John chapter 21. And Peter is reinstated by the Lord Jesus.

So the Lord Jesus is risen, isn't he? And he comes down and they have breakfast on the beach. He comes onto the beach with Simon Peter and they share breakfast together. I was just reminded of this amazing moment because Peter's denied Jesus again and again and again before his death.

But then there's this beautiful, powerful reinstatement that happens and he says to him, Simon Peter, do you really love me? And he says, yes, Lord.

You know that I love you. And he says, feed my lambs. And he says to him again, Simon Peter, do you really love me? Like how much do you?

Do you really? Yes, Lord. You know I love you. Feed my sheep. And then a third time, Simon Peter, son of John, do you really?

[28 : 56] Do you love me? Do you love me? Yes, Lord, I really love you. Feed my sheep. And I was just like, okay, Lord, what?

Stop feeding yourself and start feeding others. Stop feeding yourself and start feeding others. It was as simple as that.

And I love that with the Lord because it doesn't complicate anything, does it? It's just simple. Stop making this about you and make it about them. And the key, as well as I've kind of unpacked it a little bit in my own heart and mind, is do you love me?

Do you love me? Because if you do really love me, then you will really want to live for me. And if you really want to live for me, then together we can go into the darkness and together we can change the world.

One person at a time. Because when we really, really love him, we want to be discerning. We want to be distinct. We want to be set apart.

[30 : 01] We want to make decisions that draw us into greater intimacy with Jesus and a greater transformation in those whose lives we touch. He was determined.

And finally, and I'll finish here, he developed. He developed. You know, the passage could end by just saying, oh, and they did this for 10 days and they looked great and everything was brilliant. It doesn't end there. This was not for nothing. Because actually what happened to these men, what happened to Daniel, not just Daniel, but his friends as well, is that they looked better for a start. They were better nourished, healthier, wiser. Daniel could understand dreams and visions. And their understanding and wisdom was 10 times more incredible than that of the magicians. They say that there was none equal to Daniel. And actually what we hear about Daniel as time goes on is he grows into one of the most incredible prophets in God's kingdom.

[31 : 06] And so the result of his actions here lead him to somewhere else that's just unbelievable. The little decisions that we make for God, little things that we think, that's not a big deal if I do that or don't do that, they're big.

They're significant in God's kingdom because people see them, God sees them, and they change you. They transform your life. You know, as a result of some of the decisions that Gavin and I took last year, people said to us, you look different.

And it wasn't, oh my goodness, you've lost weight or you've changed your hair color, or it was you look different. You know, there's something about your face that's changed. There's something about what you're saying and doing that's different.

Jesus. It's Jesus. Because Jesus takes the little offering that we've got and we put at his feet and we say, okay, I'm going to try doing that. I'm going to make a decision to do that, God.

Even though I know it's going to be really hard and it's going to cost me, I'm going to make a decision there and I'm going to put it at the foot of your cross and I need you to help me walk that journey. And Lord, would you grow something in me and through my life that will transform other people?

[32 : 19] Because it's not about me and my ministry. It's about Christ and his kingdom, isn't it? And what he does to change this world. And I do believe we're in interesting times.

And I don't know about you, but I want to be part of an army that's arising. I want to be part of that, but I know that it demands a lot of us. And I know God's saying, do you really want in?

Do you really want in? Do you really want to understand the fullness of who I am? Do you want a greater glimpse of me? Because if you do, it's going to cost you.

But I can do amazing things with that offering that you're going to put before me. You're right.

According to minutia to you, I don't really want to know you and God you're going to make your friend so it can survive. Therefore, God is realing and god and that you're going to do on the battlefield.

Have you ■■■ce that you got in? You see, when you do different cute things, I get your face. jeito I set your face.

[33 : 25] Greek ■ I know