

The Virtues of Vegetarianism

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[0 : 00] Okay, if I can ask you to turn with me to the first chapter of Daniel, you're probably already there, but turn back to that on page 437 of your Bibles.

So today and for the next four weeks, five weeks total, we've got this family service we're going to look at and hear from the book of Daniel. Daniel is one of four major prophets, you may know, in the Old Testament that precede in the Bible, in the canon, the minor prophets in these four major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then Daniel.

Right in the middle of those four books, you may know, is the book of Lamentations. So they're split actually in two by this lament, this great lament, but we're looking at Daniel and we're going to cover the first six of the 11 chapters of this.

Chapter one is an introductory chapter. Chapter two actually tells five stories. They all end with the sovereignty of God who rules over history.

Chapter 7, 12, we're not going to look at, give four apostolic visions revealing an immediate and an ultimate course of history. Here's the key verse in chapter 4, verse 3 of this book, though.

[1 : 21] You can turn over to that with me now, just over a few pages. But it says, chapter 4, verse 3, His kingdom, that is God's kingdom, is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures from generation to generation.

Why don't we actually say that together? Bible open. If you're able to grab a Bible, grab it, open it.

You may need to share with someone. But let's say this together. It's such a key verse. Together we say, His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures from generation to generation.

That's worth memorizing, I figure. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His generation endures from generation to generation. That is dominion. This book is worth reading, as well as a few verses memorizing.

Memorizing not only this verse, but the whole shape of the book. Let me encourage you to find someone this week to read it with. Read it with a friend or a spouse, maybe your child or a colleague or a neighbor.

[2 : 29] This week I was reading with my son on my way down to White Rock, and he began reading chapter 1, and he actually said to me, you know what? He said, I ought to read the Bible. And I said, really?

I think that's a good idea. What might keep you from doing that? And he gave no excuses. And it's never too late to actually start reading the Bible. So let's look at this together, and I think this is what we're going to learn for the next five weeks about Daniel, and that is that our hope is grounded in the character of our great and faithful king.

So we have this clash of kings. We see our king, God, and the kings of the earth. It's going to happen in these three ways that we'll see that our hope is grounded in the character of our great king and God.

It'll happen when, one, we realize that our Lord rules the nation, number two, that we resolve to obey our Lord no matter what, and finally, we rely on the Lord's gift for service in his kingdom.

This comes right out of the text. In verses 2, 9, and 17, these are the key verses. I want you to look down with me right now at those. Verse 2, this is really key.

[3 : 39] It says, And the Lord gave Jehoiachin of Judah into his hands. Go down to verse 9 with me. Look at that. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of eunuchs.

And then verse 17 on the next page. Then Daniel went into his house and made the matter. Sorry, I skipped over too far. Verse 17, As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all the literature and wisdom.

Notice the repetition of the word gave. We can get focused on Daniel, but actually our focus should be fully on the Lord in this case. So let's look at this first way in which we'll realize that our hope is actually in the Lord our God, who's this great king.

Realizing that the Lord rules over all the nations. So, we live in a world with a lot of influences and control, don't we? Money, power, education, military, markets, rhetoric, political, economical, and social influence, just to name a few.

So, during the years 605-530 BC, we saw a period between leaders like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus exercising their control.

[4 : 58] They seemed like they had their way with the nations. Judah was under the influence of both of these kings through this period. So much so that the best and brightest of Judah, including Daniel and his three friends, were relocated to the land of Shinar, which is actually the land where God's people tried to build that tower named Babel.

They were re-educated. They were sent to a university called Chaldea. And then we also know that these four men and many others were renamed. So, relocated, re-educated, renamed.

And this all amounted to a kind of a re-indoctrination spiritually, socially, politically, physically. Had their minds being kind of changed and shaped.

They had to eat new meals. There were all kinds of motives. This all happened by force, as we see in verse 1. So, Daniel and his three friends could have drawn this conclusion.

I'm in the wrong place. They could have protested, Really, Lord? We're in the wrong. They could have thought.

[6 : 09] And you may think that too. They could have thought we're in the wrong country, the wrong city, the wrong school, the wrong job, the wrong family, the wrong temple. This is completely wrong.

But if so, Daniel then would have been wrong. Verse 2 reads this, And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his, that's King Nebuchadnezzar's, hand.

Not the wrong hands. In reality, King Nebuchadnezzar is in the Lord's hand and he's using him for his people and for the world. Daniel is in the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar because of the Lord.

Surprising, the Lord has King Nebuchadnezzar. Or Daniel and his three friends right where he wants them. King Nebuchadnezzar may think that he's importing these foreign students in his own doing, of his own kind of making.

But if so, he would be wrong about that. I wonder if this reminds you of another story at all. Another ruler. Or rulers, Herod and Pilate. Jesus retorted Pilate before his own crucifixion saying, you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above.

[7 : 23] God had Jesus in the world right where he wanted the Christ for the world's salvation. He has Daniel and he has us right where he wants us. So we really would do well if we took note of this and know that it's the Lord who's actually ruling over all the nations, the whole universe.

And especially when we might actually be tempted to think that we're in the wrong place. So that's the first thing. Realize that the Lord is the ruler of all nations. But also this. Resolve to obey the Lord no matter what.

Now, we live in a world with great resolve. People assert their wills in many ways and always have. Sometimes with wisdom, other times with foolishness. Resolve is a real motivator to greatness but sometimes disaster.

Let me give you three quotes just to kind of jog our our imaginations about memory from some famous people. This first one from a leader at one point named Yamamoto. He said, I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve.

Helen Keller once said, resolve to keep happy and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against all difficulties. Resolve is the way that she did that.

[8 : 42] And Rene Descartes said this, divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it. He had great resolve too.

All kinds of matters motivate people to resolve something. So I ask you, what motivates you? Where does your resolve come from? Is it explainable? Is it sometimes good?

Sometimes. At other times it might even be evil. Even a good resolve though can be infected with sin and bad effect or unintended circumstances can come as a result of our resolve.

Well, Daniel discovered resolve somehow and in some way. But it wasn't something within him. It wasn't the bad circumstances that induced his resolve. It wasn't even a principle but it was a person.

So look down with me at verse 8. I want to read this out loud together again. Verse 8. Let's say this together. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

[9 : 53] Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. It looks like Daniel's motivation for resolve was divine and spiritual.

There was something about the food and wine of Babylon that presented some kind of ultimate problem for him. It wasn't about keeping kosher or keeping fit. And in the end, Daniel and his three friends will get this.

What happens to them? They get fat on water and vegetables. That's what it says in the text. I don't know if you've noticed that before.

I don't know if any of you are motivated to become vegetarians. Maybe you are and that's fine. I wonder if any of your motivations was so that you would become fat. Probably, probably not.

Right? I think the issue here for Daniel is one of, as it says twice there, about defilement. It's a matter of worship and witness. This is what's at stake. And Daniel couldn't change his location or his education and his name was changed but one thing he could be sure about and that was his devotion.

[11 : 01] Food probably dedicated to another god as an act of worship may be the explanation for why Daniel wouldn't eat that food and wanted to eat water and vegetable instead.

The issue was one of defilement. Okay? Here's what our Lord actually said about defilement. You may remember it when some others came to him taking actually issue with his disciples and why they weren't washing their hands.

Jesus said it's not what goes into the mouth of one who defiles a person but what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person. Daniel wasn't just differentiating.

His resolve isn't just some kind of risk or some kind of courage. The issue that's at stake for Daniel is defilement and the result of that was that they became fat. Here's a little acronym for you.

I know this isn't what it means but you think fat think this faithful available and teachable. Daniel and his friends were fat. They were faithful to the Lord.

[12 : 04] They were available to the Lord with that. They were very teachable by their Lord too. So let's resolve like Daniel not just to dare to be different but to resolve not to defile ourselves.

Finally then kids are being great. The last thing let's think about this then to rely on the Lord's gifts for service in his kingdom. After we realize that the Lord rules the nations that we resolve not to defile ourselves we can rely on the gifts that God's given us for ministry for service.

No matter where we find ourselves the grace of God is sufficient for our ministry. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is unique for salvation but it's also unique for service. The same grace that convicts us of our sin our defilement is the same grace that convinces us that Jesus is Savior as well as Lord and King.

But it's also the same that converts our life and compels us to serve the Lord and to do good works. And it all begins with this gift of faith that God gives us which is not despite the evidence that's around us as our world actually thinks and critiques our belief but faith or faithfulness is obedience despite the consequences.

Daniel faced dire consequences potentially and Daniel and all of us are told that faith is blind of evidence but actually to the contrary.

[13 : 38] Grace or faith is obedience to our king no matter the consequences. So fortunately Daniel and his three resolved and they obeyed and yes they risked their lives.

The result was a favor and a compassion because of the grace of God from the chief of the eunuchs which was given to him and upon the eunuchs by the Lord.

And so as a result there was evidence of good health but not because of a good diet. It was the grace and the strength of the Lord not the virtues of vegetarianism.

Well Daniel's diet was different and Christians eat odd things as well you must admit. We are strengthened by God's grace and that happens when we participate in what we will later which is called the Lord's Supper.

Some bread and some wine the body and blood of Jesus Christ and God strengthens us. He enables us to resolve not to defile ourselves as a result of that.

[14 : 41] So Daniel and his three are given these gifts of God then and I want to read one last thing with you and let's read it out loud and it's verse 17 and this is for service in God's kingdom.

Verse 17 let's read this out loud. As for these four youths God gave them learning and skill and all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding and all visions and dreams.

Daniel has no illusion. He's not relying on himself, his friends or good fortune. Now he won't rely on the wealthiest in Chaldea.

Not the most powerful or the most glorious kingdom in the world at the time but he is relying on the gifts that his king, his Lord, has given him and as a result he's becoming a servant of the Lord in the very place that he finds himself in a unique order and rule of the Lord.

Now friends, we have a choice in who we serve. Choice shapes our service and gifts required to exercise that service. and the Lord won't demand anything of you, anything of us that he isn't willing to equip us for.

[15 : 57] Each of us are given learning, skill, understanding that will make us potentially stand before rulers and not only do the good works of God but speak the grace and the blessing, the truth and the grace of God.

So let's rely on the Lord's gifts for service in his kingdom. So as we begin these August services as the whole household of God, let's not just remember Daniel, which we'll be tempted to I think, but remember his and our Lord, this unique king in the universe who knows all of the details of our lives and rules over everything.

Our king governs the course of history and uses the events of our day, some of which we don't like, to draw out our faith. That is this obedience in the face of no matter what the consequences and whatever happens.

One of the things I figure about this book of Daniel is that it's a really missional, it's a very missionary book. As Daniel's brought to this foreign land and brings the gospel actually of God to bear on people's lives.

So let me finish with this prayer. Actually, it's a missionary prayer from our book of common prayer. As we think about the importance of realizing what God is doing, resolving not to defile ourselves, and then finally relying on the gifts that God gives us.

[17 : 24] As we pray, O God, who wills that all people should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, prosper, we pray, all whose labor in the gospel at home and in distant lands like Babylon or maybe Vancouver, protect us in all perils and support us in loneliness.

And in the hour of trial, give us your grace to bear faithful witness to you. And do all of us with a burning zeal and love that we may turn many to righteousness through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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