

Living for God in a Godless world - Daniel 1 (3)

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[0 : 00] We'll wait for good before thy saints it is.

Well please turn with me to the book of Daniel. And let me say as I begin this evening what a pleasure it's been for me to be here.

I enjoy greatly coming to the island of Lewis. I enjoy very much meeting old dear friends and making new friends. And I especially appreciate the warmth of your welcome.

And trust the Lord will prosper because of his kingdom among you. That God will keep you faithful. And that God will keep you pressing on in the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we live in dark times. We live in confusing times. We live in sad times. And it's salutary for us to look back and see once prosperous Christian congregations.

[1 : 11] Who have all but abandoned the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. So may the Lord in his kindness keep us faithful and true.

And enable us to press on to the end. So thank you for your welcome. And thank you for the kind invitation that your minister extended to me in coming here to point.

The book of Daniel both poses and answers two great questions.

It poses the question, how are believers to live for God in a godless world? And that's an important question.

We live in a godless world. Little different from the world of Daniel's day. Our world is not proliferated with the kind of metal and molten and wooden images that prevailed in Daniel's time.

[2 : 19] But we live no less in a world consumed with idolatry and with self-indulgence and with ignorance and opposition to the living God.

And we need to know better how to live for God in a godless world. And the book of Daniel by and large helps us to respond to that question.

We see Daniel not disengaging from the godlessness around him. But engaging with faithfulness and confidence in his God.

The answer is never to disengage from the godless world. For how else would our godless world know the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

How else would our godless world know Jesus Christ? Whom to know is life eternal? Even our Lord Jesus Christ, when he came into the world, did not come to disengage with the world, but to engage with the world.

[3 : 29] The word became flesh and dwelt among us. In the very midst of us, full of grace and truth. Not distancing himself from the unbelief and the godlessness of the world.

But engaging with it in truth and in faith and in confidence. And the book of Daniel also poses the question, but how are believers to live their lives when all the lights have gone out?

How are we to live when the bottom has fallen out of our world just as it had for Daniel? It's hard to imagine what it must have been like for this young lad.

Barely in his teens it would seem. Uprooted and taken away from family and friends and homeland. And deposited in the midst of a pagan society.

It's hard to know what it must have been like. How bewildering, confusing. The bottom has fallen out of Israel's world.

[4 : 40] And the lights appear to have gone out. God seems to have abandoned his people. How are believers to live when all the lights have gone out?

Well we see with Daniel that we are called supremely to live by faith. And not by sight. Let him who has no light.

We read in Isaiah chapter 50. Let him who walks in the darkness and who has no light. Yet trust in his God. This is the great default of the Christian believer.

That we live by faith and not by sight. We are not to judge God by our circumstances. But to trust him for who he is. To trust him for the great grace he has shown us.

In sending the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. To deliver us from darkness. And bring us into the kingdom of the Son of his love. We are called to live by faith.

[5 : 40] It was Samuel Rutherford who said that faith is the better for the free air and the sharp winter storm in its face. Grace withereth without adversity.

If my waters would stand, said Rutherford, they would rot. Faith is the better for the free air and the sharp winter storm in its face.

And so it was for Daniel. Would he ever have become the man he became. But for this sore, dark providence of God.

I doubt it. Because the Lord is pleased at times to bring his church and his people into the crucible of affliction. That he might do for us in the crucible of affliction what he cannot do for us in any other place.

And so we see in this young lad Daniel. A young lad who resolved or who purposed in his heart as we saw this morning.

[6 : 47] To believe God. And to stand for truth and righteousness. In a fallen, godless and sinful world.

And one of the striking features of the book of Daniel. Is that he maintained that integrity of heart and purpose all through his long life.

As we shall see, I trust a little this evening. It seems that Daniel, at the very least, was in Babylon for around 70 or so years.

And all during those years. He remained the man he had become. By the grace of God.

When he first came to Babylon. The whole of Daniel's life was a life lived in the midst of a fallen, palpably godless and sinful world.

[7 : 49] And yet he remained unyielding. He remained true and faithful to his God. And in this we saw, as we touched on this morning, we saw Daniel as something of a type of the great man of faith.

Jesus Christ. Every true man of faith in the old covenant picture. In their lives, analogically. In a sinful but yet true way.

The great man of faith. Jesus Christ. And so, as we look at the book of Daniel tonight. We see a young man who became an old man.

But who in his old age remained unbending. In his trust in the Lord. And unyielding in his faithfulness to the Lord.

You never get to the stage in the life of faith where you can simply cruise to glory. There is always the good fight of faith to fight.

[8 : 57] We are always being tempted to take lower ground. To take the easier path. The path of least resistance. The path that will be most comfortable to our flesh.

And we would just love to cruise to glory. But it wasn't that way for the man of faith, Jesus Christ. Who even as he hung on the cross was tempted to take lower ground.

If you be the son of God. Come down from there. Even at the last, Satan is tempting him to take lower ground. And to avoid the cost.

For inherent in the life of faith. There is this pulse beat. This rhythm of the man of faith, Jesus Christ.

And it is the rhythm of costly obedience to the way of the Lord. So, turn with me to these verses.

[10 : 09] And join with me as we seek to think our way through them. We see Daniel here with these three others. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

As their names were renamed. Truly, Azariah, Mishael and Hananiah. And these young men find themselves confronted with a choice.

Will they eat the rich food of the king's table? What will they do? Now, the issue is, is one of some moment.

Some suggest that it's to do with the Levitical food laws. I'm not so sure that's right. Calvin even suggests that they chose not to eat of the rich food of the king's table.

Because it would give them preferential treatment over the other exiles. And they wanted to identify with their brother. In the Lord. That's a great truth.

[11 : 13] But maybe not quite the truth that's being taught here. What is more likely is that this rich food of the king's table was food that had been offered up first to idols.

And rather than give even the appearance. Even the appearance of conniving with idolatry. Rather than give even the appearance of settling in with the wickedness and the waywardness and the idolatry that prevailed in Babylon.

Daniel and his three friends resolve in their hearts to refuse the king's food. They're faced with a momentous choice.

You know I would guess that all of us face choices every day of our lives. Some of our choices are trivial. Some are so trivial you hardly even pick their choices.

[12 : 15] Well I get up in the morning. Although my second son finds it the greatest struggle to get up in the morning. Some choices are just choices that we make automatically.

But there are other choices that will determine the shape and the direction of our lives. And here these young men are faced with a choice that will shape the direction of their lives.

They don't know the outcome. They don't know what will happen if they choose to refuse the food of the king. Maybe someone's here tonight and you find yourself faced with a choice.

A choice that is searching out your heart. Maybe it's the great choice. The ultimate choice. Will I go with this man Jesus Christ? Will I choose him to be my saviour and lord and king?

Will I embrace him? Will I choose this day to go with him? So I want to reflect with you on these verses.

[13 : 24] And to notice four things. Regarding the choice these young men made. First of all notice the courageous choice that they made.

We read in verse 8 that Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself. With the king's food or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself with food that had been offered to idols.

Now the great thing to notice here is that although Daniel is the one who is set before us. We can see from verse 10 that it's not just Daniel. Because the pronouns in verse 10 are plural pronouns.

The chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel. I fear my lord the king who assigned your food and your drink. These are in the plural. Speaking of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

For why should he see that you plural were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age. These young men were faced with a choice.

[14 : 38] But the great thing it seems to me here is that they faced this choice banded or bound together. They did so as a band of brothers.

They were not living isolated believing lives. But they were living their life of faith in the living God communally. Collegially.

Fraternally. They were brothers. And as they banded themselves together. One could imagine the one encouraging the other. And the other encouraging the next one.

It's a great thing you know. It's a great thing. That in his great kindness and mercy the Lord plants us. By his grace in the midst of his church.

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ. And it's within the church of Jesus Christ. That the great means of grace. Are set before us for the nourishment of our souls.

[15 : 40] We're not left to meander our way through the life of faith. All on our own. Atomistically separated at a distance from one another.

But rather together. Because there is in togetherness strength and encouragement. It is together with all the saints. That we learn how high and wide and deep and broad is the love of God in Jesus Christ.

God binds us or binds us together in the gospel. And it's with this band of brothers.

That we see the courageous choice that they make. Plotted before us. They don't know where this will lead them.

But they know this. It will be dishonouring to God. If they were to eat this food that has been sacrificed to non-entities.

[16 : 44] That the Babylonians worshipped. It seems to me what these young men are doing is this. They're saying we will pursue the path that is right.

Come what may. If it please the Lord to deliver us. Blessed be his name. And if it pleases the Lord not to deliver us.

Blessed be his name. We are not called to second guess the Lord. We are called to pursue the way of the Lord. And the honour of the Lord. That's why the Lord Jesus Christ.

Regularly. Informed. Would be disciples. Of the course. That was native to the life of faith. A man comes to Jesus and says.

Lord I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus says. Foxes of holes. Birth of the heir of nest. But the son of man has got nowhere to lay his head. Are you willing to embrace poverty? For my sake and the gospel.

[17 : 53] Jesus was always. Setting before would be disciples. The potential costs. Even to the point where he said. If any man would come after me.

Let him deny himself daily. And take up his cross. And follow me. Now I think when many of us read that verse. In Luke chapter 9.

There is the great temptation. To tone down. The significance of our Lord's language. We say things like this. Well you know. We all have different crosses to bear.

Maybe the Lord is telling us. That we will have to bear the cross. Of difficulty. Or opposition. Or whatever it may be.

But brothers and sisters. That is not what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying. He is saying. If any man would come after me. Let him be ready to die.

[18 : 48] Let him take up his cross. The instrument of execution. Let him be ready to die. If you are not ready to die. You are not ready to follow me. These young men did not know.

What awaited them. But they knew. That whatever awaited them. Their calling. Was to be found. Faithful. Their calling.

Was to stand. For truth. And for righteousness. In this godless world. Their calling was to bear. Personal testimony.

To the Lordship. Of Jehovah. Their God. And they did so. Together. It is a great thing.

To be part of a. Believing brotherhood. As the church of Jesus Christ is. It is a great thing. To stand with others.

[19 : 50] Who are standing. I know there have been times in my life. When I have. Quaked and. Feared and trembled. At certain choices.

That confronted me. But there were. Times when I knew. That there were other brothers. Who were standing. And facing the same crisis. And what encouragement. Their example gave me.

What a courageous choice. These young men. Made. With Daniel. They had purpose. In their hearts. Have you purposed.

In your heart. God helping you. To stand. For his honour. Come. What. May. You know. Those great lines.

Penned by Martin Luther. Though they take. Our life. Goods. Honour. Children. Wife. Yet. Is their profit small. These things.

[20 : 49] Shall vanish all. The city of God. Remain. When you find. When you find yourself. Confronted.

With a choice. That is utterly. Elemental. That's the kind of perspective. You need. Because the only thing.

That will be left standing. In this universe. At the coming again. Of Jesus Christ. Is the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. These men.

Had clearly. It seems to me. An eternal perspective. Before them. They counted their lives. As of little moment. Compared to the great honour.

Of their God. There's a great story told. Of Lord Reith. Who was the first director general. Of the BBC. He was a very tall.

[21 : 46] Scotsman. Six foot six. I think. One day. He came into the boardroom. Of the BBC. In the mid-1930s. I think. The corporation. Was still young. And he found. A number of the young executives.

Animatedly. Discussing something. And he said. What are you talking about? Oh. They said. We are writing. The obituary. Of the Christian church. And you know.

In the 1930s. The Christian church. Was effete. It was weak. It was. Pathetic. By and large.

And Lord Reith. Stood up. Before them. And said. Gentlemen. The church. Of Jesus Christ. Will stand. At the grave. Of the BBC. And at the grave.

Of every human institution. In this world. And brothers and sisters. We need that perspective. To know. That we stand. Not only for truth. And righteousness. But for that. Which is enduring.
[22 : 44] And eternal. And so. These young men. Made. Their courageous choice. And embraced. Whatever. The consequences.

Would be. Then secondly. Notice. The powerful. Impact. That. They made. God. Wonderfully. Bless. Their courage. And their faithfulness. We see. In verse 17. As for these. Four youths. God gave them.

Learning. And skill. And all literature. And wisdom. And Daniel. And understanding. Of all visions. And dreams. And when they were finally. Brought before. King Nebuchadnezzar. He found them. To be. Ten times. More acute. Than the. Astrologers. And the enchanters. Of Babylon.

[23 : 39] Now when you read. The narrative. You need to read. That 17th verse. In the flow. Of the narrative. Because there is. A narrative. Connection. As well as. A theological. Connection.

Between what we read. In verse 17. And what precedes. Verse 17. It's as these young men. Courageously. Embrace.

The choice. And the opportunity. To be faithful. And true. To their God. That God. Subsequently. Is pleased. To bless them. And to prosper them.

There is a narrative. Connection. Between how these boys. Acted. And how God. Responded. And it do seems. It does seem to me. As I read through these verses. That God is shouting out to us. Do you see. Do you see. Those who. Honor me. I. Will. Honor. Those who. Give themselves. For me.

[24 : 37] And for the cause. Of my kingdom. In this world. I will bless. I will bless. Now don't misunderstand me.

Please. It pleased God. In this particular way. To prosper. And bless. Daniel. And Azariah. And Mishael.

And Hananiah. But God is not. Always. Pleased. To bless. And to prosper. His servants. In the same way. Remember Stephen.

How he. In another occasion. Acts chapter 7. Embraced. The choice. That was set. Before him. Will he be muted. In his testimony.

To Jesus Christ. Or will he. Proclaim. The grace of God. In his savior. And Stephen. Boldly. And unashamedly. And courageously. Embraced the choice.

[25 : 35] And proclaimed Christ. And his head. And his body. Were smashed. To smithereens. By boulders.

You say. Well. What kind of blessing. Was that? My friends. It was the blessing. Of martyrdom. For the sake.

Of the son of God. It was the blessing. Of God. Bringing one of his own. Into his immediate presence. You know.

When we look. At the scriptures. We need. Always. To remember. As Robert Murray. McChain. Put it. It's not great talents. God bless us. But great likeness.

To Jesus. What is the great likeness. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. That he. Maps out for us. In a prototypical way. What it means.

[26 : 33] To be a man. Or a woman of faith. It is this. That he. Endured the cross. That he embraced. The way. Of his father. Despising.

The cost. That would come to him. There was none more. Faithful than he. And he was obedient. Unto death. Therefore.

God has highly. Exalted him. Therefore. God has highly. Exalted him. But with these young men. Here. It pleased the Lord. In this particular way. To. To bless. Significantly. Perhaps. Beyond.

Anything. They could ever. Have dreamt. Or imagined. Can you imagine.

Them talking. One to the other. Daniel. What do you think. This will mean for us. They are all.

Fourteen years of age. How will it. Pan out. Daniel. What will happen.

[27 : 30] Do you think. They had any. Idea. That this. Would be the outcome. But isn't this. The great calling.

That every. Christian. Believer has. We are called. To be faithful. And to lead. The outcome. To the Lord. We are called. To seek first.

His kingdom. And his righteousness. And leave the consequences. To him. Those who honor me. I will honor.

Is to be. Woven. Into the very. Flatter. Of our beings. For there is always. This temptation. Sometimes.

Sometimes. Pressing. Hard. Upon us. At other times. Subtly. Seducing us. The temptation. To take. Lower crowns. The temptation.

[28 : 26] To trim. Our sails. The temptation. To. Stand. Back. From enduring. The cost.

That goes. With faithfulness. To Jesus Christ. Jesus. I was talking. To one of your older. Members. This morning. And he was telling me. That.

He loves those words. Always carrying. A bunt. In the body. The dying. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. When we get.

To glory. If we get. To glory. At all. And only. Through faith. In Jesus Christ. It will be. To our astonishment. To discover. That our.

High points. In the life. Of faith. Have been. When we were. Most. Bearing about. In our bodies. The dying. Of the Lord. Jesus. What a powerful.

[29 : 28] Impact. These young men. Subsequently. Made. I've lived. Long enough. As a Christian. Long enough. As a Christian. Minister. To. Have heard. People say. That the way.

Forward. Is to. Engage. As one man. Put it. In. In ecclesiastical. Ways. We are called. To. Configure.

Our lives. According. To the. Ecclesiastical. Climate. Of the day. We are to be. Credential. In the way. We go about. Our ministry. I don't read that.

In holy scripture. We are called. To honor. The Lord. And if that. Sits well. With the ecclesiastical. Climate. Of the day. Well. And good. And if it doesn't. Well. And good. And then.

[30 : 26] Thirdly. Notice. The lifelong. Influence. That Daniel. Attained. Verse 21. And Daniel. Was there. Until the first year. Of King Cyrus. Which is the year.

Five. Three. Nine. It's not saying. Daniel. Was only there. Until the year. Five. Three. Nine. Which is. Sixty. Six years. After he was carried off.

Into captivity. But he was there. At least. To the beginnings. Of the reign. Of King Cyrus. Sixty. Six years later. To the. At the very least. Daniel. Daniel. Was continuing.

To be. The man. He had always been. I don't have many. Older people. In my congregation. In Cambridge.

I'm one of the oldest. And I'm a young man. We have. Two ladies. In their 80s. With a couple. In their 70s.

[31 : 27] Four or five. In their 50s. They're all. 20s and 30s. My congregation. Is adorned. With these older saints. I look at them often.

As I preach. And think. What a great thing it is. Here they are. Engaged in the worship. Of the living God. 40. 50.

60 years. 70 years. After they first came to faith. It is a magnificent thing. For the church of Jesus Christ.

To see. Older. Men and women. Still. Going. On. A number of years ago.

Eric Alexander. Was telling me. Of the occasion. He first met. Martin Lloyd-Jones. In London. And after the evening service.

[32 : 20] He lined up. With a friend. To. To speak. With the doctor. And there was this. Long. Few of people. And Eric said. I thought we would never get. To the doctor. And as they got nearer.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones. He said the same thing. To every single person. Who thanked him. He said. Go on. And Eric said to me.

He said. You know Ian. I thought to myself. Is that all the great man. Has got to say. Here are these people. Lining up. To thank him. For the ministry. Of the word of God. And all he's got to say. Is the same thing. To every one of them. Go on. And Eric said. You know Ian. I thought. What better thing. Could he say. What better thing.

Could he say. My brothers and sisters. Go on. Go on. You young folk.

[33 : 15] Here tonight. Pray that God. In his infinite kindness. Will keep you. Faithful. To the last. I said to one of our older members.

Recently. I thanked her. And said. You are a great. Encouragement to me. And she looked at me. Bewildered. I said.

Your life. Is a sermon. That God. Preaches to me. Every time. I look at you. And that's true. It's a sermon. Of the faithfulness. Of God. And here.

This little. Note. In verse 21. Isn't simply. A chronological. Marker. That would be to. I think. It missed the whole point. Of it. It is of course. In a sense. A chronological marker.

But it's profounder. Than that. It's saying. Do you see. This young. Fourteen year old boy. Sixty six years later. He was still.

[34 : 10] Being the same man. As he was. When he was a boy. There was a. Seamlessness. To his. Gospel. The integrity. Are you going on.

Are you. By the grace of God. Day by day. Praying. Lord. Keep me. Hold me. Preserve me.

Enable me. Till. I believe. My last. To be known. For being. Faithful. It's a great thing.

You know. Just. Enduring. Faithfulness. Sometimes. I think. In the Christian church.

We. We judge ourselves. And we judge others. By what they're doing. Some of our older folk. Well there's only half a dozen. Of them. In my congregation. They're at an age.

[35 : 11] When they can't be. Doing much. As it were. But oh. How much. They're doing. Just by. Being. At the means. Of grace.

And delighting. And seeing the delight. In them. Singing God's praises. It's a great thing. I think of one woman. In particular. It's an old couple.

I visit. Sisters. In their 80s. And. I visit them more. To be encouraged. By them. Than for me. To encourage them. What a delight. It is. To visit them.

Do you know. In the 11 years. I've been in Cambridge. I've never had a complaint. Now that's not because. That's not because.

I'm perfect. You know that. And you ask them. As I will often do. When I visit people. I'll say. What could we be doing. Better. In Cambridge.

[36 : 08] Presbyterian Church. Nothing. And I've tried so often. What could we be doing more. Nothing.

You know. I don't mean. That we shouldn't be doing. More of course. But. They're just so. Thankful. For what they are. They're so. Thankful. They can come on the Lord's Day.

Morning and evening. And hear the word of God. And sing the praises. Of Jesus Christ. Our congregation. Would be impoverished. And Daniel.

And Daniel. To the very end. As far as we can see. Remained unbound. My older brothers and sisters.

Is that you tonight? My younger friends. Is that. What you cry to God for? God. But then finally.

[37 : 09] Notice. The great grace. These young men were given. And I say this just in a moment. How. How did Daniel and the others.

Get to be like this? How do. How do you get to be. So. Godly. So.

Committed. So. Faithful. How do you get to be like that? This takes us back to where we began last evening.

God gave. God gave. God gave. God. They became.

What they became. Because of the grace of God. That's how they became. What they became. God.

[38 : 07] Gave them. The grace. To be like that. That's why in scripture. There are so many admonitions.

And encouragements. For us. To ask. And to seek. And to knock. And those great words. In Luke 11. Is it? If you who are evil.

Know how to give good gifts. To your children. How much more. Will your father in heaven. Give his. Holy spirit. To those who ask him. Oh you say. But I have the spirit. Well bless God.

For that. But our Lord Jesus Christ. Speaks of a greater. Access. And a greater. Refusion. Of the spirit. How much more. I delight.

To give good gifts. To my children. Love to see their faces. Even in their twenties. Oh but how much more. Will your father in heaven. Give his holy spirit.

[39 : 03] To those who ask him. How did they get. To be like this. I have little doubt. Because they said. Lord. Give us the grace. To be like this.

Grace. Doesn't Paul tell us. That our God. Will supply. All. Our needs. According to his riches. And glory.

In Jesus Christ. Grace. Is the great. Word. Of biblical. Christianity.

