Series: Stand Up for Jesus, #1

Daniel 1:1-21; Hebrews 3:12-19; Mark 10:17-22; Psalm 90:12-17 October 14, 2018

**Summary: Daniel and his friends were strangers in a strange land and were surrounded by paganism. How did they deal with standing up for God in that setting, and how can we stand up for God in an increasingly offensive world?**

I know we’ve had a message on this Scripture before but I want to take another, a bit different look at it today because it is so important to how we live in our nation today.

Daniel and his friends, their names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and they were all Judeans. They’d been carried off into captivity by Babylon. Their parents were probably dead, and they’re unlikely to ever see their homes again. Now they find themselves captives in a foreign land with little chance of escape.

But these boys are different. According to our text they were apparently men of noble birth. They were good looking, intelligent and had fairly good judgment, and because of all that, they had been chosen to be trained to serve in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

But now… there appears to be a problem. They don’t want to eat what’s set on the table in front of them. There’s something wrong with the food they’re being given.

Why don’t they want to eat this food? What’s wrong? Well they don’t want to eat it because they were paying attention in Sunday School. They had paid attention and they believed what they’d heard – and they’d heard enough to know that they ought not to be eating what the Babylonians were serving.

Now that still leaves the question: what was wrong with that food? My first thought was that the food was unclean. Leviticus 11 gives us a really long list of foods that Israelites weren’t supposed to eat - there were certain kinds of fish, mammals and even insects they couldn’t eat, but the most famous item on that list was pig meat.

But then, as I studied the text it occurred to me that these boys didn’t want ANY of the meat at all, not even beef or lamb, or other meats that were considered clean according to Leviticus standards. . . all they wanted was salad. You’d have thought that there should have been some meats that would have been acceptable. You’d have thought there’d at least have been something on the “clean list” they could have eaten. But they rejected EVERYTHING on the table. So I began looking for a better answer to question – and I found that answer in a commentary I came across that said: “… though it might be food in itself lawful to be eaten, yet part of it being first offered to their idol "Bel," as was usual, and the whole blessed in his name, it would have been against (Daniel’s) conscience, and a defiling of that, to eat of things offered to, or blessed in the name of, an idol.”

In other words, all the foods Daniel and his friends had been asked to eat had been dedicated to a pagan god and had been sacrificed to honor him. That was enough to make Daniel say “I’m not eating that.”

Now that made sense. The worship of pagan gods was so much a part of Babylonian society that they even renamed these Jewish boys to honor those gods. Daniel – was renamed BELTESHAZZAR or “Bel’s treasurer”. Bel was the chief idol of the Babylonians. Hananiah was called SHADRACH – the “rach” ending stood for their Sun God. Mishael was called MESHACH, - the name of another one of their gods. And Azariah he called ABEDNEGO - "a servant, or worshiper of Nego" (another god of the Babylonians).

So, Daniel and his friends had a problem. They were strangers in a strange land. They weren’t in Judah any longer and the Temple wasn’t just up the street. This was a pagan land filled with pagan practices and there was no way they’d be able to get away from it.

It’s like the difference between being in church on Sunday and going to work the next day where no one cares about God or morality. At church even the most godless folks will mind their manners, but out in the world… there’s a lot of people who could really care less. There’s foul language, dirty jokes, the names of God and Jesus are mentioned a lot, but only in the course of cursing. Now, if you can visualize that, and maybe you’ve experienced that --- you have a pretty good idea of the kind of situation these four young men found themselves in.

What I want us to focus on this morning is HOW they dealt with living in that kind of world. I mean –we all know how we’re supposed to behave in church. But what about when we leave the church building? What about when we have to breathe the same air as the folks who are crude and rude and fairly despicable? How should you and I handle that kind of thing?

Well let’s break this story down a little at a time.

**First – Daniel made up his mind that he wasn’t going to go along to get along**. *“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.”* Daniel 1:8

We live in an increasingly crude world. Refuse to accept bad language or bad behavior. Don’t let yourself get sucked in to this mindset.

ILLUS: Someone once made an observation about rocks they found in rivers. They noted that you could take a rock out of the stream that had been there for years. It was submerged all that time in the waters of that brook. It had no choice. But if you were to take that rock out of the river and crack it open… guess what you’d find? You’d find that the INSIDE of that rock was bone dry. That rock had been IN that water for years but the water had never gotten INSIDE the rock.

In the same way, you can’t help having to live in the world… but you can resolve not to let the world live inside you!! Be a rock for Jesus!

So – 1st make up your mind not to defile yourself.

**Second – realize that others are watching YOU to see what to do.**

*“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.”* Daniel 1:8

Whoa… wait a minute – I thought there were 4 young men from Judea. Where’s Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah? All we read is that DANIEL made up his mind… there’s no mention of the other three. You know what happened? What happened was that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were good Jewish boys - but at this point in their lives they’re not prepared to make a stand for righteousness. If they had been left on their own - they just go along to get along.

That’s what Daniel did here. He stood alone, by himself. He decided that no matter what he would not defile himself with the pagan food offered to idols, and his three friends just said – “Hey, he’s right!” and they went over and stood with him.

So, realize that others are watching you to see what to do.

**Third – Saying no is important… but it matters HOW you say no.**

*“Daniel resolved that he would not defile 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.”* Daniel 1:8

Notice what Daniel did… he ASKED. He didn’t demand, he didn’t insist, he didn’t get angry and indignant. He politely asked. He approached his boss with an obviously sincere desire to work things out.

Too often Christians get angry about unrighteous stuff. They get “righteously indignant”. I like that phrase “righteously indignant”. I can wrap my mind around that. It makes me feel good about myself. It makes me feel important and “Godly”. And it makes me feel that I should speak up and confront unrighteousness in an “in-your-face” approach that will bring the offender to their knees.

In order to be RIGHTEOUS… you and I have got to do things RIGHT. There IS a time to be righteously indignant about things being wrong, but our first option should NOT be making a scene. It should NOT be belittling and embarrassing people who behave badly.

Our first option should be to try to work things out. To try seeing things from the other person’s point of view. To try to be that person’s friend and help them find a solution.

That’s what Daniel did with the Chief Eunuch. He politely asked for the Eunuch’s help in a moral problem he was facing. And because Daniel was gentle and polite, the Eunuch ended up cooperating with Daniel and even becoming his ally… rather than his enemy.

**How did that work out for Daniel?** Verse 17 tells that God took notice of Daniel’s TAKING A STAND: *“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.”* Daniel 1:17

Did you catch that? Because they stood up for God and His righteousness - and they did it the RIGHT WAY - God gave these 4 Jewish boys learning and skill. It came easy to them. They were like those kids in High School – the kids that never had to study for a test, but aced them anyway. That was these four guys. God made it so that they aced all the tests. And God made them SUCCESSFUL in things they did so that they were obviously better at things than all the other folks in the room. And God made these 4 young men STAND OUT above everyone else trying for their job.

**Because they stood up for God, God stood up for them.**

But I want you to notice something else from that verse. Did you notice that while God gave all these boys learning and skill in all literature and wisdom… DANIEL had understanding in all visions and dreams? The other 3 boys didn’t get that … ONLY DANIEL. And do you know why? It was because Daniel was the only one who had RESOLVED to do the right thing. The other three followed Daniel… but Daniel followed God.

There’s a great Old Testament passage that I will probably repeat to my grave: 2 Chronicles 16:9 says *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him”* (NKJV)

God is looking for somebody who’ll just stand up for Him and for His Righteousness. He wants to reward those folks. He wants them to know He knows they’ve gone above and beyond what most people do. Too often people refuse to stand up for God because they’re afraid of the consequences. They think it is better to keep their mouths shut and sit over in the corner. But God doesn’t want followers who sit in the corner. He wants disciples who stand up and are willing to do what is necessary to stand properly for God.

Why do many Christians just sit down and shut up? Because they’re afraid of what will happen if they commit themselves. They’re afraid that others will shut them down and cut them off. They’re afraid they’ll lose friends and success and jobs and promotions. And you know what… they’re right! Jesus even said this is what would happen.

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* Matthew 5:10-12

If you stand up for righteousness and for God… you will be persecuted. You will be insulted and reviled. There will be people who WILL hurt you if they can because they don’t want to hear your message. But then Jesus says: “*Blessed are you”* when this happens. “*Rejoice, and be glad*”. Really? Yes, really. Because, though the world may succeed in hurting or damaging you because of what you stand for, God is watching. In fact, I can almost see God standing up from His throne and pointing at you and saying “THAT’S MY CHILD! That’s the one who really loves me. And I intend to find a way to make them strong and reward them for their willingness to face persecution and hardship for me.”

Wouldn’t that be cool to get God’s attention like that? Wouldn’t you want God to point you out personally and have Him in your corner? Of course you would. But in order to get that kind of attention from God you’ve got to decide that you will stand up for Him and for His righteousness.

**Let us pray:**

Lord God, give us we pray the rock solid faith in You and inner attitude of the heart that would never give in to the ways of the world so that we would always stand up for Jesus. In His great name. Amen.