

An Uncompromised Life

Daniel 1:8-21

In the early part of the twentieth century, a ship was wrecked off the Scilly Isles near the coast of England. The sea had been calm and the weather clear, but the vessel was caught in a treacherous current that slowly lured it off its course. Before the captain and the crew realized what had happened, the ship had crashed into the rocks.

In our spiritual life, too, powerful currents of compromise can catch the soul and carry it to shipwreck. Spiritual drifting is usually a slow and imperceptible process. But our life is a series of choices. You are who you are today because of decisions and choices you made years ago. Most of the time we don't realize how important small choices can be. How can we steer our way through life without ending up shipwrecked on the rocks of compromise?

Our text today is about four men who came to a time of decision in their lives. They could either compromise and go with the flow, or they could stand their ground and live for the Lord. The circumstances they faced and the decisions they made set the course or the rest of their lives.

As you and I go through life, there will always be times where we are going to have to make decisions to do the right thing. When these times come, and they most certainly will, we will either decide to go with God despite the cost. Or, we will choose to compromise. The truths contained in this passage will help us to live an uncompromising life as we face the serious crossroads of life.

Listen to the account from Daniel 1:8-21,

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah,

12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants."

14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

- 15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies.**
- 16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.**
- 17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.**
- 18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.**
- 19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.**
- 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.**
- 21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.**

As we saw last time, Daniel and his friends are in Babylon, having been torn away from their families in Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar and the mighty Babylonian army. The king orders these young men from noble backgrounds to be trained to enter his service. Daniel and his three friends are God-fearing Jewish teenagers, ripped out of everything they have known, now being trained to work for a pagan king.

The idea was to assimilate them into the Babylonian way of life. For three years they will be immersed in Babylonian knowledge, culture, history, language, and religion. Their Jewish names are changed in favor of new Babylonian names. At the end of that time they will enter the king's service and work in government positions. The process was designed to cause them to form a new allegiance to the king and his pagan way of life.

But then we come to verse 8: **"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank."**

This is the crucial event of Daniel's life. Although it might not have appeared important at the time, what he decided here shaped his life for the next 70 years.

How did Daniel live an uncompromised life?

1. Purposeful Resolve – (Dan. 1:8) "Daniel purposed in his heart."

The Word purposed means "to put, to place, to fix." Daniel decided ahead of time that he was unwilling to give into the temptation that was put before him. His resolve was settled. His mind was made up. Daniel was not going to allow anything to defile his body.

This was difficult. Here is Daniel in Babylon as a captured enemy of the state. I do not think he has much bargaining power. He could lose his life...for what...the wrong kind of food. Yet what Daniel knew is that it was his job to stand firm, it was God's job to make a way of escape. And did God make a way of escape? Yes, as we will soon see.

I think it's fair to say that looking back from our perspective, Daniel's decision appears odd to us. We aren't Jews living in captivity in Babylon, so it's hard for us to understand what the big deal was about eating the king's food from the king's table. After all, as far as we can tell, Daniel accepted his captivity, he accepted the pagan education, and he evidently even accepted a new pagan name. If you're going to go along with all of that, why worry about the food? What's the big deal here?

There were at least three problems with the food served at the king's table. First, it certainly would not have been prepared according to the kosher laws of the Old Testament. Much of it would be ritually unclean. He drew the line at the law of God. Second, probably all the wine and most of the meat would have been previously offered to pagan gods. To eat that food in that situation would be to participate in pagan religion. Third, Daniel knew that sharing a meal at the king's table represented sharing the king's values. Sharing a meal with someone had huge symbolic meaning. To eat together implied friendship, support, endorsement, and shared values. In the end Daniel could obey the king and even serve in his government, but he could not become like the pagan king. Therefore, he made up his mind he would not do it. He purposed in his heart not to defile himself.

And the point is this: we must draw the line where God draws the line. And He draws the line of no compromise on the basis of the absolutes of His Word.

What is the first step in overcoming worldliness? We need to have a purposeful resolve. We must purpose our hearts to obey the word of God. It all starts with the firmness in mind that resolves to a life of purity in obedience to the word of God. If our mind is not steadfast, then our foundation will falter. That is why it is important to first fix our mind upon the word of God.

This is hugely important because it teaches us that you can't corrupt a man from the outside. You can change a culture but not a character. You can change his name but not his nature. Daniel may have looked like a pagan but on the inside he was a servant of the living God. Even the mighty Nebuchadnezzar couldn't do a thing about that.

2. Persistent Confidence – (Dan. 1:9-11)

The issue of the king's food was a test for Daniel and his friends. Will they compromise or will they trust in God?

Verse 9 tells us how they were able to have a persistent confidence in doing what was right. Verse 9 begins with the words, "**Now God...**" As Daniel writes this account he remembers the hand of God at work in this whole situation. Daniel had confidence in God. He sees God as in control of not only him and his friends, but also in control of the pagan powers that be in his world.

God had brought Daniel into a good standing with the prince of the eunuchs verse 9 says, **Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.** But Daniel first had to stand up for his decision. Does God bless those who honor him? Yes he does, but you generally don't experience that blessing until you stand up for what you believe. There is a blessing reserved for the bold that the timid never experience.

At first, the man in charge is resistant, but Daniel was persistent. Daniel steps out confidently in faith and proposes a challenge.

But before look at his challenge, notice first that Daniel's confidence and boldness is in response to his faith. Daniel is confident that God will make a way of escape. And Daniel is confident that God is preparing the way. And he is confident that he has to take action. So what does Daniel do? Daniel calls the Chief of the eunuchs to the side and begins to ask the Ashpenaz his specific requests.

John MacArthurs says, "An unashamed boldness goes with an uncompromising life." We are called to a persistent confidence, an unashamed boldness. Mark 8:38. Our Lord says, **"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."** In 1 Peter 4:16, it says: **"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."** Psalm 119:46. It says this, **"I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, And will not be ashamed."** In Romans 1 Paul wrote, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."** There shouldn't be anybody in this world to intimidate you to compromise your purity or scare you out of your proclaiming the gospel, nobody.

Daniel is presented with a path that is unacceptable to him. He is nothing more than a slave. Yet Daniel has confidence to make his requests known. Sometimes people are put in situations where the way of the world seems to be pressing them hard, but they say nothing. They are asked to do things that are contrary to God's word, and they say nothing. Daniel was bold enough to speak.

He did not give up in the face of opposition, because he had a purposeful resolve to stay pure and a persistent confidence in God and His power.

3. Planned Action – (Dan. 1:12-16)

When God intervened causing Ashpenaz to look upon Daniel with favor and compassion, you might expect this to result in Daniel's request being granted, but it did not. How easy it would have been for this Babylonian official to demand obedience without explanation. Instead Ashpenaz openly disclosed why permission could not be granted.

Ashpenaz greatly feared the king. From what we read in the following chapters, his fear was well-founded. Nebuchadnezzar was a harsh man whose wrath was to be avoided at all costs. If Ashpenaz granted Daniel's request and it resulted in Daniel looking worse, the king would have his head.

This information the commander gave Daniel was of great value. Daniel understood that his actions would affect his superiors as well as himself. He needed to act in a way to please God and to protect and prosper his superiors.

Daniel's wisdom is evident as he acts on his convictions and the information which the commander gave him. The goal of Daniel's Babylonian superiors was to obtain the optimum physical and mental performance of those in training. So Daniel sought out the steward in verse 11, whom Ashpenaz had put in charge. Since he was directly involved with Daniel, Daniel sought him out, not in an effort to circumvent Ashpenaz, but because he was in a position to execute and evaluate Daniel's proposed plan of action.

The goal was peak performance, physically and mentally. The "control group," against whom Daniel and his friends could be compared, was the rest of the Hebrew trainees. Daniel proposed that he and his friends be allowed to eat vegetables for ten days and then their condition compared with the rest. If Daniel's group could match or surpass the others, then the goal of the Babylonian officials was obtained, yet in a way that did not defile the Hebrew youths. Daniel's proposal is submissive because it seeks the permission of the one directly in charge; it seeks to fulfill the purposes of Daniel's superiors.

The proposal was accepted. It would seem God divinely intervened not only making the condition of Daniel and his friends markedly superior, but in a very short period of time. Daniel's proposal not only preserved the purity of these four Jews, but it did so in a way that benefitted their superiors. After all, if Daniel and his friends were so obviously superior to the rest, the king would give some of the credit to those in charge of them.

So Daniel asked for a 10 day test. Daniel's proposal was very simple. He asked that he and his three friends be taken off the rich diet and be served only vegetables and water for ten days. At the end of that time the guard could make his own comparison and draw his own conclusions.

There are several attractive features in the way Daniel made his proposal. First, he was tactful in the way he spoke. He didn't demand anything, he simply made a request. Second, he was obedient in following the chain of command. Third, his request was reasonable. The test would be over in ten days and didn't require the preparation of unusual food. Fourth, it was easy to evaluate. The guard simply eyeballed the four versus the others and drew his own conclusions.

The test was more about God's ability than it was Daniel's. The test was...is God's way best! Daniel already knew the answer, but the Babylonians did not.

4. Powerful Testimony – (Dan. 1:17-21)

Here we see the results of the challenge and of Daniel's uncompromising stand. After ten days of eating that kind of food, those guys looked wonderful. They looked handsome, strong and healthy.

Verse 17 informs us that God gave these four young men wisdom and understanding. That guaranteed they would stand out above their Jewish contemporaries and far above the Babylonians. These four young men will soon find themselves in positions of enormous influence in a pagan government.

By the way, it's important that we notice the order. First, the decision is made to stand up for what they believed. Second, God honored that decision. Third, God gave them wisdom and understanding. You can hardly ask God for wisdom while you are living in a state of spiritual compromise. Again, God honors those who honor him.

Verse 18 skips to the end of the three years of education. Now King Nebuchadnezzar will examine all the young men himself. This is the ultimate oral exam. They would be questioned on history, science, economics, the Babylonian language, and presumably also on details of Babylonian religion. These young men had to know everything the other young leaders had to know. The result is astounding. The king found them ten times better than the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom. They immediately entered the king's service.

Verse 21 adds that Daniel remained in the court of Babylon until the first year of Cyrus, 539 BC. That means he served as an advisor to a whole series of Babylonian and Persian kings for at least 70 more years. All this because Daniel resolved not to compromise.

This story comes to an end on a very positive note. We discover in these verses that God always honors those who honor him. In this case the reward came very quickly. Often it takes much longer than that. And sometimes when we are faithful, our reward doesn't come until we get to heaven.

I know that in terms of scientific progress, the world has changed since Daniel's day, but God has not changed. God's Word has not changed. And the world still tries to seduce us. The good news from Daniel 1 is that it is possible to live for God in high school, in college, at work, and in your career. Daniel has shown us the way.

In 1873, P.P. Bliss wrote a gospel song about this story that became very popular but has in our day become virtually unknown. It is called "Dare to be a Daniel." Its refrain says,

*Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.*

One of the lessons that we learn in this passage is that it is not where you are, or what you are facing, who you know that matters. Daniel was able to live an uncompromised life because he had faith in God who rules everything. He believed that God's kingdom triumphs over all.

But Daniel is not our best example of that. God's Son, Jesus Christ is. He came to this earth to live as a man in a sinful world that hated Him. He lived an uncompromised life of holiness, obedience to His Father and love toward men. His death for us on the cross purchased our salvation from our captivity to sin. And God raised Him from the dead on the third day in triumph over death. He is alive forever and gives eternal, abundant life to all who believe in Him. He is coming again to fulfill the triumph of His kingdom and to reign forever.

Do you know Him?