

Committed Persons

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of unwavering commitment to God through the examples of Daniel and other faithful believers throughout history.

Duration: 37:46

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 12:41-44, Luke 8:1-3, John 1:29, John 13:23

Topics: "Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of standing firm in one's principles and faith, even in the face of persecution and adversity. He uses the example of the three young men in the Bible who refused to bow down to the king's idol and were thrown into a fiery furnace. Despite the intense heat, they were miraculously protected by God. The speaker also highlights the unwavering determination of the apostle Paul and encourages listeners to have the same steadfastness in their own lives. He concludes by discussing the story of Daniel and his friends, who remained faithful to God and were ultimately honored and blessed.

Transcript

I am humbled before my God, meaning his pagan God, and Abednego, servant of Nebo. Interestingly enough, the first temptation came to these fellows in the area of food. They could have the finest gourmet food in the, one of the great, well, the greatest empire in the world at that time, and they were told to accept the royal menu.

There was nothing better than that food or wine. I tell you, there wasn't. By agreeing, they would really enhance their prospects for advancement in the kingdom of Babylon, and really, after all, a great deal of kindness had been shown to them, and shouldn't this, shouldn't they show their gratitude by agreeing to do it? And, you know, they could eat that food without endorsing it in their hearts.

They say, well, I'm eating it, but my heart's not in it, you know, in what I'm doing. And anyway, the Jews outside would never know. Nobody would ever know what was happening, and everybody else was doing it anyway.

But dear friends, it was not kosher food. It was not food according to the law of God there in the Old Testament. It probably had been offered to idols, and to be eating it would be violating the dietary laws of the nation of Israel, the laws which God had given to his people.

So it says, 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. Problem! I mean, are you going to fly in the face of the king? No. Daniel wisely came up with an alternative proposal.

He said, would you let us just go on a vegetarian diet for 10 days, and then we'll see at the end how things come out. And you know, that was a good solution to the problem, and the steward agreed to the plan. And 10 days later, what do you know, the king found those fellows to be more handsome, and all you fellows will be going on a vegetarian diet tomorrow, more handsome, wiser, and more understanding than all the others.

And he had to admit that they were 10 times better than all his Babylonian magicians and astrologers. Then let honor me, I will honor. They stuck to their principles in what might seem to be a trivial matter, but it wasn't a trivial matter, was it? They were honored by God, and they were prepared for a more severe test, and that test wasn't long in coming.

The king had a dream, and as a result of that dream, he went on a superego trip, and he decided that there should be an obelisk raised there in Babylon. It was eight stories high, and it was overlaid with gold, and when the trumpet sounded, everybody must bow and worship. Well, it is a more severe test, isn't it? You'll have to agree to that.

On the day of the dedication of this great monument, everybody was ordered to bow in worship, and the penalty for refusing was to be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Well, now's the time to do a lot of rationalization, isn't it? You know, I could think of a million and one excuses in a situation like that. It's interesting, Daniel wasn't away at this time.

His name is not mentioned in this particular incident. I think he was away, but you know, his example in the previous chapter wasn't wasted on these three fellows, huh? It's wonderful how they learned a lesson from dear Daniel, and they took a resolute stand, and under no circumstances would they bow and worship that idol. Well, I think it was probably the king's advisors that reported them, because you know, these fellows had been appointed over all the province of Babylon, and you can imagine that those Babylonians would be really jealous of them under such circumstances.

When the king heard it, he couldn't believe that anybody would have the gall to defy his order, to disobey his order. Did they think that their god could rescue them from his power? How ridiculous. And those young Hebrews just did believe that.

They believed that God could, and that he would. So when the king delivered his final ultimatum, they said, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O king, but if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up. How do you like that? Tremendous, isn't it? Thank God for those fellows.

They knew it was better to burn than to compromise. Better to die than to deny their principles. And as I said, better to go to heaven with a good conscience than stay on earth with a bad one.

The king was livid with rage, and he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times more than normal. That's hot, isn't it? And the three young non-conformists were ordered to be thrown in. The thought of being consigned to such torture is enough to give me cardiac arrest.

How about you? I mean, that's terrible, isn't it? But notice what happened. The flame killed the executioners, but not the three fellows. It was a very discriminating flame.

God's judgments are always discriminating. Those three young men were not deserted by the Lord. He was with them in the fire.

And I tell you, if you have the Lord with you, it doesn't make any difference how hot the flames are. Doesn't make a bit of difference. Third, all the fire did was destroy the ropes that bound them.

I said it was discriminating, huh? Sure was discriminating, getting more so all the time. When they came out, their clothing was not burned, their bodies were not scorched, their hair was not singed, and there was no smell of fire upon them. I think that's great.

And what happened? The king made an edict honoring the God of these fellows. He promulgated it throughout the kingdom, and he threatened death to anyone who spoke against that God. And he also promoted the three fireproof men.

Spurgeon said, if you yield an inch, you're beaten. But if you will not yield, no, not the splitting of a hair, they will respect you. The man who can hide his principles and conceal his beliefs, and so did a little wrong, is a nobody.

You cannot shake the world if you let the world shake you. Worth thinking about. And then the years go by, and Daniel is now about 80 years old, between 80 and 90, actually.

He's between 80 and 90 years old, and he's a powerful figure in the kingdom of Persia. And his jealous colleagues, here they are again, his jealous colleagues, they wanted a reason to get rid of him. But you know, he wore throughout the white flower of a holy life, and they had a hard time finding him.

They said, look, he doesn't do anything wrong. The only way we'll get him is to get the king to make a law forbidding prayer. Now, that was a tremendous tribute to Daniel, wasn't it? They knew what he was.

They knew what he was made of, that fellow. And they knew that he was a man of prayer, too. The only way to get him was to outlaw prayer to Daniel's God.

So an unchangeable law was passed, and in the next month, anyone who prayed to any god but to the king, Darius, would be thrown to the lions. Daniel could see no reason why he should stop praying. So three times a day, he knelt in his room, facing toward Jerusalem, where the dwelling of God was, the temple, okay, facing toward Jerusalem, giving thanks and making earnest supplication.

And that wasn't all. He knelt by an open window, just as he had always done. Why change now? Here was a man who preferred a den of lions to a day spent without prayer.

He preferred a den of lions to a day spent without prayer. And since his colleagues were looking for him to break the law, they didn't have long to wait, did they? They didn't have long to wait. He didn't pray under a blanket in bed.

He didn't pray silently in his heart. No, he prayed out loud in full view. And the reluctant king had no alternative.

Daniel must become meat for the lions. And so he was thrown into the den. But wait, Daniel is having a good night's sleep without summoning either.

And the king is having a restless sleep. He has a king size case of insomnia. Now, this is a kind of a reversal, isn't it? And in the morning, God's men came out in perfect condition.

God had shut the lion's mouth and his accusers were slain. How do you like that? His accusers were slain. And his God was honored by a royal decree.

Think of it. Think of the glory that came to God as a result of Daniel's commitment. That valiant man knew nothing of what Robert G. Lee called invertebrate theology, a theology without a spine.

Daniel knew nothing of invertebrate theology, jellyfish morality, seesaw religion, India rubber convictions and somersault philosophy. And we're full of it today in the church in the United States. These committed ones had convictions for which they were willing to die.

And their dedication to the Lord was final and irreversible and irrevocable. For them, the will of God was paramount in their lives, and they had nothing but contempt for escape routes, for easy alternatives, for excuses in life or death. They were the Lord.

And we're talking about them in 1997. No wonder we are. Then we move over to the New Testament rapidly.

We think of some of the people there that were committed to the Lord. We think, for instance, of those disciples that he called. Let's see.

Ten of them died martyrs death, and one of them lived a martyr's life, John. And one of them, of course, was the traitor Judas. When a younger John heard John the Baptist say, behold the Lamb of God, he followed.

He followed and spent his life in untiring service for the Lord Jesus Christ, earning for himself the title, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Matthew heard Jesus say, follow me. And he left his table and he left all the accoutrements of income tax or excise taxes or all kinds of taxes.

And he forsook all to obey. And his reward was to write the first gospel. Think of the faithful women in the New Testament, women who were dedicated.

Actually, women shine brighter than men do. I think we miss that sometimes when we read the New Testament. Women shine brighter than men do.

Last at the cross, first at the empty tomb. There was a woman who cast in all that she had. There were the women who washed his feet with their tears.

One of them wiped them with the hairs of her head. My such devotion to the Lord Jesus. One prepared his body for burial there in the house of Simon the leper.

And then we have Lydia and Priscilla and Lois and Eunice and others. We think of Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church, preeminently a man of loyalty to Christ, choosing a violent death rather than compromise. We saw that Abraham was perhaps the outstanding example of commitment in the Old Testament.

Well, the apostle Paul is in the New Testament. No question about that. All you know was a rising star among the forces of Judaism.

He was one of the strictest of the strict. He was proud of his racial and religious credentials. He zealously promoted his own faith and thought to exterminate anything that seemed to be competition to his faith.

But on the road to Damascus, he met the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. And he said, Lord, what will you have me to do? That was the beginning of a life of dedication to Jesus Christ, his Lord. And probably few lives have ever been lived like that on earth.

Few people have ever run the gamut of human emotion and suffering as did Paul. He knew what sorrow was, perplexity, disappointment, heartbreak, betrayal. He was slandered by his foes and deserted by his friends.

In his book, *The Life of Paul*, James Stocker says there was never such singleness of eye or wholeness of heart. There was never such super superhuman and untiring energy. There was never such an accumulation of difficulty, victoriously met and suffering, cheerfully born for any cause.

Yet there was never a thought of giving up or turning back. Having put his hand to the plow, he went steadfastly forward for Jesus. If this was the price of commitment to Christ, he was glad to pay it, even to the pouring out of his life blood, which he did in Rome.

He had only one passion. It was Christ and Christ alone. Paul was not one of those brittle saints who fainted at the sight of blood.

He was not one of those soldiers who said, if it wasn't for those nasty guns, I would be a soldier. When the scaffolding seemed to be crashing down around him, he did not put it back to Antioch, whining and complaining. He never gave up.

He had never learned to sound retreat. In one of his battles, Napoleon said to one of his men, sound retreat. He said, sir, you never taught me how to sound retreat.

And I want to tell you, the Lord Jesus never taught you or me how to sound retreat. Listen to the magnificent response which he heard, which he hurled as he thought of his life of pain and persecution. He said, but none of these things move me.

Neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy. The ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. I want to tell you there's a greatness about that man.

And the greatness was his connection with Calvary and his commitment to the Christ of Calvary. And while thinking of these New Testament saints, you can't help thinking of those dear people who lived in Rome there in the time of Nero. And when Nero would take their bodies and dip them in tar and put them on fire to provide lighting for his garden party.

And they did it for the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to move forward into later church history beyond the New Testament time. I think of dear John Huss, Bohemian.

And you know, the passion of that man's life was that the people, that the common people should have the word of God. And of course, he flew into the face of a church that was drunk with the blood of the saints.

And they eventually paid for it with his life.

And they buried him. And later on, they dug up his remains, reduced them to ashes, and threw them into the Rhine. But that wasn't the end of the story.

Everywhere the Rhine flowed, the gospel flowed shortly afterwards. God had the last word. I think God chuckled from heaven when he saw them throwing the dust of John Huss into the Rhine River.

I think of Count Zinzendorf, leader of the Bohemian Brethren. And one day he stood beside or in front of the picture of Christ crucified by Steinberg. And it contained the words, he sang, All this I did for thee.

What hast thou done for me? That searching question led him to consecrate his life, wealth, talents to the cause of the Lord. So many men like that down through the history of the church. I like the story of Thomas Cranmer, bishop in England years ago.

And the enemies of the gospel were putting pressure on him to renounce the Lord, renounce the gospel of the grace of God. And he refused to do it. And of course, he was threatened with being burned at the stake.

And in a weak moment, he took a pen in his right hand, and he signed a recantation. He bowed to that terrible pressure, and he signed a recantation. But then as time went on, he realized what a terrible thing he had done.

He had denied his Lord. And he went to the authorities and said, I signed it. But he said, My heart wasn't in it.

And they said, You'll have to burn at the stake. And he said, Burn, I will. They led him out to the stake and set the wood on fire.

And they said, Do you have any last request? He said, Yes. Please untie my hands. And he walked over to the fire, and he held out the hand that had signed the recantation.

And he held it in the fire. And he said, Perish this unworthy hand. He wanted it to be the first part of him to burn.

Dear friends, that's commitment to Christ. That's commitment to Christ. Scotland knew a little about this during the time of the Covenanters.

Here were men and women. They signed a covenant of loyalty and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ when they were being pressured to yield to an apostate church. And there were two women that were captured by the enemies.

One was Margaret McLaughlin, and the other was Margaret Wilson. The first one was about 60 years old. Yes, about 60 years old.

And the other was about 25 years old. And so they had an ingenious way of working with these women. First of all, down by the tide, they put a stake in a bit far out in the tide.

And then another one closer to shore. And their plan was to tie Margaret McLaughlin, the older woman, to that furthest stake. She would be the first to drown.

And when the other one, Margaret Wilson, saw it, she would recant. So they tied them to those stakes for the incoming tide to destroy them. And when the tide came in to Margaret McLaughlin, the older woman, they heard her saying, I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, or any other creature can separate us from the love of God.

And the tide went over her mouth. Did the younger woman recant? No, she didn't recant. She said, if God can give grace to an older woman to die for him, he can give grace to me.

The tide came in and covered Margaret Wilson. She went home to heaven to see the king and all his beauty. Women who had steel backbones, who knew something about commitment.

Let me just pause here to say, I had a Scottish mother, and she brought us up on the tales of the Covenanters. She said it was good for us. Oh, don't do that.

Don't tell young people those stories. They're awful stories. Listen, what do they see on television? The violence, the crime, and all the rest.

But don't tell them about the martyrs. I would suggest to you, mothers who were raising children, tell your children, breed commitment into them by telling them what some of the men and women of the past have gone through. In our kitchen at home, I remember a calendar, a calendar there, and it was a picture of the times of the Covenanters, a picture of John Brown.

John Brown was being chased. He was a loyal Christian, true to the Lord Jesus, and he was being chased, hunted and pursued. He lived in dens and caves in the woods, but every once in a while he did have to come home for food and for clothing.

And one time when he had come home, he was there in the kitchen with his wife and little ones, and Lord Claverhouse came. And Lord Claverhouse ordered his men to shoot John Brown, and they saw the face of an angel and they couldn't shoot him. So Lord Claverhouse himself shot him.

And in this calendar you saw John Brown's body on the floor, and you saw Mrs. Brown, and you saw the little ones clinging to her apron. And Claverhouse says, what do you think of your husband now? And she said in her broad scotch, I always thought a great deal of him, but I think more of him now than I ever thought of him. Commitment to Christ.

We remember John Knox, a fearless defender of the faith in Scotland. He was strongly influenced by Calvin. He was a foe of idolatry and of all the heresies and unbiblical teachings of the church.

He was the one who said, give me Scotland or I die. One biographer said of him, Knox, a man of unyielding strength of character and a spiritual giant, molded the thought of an entire nation, probably as no other man has ever done. And you know, Queen Mary, Mary, Queen of Scots said that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies of England.

What does it say? It says, be true to Jesus so a thousand voices from the world may call. You honor him and he will honor you also in days to come. I tell you, it would take an encyclopedia to tell all of the stories of men and women who have been true to the Lord Jesus.

Let me just move briefly into more recent times. I think of John Nelson Darby, a fellow who could have had the world in his hands and he forsook it all. And he tramped for months at a time over the Wicklow

Mountains of Ireland.

He saw hundreds of Catholic, dear Catholic people, one to the Savior. Then he went across to the continent and he he traveled for, I think, 26 years without unpacking his suitcase. That is, he just went, kept going.

He was itinerant. He kept going. He 26 years without unpacking his suitcase.

And one day he sat in a cheap Italian boarding house and he said, Jesus, I, my cross have taken all to leave and follow thee. And it was true, too. His combined writings fill over 34 volumes.

He translated the Bible into at least three languages. Well, English, French, German and English. Yes.

And his own writings fill over 34 volumes. God used him to revive dispensational teaching, the rapture of the church and the priesthood of all believers. Dwight L. Moody and C.I. Schofield were greatly influenced by the writings of John Nelson Darby.

Bible schools in the United States also felt the impact of his teaching. Few men since the Paul have had as wide ranging a ministry as John Nelson Darby. Few men.

His philosophy was, ah, the joy of having nothing and being nothing, seeing nothing but a living Christ in glory and being careful for nothing but his interest down here. Many of you know the story of George Muller, George Muller, whom God laid upon his heart to establish an orphanage in Bristol, England. Why? To take care of the child.

Well, yes, secondary. But the purpose he had in establishing that orphanage was to show the people of Bristol, England that there's a God in heaven who answers prayer. And did he ever do it? And, you know, one day Arthur Pearson said to him, Mr. Muller, what is the what is the reason behind your life, the way God has used you? And George Muller said there was a day when George Muller died and he bowed his head lower, lower, lower.

So it was almost down under between his legs. He was silent for a while. And then he said, as a young man, I had a great many ambitions.

But there came a day when I died to all these things. Then I said, henceforth, Lord Jesus, not my will, but thine. And from that day, God began to work in and through me.

I think that's very significant. I'd like to tell you a little secret. You read the biographies of men and women who have made an impact for God.

And almost every one of them had a similar experience in their lives, when by a definite act, they turned their lives over to the Lord, abandoning their own plans and accepting his will for their life. I think of dear David Livingston, how impressed I am and how it's been a beacon in my life. He said, I'm determined to have or possess nothing except in relation to the kingdom of Christ.

He wasn't drawn aside by tangents. When he was 59, he wrote, My Jesus, my King, my life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to thee. The word furlough was not in his vocabulary.

I'm not opposed to furlough. It was not in his vocabulary. He once wrote to a missionary society that he was ready to go anywhere, provided it was forward.

One day, his African brothers found him on his knees, dead. His heart was buried in Africa. His body was entombed in Westminster Abbey.

And I'm sure some of you have seen it. The inscription there says, for 30 years, his life was spent in unwearied effort to evangelize. What a tribute.

Frances Ridley Havergill, we sang her hymn tonight. I was so pleased that her hymn was given out. I gave my life for thee.

And 17 years later, she wrote that hymn, take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. I mentioned C.T. Studd, that famous saying, Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him. Some of you have read the writings of Amy Carmichael.

Amy Carmichael was an Irish lady, but strong character. She went out to India, and she was used there in a tremendous work to save young girls from becoming temple prostitutes in India. She had tremendous strength of character and leadership ability.

And you know, the measure of her devotion, her commitment to Christ, is seen in her writings. I love the writings of Amy Carmichael. She says, the vows of God are upon me.

I may not stay to play with shadows or pluck earthly flowers, till I my work have done and rendered up an account. Isn't that good? Let me say it again. The vows of God are upon me.

I may not stay to play with shadows or pluck earthly flowers, till I my work have done and rendered up an account. Another place she wrote these many immortal lines. She says, from prayer that asks that I may be sheltered from winds that beat on thee, from fearing when I should aspire, from faltering when I should climb higher, from silken self, O Captain, free thy soldier who would follow thee.

Isn't that great? From silken self, O Captain, free thy soldier who would follow thee. From subtle love of softening things, from easy choices, weakenings, not thus are spirits fortified, not this way went the crucified, from all that dims thy calvary, O Lamb of God, deliver me. Give me the love that leads the way, the faith that nothing can dismay, the hope no disappointments fire, the passion that will burn as fire.

Let me not sink to be a clod, make me thy fuel, flame of God, Amy Carmichael. I think of William Borden, son of millionaires, class of 09, Yale. Wonderfully saved by the grace of God.

Wanted to take the gospel out to Muslims in China, I believe it was. A man visiting in the United States, a man from England was visiting in the United States, and just as he was ready to go back, he said, somebody said to him, what impressed you most in your visit to the United States? And he said, that young son of millionaires in a mission down there on the Bowery with his arms around a bum, thinking to lead him to Christ. He got as far as Egypt in travels to the mission field.

He was stricken with spinal meningitis and taken home to heaven. Never saw the mission field that he felt God was leading him to. But more people have gone to the mission field through the book that was written about him, Borden of Yale, than if he had lived to be a hundred.

And so the record goes, men and women. Here you see commitment in flesh and blood. I think of Betty Scott Stamps, student at Moody Bible Institute.

Years ago, one night there, she sat in her room and she wrote this covenant in her Bible. Lord, I give up my own purposes and plans, all my own desires, hopes and ambitions, whether they be fleshly or soulish, and accept thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all utterly to thee to be thine forever.

I hand over to thy keeping all of my friendships, my love, all the people whom I love are to take second place in my heart. Fill me and seal me with thy Holy Spirit. Work out thy whole will in my life at any cost, now and forever, to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Some of you have read the book, *The Triumph of John and Betty Stamps*. If you haven't, you should. Jim Elliott.

I'm sure some here in the audience knew Jim Elliott. I met Jim Elliott. The thing that impressed me most about that dear fellow was his intolerance of anything that stood between the soul and Christ, between a life and wholehearted commitment to the Savior.

He was absolutely intolerant. In this, he agreed with James Denny, who said, if God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if he has made it known, then it's a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away. Jim was intolerant of anything which denies, ignores, or explains it away.

You feel this intolerance when you hear him pray. He makes his ministers a flame of fire. Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of other things.

Saturate me with the oil of the spirit that I may be a flame. But flame is transient. Canst thou bear this, my soul? Short life? In me there dwells the spirit of the great short-lived one, whose zeal for God's house consumes him.

Make me thy fuel, flame of God. His philosophy was well summed up in those memorable words. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Shall we pray? Blessed Father, when we think of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for us on Calvary, we realize that the best and only thing we can possibly do is, first of all, be saved through faith in him. Come to the foot of the cross and bow the knee. Say, Lord Jesus, I do accept you as my Lord and Savior.

And then that we should bow the knee again and say, Lord Jesus, you're a wound.

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