

DANIEL - PART 1
Small Choices, Big Consequences
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 1
Subject: What happened to Daniel when he purposed in his heart to honor God even in small choices in his life
Complement: God honors him.
Exegetical idea: When Daniel purposed in his heart to honor God even in small choices in his life, God honored him.
Homiletical idea: **God always honors those who honor Him.**
Purpose: To challenge my hearers to purpose in their hearts to honor God even in the small choices of their lives with the blessed realization that God will honor them.

Introduction

One of the first songs that I can remember singing as a child besides “Jesus loves me” was this one: “Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known.” In the next few weeks, we are going to study about the life and ministry of Daniel—a gifted young nobleman, prisoner of war, government official, prophet of the Most High God. From the book that bears Daniel’s name, we will learn powerful lessons about how to live well and how to finish well.

Now, I realize that some have rejected the authenticity of the book of Daniel. The first attack came from a 3rd century neoplatonic philosopher named Porphyry. He claimed that the book of Daniel was a forgery, written 400 years after Daniel’s life. In other words, it was a counterfeit, a work of deception, written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, in the 2nd century BC. How was it possible that any man could write with such accuracy about events that had not yet taken place? But Porphyry clearly had an agenda of his own. He is described by secular historians as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of paganism. This attack on the book of Daniel was taken up in the 19th century by liberal German scholars. They echoed the

sentiments of Porphyry that the book of Daniel was a forgery, a work of deception, written in the 2nd century BC during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But before the time of the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, who oppressed the Jews in the 2nd century BC, resulting in the Maccabean rebellion, before that time the book of Daniel was already included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Those Jewish scholars clearly recognized the book of Daniel as authentic, long before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The 1st century Jewish historian, Josephus, also recounts that when Alexander the Great brought his conquering armies to Palestine in the 4th century BC, the high priest Jaddua went out to meet him with the book of Daniel. The high priest showed Alexander the Great that his military conquests had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Daniel. And Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet of Daniel during the time of the Babylonian captivity of the 6th century BC, refers to the prophet Daniel in his book (Ezekiel 28:3). Most important of all, Jesus recognized Daniel as a true prophet of God, and referred to his book as authentic and authoritative (Matthew 24:15).

So I urge you to reject the liberal hypothesis that the book of Daniel is a fabricated work of deception and counterfeit, and rather receive it for what it is—the Word of God, written by a prophet of God under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. I believe the inspired testimony of the apostle Paul when he declared that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). I believe the inspired testimony of the apostle Peter who declared that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

So let us receive this book as the inspired Word of God, written by a prophet of God. And it is my prayer that when we come to the end of our journey, we will all say, “Dare to be a Daniel! Dare to be a man of God, a woman of God, who is willing, if necessary to stand alone for God. Dare to have a purpose firm, and dare to make it known!”

Daniel was born between 620-625 BC. His autobiography doesn't tell us much about his family, except that he was a young nobleman of the tribe of Judah. The 1st century Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that Daniel was part of the royal family, a relative of king Zedekiah of Judah. We are given no information about Daniel's parents, but it seems clear that they were servants of the Most High God. They named their son, Daniel, which means God is my judge. And they poured their lives and their unfailing love into their son during his early years. That is the only way that we can explain his strength of character and purpose in later years.

When Daniel was still a teenager, probably 16-18 years of age, the feared tyrant Nebuchadnezzar marched south toward Jerusalem. It was the summer of 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar's army had already defeated an Egyptian garrison at Carchemish, and now the Babylonian soldiers were preparing to encircle the city of Jerusalem like a deadly noose. King Jehoiakim had foolishly turned away from dependence on the God of heaven and had made an alliance with Egypt. But where the Egyptian allies now? It was only a matter of time, and Jerusalem would be forced to surrender.

I have tried to imagine what thoughts were racing through Daniel's mind on the day that he heard that the city walls of Jerusalem had been breached. He had heard of the brutality of the Babylonians. Undoubtedly, he expected a swift and merciless execution. But instead, he faced a more terrible fate. He was seized, along with a select group of other young noblemen, publically

humiliated, and taken off as a prisoner of war. Were these young men just hostages? I don't think so. Nebuchadnezzar's strategy is recorded in Daniel 1:3-4. "....."

Nebuchadnezzar had a strategy for subduing the nations that he conquered. He would take the young leaders from that conquered nation, the cream of the crop, the best of the best, and he would take them back to Babylon to indoctrinate them. If you were listening carefully, you may have inferred from Daniel's account that some time between his capture and the beginning of his indoctrination program, it is very likely that Daniel was castrated. He, and the other young men who were with him. Why else would they be put under the care of Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs. It's true that some scholars argue that point. "Why," they ask, "would Nebuchadnezzar select young men in whom there was no blemish and then castrate them?" But Nebuchadnezzar was more ruthless than rational. These young men belonged to him, and he demonstrated his power over them.

Now, I've never been castrated. So I don't know exactly what that would feel like, physically and emotionally. But I'm guessing that it would be a devastating blow for a young man in the prime of his youth. It would be so easy to just curse the Most High God and wish to die.

Toward the end of August, 605 BC, while Nebuchadnezzar was still in the vicinity of Jerusalem, he received word that his father Nabopolassar had died. He immediately gathered an elite group of bodyguards and took the dangerously dry but much shorter route home across the Syrian desert. A cuneiform tablet, now stored at the British Museum, records that Nebuchadnezzar arrived back in Babylon on September 7, less than two weeks after the news of his father's death had reached him. There was no time to waste. He needed to claim the throne

and leave no opportunity for a contender to take his place.

Nebuchadnezzar left orders for the rest of his army still in Jerusalem to bring the prisoners back to Babylon along the trade routes. That was a journey of at least 8 weeks—north from Jerusalem on the mountain road to Samaria, along the sloping shores of the sea of Galilee, between the twin mountain ranges of Lebanon, and then turning southeast at Carchemish, and following the river Euphrates the remaining 500-600 miles to the great city of Babylon.

There was plenty of time during those 8 weeks of marching to weep and to grieve. I imagine that Daniel also had his moments of anger. “God, why did you let this happen to me? I’ve always honored you. I don’t deserve this!” You know, some people think it’s a sin to be angry with God. And perhaps there are times when anger is expressed toward God inappropriately. But I am convinced that God can handle our anger. His love is stronger than our hurt and our confusion.

I imagine that after Daniel had recovered from his initial shock and anger, he began to recall stories that he had heard as a child. Stories told to him by his loving parents. Perhaps he recalled the story of another young man who was taken captive 1200 years earlier. He was also a prisoner of war, But unlike Daniel, this other young man’s war had occurred in his own family. Sold as a slave by his brothers to Ishmaelite traders, Joseph had ended up as a servant to Potipher, captain of the Pharaoh’s guard. Daniel knew the story well. Joseph was far away from home. No one knew him there in Egypt. But Joseph purposed in his heart to honor God.

Daniel thought about the similarities between Joseph’s story and his own. In Egypt, Joseph had gained the respect of his new master. In fact, Potipher trusted Joseph to oversee his entire household. And just when things were going well, Potipher’s wife tried to seduce him.

But Joseph purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Joseph purposed in his heart to honor God. It was true Joseph ended up in prison. But that wasn't the end of the story. Because God always honors those who honor Him. Did you hear what I just said? God always honors those who honor Him. One way or another. And Joseph was delivered from prison and became a great leader in Egypt. I imagine that as Daniel thought about the story of Joseph, he purposed in his heart to honor God, just like Joseph.

Perhaps Daniel also remembered the story of another prisoner of war during the time of Elisha the prophet. Daniel didn't know her name. She was simply referred to as the Israelite maid. She had been taken to the household of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria. But even though she was far away from home, that young girl purposed in her heart to honor God. She did not forget the LORD God of heaven. And when her master Naaman was struck down with leprosy, that young Israelite girl was not ashamed to bear witness of her faith in the God of heaven. She told her master's wife about the prophet of God. And as a result of that testimony, her master went on a journey of faith and returned home healed! As Daniel reflected on that story, he noticed that this young Israelite girl had also purposed in her heart to honor God, and God honored her. Because God always honors those who honor Him.

Somewhere on Daniel's journey into exile, he made a life-changing commitment: he would honor God in every aspect of his life—even in the small choices of life. When he arrived in Babylon, Daniel was put under the care of Ashpenaz, the chief of the eunuchs. Daniel continues his account in Daniel 1:5. “.....”

Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was simple. He planned to reprogram his young captives. They were given Babylonian names and immersed in the culture and lifestyle of the

Babylonians. It would have been so easy to just fit in. Forget about the God of heaven. No one would ever know.

But Daniel gives this testimony in his autobiography. Daniel 1:8 “.....” Some might think that this was a minor issue. Why make a big fuss about food and drink? But Daniel had purposed in his heart to honor God. He had purposed in his heart not to defile himself. And so, instead of feasting on the delicacies from the king’s table and drinking the king’s wine, Daniel requested a simple diet.

Was this a choice about clean and unclean foods? Perhaps. Had these delicacies been offered as gifts to the gods? That’s possible. It certainly wasn’t just about choosing the healthiest diet. Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Eating and drinking at the king’s table would hinder him from making healthy choices in other areas of his life. Daniel purposed in his heart to honor God.

The consequences of his decision could have been fatal. Any act of defiance could be interpreted as treason, a crime punishable by death. But Daniel decided that it was more important what God thought than what people thought. It was more important what God said than what people said. The food and wine at the king’s table was inappropriate. So Daniel requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

We read on in Daniel 1:9-14. “.....” The word translated “vegetables” literally means “things sown.” Daniel was requesting a simple vegetarian diet. Did Daniel really think that ten days would make that much difference? I’m not sure. But I have no doubt from what the rest of the book tells me that Daniel took this situation to God in prayer. We’ll learn later in his autobiography, that Daniel had set times of prayer, morning, noon, and night.

But he also prayed at other times. When he faced the challenge recorded in chapter 2 of his autobiography, he didn't wait until prayer time to gather his friends for prayer. When he was in the lion's den, I'm sure that he prayed all night! Any time is prayer time!

I imagine Daniel calling out to God. "LORD God, I want to honor you even in the small choices of my life. I've been given 10 days to demonstrate that this nutritional plan works. Help me, LORD!"

And Daniel's autobiography records in Daniel 1:15, "....." Now I'm sure whether Daniel and his 3 friends looked that much healthier, or whether the other young men who were eating at the king's table looked worse. Probably it was both! But whatever the reason, the evidence was enough to convince the steward that Daniel's nutritional plan was working!

Daniel records that as a result of this decision to honor God in this small aspect of his life, God did more than bless him with good health. Read on with me in Daniel 1:17.

"....." This small choice to honor God had big consequences. Better health. Better academic performance. And most important of all, Daniel was called to speak for God, called to be a prophet of God. Those who met Daniel would recognize him as one in whom the spirit of God dwells.

And at the end of the 3 years of training, Daniel gives this account, in Daniel 1:19-20. "....." As I read this first chapter of Daniel's autobiography, I was impressed that even small choices to honor God have big consequences because God always honors those who honor Him.

Later in his book, Daniel prophesies about the Messiah who is to come. He is the One who will most fully demonstrate a steadfast commitment to honor God. He said, "I have come

down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me.” Jesus sought to honor God in every choice that He made. Big and small. In the wilderness, when Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, to save Himself from starvation by His own power, He purposed in His heart to honor God and trust in God to deliver Him. On the pinnacle of the Temple, when Jesus was tempted to jump off and bring attention to Himself as Messiah, He purposed in His heart to honor God rather than presume upon God’s mercy. On the mountaintop, when Satan tempted Jesus with an easy way out, Jesus purposed in His heart to honor God and worship only His Father in heaven. In Gethsemane, when Jesus agonized in prayer and longed for some other way to save His lost creation, He purposed in His heart to honor God and suffer death for our sake, even death on a cross.

And His commitment to honor God, even in the small choices of life, had big consequences. Not only was salvation provided for all who believe, but also God the Father has highly exalted Jesus and given Him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God always honors those who honor Him.

My brothers and sisters, there are many lessons to learn from the life of Daniel. But one lesson is this: God honors those who honor Him. Even small choices to honor God have big consequences. Because God honors those who honor Him.

As we continue our journey in the weeks ahead, studying the autobiography of this great man of God, will you choose with me to purpose in your heart to honor God even in the small choices of your life? Will you purpose in your heart not to defile yourself, even if people all around you are defiling themselves? Will you dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to

have a purpose firm and dare to make it known?