

The Daring of Daniel

M.W. Bassford
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Introduction.

- A. The other day at work, my wife had an interesting conversation with her boss about the way that God works in our lives. He described a time when, in his words, God compelled him to do something. He didn't know there was a need, he didn't know what had to be done, but God picked him up like a human sock puppet and used him to do what God wanted done. Lauren, by contrast, described the Biblical version of Christianity, where we learn about God's will from His word and then look for opportunities in our lives to carry out that will. Certainly, we can expect help from God in that, but the basic decision is our own.
- B. These two stories represent two opposite visions of Christianity, each one of which has massive implications. Are we prompted by the word to do good ourselves, or are we picked up and moved around by God like a pawn on a chessboard? If we believe in the pawn-on-a-chessboard theory, that completely absolves us of responsibility for doing anything ourselves. We're not spinning our wheels; we're just waiting for God to possess us and do something with us. By contrast, if we're the ones who decide what we do, then all the weight is on our shoulders. We're the ones who are supposed to take the initiative to do good, and if we don't use what we have been given for God, then He's going to hold us to account for our laziness.
- C. That's the Biblical way of understanding Christianity, but it's also the scary way. It means that we are expected to be constantly productive, and if we aren't, we aren't doing what God wants. Often, this search for ways to be useful leads us to do things we haven't before, and that can be especially scary. It takes courage to step up to the plate and do what's right, especially when what's right is uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Thankfully, the Bible is filled with stories of courage that can encourage us. Let's look at one of the most famous of these stories this evening. Let's look at the story of the daring of Daniel.

I. Daring to Stand Out.

- A. One of the first places we see daring appearing in Daniel's story is in the way he dared to stand out. This becomes apparent from the description of Daniel in Daniel 6:1-3. To fully appreciate what this says about Daniel, we need to recognize where he came from. Daniel had come to Babylon as a slave, one of the captives triumphantly carried off by the Babylonians during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. He didn't have any status other than what he earned; he didn't have any friends other than the ones he made. Despite that, here's what we see of Daniel during his later life. He had risen to the position of one of the top three officials in the entire kingdom, and he was doing such a good job that the king was considering making him the first.
- B. Friends, that's an example that any servant of God can learn from! Daniel wasn't content to be a mediocre captive somewhere living out the mediocre days of his mediocre existence. As this passage says of him, he had an excellent spirit, and he wanted to excel. In the work we do, we should want the same thing. Remember, friends, Paul instructs us in Ephesians 6 that we should serve our employers with the same level of intensity with which we serve Jesus. We shouldn't work when they're watching and loaf when their backs are turned. Instead, we should work as though we were under the eye of an all-seeing God, because we are.
- C. One of the greatest compliments to Daniel's work ethic, though, appears in Daniel 6:4-5. He was so competent and so honest that when his enemies investigated him, looking to dig up some dirt on him to smear him before the king, they found absolutely nothing. He had such a pristine work record that even people who were examining it with evil intent, even for anything they could twist against him, came up empty.
- D. Would that be true of us? Let's be honest here, friends. If we had an enemy who was looking for a reason to discredit us at what we do, would he be able to come up with it? Is there something we do on the job that we don't want our employers to know about, that would embarrass us if it came out? Are we honest and hard-working all the time, or just when we know somebody's watching? This is a test we need to pass, friends, not just for our own sakes but for the sakes of those around us. If people on the job know that we're slackers, they're not going to be interested in what we have to say about spirituality. Let's be like Daniel instead.

II. Daring to Defy.

- A. As this passage says, Daniel's enemies soon realized that the only way to get at him would be to get at him through his God. Their plans from this point forward highlighted another facet of his daring: his daring to defy. Look at the way that the story unfolds in Daniel 6:6-7, 9. Apparently, the Persian king at this point in time is something of a silly, vain guy, and Daniel's enemies decide to play on this. They persuade this foolish king to pass a decree that anybody who recognizes any authority but the king for a whole month is to be thrown into a den filled with hungry lions. This was specially calculated to destroy the God-fearing Daniel.
- B. Thankfully, none of us have enemies who are able to persuade the President to enact laws specifically targeted at us, but that doesn't mean we're safe. As we consider the changes in the world around us, it soon becomes

plain that the devil is shaping our entire culture as a tool to destroy righteousness. This is most obvious in the message that our culture is sending to our young people. In high school, the message comes through loud and clear: they are expected to drink. They are expected to rebel against their parents. They are expected to practice sexual immorality before marriage. To some extent, the same challenges face all of us.

- C. We see how Daniel reacted to the anti-God pressures of his day in Daniel 6:10. Basically, he didn't react at all. He knew about the law, all right, but he didn't change his behavior one little bit. He didn't stop praying to God, and he didn't even try to hide the fact that he was praying to God. He had to have known what was going to happen next, but it was more important to him to do what was right than to do what was safe.
- D. In the same way, friends, we need to learn to have a defiant attitude toward the world around us. Our society might have changed a lot over the past 50 years, but God's law hasn't changed, and that means that we must not change either. We need to live in the same simple, honest, righteous way all the time, whether the people around us approve of that or openly condemn that. There's no reason for us to act weird for the sake of acting weird, like the religious groups around us who adopt funny-looking clothes just so everybody knows they're different. However, when the world expects us to sin, we must defy that expectation and be righteous.

III. Daring to Believe.

- A. We also see the daring of Daniel revealed in his daring to believe. This appears in Daniel 6:11-12. As the Bible tells it, Daniel's enemies pounce on his unlawful prayer as soon as he utters it. We see what happens from there in Daniel 6:16-17. As the law directs, they take Daniel, throw him into the den of lions, and seal it up until presumably he becomes cat food. What's interesting about this segment of the story is Daniel's calm in the face of apparent disaster. We see the foolish Persian king doing everything he can to find a loophole in the law, but there's not even a hint that Daniel tried to escape his fate. We don't know what Daniel thought was going to happen. Instead, it's quite apparent that Daniel mainly cared about what had already happened. He had done what God expected him to in the face of temptation, and the result was up to God.
- B. That's the attitude we need to have too. Sometimes, we get too caught up in worrying about the consequences of doing the right thing, instead of focusing on the act itself. Folks, that way of thinking is pointless. The only thing that it will accomplish is to lead us into sin if we think the price for obeying God is too steep. Instead, we need to have spiritual tunnel vision. Consequences are God's problem, not our problem. We must obey God and trust in Him to sort things out for us. We must have the faith of Daniel.
- C. The consequences of Daniel's faith are revealed in Daniel 6:19, 21-23. He'd spent the whole night in the midst of hungry lions, but didn't even have a scratch on him. He was saved because of his faith. Sometimes, perhaps even usually, that's the way things will work out for us physically if we trust in God. If we dare to do what is right without regard for the consequences, very often the problems that Satan tried to use to scare us never materialize. Very often, we get respect for taking the high road instead of being condemned for it. Even if not, though, even if we suffer for doing what is right as so many in the first-century church did, obeying God is still the best choice. No matter what trials we have to undergo here, God has an eternity to repay us for our sacrifices, and there will never be a faithful Christian who gets the short end of that bargain. What we need to take from Daniel is this: sooner or later, doing the right thing is going to work out.

IV. Daring to Succeed.

- A. Of course, the story continues after Daniel's miraculous escape from the lions, and it reveals the final aspect of Daniel's daring: his daring to succeed. Look at the first sign of Daniel's success in Daniel 6:24. God sees to it that the enemies of Daniel and the enemies of God are destroyed. This should teach us an important lesson: just as doing the right thing always ends in success, so too doing the wrong thing always ends in failure. Whenever we give in to the pressure that is placed on us, whenever we let Satan muscle us into sin, there are consequences attached to that. Satan's a liar, folks. He never follows through on his promises. There will always be one more sin we have to commit, one more way we have to betray God, before we can be safe and happy. It's not safety and happiness at the end of that road, though. It's destruction. The right choice isn't just the tough choice. It's also the smart choice. It's the easy, evil choices that will kill us.
- B. Even beyond avoiding the punishment that God metes out, though, we also find success in promoting the name of God through our righteousness. Look at what happens in Daniel 6:25-26, 28. After Daniel emerges unscathed, Darius makes a proclamation to the entire kingdom. He makes sure that everybody knows what a great God Daniel has. When we live righteously, even when it's hard, our lives will have the same effect. When we go to the movies, what kind of movies do we like to see? Movies where the main character is a wimp who gets stomped on by the challenges that face him? Or movies about the hero who succeeds in the face of impossible odds? People don't just like the hero, friends; they want to BE the hero. When we use our lives to take a stand for righteousness, and when the people around us see it, we're showing them the path to spiritual heroism. That kind of shining example can lead more people to Christ than a hundred sermons, and it works on our co-workers, our friends, and especially our children. Let's be sure our example has that effect.

Conclusion. If you haven't been living courageously for God, now is the time to stand up and be counted.