

# The Virtues of Vegetarianism (Evening Service)

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Preacher: Ben Short

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, hello again. Yes, it's still me. And if you look at the sermons get titles, the sermon has been entitled, you'll be happy to know, The Virtues of Vegetarianism. I'm not going to talk about that.

But maybe if you get bored while I'm talking, you can think about the virtues of vegetarianism for yourself. Or tell your kids about that. So, we're starting a new series today. Five weeks in the book of Daniel. How exciting.

The book of Daniel is great. It's just a great book. There's great stories. It's challenging. It's quite different. It's the stories we tell kids. We just had the St. John's Summer Bible Kids Camp. And I went through Daniel. I helped out a bit at it. It was just great. Like, it was really great for the kids. And it was really great for the adults, too. I think it was really great. So, because we're starting five weeks in the book of Daniel, I thought I would begin with a little bit of history.

That's the history a bit behind the book of Daniel. And we'll start from there. So, the book of Daniel starts with a king called King Nebuchadnezzar, who's from Babylon.

[ 1 : 25 ] So, in the year 605 BC, the last king of Babylon died. And King Nebuchadnezzar became king. And he was awesome. He was a general.

He was an administrator. And he took Babylon from a kind of big country to the ruling empire all across the Middle East. He conquered from Greece to India down to Egypt.

He conquered a lot of stuff. And one of the places he conquered historically was Israel, Jerusalem. And this is the very end of the kingdom of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar comes and he beats the snot out of Israel. And he actually has a kind of two-step process. The first step is he does a kind of a little beating.

And he makes them like a vassal. And they have to give tribes, taxes, and tribute. A little historical lesson. If you want to be a conqueror of the world, you don't want to destroy all the countries.

[ 2 : 26 ] You begin by tribes, taxes, and tribute. And if they have a little rebellion later, the second phase is you just obliterate them. So Daniel chapter 1 is actually in the first phase.

And Daniel and his friends are part of this tribute that gets sent from the kingdom of Israel to serve in the kingdom of Babylon. Basically to say the kingdom of Israel is under the kingdom of Babylon. Now, that's the history behind it. A little bit of it. It's quite interesting. I recommend you go read about that. But into that history setting, the book of Daniel starts giving us questions.

They're really great questions for us to think about today. Questions like, how do I be a person of faith in a place that doesn't have the same faith as me?

How do I be a person of faith somewhere that's hostile to my faith? What does it look like to be a person of faith in that setting? And does God care about me in that setting?

[ 3 : 29 ] And the answer that the book of Daniel comes to you again and again and again is that God is king even in Babylon. And we can know that God is king even in our lives too.

And that's the main point of the book. So today, I want to make one point from Daniel chapter 1 and two applications. My point is the extent of God's love and care.

The extent of God's love and care. And two applications. Alright, let's go. So, Daniel chapter 1 has one main point to make to us.

And that is, no matter what our eyes and senses tell us, God's love is still there. No matter what our eyes and senses tell us, God's love is still there.

I saw a great thing. I was skiing. I think I was with Luke Frible. The last time I went skiing was with Luke Frible. He's here tonight. And I saw something really cool.

[ 4 : 33 ] I saw a child skiing, which you see sometimes. But behind the child was the father. And he had this band. Like a big elastic band.

And this band was through the arms and around the chest of this little boy. I think he was 8 or 7. And the little boy was just going.

And leaning into this band. And the father was behind him skiing. And just taking care. So, oh, there's a bump. I've got you.

And it meant that this child could be fearless. Just going straight down the mountain. And the father had to really hold on like that. And when I saw that, I thought, that is such a great picture.

Of the love that God has for us. He is there kind of behind us. Just guiding us. We need to ski. We need to live our lives. But his love is there kind of holding us.

[ 5 : 31 ] Leading us down. Luke, do you remember that? You saw that with me, right? That was with you. Yeah. That's right. That's great. What a great picture. So, verse 1.

Okay. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. So, I already told you about the history.

Verse 1 is history. What happened? A very short version. But verse 2 is an explanation of the meaning of that history. It says, And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hands.

That is the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This situation, the destruction and besiegement of Jerusalem, does not look like a good one.

But God was there and he did it. It says, very often, the care of God in our lives does not look like what we want it to.

[ 6 : 35 ] What we would choose. I'm sure that Daniel prayed when he was 10. God, do not let Nebuchadnezzar win.

And God said no to that prayer. And Daniel and his friends found themselves in this assimilation program in Babylon. So, what's happening is, the Babylonians are trying to brainwash these Hebrew, they're kind of teenagers.

They're getting new education, new names, new language, new families. They're being cut off from their homeland, their families, their language, their God.

They're being cut off and given totally new identities. That's why the names are so important. It's really interesting. Verse 6. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel, he called Belshazzar. Hananiah, he named Shadrach. Mishael, he called Meshach. And Azariah, he called Abednego.

[ 7 : 49 ] And the meaning of all these names is significant. We kind of forget about this in the modern age. But in ancient times, people really felt the significance of names. They were really important.

So, for example, Mishael means who is like God. That's what his name means.

It means God is great. Meshach, the ending is different. That Ach is a god of Babylon. Aku, the god of the moon of the Babylonians.

And that Meshach means who is like Ach. Who is like the god of the Babylonians. So, his whole life was pointed towards God. And the Babylonians are trying to turn them around and point them towards this other god.

They're going for their circumstances and their hearts. Right? It's a total assimilation. And the point is, God's there. That's where God is.

[ 8 : 50 ] In this obliteration of their identity. At least they're trying. And the word hand in verse 2 is so important. Because maybe it looks like they're in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

But actually, they're in the hand of God. Maybe you think you're in the hand of trouble.

Maybe you think, I'm in the hand of debt. But actually, you're in the hand of God. Maybe you think, I'm in the hand of sickness.

But the truth is, you're in the hand of God. God's hand is over all those things. It can look to our eyes like God is beyond us.

But his hand is there. There is no circumstance beyond God's love. And I made a lovely discovery in verse 9. Let me read to you verse 9.

[ 9 : 54 ] Verse 9 says, God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. Now, it's ambiguous in the original language.

And we have to get rid of the ambiguity in English. But the word favor there, we were singing about God's steadfast love. That's the word favor here.

And the verse says, God gave to Daniel steadfast love and compassion in the eyes of that guy.

And the point is, God's love is there for Daniel in Babylon. There are some people that know in their heads that God is active in his love, but they forget about it.

And what we need to do is to lean into the love of, sorry, lean into the love that God has for us. Like that child skiing.

[10:52] We need to trust that his love is around us and lean into it. When something happens to us, when something goes wrong, what's our reaction?

It's our reaction to worry, to deal with it. Or do we go to God and pray? Ask him for help. Confess, Lord, I know that you are here.

This doesn't get rid of our problems, but it does help us to see them differently. It helps us to know that God's love is there, even in Babylon.

And when we trust God, it can free us. We can learn to lean into him. The care of God is like glasses that we can apply to our lives.

Is the love of God bigger than this situation? And if we lean into that, it can give us freedom. Okay. Okay. So that's it.

[11:53] That's my point. That's my one point. God's love is there in every circumstance. Now, I'm going to make two applications, but these two applications come out of that.

That is, if we lean into the band of God's love around us, we will start to be two things, two things like Daniel. And those two things are courageous and discerning.

If we lean into the love that God has for us, we can learn to be courageous, and we can learn to be discerning. Okay. What do I mean? Courageous.

So this story is about Daniel and his friends and a little act of courage. They're in this assimilation program, and verse eight is kind of a cool verse, right?

Verse eight. But Daniel resolved he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank. So Daniel's there.

[12:59] He's in Babylon. He's reading these foreign texts and learning language and doing all these things, and he decides in his heart this one thing.

He's not going to eat the food, or at least the meat and the wine. And what he does is he says, all these things are happening.

I don't know about all these things, but this is my line in the sand, and I'm not going to cross that. And that's it. Now, the actual thing that he does is kind of small, actually.

Notice it's a private thing. No one knows about it. The king never learns about it. Other people don't learn about it. Daniel and his three friends do, and the guy who handles the food knows about it. Those five people. But no one else knows about it. It's not big. It's not flashy. But what happens is Daniel is making grooves in his heart of courage.

[14:07] He is planting roots down into God. So when a real storm comes later, the tree will stand. Please turn to Daniel chapter 3.

I'm going to read one of my favorite bits from Daniel. Daniel chapter 3 is one of the great acts in Daniel. I'm going to read from verse 16. So this is from the famous story, The Fiery Furnace, and it's about the three friends.

And they are being threatened with being thrown into a fire if they don't worship the God of Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 16, this is what they say. Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this manner.

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Wow!

[15:12] Wow! Love that! Do you taste it, right? Like there is drama in that scene. That is a courageous, crazy thing that they're doing, right?

Here's my point. If they hadn't made this tiny act of faith in private, this line in the sand then, they wouldn't be able to do the great acts of courage later.

These things are connected. The things we do in private are very important. God takes with full seriousness the shape of our hearts and what we do in public and what we do by ourselves and in private are connected.

We need to seek God and to obey him in the big things and in the little things too. remember this story is about God's care.

Even at this very beginning point, Daniel and his friends are able to make this line in the sand because they know God's care is there for him. And if we are tapping into the well of the love of God, we will learn to have courage like Daniel, I think.

[16:29] I want to take a moment and talk to younger people today. I'm thinking of people in high school and university right now. And it's worth saying that Daniel and his friends are probably 15.

Babylonian education started at 15 and went until 18. and I just want to say Daniel and his friends are, they're young.

They're just starting out in their lives. They're becoming adults. And it's at this point in their life they start making radical decisions of faithfulness to God.

So, if you are, I'm sorry, when I was in high school I didn't want to be called young. What should I say? If you're in high school or university.

Let me just say to you, it's worth taking this seriously now. What does it mean to be a Christian? At school, at university, these places are not places of faith.

[17:36] God is not held as king in school. God is not held as king in university or at least most of them. But, we are called as students to learn to be faithful to God in our little things at school.

So, I just want to point that out. If you're in high school or university, today, you can start saying to yourself, what does it mean for me to take this Christianity thing seriously?

How can I be courageous? Okay, that's my first application. Courage. My second one is discernment. If we trust the love of God, if we lean into those bands, we will learn to be courageous and we will learn to be discerning.

I am saying that this action of Daniel is like an example for us, drawing a line in the sand. But I don't pretend to know everything about your life. I know much about some of you and a little bit about others.

People here do all kinds of different things, have different jobs, family life, circumstances, and I am not the great authority on your life.

[18:48] You are pretty much the best authority on your life, perhaps from God. And I don't know all the decisions you have to make. What being faithful to God means can be complicated.

But it always means being alive to choices and being alive to the Holy Spirit. it's really interesting where Daniel puts his line.

It's really interesting. Why the food? This is a bit risky to say. Daniel was probably reading Babylonian texts about magic.

He was in a very pagan context and there were lots of things he could have said no to. But he chooses the food.

Some people think the food is about idolatry. It's probably not about idolatry because the vegetables were also part of the pagan worship. So the vegetables are just as much for the idols.

[19:54] Some people think it's about the kosher. The wine is kosher. He said no to the wine so it's probably not kosher laws. I think the main thing is about allegiance.

The food is the king's food and Daniel senses that if he does everything he's kind of buying into the king's program. So he's trying to say I'm going to be part of this court but I'm not going to be fully part of the court.

I'm saying no to this. He won't buy in all the way. As we watch Daniel make this act this decision to be a moral agent with a choice.

I think we can come awake to ourselves that we have choices too. We live in a sea of responsibility.

You and I have all these Romans 8.12 says debts all these things debts that we have in our life.

Competing moral obligations and being a discerning person means learning to weigh between the debts that we have to pay.

[21:11] do I give more time to my family or my work? Do I give more time to prayer or evangelism? Do I give more time to watching TV or to walking outside?

These are things we have to do and these things are asking for us but Romans 8 also says that we have a choice to walk according to the flesh or to walk according to the spirit.

theologian Oliver Donovan says being a moral person means walking into responsibility and freedom.

Those two things together and the apostle Paul calls that the life of the Holy Spirit. We need to seek to be faithful in our circumstances but we need to become awake both to the circumstances we're in and the Holy Spirit within us.

Daniel is learning to listen to what's happening around him and I can't tell you what that means in your circumstance but I can tell you we all need to learn to listen what is happening around us. [ 22 : 24 ] We need to learn to pray and then we need to learn to act trusting that the band of God's love are around us. We need to learn responsibility as moral agents.

Okay. My time is up for today. I'm going to pray for us. I think this is a wonderful passage but I'm going to pray for us. Father we thank you that you are good and that you love us and you give us decisions to make but I ask that you will teach us to trust your love is over us.  
Amen.