The Lord Works Through His Faithful People

Daniel 1:8-16

 Good morning! If you have your Bibles with you, would you please open to the first chapter of the book of Daniel. Today we are continuing our study of the prophetic messages found in the Old Testament book of Daniel. So far in our study we have laid the foundation for the book by setting the stage and identifying the main idea of this book, which is to encourage readers to remain faithful to God despite the hardships and to show the faithfulness of God as He honors the covenant He made with Abraham and the people as well as hoe God will sustain His people in the days that are to come. Last week we discussed the ways that the king of Babylon worked to indoctrinate the young men he took into exile into the culture of the Chaldeans and how that is like the way that Satan is working to take over the church today. We concluded that Satan cannot and will not overtake the church as long as the people of God remain faithful to the gospel and to Jesus Christ. Today we will begin looking at how the faith of Daniel, as well as his three friends, will sustain them as they live out their days in exile in Babylon.

 In this first chapter of Daniel, we find he and his three friends being offered the food and wine from the king’s table. This is an honor that not many at that time were able to enjoy, but rather than accept that honor, Daniel will refrain from consuming them. Let’s read Daniel 1 verses 8-16 together: “**But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials. The commander of the officials said to Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has allotted your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking gaunt in comparison to the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.’ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ‘Please put your servants to the test for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king’s choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see.’ So he listened to them in this matter, and put them to the test for ten days. And at the end of ten days their appearance seemed better, and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king’s choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.”**

 This first major event recorded in Daniel after the trip into exile provides for us a glimpse into the lives of these four young men and helps us to better understand the faith and strength they possessed. In verse 8 it is recorded that Daniel made the decision that he would not eat the food that came from the king because he did not want to defile himself before God. This decision might seem to have been made for an obvious reason. Its very likely that Danile said he would not partake of the food because some of the items the Babylonians ate would be in violation of the strict dietary laws found in the law of Moses. While this is likely, there are a few other possibilities that we need to consider here. According to Matthew Henry there are a few other likely reasons for Daniel having such a strong conviction regarding this decision. One possible reason is that by refusing to eat the food Daniel and his three friends were trying to protect their status as Israelites who are the chosen people of God. Eating the king’s food would be a sign that they were no longer God’s people but were now giving up what made them unique and were now trying to be just like everyone else. Another possibility could be that the men would not partake because their conscience would not allow them to do so. What this means is that the men said no to the food because they did not feel it was right for them to enjoy the delicacies of the king while so many of their fellow Israelites were suffering with hunger and being killed by the thousands by the Babylonians. So, the second possibility was that they did not feel they had the right to enjoy the food while others were suffering. The third possible reason I will share is that the men refused to partake of the food was because if they did would start to become reliant on the king for their well-being rather than on the Lord God. By refusing to eat his food the king would know that their faith was in the God of Abraham, not in the King of Babylon. I believe it is very likely that each of these possibilities played a role in the decision of the men not to partake.

 In verse 9 we are told that God had blessed the young men by giving them favor in the sight of their overseers who treated them with respect. God had done this for the men because they had made the choice to honor Him no matter what situation they may have found themselves in. This aspect of living according to the righteous standard of God shows us that when God’s people stand up courageously for the standards of God and live to honor Him God will make it possible His people to be able to live out their faith courageously. Jesus told the Apostles that when they were to speak before kings it would not be them that was speaking, but the Spirit of God speaking through them (Matthew 10:18-20). Our God equips us with the tools necessary to share the good news with others, even if we happen to be threatened with prison or death. Our God is with us when we boldly stand in His name.

 The official responds to Daniel’s request positively, but he does have some concerns. He makes the point that if he allows Daniel and his friends not to eat the food and they begin to show signs of being malnourished or any sign of imperfection he will be held accountable, and it could cost him his life. What we see here is that for the official to allow Daniel to do this he was going to need some assurances. Therefore, in the next few verses we will be shown what those assurances would be.

 Daniel tells the chief official that he wants to do a test to see if the food could be withheld. Daniel suggests a 10-day challenge. If at the end of 10 days, the men looked weaker and not as healthy as the other men they would stop eating just vegetables and would agree to begin eating the food of the king. We are told that at the end of the 10 days the men looked better than the other men and had a healthier appearance. This test of obedience had been passed by Daniel and his friends because of their faith in God and the desire to be obedient to Him.

 This situation that Daniel and his friends found themselves in is unique because it was the men who chose to have themselves challenged in this manner. What they did was not wait for God to intervene or to take a miraculous step to protect them. Rather they stepped out in faith and allowed themselves to be used to bring God the glory in this situation. With the remainder of our time together today let us look at the way God uses His faithful people to show others His greatness and the things that can be done though those who place their trust in Him.

 The first application we need to take from today’s passage is that Daniel had the goal, from the very beginning of his experience in captivity, to bring glory and honor to the God of Israel. In verse 8 Scripture tells us that Daniel made it up in his mind that he would not defile himself by eating the food taken from the king’s table. This shows the resolve that Daniel and his friends had regarding their faith in God. They were not going to be pushed away from their faith, and they would not be bullied into doing something that went against the Law of Moses. The resolve that the men showed in this situation gives us an example that we can follow when we are encountered with a situation where the world is asking us to compromise our faith in God by following the ways of the world rather than God’s design for life. When you and I are encountered with a situation in our lives and the world wants us to compromise our faith to please it, we need to stand firm in our resolve so that the world can see that we are followers of Christ and that we honor Him. Dave Guzik in his commentary of Daniel provides a five-step process that followers of Christ can use to conquer a difficult trial in life.

1. Before anything else, *the heart must be set* that no matter what takes place in the situation you will not compromise your faith. This resolve must be established so that when the trial comes you will able to withstand the challenge of Satan.
2. *The life must be positive:* When you and I stand firm against the ways of the world but we also live in a positive manner we will have the respect of others who will know that we are not doing what we are doing to be difficult or cause problems, but we are really honoring the God we serve.
3. The third part is that the *protest must be courteous*. We see in Daniel that he requested that he and his friends would not have to eat the food. He did not act rudely or cause a commotion, he refused to compromise his faith but did so respectfully.
4. *Self-denial must be sought*: this means that when a follower of God stands firm they know that their actions will cost them something. The evangelist Chales Spurgeon said these words regarding this passage “Be ready for a bad name; be willing to be called a bigot; be prepared for the loss of friendships; be prepared for anything so long as you can stand fast by Him who bought you with His precious blood.” It is better to have the approval of God rather than the approval of man.
5. *The test must be boldly put*: standing boldly for the Lord is an opportunity for our faith to be tested. If we really love the Lord and desire to please Him we should be happy and willing to face difficulty for His name.

Our second application today that we can take from this passage is that “He (God) is able to preserve us throughout the trials and tribulations that we face, no matter how intense they may be or how long they may last. When the world does its worst, God’s faithfulness is enough” (Reformed Expository Commentary, p. 14). The entire book of Daniel is a testimony of God is faithful to those to stand firm in their faith and seek to honor Him with their lives. As we continue in the book, we will find that God is with these men while they are in exile and is willing to use their lives to encourage all the others who are still in exile with them. What we cannot neglect to mention as we study this book is that for our lives to honor God, we must be willing to be used for His glory so that not only will God receive the glory, but also that others will see that when they do the same, they can experience the power of God in their lives as well. The example that the faithful in God show to others can create a life-long impact on others that will guide and sustain them throughout whatever trials they face.

Out third and final application that we will discuss today is that when the people of God stand in faith and are unwilling to compromise in a world that demands them to conform, God will bless them. In this passage today we find in verses 14-16 that Daniel and his friends. The chief of the eunuchs consented to Daniel’s plan and because it was able to be carried out the men looked to be fatter and healthier than the other men who had been eating the king’s food. This blessing was obviously from God because it would not be normal for someone who is eating only grains and vegetables to be fatter than the others who are eating rich meats and more solid foods. God placed His hand of approval on these men giving them the ability to live out their faith in Him with confidence as well as a good reputation with the chief official who oversaw their care. God will sustain and take care of them who stand firm in their faith in Him. What we do have to be careful to remember, however, is that the plan God has for our lives might not always match the way we think things should go. We must be willing to accept some difficulty in life and know that God may ask of us to suffer for His name. Jesus Christ Himself was sent to earth to live a perfect life, testify to the truth regarding God, and give His life as a living sacrifice so that those who believe in Him will have eternal life. That life was pleasing to God and brought Him glory, but it was a life filled with trial, suffering, rejection and difficulty. We cannot assume that just because our life is filled with challenge and difficulty that God is not with us. No matter what situation we face in this life we can rest assured, as we study the lives of those who have come before us, that God is not only present, but He is also walking through the storm with us.

As we conclude today let us leave from this house of worship equipped with the truth of Scripture that is teaching us that standing firm in faith and refusing to compromise with a world that rejects God will come with blessing and an eternal reward. If we follow the example of Daniel who stood firm in His faith and did so with a respectful attitude, God will stand with us and give us the strength and resolve necessary to conduct ourselves in a manner that will bring respect upon Himself as well as us.