

Daniel: Stand Strong
Part 4: Holy Allegiance
June 29, 2014

Welcome: Today, we will finish our series through the book of Daniel, which is one of the best books in all of Scripture that gives us a picture of how we are to live as followers of Jesus in a society and culture that does not align with the values and priorities of God or His Kingdom!

The life of this young man, Daniel brings us face to face with some important questions, such as... *How will our faith in Jesus Christ shape the way we go about work, business, and family? How will our love for the gospel lead us to interact with our community and neighbors and in redemptive ways!*

See Big Idea! And today...influence)

Go with me to Daniel, chapter 6...

“Darius the Mede (who had conquered Babylon) decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king’s interests.” Daniel 6:1-2

The Book of Daniel describes the historical time period after Babylon invaded and pillaged Jerusalem, carrying off not only its financial resources...but also its very best human resources. Daniel was one of the young men taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar. When Babylon fell to the Medes, and Darius assumed power, Daniel continued to serve in the king’s royal courts where he quickly ascended in authority and influence.

Keep reading...

“Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.” Daniel 6:3

Read that again! Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire!

We see down in verse 4 that Daniel was a man who was skilled and effective in his leadership, **AND** at the same time he was faithful, reliable and completely trustworthy. As a result, Daniel grew in **authority AND influence**. Now...I want you to notice that nowhere in the text do we see any hint that God used Daniel in spite of his success, or that God allowed Daniel to have influence regardless of his rapid career advancement!

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Daniel's work ethic, character, and commitment to the king are what positioned him for tremendous influence!

Why is this important?

Sacred/Secular: There tends to be a lingering idea in the church today that stretches back well over 500 years and it says that there are two categories of activities in life, and a bold line stretches out between them. **On one side are activities that are sacred** and pleasing to God (such as church involvement, Bible reading, small groups, prayer gatherings, even home life). **And on the other side are activities that are secular and mundane** and therefore, looked down upon...or even outright condemned by God!

This idea has taken on a variety of forms since the 16th century!

OCC – Now...there are extreme and goofy examples that make me want to cry! I went to a small college in Southwest Missouri, which placed many ordinary activities into the secular category, **one of which was dancing!** No joke...as students we had to sign a contract during our Freshman Orientation stating our intention to refrain from dancing. There was a legend that if the college ever allowed a dance to be hosted, the entire campus would have to be burnt to the ground! ***So this meant for me that a rebellious night out in college was line dancing at the local lion's club with senior citizens! Very edgy!*** Now...most of us scoff at how silly that sounds, don't we?

At the same time, within the sacred/secular divide are ideas that are much more influential and hard to recognize than we realize. One of those is around the issue of work. Five hundred years ago, the church taught that the only spiritual line of work was that of service to the church. So...if you were a priest or bishop, your life was pleasing to God. Everything else from business and industry to education and the arts were all 2nd rate lines of work relegated to 2nd class Christians! You might say, ***"That's just goofy...no one thinks that way today!"***

Conversations: Absolutely we do. I've had countless conversations with young men and women who will say to me, *"Jed, I wish I was doing something that mattered or that was more fulfilling; something like ministry."* Implying that what they do occupationally is somehow 2nd rate compared to what I do...and that if they were in ministry, they'd be better positioned for influence! Let me be clear...if God is pressing you toward ministry within the local church or on a global scale, run after that! But if not, don't for a moment think that being a teacher, or engineer, or artist, or electrician places you in a category that is somehow less pleasing to God or that it hinders you from having a significant and lasting influence in God's Kingdom! **There is nothing further from the truth!**

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Martin Luther – During the mid-16th century, certain church leaders including Martin Luther began to read their Bibles and recover a biblical theology of work, which tells us in Genesis 2 that God created us with different abilities and gifts necessary to steward (manage) his creation so that things like education, science, technology, and home-making all become ways of fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives. **Adam and Eve were the very first project managers...specializing in horticulture and zoology...**

From day one of creation...God intended work to be a means of worship!

What does this have to do with Daniel?

Daniel had the gifts to be a full-time prophet, but instead he had a high-profile job in a pagan government...and this is where he expressed his commitment to the kingdom of God, by not being in ministry. **In the same way, it is not a contradiction to excel in your field while at the same time being right in the middle of God’s purpose for you!**

There’s a great correlation to this text in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus describes the kind of influence He desires for his followers to have...

“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden...so let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” Matthew 5:13a, 14, 16

Do you know what the purpose was for salt in the 1st century? It wasn’t used to make things taste better! Salt was a preservative used to keep things from going bad!

Jesus says to us, “In the same way that salt gets into things and keeps them from falling apart...you go and get involved in places that are prone to decay and rot, and preserve them! Make them better!”

Application: The reason I’m spending so much time on this one point is that the majority of us spend 40, 60 times the amount of hours at work each week than we do here on a weekend, and yet the church has a bad habit of never talking about God’s good purpose for work!

You need to know that no matter how much you love or don’t like your work...no matter how great or terrible your work environment is. No matter how encouraging or frustrating things are going to be tomorrow morning when you walk into your cube... **God has a purpose for you there. Sure...a few of you might need to prepare your resume or change careers.**

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But the majority of us need to recapture a biblical theology of work and understand what God can do in and through us in order to have great effect and influence!

Now please hear me. As soon as you begin to recover a biblical understanding of work! And let's broaden this for a moment to include family and community. And you say, *"I'm going to do my very best by the power of God at work in me to live for the good of my neighbor and for the glory of God...you will be positioned for influence! But you will also experience a great deal of tension! It will not be easy..."*

Keep reading in verse 4...

"Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. So they concluded, 'Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.'" Daniel 6:4-5

The text goes on to say that Daniel's colleagues went to the king and encouraged him to enforce a law stating that for thirty days, any person who prayed to a god or man other than Darius would be thrown into a den of lions!

When was the last time your corporate office enforced a rule saying that rule-breakers get the death penalty? How's that for work environment?

On one hand...we have no context for understanding Daniel's world! Unlike the Jewish people, we experience a tremendous amount of freedom and very little, if any persecution! Yet...we still live in a country and culture that is led by people...

And so if Jesus is your King...on one hand you belong to the Kingdom of God...where Jesus is continually shaping your values and priorities around his. But on the other hand you still live and work and play in the kingdom of man that reflects the values and priorities of man. And where the Kingdom of God collides with the kingdom of man...there is always tension!

I'll briefly suggest three reasons why believing in and belong to Jesus in a world that does not believe in and belong to Jesus (holistically speaking) will create tension in your life!

Each of them can be found in the narrative...and they build on one another!

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#1 – The Kingdom of Man says, "Work is a means to an end." The Kingdom of God says, "Work is a means of worship."

Daniel's colleagues – Promotion and career advancement and the king's approval was their identity. Everyone and everything else, including Daniel, was a means to that end...

Daniel – Daniel never sought career advancement! He worked hard for some very messed up kings...but he didn't need their approval because he recognized that his position and power were given to him by God...They were a means of worship...

Question: Is your occupation your source of identity? You'll know that if you experience a great deal of anxiety and worry over whether people notice you! Whether you'll get the promotion! But, if work is a means of worship, you know your identity is as a child of the King! And you can rest knowing that no matter what happens at work, it doesn't define you!

#2 – The Kingdom of Man says, "I come first...you come last." The Kingdom of God says, "I come last, you come first."

Daniel's colleagues – Experienced an intense jealousy because they wanted recognition and promotion, and they were willing to take Daniel out to come out on top!

Daniel – All yet Daniel...all through his life...expressed a quiet and consistent loyalty to the kings he served under. He honored God through his work ethic and reliability.

Why is there tension in our workplaces? Our desire to be noticed...to be first in line for promotion...to get to the top leads us step over people! We're so determined to be first, that we don't care who comes in last!

Question: Are you focused on promoting yourself...or are you doing everything you can to help promote the good of others...to make them better by putting them first?

#3 – The Kingdom of Man says, "Integrity is a means to an end." The Kingdom of God says, "Integrity is a means of worship."

Daniel's colleagues – Were willing to bend the law and throw Daniel under the bus to get him out of the picture.

Daniel – Daniel was honest and trustworthy. The text says that they found nothing in him to criticize...so they plotted against him! **Look at Daniel's response...**

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“But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in the upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to God.” Daniel 6:10

Even when Daniel was wrongly accused and faced with death, he didn't become angry and fight back or run away! He didn't smear Darius on Facebook – *“Hate my boss!”* Nor...did Daniel bow down and worship Darius! He went into his attic, threw open the windows and prayed to His True King!

Jerusalem: Window faced Jerusalem – For a Jew...Jerusalem was the place of God's presence and reign! Daniel set his eyes on God...sovereign over circumstances!

Question: Most of us haven't faced the death penalty! Maybe going to work feels like the death penalty to you! But...when we are faced with the decision to compromise our integrity to get ahead...or to make ourselves look better in spite of the cost, what do we do? Do you compromise? Or do you, like Daniel, get on your knees, set your eyes on God...and thank Him that no matter how good or bad your circumstances, He is sovereign!

The text goes on to say that when Darius discovered that Daniel had been seen praying publicly, he tried to find a way to protect Daniel, but he could not! So Darius gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions...

“Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions' den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions? Daniel answered, ‘Long live the king! My God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty!’” Daniel 6:19-22

Now...if you grew up in or around church, you're at an immediate disadvantage when you hear this story. Because you, like me, probably grew up hearing something like this... “When you make the right choice to honor God by living a life of integrity and faithfulness, if you go into the den of lions...if you face tension or opposition...God will deliver you! He'll shut the mouths of lions...

Please hear me...if you were with us last week, we said that this is not true! Historically, followers of Jesus have faced the furnaces of life...they get thrown to the lions...literally even! Christians in the first and second centuries were thrown to the beasts in the coliseum because they wouldn't recant their allegiance to Jesus! Even today in the news...followers of Jesus in Africa and Asia are experiencing intense persecution for their faith!

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The message of Daniel is not that God will always keep you from the lions! If you remain faithful to Jesus Christ...you will experience opposition, and there are times when it will cost you deeply. The message of Daniel is that when you stand faithful for Jesus...even when it costs you...there is One who stands with you!

The only way you'll ever stand strong is if your confidence and endurance comes from something greater than you! Daniel knew that his God was able to rescue...and that even if the lions consumed Him, **God was in control of his circumstances!**

On this side of the cross...we know this is true!

Gospel: Jesus Christ, the Son of God came into our world. The gospel writer John wrote that when he came the world didn't recognize him or receive him! Jesus' own people rejected Him. He was wrongly accused! The laws were bent in order to condemn him. He was thrown to the lions. Whipped, tortured, a crown of thorns pressed into his head...a cross laid across his back...nails driven into his hands and feet!

"He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people." Isaiah 53:7-8

Jesus was treated wrongly for our rebellion. He went to the slaughter, but he didn't fight back? **Why?**

"God showed us how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." 1 John 4:9-10

Jesus became a sacrifice for our sins!

You and I deserve to face the full wrath of God for the wrongs we have done! No amount of good we do can make us right! But Jesus...though perfect and sinless came to take away our sins!

He died the death we deserved to die so we could have life! And He did it for love...so that when we place the trust of our lives in Him as King...He saves us!

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When you know that God loves you that much! When you find your identity in Him. When you rest in his sovereignty – no matter how good or bad your circumstances are – you will stand strong!

And you will be positioned for influence!!!! Daniel chapter six ends in a worship service with Darius as the leader!!

“I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For his is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 5:26-27

My prayer for you through this series is that you would come to see the influence you can have in your homes, your workplaces, your communities, when you come to see and know the Living God face to face!

*Though our circumstances spin out of control, He is sovereign!
Though our strength fails, He holds us and does not tire!*

Though our wisdom and power is limited, His has no end!

Though we will face opposition and tension because of our faith, Jesus faced the ultimate opposition...death...and He won!

Armed with this understanding...we go from here with a high calling on our lives to live for Jesus Christ no matter the cost! Harbor...I love you...let's stand strong for Jesus together!