

Daniel - the Voice of God in History

by William Fitch

The book of Daniel is a testament to the sovereignty of God and the power of faith in the face of adversity and captivity.

Duration: 37:39

Scripture: Daniel 1:1-4, Daniel 1:8-9, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Voice Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the pressure and temptation that young people face in society. They highlight how the pull of position, prestige, and societal norms can be dangerous and antichrist. The speaker emphasizes the importance of standing firm in the faith and relying on the grace of God. They use the example of Daniel and his friends who made a resolve to not defile themselves and remained faithful to God despite the king's commandment. The sermon emphasizes the victory that comes from doing the will of God and the importance of trusting in God's sovereignty and pursuing purity of life.

Transcript

Before the message, our family, O Lord, wilt Thou hold me, that I may uplift only Thee? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, for Thy great love's sake. Amen. Our text this morning is the first chapter of the book of Daniel.

I want today, with the help of God, to commence a series of studies in this book. About five years ago, we studied the book of Daniel at our evening service, but I can't recall having spoken from these chapters at any morning hour of worship. It would therefore seem that the time has come for us to address ourselves to this most remarkable portion of sacred scripture.

The book of Daniel is a book for every generation, perhaps especially for times of tumult and storm. And such, of course, is our generation. You and I are privileged to live in volcanic days, days of tempest and fury, days of uncertainty, days when the winds of change are blowing strong across the face of the earth.

It was in such a time that Daniel lived and wrote. It was in days very similar to our own that Daniel knew himself to be the called of God, and set himself to pursue the will of God. And because of this, he speaks with understanding and with authority to us today.

Daniel was no dweller in ivory towers, isolated from the pressures and pulls of a hostile world. No, he is one with us in his involvement in the stern business of living. He knew the bewilderment of mysterious providence.

He had heard the thunder of invading armies approaching his home. He was rudely torn from that home and carried captive across hundreds of miles of scorching desert and set down in a foreign land. All this Daniel knew, and in it all he walked with God and set his heart to obey his Lord's command.

Because of that, he is able to confront us this morning and to tell us that God is faithful, that God will never forsake his own who walk before him in righteousness, and that the sovereignty of God is the most abseant fact in all the history of man. That's Daniel's faith, and it's that faith that we are to consider now. But first, perhaps we should make some preliminary notes on the book.

Just a word about Daniel's own personal history. We know little about him beyond what may be gathered from the book that bears his name. He wasn't a priest like Jeremiah or Ezekiel, but like Isaiah, was of the tribe of Judah and probably one of the royal line.

This we see in the first few verses of the first chapter. After the record of Nebuchadnezzar's overthrow of Jerusalem and his carrying of the king and others of the royal line to Babylon, we read, and the king spake unto Ashpenaz, the master of his units, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel and of the king's seed and of the princes, children in whom was no blemish, but well-favored and skillful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge and understanding signs. Now, numbered amongst these children of the royal line was Daniel together with Hananiah, Mishiah, and Azariah.

Daniel's personal history begins in very bitter and tragic experience. He's a war casualty, a prisoner of Israel warfare, all which means that the first movements of the symphony of his life are very dark. We must fill in as best we may the accompaniments of this, the desolation of the scorched earth behind Nebuchadnezzar's armies invading the holy land, the cry of the widow and of the orphan, the homeless and the refugee, the pestilence and the famine that followed in the wake of war, the wounds, the bitterness, the grief.

All that Daniel knew, and in all that terrible agony, his faith was born and became living, articulately strong, vibrant. Some there are who find their faith falter and fail under the bludgeonings of misfortune. Not so Daniel.

Through it all he was preserved and raised to position of high rank and great power under both Babylonian and Persian dynasties. Sometimes the story of Daniel is compared with the story of Joseph, and there are certainly many analogies. Both belong to a captive race.

Both were young men in the court of a heathen king. Both were exposed to strong temptation. Both found help in prayer.

Both suffered for their faithfulness to God and to conscience. Both won the respect of the manna and reached the highest place under him in the government of the state. On any account, the story of Daniel is remarkable, and the personal history of Daniel is one with which we ought to be most intimately acquainted.

But still thinking in an introductory way, we should not only know the facts of his personal history, we should also acquaint ourselves with some of the details of the record of his prophecy. We should know

certain things about the book itself. For one thing, this book is not numbered amongst the prophets in the Hebrew Bible.

It's among the later writings, the Kethuvim, of which there are five--Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. We should know that the book is in two main parts, historical and prophetic or apocalyptic. The first six chapters are historic.

The last six chapters are prophetic apocalypse. Or as Candle Morgan says, in the first half of the book we have the historic night. In the second half, we have the prophetic light.

The book was written for Jews in captivity, as well, of course, for generations yet unborn. And the grand subject of the book--and this is most remarkable--when written for Jews, the grand subject of the book is the trend and the end of the times of the Gentiles and the universal kingdom of God's appointed King. The span of the book itself is seventy-two years.

Concerning the authorship, we need say little this morning because this isn't a seminar on biblical criticism, but let me say this. From ancient times, the book has been held to be from the pen of Daniel himself. The first to question this, historically, was a most vigorous opponent of Christianity in the third century, Porphyry of Tyre.

All through the long centuries of Christian testimony, through the era of Enlightenment and Reformation, down to the time of the deistic movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Danielic authorship was uniformly accepted. In modern times, this has been much debated. But my personal view is that not until the weight of evidence, internal, historical, grammatical, theological, make it impossible to regard Daniel as author, we must still hold him to be the inspired writer of this book.

And I have no hesitation in giving it as my own personal judgment, after many years now, what I think is somewhat careful and detailed examination of the evidence. But the evidence adduced does not appear so cumulative, so overpowering, so inescapable, so compelling, as to warrant abandoning the historic belief that the author of the book of Daniel was the prophet Daniel himself. I hold my own thinking that under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, Daniel wrote the book that today we read, all that by way of introduction.

And that brings us to the sacred text. And the first chapter brings to us the exhorting, prelude, prologue, to the mighty history and prophecies that are to follow. And it is significant that in this first chapter, all the dominant notes are heard, just as when a great symphony is being composed by a great musician.

In the opening movements of the symphony itself, all the chords are there subtly interwoven, so it is subdued and yet nonetheless emphatic form. You sense what is going to be the mystery and the majesty of great music. So here, in the opening page of this book, we're given the great exultant and dominant chords that are to be heard, with variations on every page to follow.

I want to mention some of these this morning, just to lift them up and look at them, to scan them together, to survey something with glory and majesty of our God's great, wondrous ways. But surely the first note that is stressed is the note of the sovereignty of God. You read the first verse of the book.

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, King of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, against Jerusalem and besieged it. There's a straightforward record, and there isn't a word about God in it. And it might seem as though God were not.

It might seem as though God were distant. It might well seem as though there were no God of history. But read on into the second verse.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, King of Judah, into his hands. And so God isn't distant. After all, God is here.

God is there on that battlefield. It's God who is determining who the victor will be. It's the judgments of God that Nebuchadnezzar is here fulfilling.

And it is God who is sovereign in it all. It is the Lord who gives Jehoiakim into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. It is Nebuchadnezzar who comes down like a wolf upon the fall.

It is God who brings Nebuchadnezzar. It is the Lord God of history, who here ordains that at this decisive moment in time, Nebuchadnezzar's armies should be there investing the holy city. And it is the God of history who gives Jehoiakim the king into his hands.

God is working out his purposes, the sovereign grace and irresistible mercy. And the sovereignty of God is here proclaimed in the very opening words of this tremendous book. The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand.

And this sovereignty we see all the way through. In the visions and dreams of the night which troubled Nebuchadnezzar, in the stopping of the mouth of the lions in the lion's den, in the preserving of three young men in a burning fiery furnace, in the sending forth of the fingers of a man's hand, and in the handwriting upon the wall. Always we see the sovereignty of God.

God active, God immediate, God transcendent, and yet God sovereign in the midst of all these days and weeks and months of the personal histories here being chronicled. God sovereign throughout the centuries as they roll. Now this is the confidence of Daniel and of his fellows.

As I have said, I believe it is he who writes the story, and it is he who there himself, a casualty of all that has happened there, it is he himself who writes the story, who says it was the Lord who delivered our king into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. God is sovereign in history, just like the church's vice that we read from the book of Revelation. There we see the church oppressed and beaten and almost broken, but in the midst of all the pressures of an alien and pagan civilization and culture around her, we hear the church uplifting her voice, and we do not hear the church saying to herself, we must get behind closed doors and we must try and save ourselves.

No! You hear the church out there and her voice is lifted in mighty cadences. Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth and Babylon is fallen, that great city, she's fallen. Sovereignty of God in history, and that's the truth that we are going to be studying week by week.

In these coming weeks and months, there is one voice that is determined in history, and it is the voice of the Lord God. No voice of man can determine history, only the voice of the eternal God. And above all the voices that we hear, may we ever hear that voice, mighty in his majesty and in his glory, the voice of God, because it is that voice that softens.

And it's that voice we need to hear today. It's that writing we need to read. As we read our daily press and as we listen to the news casts, so bewildering oftentimes and so confusing and upsetting, why once again we must come back and gaze into the mirror of the Word of God and note this, there is one who is

sovereign in all our history.

It is God. It is God. It is God.

Sovereignty of God. But in this opening page of the book of Daniel, we have this, not only this note of the sovereignty of God, we have this revelation of the machinery of totalitarianism. I remember when I spoke about five years ago now, I dwelt at some length on this machinery, because it is very subtle and very insidious and very tempting.

It's very ingenious, the whole pattern down which Nebuchadnezzar and his monarchy moves. They have a three-year plan, and incorporated into this plan are the best of the youth, only those in whom there was no blemish, only the best have to be taken, they and they alone. And they have to come under a system of brainwashing.

They have to be re-educated in order they might stand before the king. And unto the head of the eunuchs is this commandment given, that certain courses will be followed and certain commandments obeyed and certain things done in order that these men, chosen from the best, might stand in the presence of the king and fulfill his word. It's very subtle the way in which the temptation was presented, because honor was before them and preferment was offered them.

And there was a certain sense in which there was ease also at the very heart of this. There was going to be good food, there was going to be good entertainment, there was going to be enjoyable work, there were going to be good surroundings. And who can resist these things? Is this ancient history only? Well of course it is in ancient history, but not only so.

For Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers stride through all history, through all the ages, and Nebuchadnezzar must have the best. The world of flesh and the devil must get the best. And to the youth of the land who are the best, the best is offered.

And you and I have seen it in our history in this generation. Study Hitler's Germany, study Stalin's Russia, study the China of Mao Zedong today. And the echoes that come constantly upon our ears, are the strident echoes of young Germany, young Russia, and young China to them all.

Being offered what John calls the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. And around us and about us this insidious environment, the culture in which we live, drawing and pulling men away from God out to these things that are immediate and of time, of sense, drawing them away from the eternal things, the pull and the pressure of the age and of our generation fighting for the soul of our children. The question is who will win? How, dear folks, if only we could see this battle that's going on, if only from the standpoint of heaven we were able to see the masked armies that are set in serendipity against the youth of the land, if we could only see behind the scenes and discern the tracery of the battle that's going on, this determination of the powers of darkness to get hold of the souls of our children.

I tell you, you and I would have greater concern and find ourselves more and more in prayer for them than we are. I don't think we understand really the temptations of the generation that follow us. So often as not, it's like preparing for war.

We're always preparing for the last war, we're told by the strategists of war. So it is that we older people are always thinking of the kind of battle we are to fight, but the battle of this age is different. And I believe our children, I believe that the young people of this generation face forms of temptation that you and I

older folks just didn't know.

This is the machinery of totalitarian evil. This is the machinery of the trinity of evil, the world of flesh and the devil, out to capture the soul. The youth of our land, it's not easy to stand against the pull and pressure of position and prestige and place.

It's all so insidious, it's so subtle, it's so dangerous. And you see it in every field, the field of sport and finance and entertainment and society, so-called. Pressure of an alien and anti-Christian society is very great.

Are you going to go with a crowd? Are you going to be one of the boys? Are you going to be social or anti-social? Will you drink with the rest, or will you not? Are you prepared to stand alone? Sometimes tremendous issues hang upon very little things, and your only hope is in the grace of God. It's this kind of pressure that we see. When the king sends his commandment and says, you will deal with these young men and you and here is the policy that you will follow, in order that they might stand before me.

Daniel's not concerned about standing before the king only. His first concern is that he might stand before his God. Of that we will see more.

We must hurry on. In these opening lines of this book we have the note of the sovereignty of God, and we have some indication of the machinery of totalitarianism. But then also we have a clear revelation of the community of faith.

I think that this is one of the most amazing parts of the story, because here at the heart of a pagan empire are the citizens of another empire. Here, surrounded by the great multitude and hosts of Nebuchadnezzar, are a few, a little band, and lowly, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, a few who will not bow the knee to Baal or to Nebuchadnezzar or to any other monarchy, until firstly have bowed the knee to their God. Here is God's answer.

And it's this that we're going to see. This is the story. This is the whole story.

The story of a society. The story of a community. The story of a pelagic.

They're at the very heart of a pagan and disinterested world. Here is this little community that God himself has created, and that God has pledged to support. God will never forsake.

How did they come there? Well, they came from their own land. And in their own land, no doubt they had been instructed in the God of their fathers, the God of Abram and Isaac and Jacob. They'd learned that God is faithful.

They'd learned to put their trust in him. They'd heard his commandment, and they knew the story of redemption. They knew that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

And they put their trust in the Lord God of their fathers. And like the saints in Caesar's household in a later generation, they manifested the miracle of divine mercy. A community of the resurrection of your life.

A society of salvation. A fellowship of the faith. They trusted in God.

They served the Lord, and they refused to forget his command. And this is God's answer, you see. This is God's answer always.

This is God's answer to a sinful world. A fellowship, a community, a society at the heart of that world. A community that just does not belong.

A community that has no continuity with the society around it. A new fellowship, a vibrant fellowship of faith. This is what God is doing, creating a new fellowship there.

This is the church, if you like, there at the very heart of society. This is the church in the world, surrounded by the world. The marks of that fellowship? Well, they trust in the sovereignty of God, and they are resolved that they will pursue purity of life.

For Daniel's purpose in his heart, he would not defile himself. And he shared that determination with his fellows. And there was fearlessness in putting the faith to a crucial test.

And there was togetherness in the rapture. All the marks of true community. And out of that there arose one great and decisive negative, to the temptation of the young.

He purposed in his heart, and he said, no. It's never easy to say no. That is, if you have a mind that can see all the possibilities, it's never easy.

But there's no rose from the fellowship of the faith. Daniel's purpose in his heart, he would not defile himself. And he shared it, as I've said, with his friends.

And the result was this great no, to Nebuchadnezzar. He said, prove us now. We'll put our trust in God.

And we'll follow his commandment. You prove us. Here was this little community in the fellowship, in the society of faith, prepared to stand against the pull and pressure of time.

You know, there aren't so many people that you meet prepared to do that. And yet, their soul's destiny depends on doing it. There are too many who are unwilling to be different.

There are too few who are willing to suffer with the people of God. Too many unwilling to bear the reproach of Christ, which is the reproach of the cross. It can't have been easy for Daniel, for his friends, to do what they did.

But within that blessed community of faith, they made the resolve, and they held to it. And this is a miracle. And this is God's answer.

This is God's answer to contemporary society, a society of the faith. And this is God's answer to the need of the world around us, a fellowship that's filled with his spirit, and prepared to hearken to his voice, and to go through regardless of the cost. They made the resolve, and they held to it.

And that's a miracle. That's an unbreakable fellowship. Well, there are three notes, and we've just hinted at them.

Sovereignty of God, the machinery of totalitarian evil, the community of faith. But we can't end without noting that here, there is so clearly indicated to us the victory that is won through doing the will of God, John says, he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. That's what we see here.

Men who have purpose within their heart, that they will not defile themselves, but will follow after God, that will do the will of God. Here is victory through the acceptance of the divine will. Here is victory through

submission, through absolute surrender to the divine commandment.

Here is victory. This is the victory of men who have realized that it's never right to do wrong. So God's will is sovereign.

The story that we are to read in these coming weeks and months, please, God is the story of the will of God. It's the story of the outworking of the divine will, the perfect plan of God in history for these men and for all mankind. And in that will is peace and power and eternal life.

And to the doing of that blessed will, we all are called. Remember, God is sovereign. And let me say this as I close.

If God's will is not going to be done through you, it's still going to be done in spite of you. Oh, better far to have your life linked with the life of God, to have your will one with the will of the Father, to have your heart just possessed by the Son of God, the Savior. Are you in the will of God today? Please, God, we all are.

Into that will may he bring.

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