

God is Able

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to imagine with me, if you would, a young man, the age of 19.! Some resolutions for his life.

Some commitments that were going to shape not only the immediate future, but in his heart, in his mind, these were the resolutions that were going to kind of go the distance for him and kind of shape his future.

Not the kind of resolutions, perhaps, that we find ourselves making or that I find myself making at times. The kind of resolutions that maybe last the day or last the week.

No, this is a kind of resolution that for Jonathan Edwards was life-shaping. He began to sit down with a pen at about age 19 in 1722.

And for the next year, he would write these personal commitments. Commitments that were derived from the Scripture. Commitments that would shape the way that he related to others, the way he related to God.

[1 : 25] And help to undergird him and provide direction and focus for his future. His goal was not to boast about his piety, but to keep his heart and mind focused on God's will.

Some examples of these resolutions. Resolution number five is resolved. Never to lose one moment of time, but improve in the most profitable way I can.

And of course, that deriving itself out of Ephesians chapter 5. Walk circumspectly, not as a fool, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. And so these resolutions springing out of the Word of God and personalizing it and shaping the direction of his future.

Resolution number six, resolved to live with all my might while I do live. Resolution number seven, resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

Resolution 69, resolved always to do that which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it. When I look around me and I see the life of those who are also pursuing God.

[2 : 42] And I wish for that for myself. I'm resolved to adopt that attitude, that posture, that heart for myself in the way I live as well.

And of course, these resolutions reveal Edwards' unwavering commitment to the Lord. And were used to help him have a life that was set apart from the world around him.

And because of a distinctive life that was concentrated on the glory of God, God honored Jonathan Edwards' commitment. Despite the trials and the challenges that he faced.

It would be Jonathan Edwards who would be a key figure in the greatest revival of American history, the Great Awakening. His legacy would also be one who would be considered a great thinker.

Who still influences pastors and professors and philosophers of this age. He's considered to be a towering intellect and the greatest mind of American history.

[3 : 46] Not just the greatest mind of American preaching, but the greatest mind of history in totality. That's what God did through this man who is devoted and resolved in his heart to focus on the glory of God.

And to point his life in the direction of dignity and honor. A life that wore the scripture. This morning we're going to get a taste of that same kind of commitment.

This resolution as it were. It stands out in the opening phrase of Daniel chapter 1 verse 8. This opening phrase, if you're following along with me, I would encourage you to turn to Daniel.

If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 767. Either 767 or 737. I forget which. Somewhere in the 700s you'll find it.

It says, But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

[4 : 48] This is a remarkable statement considering where Daniel is. Daniel now in Babylon. We get a taste or a sense of the context right there at the beginning of Daniel in verse 1.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, it says, King of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Of course, the history of Judah up to this point.

And especially in the latter days, Jehoiakim being one of the final kings of Judah's history. We find the commentary of his life. Very brief commentary.

And it says that he was an evil man. Following the pattern of and traditions of his fathers. Jehoiakim led the people into pagan worship. Jehoiakim, it says in 2 Chronicles, participated in things that were considered an abomination to the Lord.

Jehoiakim followed after the pattern of the kings before him. And so it's easy to assume that he also did the things that those heathen, wicked kings did. In terms of pagan worship.

[5 : 55] In terms of raising up the high places. In desecrating the temple. In sacrificing his own children in the altars to these foreign gods.

God had faithfully warned his people time and again through the testimony of his word. Not only the written word that came through Moses and through David.

But also the spoken word through his prophets. Prophet after prophet. Generation after generation. Came and went as a testimony to God's faithfulness. To send his word.

And of course, God also had to be faithful to keep his word. That word that God had given. That if you rebel against me, I will send you into captivity.

And that is exactly what God would do. We find in verse 2. The Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand.

[6 : 53] So Nebuchadnezzar, on the surface, may have assumed that it was his power. And the power of his Babylonian gods. That was behind this conquering of Judah and Jerusalem.

And the bringing back of the captives to Babylon. But God makes it very clear at the outset of this book. God is the one who is writing his name across the events of history.

It is God who is the unseen force behind all that will unfold for us in this book of Daniel. The Lord is the active agent in this narrative.

Make no mistake. No empire, no king, no conquering takes place apart from his intervening power. He is over it and through it and encircling it.

Last week, Nebuchadnezzar issued this command. This command to draw from the captives of Judah and to raise them up. To give them this unique opportunity to stand before him in his presence.

[7:55] There are several features or characteristics that would need to be true about them. We find from verses 3 and 4. They are to be from the royal family. They are to represent nobility.

They are to be from the court of Jerusalem. They would be the ones who would be qualified to stand in the courts in Babylon. They are to be young. Probably around the age of 14 or 15.

And to work through this three-year education process. So that by the time they are done. By 17 or 18 or so. They would now be able to stand before the king.

They were to be without blemish. And I draw attention to this because this is going to weave itself in again throughout our passage this morning. Without blemish. Of good appearance.

These guys are striking. These guys are solid. These guys are the kinds of young men. They walk into a room and every head turns. They capture attention.

[8:55] Yeah, that kind of guy. Those who made it into this elite school represent the best of the best. They are in the elite school of Babylon.

No doubt being trained by the brightest minds across the known world. And this honor comes with special privileges.

Not only does Nebuchadnezzar issue this command to draw out this group of select individuals. But he is also going to give them or assign them a portion of the king's food.

The delicacies that were fit for a king. Made in the king's kitchen. By the king's own chefs. The best meat, produce, vegetables from the kingdom. Literally, they are eating like kings.

They are also going to receive this education from this elite school of Babylon. Which would have been the Harvard of Harvards as it were. The brightest minds of the known world. As Nebuchadnezzar is doing the same kind of thing for every other conquered nation.

[10:01] Drawing from the smartest and best and wisest young men. And raising them up in his kingdom. An education process that would have taken about three years to complete.

But even then, it wasn't a guarantee that these recruits would be able to make it to the finish line. And stand before the king. Everything depended upon compliance.

Everything depended upon learning aptitude. Everything depended upon maintained appearance. Mental conditioning. Broad categories of comprehension.

Problem solving. Knowledge of laws and policy and language. This was an opportunity of a lifetime they dare not jeopardize. The pressure to conform.

To adapt. To comply. To fit in. Would have loomed large over these young men. And that's what leads us to our passage today. With all of that external pressure.

[11:00] What will Daniel and his friends do? So as we turn our attention to Daniel chapter 1 verse 8. We're going to see that God is continuing to write his name.

And his power across the landscape of our passage. Last week we saw that God was faithful. This week we're going to see consistently that God is able.

That God is able. And here in verse 8 we're going to see that God is able to preserve his servants. God is able to preserve his servants.

Just this opening phrase. But Daniel resolved. But Daniel resolved. The king's command was given.

A selection was made. Names were assigned. Privileges were dispensed. But Daniel resolved. New culture.

[11:57] New city. New language. New status. New customs. New clothing. But same God. And same commitment. There's so much that can be said about this phrase.

What is Daniel doing? By resolving. He says to himself. I will not be enticed by the opportunity.

I will not be influenced to compromise. I will not renounce my convictions. I will not bend the standard to fit my situation. I will not flex because of the pressure.

I will trust that the God who faithfully led me to this place. Faithfully preserved me from Judah into Babylon.

And provided this unique opportunity for me to stand in the presence of the king. Is the same God who will lead me to the finish line. I will remain committed to God.

[13:02] After all. The God I serve is the God who transcends culture. He's not just the God that is located in Jerusalem. He is the God who is overall.

He is the God who is transcendent. He is the God of heaven. He's overall. And I will remain committed to that God. I will not succumb to the pressures of Babylon.

And to believe the lies of my captors. Who say that their gods are stronger than the God of heaven. I will remain committed. To the extent that I will not fit in for the sake of comfort.

And I will not compromise for the sake of position. I will not see this opportunity to have this potential influence in the king's court.

As a means by which I will lay down certain convictions for the sake of having the greater good. No, I will trust God from start to finish.

[14:02] I will not compromise and he will get me through. Because God is able. But Daniel resolved. Literally this phrase is he purposed in his heart.

And I think that's important for us to consider. It's important for us to know that he purposed in his heart. That is the literal rendition of this. This is more than about a mental ascent.

This is more than just he made up his mind. This is going to the deepest parts of who Daniel is. It goes to his heart. It goes to affection.

It goes to desire. It is the desire that Daniel has that drives him to this commitment. It drives him in true affection for God.

It drives him to true loyalty and to true worship. It drives him to true fellowship with God because he understands that for him to defile himself, he would sever this connection, this fellowship, this intimacy that he has with God.

[15:06] And he would not have that. Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank because Daniel's affection for God led to a desire for fellowship with God.

It led to a craving for intimacy. He would not jeopardize that by becoming unclean. But in what way did Daniel think he would defile himself? Well, there are at least a couple of ways in which the food that was offered to him through these delicacies would have defiled him perhaps as a Judean.

First, many of the foods that were eaten at the Babylonian court were pork and horse flesh, which would have been unclean ceremonially in the law of Moses.

They were also prepared without removing all of the blood. And so that also would have been a defilement to Daniel and his friends. But I think most importantly, there was an understanding that the meat that was offered to these candidates was also first offered to the gods.

And the wine that they drank was first poured out, at least in part, to the gods of that nation. And Daniel was not going to defile himself in that way.

[16:26] It's remarkable considering that he was in Babylon because of idolatry of his nation. This is where I want to draw out our point.

God is able to preserve his servants. He was able to keep them. Somehow, Daniel and his three friends were uniquely preserved from the situation of idolatry that was taking place and running rampant throughout Judah.

God preserves his people. God uniquely sets them apart. And so even this morning as you're looking around and you are in a job situation or in a school situation or even in your community, you look around and wonder how many people are left who truly love God the way I love God.

Be reminded of Elijah. Elijah, who had a similar experience, face to face with God and criticizes God by saying, only I am left!

In which God says, no, no, Elijah. I have kept 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. You can trust me because I am the God who preserves.

[17:48] We find that in 1 Corinthians 10, 13. Take comfort in the fact that God delights in preserving his people. It says, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. Or I should say, so you may be able to remain pure and holy as God has called you to be holy.

God is over that experience. God is able to help through the power of his spirit to preserve you from those temptations, to draw you into purity, to draw you into obedience.

God is able to preserve his servants. And then the second half of verse 8 to verse 14, we also find that God is able to provide for his servants.

Not just preserve them, but provide for them. Notice what we find. Halfway through verse 8. Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

[18:59] This is important for us to understand because this becomes the key that unlocks the rest of the book of Daniel open to us. To understand what was it that drove Daniel.

What is this that allows Daniel to be lifted up and promoted into the eyes of this kingdom of Babylon and to be useful for God. It was this commitment that Daniel has to God's faithfulness and also his commitment to God's power that preserves him in this difficult situation.

Daniel asked to speak with, to search, to inquire and desire knowledge, desire information.

Daniel did not make demands. He did not simply decide and cross his arms and say, I'm checking out. Daniel didn't throw a fit.

Daniel didn't protest. He didn't dismiss himself from the selection process. He didn't rebel against the authorities that God had placed over him. He complied to the extent that he trusted in God to help work through this difficult situation.

[20:17] Daniel understood that God was in this. And so he sought to honor God through this. He recognized that as God was in this situation, that God would use this uniquely to accomplish his purposes, which in fact is exactly what God did.

God was using this situation to set Daniel and his friends apart, to distinguish him and his friends uniquely as being servants of the only God, the one true God.

Who would dare to jeopardize this opportunity? Who would dare to put this all at risk? Well, Daniel. Because Daniel remained, desired to remain holy to the Lord, was ultimate for him.

And since he believed that God had brought him to this moment, he didn't want to jeopardize the very working that God had him in store. the way in which God was going to use Daniel and his friends to accomplish the purposes that God had set for Daniel and his friends.

God provided for Daniel. But God honored Daniel because of his commitment. We see that here in verse 9. Notice. It says, And God gave Daniel favor and compassion.

[21:38] Daniel set his heart to trust in God. Daniel obviously prayed to God and God answered by showing him favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of eunuchs.

Verse 10. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord the king who has signed your food and your drink. For why should he see that you are in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age?

So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hanani, and Mishael, and Azariah, test your servants for 10 days.

Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of these youths who eat the king's food be observed by you and deal with your servant according to what you see.

So he listened to them in this matter and testified or tested them for 10 days. At the end of 10 days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in the flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

[22:46] So the steward took away their food and the wine which they were to drink and gave them vegetables. God worked to produce the right response in the chief eunuch.

There was every reason for the chief eunuch to say no, absolutely not. There is no way in the world I'm going to entertain this request.

I'm not going to risk my life for this. So Daniel proposes a test. This is a way to preserve the chief eunuch and also a way to preserve his own dignity and purity.

And I want to just draw attention to this briefly because we're going to see this repeated theme as we make our way through the book of Daniel. Notice that Daniel cares about his captor.

Daniel is interested in the preservation of this chief eunuch. He does care about his head. And we're going to see the same thing in chapter 2 where Daniel even cares about his competitors, the other wise men, the other sorcerers, those who are caught up in evil practices.

[23:56] Daniel cares about people, even his enemies. That theme is written across this book, but it's tangential to the theme that I'm trying to draw out at this point.

Daniel personally remains pure to his convictions. Test your servant for 10 days, he says. Give us vegetables to eat, water to drink, evaluate our appearance after this is all done.

We've already seen this word appearance in chapter 1, verse 4. We're going to see it some more throughout this passage and as we move our way into the next chapters. It's the same word that's used throughout the Old Testament to draw attention to the uniqueness of God's favor on his people, especially the patriarchs and their wives.

Genesis chapter 12, verse 11. Abraham, speaking of his wife, he says, I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance. We find of Rachel, Rachel was beautiful in form, in appearance.

And then in 1 Samuel, chapter 17, verse 42, it says, And when the Philistine saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.

[25:14] And then Genesis 39, 6. I missed that one now. Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. This way of God's special favor on his people.

And I just draw this out because the correlation is also true of Christ in Isaiah 53, 2 and 3. For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground, he had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Our Savior, who could have been the most striking of every, any person who ever walked the planet, chose in humility to lay himself low, to be of no form or comeliness so the strength would not be in his winsomeness, in his appearance, but in the message of the gospel and the power of the Spirit.

But here, in Daniel, God has allowed Daniel and his friends to be those who stand out from the crowd because he knows that man looks on the outward appearance.

[26 : 38] So God had instrumentally allowed Daniel and his friends to stand head and shoulders above the others in the way they looked. They were noticeable. The chief eunuch was not going to risk this key component, so he puts them to the test.

And it's interesting, we find here in verse 9, God gave Daniel what church? His favor and compassion. This word favor is the word hesed.

It's the word that's used throughout the Old Testament to call attention to the loyal, covenant love of God. This is so important because here they are being disciplined.

Here they are in captivity. Here they are being scourged because of their sin in Judah. And here they are in Babylon in God's hesed, loyal, covenant love has not left them.

And he's placed that love and allowed this chief steward to demonstrate that loyal love in favor in this situation. They sense his love.

[27 : 45] They sense his compassion. The book of Daniel continues to emphasize God's unseen power as the ultimate source of the events that we see working on the surface.

We find that in verse 14. So he listened. You get that? He listened. He didn't refuse. He didn't turn a deaf ear because God was working behind the scenes.

The steward granted Daniel's request. God granted favor. God allowed the matters that seemed to be out of hand to work exactly the way that God had designed them to work.

So that now when we turn our attention to verses 15 to 21 we also see God's power and his ability now to promote his servants. God is able to promote his servants not just preserve them but to promote them.

We see this at least three ways here in our passage today. In verses 15 and 16 God promotes them by giving them health. At the end it says in verse 15 of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in the flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

[29 : 03] So the steward took away their food and the wine that they were to drink and gave them vegetables. Vegetables. And they were fatter in the flesh after ten days.

You think that was a miracle perhaps? This word vegetables is a word that denotes those things which grow from sown seed.

It could have included things like fruits. It could have included things like grains. But most likely it was just simply vegetables. Broccoli. Beans. Carrots.

Cauliflower. Those kind of really great foods that you all look forward to. And I just think about our own home. I think about the dips and the ranch dressings but eating all of that without the delicacies that we enjoy today.

A miracle. Now I'm not a medical expert but I just want to rehearse some statistics or data for you to just try to give you some understanding of what this would have been like.

[30:14] Okay? So for a 11 to 15 year old boy they need about 2800 calories a day just to maintain their weight. Now that's 18 calories in a cup of mixed vegetables.

That's about 23 cups of vegetables a day just to maintain your weight. 23 cups which is about 4 pounds of vegetables. Now I don't know if you've had 4 pounds of vegetables every day for 10 days it does something to your digestive system.

That alone is a miracle. But then the fact that they were better and fatter which is the word that is used in Genesis to speak of the cows in the dream of Pharaoh who were plump in comparison with the thin emaciated cows of his dream.

A person generally has to gain about 10 pounds in order for their weight to be recognizable. Okay? So we have 10 pounds 10 days how much weight per day do they need to gain?

A pound. You guys are amazing. Okay. Now run with me. A pound or excuse me gaining a pound it's about 3200 more calories on top of the 2800.

[31:41] So more than double what you had to have before. So that's about 45 to 50 cups of vegetables more than 10 pounds of vegetables a day.

Let me tell you they didn't eat 10 pounds of vegetables a day. God was able at the end of this time to allow them to be better and fatter.

They were tested and they excelled. God allowed these boys to flourish. So the steward honors the request and the boys remain pure and undefiled and he gives them veggies and water to eat for the rest of their time for three years.

Now he gives them vegetables and water for breakfast and lunch and dinner for three years without ranch without dip.

That alone is a miracle. table. This was not easy for them to eat beans and broccoli and carrots and cucumbers but then consider sitting at the only table there in Babylon with your peers and the only ones who are not eating the filet mignon and the baked potatoes and the chocolate cake.

[33:12] It would have opened them up for criticism and ridicule. It would have set them apart not only from their peers but also drawing attention to themselves even by the chief stewards.

Now their life is a spectacle. I want you to understand this was not an easy decision. Now their life is an open book.

They are living in the spotlight. Every decision, every word, every action is under the microscope. This is not an enviable place to be.

If you've ever been in that situation, you do whatever you can to duck your head, to run for cover, to be anonymous, but not these boys. They stood for God.

How would they fare? Will they survive to the finish line? And of course we find from verse 17 to 20, that's exactly what happens. God gives them health but also God gives them learning.

[34:11] He gives them learning notice. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

At the end of the time when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar and the king spoke with him and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hanani, Mishael, and Azariah, just pause for a moment.

One of the primary conditions about standing before the king had to do with appearance. These guys were stunning.

These guys were head turners. These guys were striking in every way and God did that. But moving on, therefore, they stood before the king.

And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and the enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

[35 : 19] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. These boys, around 14 or 15 when they started this program, now maybe 17 or 18 when they finish.

and they aren't just the valedictorians of their class. No, these guys are smarter than everyone in the kingdom. And not just smarter, they are ten times smarter than anyone in the kingdom.

They make everyone else look stupid. God did that. Another miracle. Their commitment to God not only set them apart from their peers spiritually, but God allowed them to stand apart from everyone else in the kingdom as it related to wisdom, as it related to understanding.

Certainly, their ability to solve riddles, answer complex questions, apply logic and reason to sophisticated issues. They're not only trained in philosophy, in language, in history, but also mathematics, in astrology, in engineering.

They find themselves to be the complete package. They are the experts in everything. God did that. No doubt, their comprehension of languages, their ability to write, their recollection of facts, historical details, names and dates and battles, whatever Nebuchadnezzar wanted to ask them and put them on the spot, perfect recall, they had the answer.

[36 : 55] They showed themselves to be superior in intellect. And so they stood before the king. God did this.

God allowed them to flourish. God caused them success. God advanced their cause, affirmed their convictions and granted them favor.

He established his servants. He promoted them in the courts of Babylon. God did that. And finally, this final verse in verse 21, which we probably read over and just pass right through, but it's significant.

God gave them longevity, especially Daniel. God gave Daniel longevity. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

the staying power of Daniel bore testimony to the staying power of Daniel's God. Nebuchadnezzar would come and go.

[37 : 59] Babylon, the empire, would come and go. A new empire would rise up. Media Persia and the first king would come and go. But Daniel remains present because Daniel's God is transcendent over it all.

Media Persia would take power in 539 BC, 60 years after the original captivity.

And Daniel would remain for another 10 years in service to the empire of Persia. Daniel remained as a testimony to the power of God over kings and kingdoms as the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 40, 15.

Behold, the nations are like a drop in the bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales. Behold, he takes up the coastlines like fine dust.

That is Daniel's God and that is your God. Your God who is faithful. Your God who is able. How do our lives bear testimony, bear witness, preach the gospel of our commitment to a God who is a God over all, faithful and able and powerful and loving and intimate and desiring fellowship that comes only through his son Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

[39 : 28] Do you know him? Have you bowed the knee? Have you confessed your sin? Have you invited Jesus to be the Lord of your life? And if you have, does your life demonstrate a commitment, a resolution as it were?

Have you resolved in your heart as the inner parts of your life, the very core of who you are, show affection for God and confidence in what only God can do?

When people look at your life do they say, their God must be the only true God. may our lives demonstrate a commitment to the God of the word and may our lives demonstrate that we not only love him but we trust him, his faithfulness, his power, his goodness.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this story of Daniel and especially, Lord, this isn't a story of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This is the story of our God who is over all. A God who is transcendent, a God of the nations as it were. And so, Lord, I pray that we would demonstrate in our own life a commitment to the God who is over all, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

[41:02] In whatever situations we find ourselves, oh Lord, I pray that you would help us to remain steady and stable, recognizing that you are over those situations and you have a purpose for them, not only to draw us into greater faith in you, but also to draw others around us into seeing your faithfulness and your power.

May we not miss those opportunities. God, give us courage. Help us to remain steadfast. May our life demonstrate not only a commitment to you and an affection for you, but may our lives reflect worship and devotion day by day.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.