

Ability to stand (Dan. 1)

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:01] Would you look again at verse 4. And as you do, remember that about 600 BC, God rejected Israel and set up a Gentile Empire with a king, whose formidable name was Nebuchadnezzar, who had formidable habits. He was a man of autocratic power.

He was a man to whom God had conceded power. And he was a man that God had to call his servant, because he was using him to chasten his people. God's strange work, judgment.

[00:01:02] But Nebuchadnezzar, as he expanded his empire, and as he turned his eyes to that pleasant land, which he couldn't have touched unless God had allowed him, but as he looked there, and he saw what treasure there was there, residual from Solomon, and of the princes and the seed royal, he gives a command that from Jerusalem, verse 4, bring children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, [00:02:05] and whom they might teach the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans. I believe that should be the writing and tongue of the Chaldeans. We must admit that Nebuchadnezzar was a man who knew what he wanted. And he drew a profile of the kind of person he needed to stand before him.

May we just turn aside and say, oughtn't we to be glad that when God sent his son into this world, he didn't come looking for men like that. He came, the Lord from heaven, to preach the gospel to the poor.

[00:03:11] He came to heal the brokenhearted.

His mission was quite different from finding this excellence. Because there is no such excellence, no. Because in its highest degree, such excellence only is attributable to one person.

Now may we go down just for a few moments through these attributes. The first, he wanted someone in whom was no blemish. And Daniel was chosen. Let's for simplicity's sake forget his other great companions. [00:04:04] Daniel was chosen, a man in whom was no blemish. Sufficiently so to qualify for the court of Nebuchadnezzar, which was only an earthly court. But they chose a young man, a prince in his own right, because at this first attack on Jerusalem, they only took the aristocracy, the king's household, the seed royal, the princes. And there was Daniel. And if you can imagine Daniel's plight, and I mustn't dwell on this, if you can imagine his plight when he saw his own city, his own people being beaten down and carried away to the east, [00:05:04] to the most notorious city of idolatry there in the world at that time. Poor Daniel, he must have had a very unhappy journey across that

desert. But he'd been chosen because in the eyes of the person given this election, he was a person who had no blemish. Well let's look at that. It must bring to your mind what kind of blemish.

Well, if we think back into the book of the law, Moses, and the Lord spoke of Moses on that day of resurrection, we think of the Passover lamb, which was to be a lamb without blemish. The sin offering that we come across later in Exodus was to be without blemish. [00:06:10] And the burnt offering, most certainly, an animal without blemish. But the actual word used in the original for those sacrifices doesn't quite fit here, because this is a man. And it is not just physical blemish, but the word implies no moral blemish. Because the man who was to stand in the highest court of the king was to have no stain on his character, no physical incapacity, no moral delinquency, [00:07:04] in fact, to be blameless. Blameless, not immature, and certainly not senile.

Now may I just gather these things together and say that there is one person, God's beloved Son, who not only fits this description, but he is described by Peter as a lamb without blemish, spotless, pure.

In manhood, someone who attracted his thousands because of his wisdom, because of his personality, [00:08:04] or more than that, because of his message, but was ever fairer than he.

He was the one whose face was more marred than any man's, but in himself he fitted into not the requirements of Nebuchadnezzar, but the requirements of a holy God who needed someone without blemish. And we can put our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ himself and know that not only was he put forward as such, but he demonstrated himself to be as such.

His judge had to say, I find no fault in this man. [00:09:04] Those who were sent to capture him came back saying, never man spake like this man. And so you needn't make a note, the scripture notes it for you. The first comment, without blemish.

I'm sure in your meditations you can project that very much further. Come to the next phrase.

Well favoured.

Excellent in appearance.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted no cretin in his court, no half-wit.

He wanted perfection.

And he wanted it to look like what it was.

[00:10:12] Calmness.

Good to look on.

Excellent in appearance.

How these phrases eliminate every one of us.

But leave exalted as the very Son of God who came to be the one who was our Saviour.

Now Daniel, he passed that test.

Probably you feel with me, I couldn't. But Daniel did.

But even Daniel in his 10th chapter, verse 8, [00:11:03] you turn it up at your leisure, not now please. He says, my calmness was turned into corruption. And that's when he had a heavenly vision. And no matter how perfect a man may seem to be on earth, no matter how much without blemish or well favoured, favoured with all that nature, all that education could give, even Daniel, who stood that test, and that selection in the 10th chapter uses this phrase, my calmness was turned to corruption.

Now let's think of our Lord. You may think of him in the 16th chapter of Matthew. [00:12:05] Now Peter was no fool. He might have done some foolish things, but that doesn't make him a fool. He was a man, impulsive, but deeply devout.

He had made up his mind.

He was prepared to die for his master. And God took him at his word. It would seem eventually he did. But in the meantime, he proved his weakness, as we know. We're not here to denigrate Peter. We're here to listen to his answer.

When the Lord Jesus Christ challenged him in the 16th of Matthew, in that 16th verse, when Jesus said, [00:13:02] Who say ye that I am?

He could look at him and say, The Christ, the Son of the living God, Messiah, the answer to all the prophets, and something added to it, the Son of the living God. And our Lord's reply to that, so gracious.

Well, nobody's told you that. You didn't find that in a book, Peter, nor did you learn it in Galilee in your fishing trade. It's been revealed of the Father, and it's the Father in heaven, whose good pleasure it is to open the eyes of those who trust in Jesus Christ to see in him all the perfection [00:14:05] and all the grace and favour that really are resident in this glorious person of whom we try, in faulting words, to speak this morning. In the 17th chapter of Matthew, on the basis of the inner belief and conviction that Peter had as to who Jesus Christ was, the Lord chose Peter to be amongst the three who were to have a preview of his glory.

And my dear young brother and young sister, if you've got a love in your heart for the Saviour, [00:15:05] he's going to manifest himself to you. He's promised to do it to those who love him. I will manifest myself, he says. He will make an open declaration, not just through what I say, not just through the books you read, but in the quietness of your own meditation. The Lord himself will come through, put himself beyond doubt, and show you, I am sure, not in some airy, fairy way, but in some deep heart conviction that the person you know as Saviour is indeed the beloved Son of God.

[00:16:03] And Peter had this experience, and here we look for a moment, don't we, on the one who was well favoured. He grew in favour with God and with men.

I must turn you now to the next statement.

It says, skilful in all wisdom, skilful or expert, wisdom in its best sense, wisdom that is used here in its very best sense.

And Daniel, of course, was a young man in whom resided wisdom.

[00:17:05] We read that the first choice of Daniel was confirmed three years later when Nebuchadnezzar, conversing with him, found him ten times better than the best that he had.

And as Daniel stood in one way highly exalted in a heathen court, he had a heart that showed that not only in Nebuchadnezzar's eyes was he a man without blemish and a man of grace and a man that was skilled in wisdom, but we read in that chapter, if we had time to have read it all, [00:18:01] that he was a man with a purpose because he had purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. And God honoured that purpose. God doesn't look on the outside of a man. He looks upon the inside. He knows the depth of our hearts. And when I creep away from someone else into the quiet of my room just to tell my Lord how much I love him, how weak I am, the great circumstances of rage round me, but the purpose of my heart entirely fixed on him, [00:19:04] then he's going to give the kind of strength that we read in the last verse of that first chapter of Daniel. Daniel continued even to the first year of Cyrus.

He saw Nebuchadnezzar go off his seat. He saw his successors. And Daniel was a man who was skillful in wisdom.

What does the New Testament tell us of our Lord? Well, in 1 Corinthians, and again we haven't time to turn to it, in that first chapter, it is said Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

[00:20:04] He brought into this world with him because he was deity, the very power of God. Remember, he was creator.

Remember, he was sustainer of all things and skillful in wisdom. Aye, the very wisdom of God.

This is a wonderful attribute of the Lord Jesus Christ and it should call out our admiration, our affection, our loyalty to the one who's loved us and died for us.

Can we imagine a person with all these attributes taking up a task such as he took up [00:21:01] because he was the only person who could come to the rescue of people like you and me? And I must pass on. There is another phrase, cunning in knowledge. I'm not going to linger long on this, I'd like to, but perhaps sufficient to say that when we think of cunning, it has several peculiar meanings in the British language. It's a terrible language, really, it's a British language and of course there was a writer who said when I use a word, it means what I want me, what I intend it to mean, nothing more and nothing less. But though that may seem trite, it is something we must look at because if you speak of cunning, [00:22:02] nearly everyone will quote that little verse in the Psalms, If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand lose her cunning. And if you look closely, you'll find that word cunning is in italics, it isn't in the original. About a year ago, it was the privilege of some of us to be in Israel, and an educated Israeli quoted that verse in a free translation that I'll never forget. As we entered Jerusalem, looking at those beautiful walls, said, If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand die. Let it atrophy, let it die. But that doesn't get us far with cunning, only to put that idea of it out of our head. Cunning brings in action. [00:23:01] It is the active use of knowledge.

Now there are some people who pack their head with knowledge. I was speaking to a young man, he's not in England now, but I said to him as he'd taken his doctorate, Well, what are you going to do now? And he looked at me rather bewilderedly and said, Well, actually I'm in a difficulty. I've studied a subject that's so abstruse, I can't find any practical use for it. Poor man, poor man.

No practical use for it. Now God is a God of doing. He doesn't ask us to do anything to save ourselves because he knows we're incapable. But he's a God of action. And to be cunning in knowledge is not only to be able to use it, but it is to be able to use it properly.

[00:24:06] Now the Lord Jesus Christ had knowledge, knowledge to the utmost. And I'm attracted to the fact that in Luke chapter 10, Jesus said, No man knows who the son is but the father, and who the father is but the son.

There is knowledge in the Godhead that we could never acquire by any reference book or by any logical process of argument. But there is such a thing, thank God, as revelation. And here we have it written in the scripture and the Holy Spirit ready to help the inquiring soul [00:25:02] who reads his Bible. And there is this wonderful knowledge that the Lord had when confessing himself to be the son of God, he said that there was an intimate understanding between father and son. He goes further in another place, he says, I and my father are one.

And so if you want an extreme and only valid example of someone cunning in knowledge, then again we have to look adoringly at our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nebuchadnezzar had another degree that he required, understanding science.

[00:26:03] The ability to perceive and acquaintance with.

The ability to analyse, to separate mentally. I can remember once discussing with one of the hierarchy of the company that I worked, a branch that we had overseas, and the chairman turned away saying, of course the whole trouble is that that man over there is muddle-minded. He's muddle-minded. And he walked away saying, what can you do with a man who's muddle-minded? But Nebuchadnezzar wanted someone who could discriminate, who could distinguish, who could understand and separate.

[00:27:06] And Daniel passed that test.

And Daniel was the only man who could discriminate in that court.

He saved the lives of Nebuchadnezzar's magicians because he was in touch with the God of Heaven who had knowledge. He was the one who understood. He was the one in whom it had to be admitted that in him was excellent understanding. What a man Daniel was. But I want to move quickly over to think again about Lord Jesus Christ, who is spoken of in the Proverbs, in the 8th chapter, under the cover of that word wisdom.

[00:28:04] He was from everlasting.

He claims to be daily the delight of God.

He was the one who from the beginning was creator.

He was in the now, as we say.

There was nothing that was not open to him. And here again I wish to pass quickly because the next paragraph, the next degree, really catches my heart. These things that we're speaking of, the first one of being without blemish, the second one full of grace, well favoured, and now ability to stand in the king's palace.

[00:29:05] To be called into the king's palace, albeit the queen's, is enough to throw a man back on his heels. Some of you have seen folk who have just been brought up into this city for some honour and seen how worried they are on account of all their deficiencies. But the king, an earthly king, said he was looking for someone with ability to stand in the king's palace. That he wanted a man who could stand firm.

Someone who had the strength, someone who had the right, [00:30:01] someone who was already endowed with those virtues that we've looked at very sketchily this morning and I hope you'll meditate upon them a little later. And someone who could stand fast. And we find that in the 19th verse of that first chapter of Daniel, it says a king communed with them and among them all was found none like Daniel and Amishiel, Amazar.

Therefore stood they before the king. They made the grade.

They didn't fail.

They were held up by God.

Their ability is here.

Their character is written for us. They stood before the king because of the excellence that was found in them. [00:31:06] And of course it is qualified by that which we've already said and Daniel continued.

He started with a purpose and he continued because he was able to stand. May we again move to put this as we may for a moment or two for your contemplation to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Stephen, the first martyr, who in his last moments said, well, he saw Jesus and he said, I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. [00:32:02] This is not inconsistent at all with what we were talking about on Saturday where it says having made one sacrifice forever he sat down also forever at the right hand of God. But there he's shown as a man standing at the right hand of God.

He had a position where he had a standing before God.

He was of that type of person, unique, never ever to have an equal.

The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God and that's what Stephen saw [00:33:02] as he closed his eyes in death saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. The one who stands at the right hand of God will stand and I mean that the right of standing there not just the posture but the right of standing there when every other knee bows because God has decreed that every knee in heaven, on earth and below will bow to the name of Jesus.

He alone has the right to stand.

Nebuchadnezzar knew what he was doing when he said he wanted a man like that [00:34:01] who was able to stand before the King. Now we're much more like mafeboosheth by nature, aren't we? He's a picture that fits us unable to stand on either of his feet. He couldn't even prop himself up. But what a wonder that the Lord Jesus is put before us in this small verse to show that there is one who has a right of access and of standing before God which God accepts because of who he is and because of what he's done. But it would seem that the Lord himself had a great impediment.

That was you and me.

[00:35:02] And this again enhances his character and his work when we think that having taken our sins upon us having died upon the cross that he's raised by the glory of the Father and he stands in the presence of God the Son of Man in resurrection.

And if he stands there I'm safe.

The fact that he is not in any way embarrassed by having become my saviour is a wonder that I shall never overcome.

And then lastly [00:36:02] as we look down this list and before we try to tie off the ends Nebuchadnezzar demanded that the people of whom Daniel qualified with full marks should be the kind to whom they could teach the writing and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And Daniel was the man who triumphed in this. And may I just remind you we've spoken of him as a man who in the first chapter had a purpose that he would not defile himself and God gave him the grace and the strength and opened the way for him to keep that and yet we find in the second chapter [00:37:03] again verse 18 that he was a man of prayer. And that goes right through Daniel, doesn't it? The man with a purpose and the man of prayer. And prayer always shows a sense of need.

Earnest prayer is the basis of standing and little did Nebuchadnezzar know the quality of the man he had in Daniel. But Daniel was not only a man of purpose and of prayer but he was a man to whom God communicated his will. And Daniel's prophecy takes us to the end of the time that we can think of. It is not yet fulfilled.

[00:38:03] And there's a wonderful thing said of Daniel He prospered.

Now God can make us to prosper.

But leaving Daniel again let me turn again to the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing I can say gets anywhere near the exquisite truth of the fact that in him all these perfections and more are found.

In Isaiah, prophetically, he speaks of having the tongue of the learned so that he may speak a word in season to him that's weary.

What a savior.

[00:39:03] What a person.

Because if Daniel was a man who could learn the tongue of another nation and excel in it.

Isn't it true that our Lord himself who was in highest glory he came down and may we humbly say in figurative speech he learned to talk our language.

No matter how low my intellect no matter how low my status as an untouchable he is the one who can communicate to me. He had this ability to communicate. He offended the people who thought they were somebody [00:40:03] in Luke 15 when they said he's a friend of publicans and sinners. And that wrote him off in the eyes of the so-called decent folk of the day. The person who was able, may we say, to borrow the words feeling that they're unfitted but they do carry the thought that the Lord himself so high, so great was the one who was willing to learn to speak to people like you and me and he'll speak to you through the scripture in the sweetest voice you've ever heard.

Now, my time almost evaporated [00:41:03] I want to make a very quick recapitulation of this verse because that isn't where my message ends today. Not to repeat what I've said but to say that there are three vertical areas to which I am trying to draw attention based on the demands of a king who knew what he wanted.

I'd like to speak more about king but time prohibits it.

He selected a man with all these virtues and thank God he was a man of God, was Daniel and God saw that that selection was Daniel because he had an important place to play [00:42:04] in the lives of folk like you and me written into Holy Scripture.

We've looked as best we can though faultily at the glories of our Lord that we may see mirrored in this verse and then there's another communication because the Lord himself is capable and determined to confer on folk like you and me the very perfections and virtues that this verse contains.

So, we, the church [00:43:01] those who are redeemed by his precious blood down this list of seven virtues again blameless, without blemish yes, in Ephesians 5.27 the Lord has determined that the church he loves will be eventually without blemish holy, set apart, blameless when he presents it to himself as his spotless bride.

We may stand in wonder that such a thing could ever be but the Scripture leaves us in no doubt [00:44:01] that the perfections that are to be found in Christ will have their true reflection in that wonderful company of every believer who constitutes the church of God as we look forward to a time when he has completed fully his work.

Well favoured, ah yes in Galatians chapter 1 we could read in verse 12 giving thanks unto the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light who has translated us from the power of darkness [00:45:01] into the kingdom of his dear Son. It speaks of a spiritual position it speaks of favour beyond anything you and I deserve or could have expected but it's in the counsels of God to work out by the one who has these perfections the very position to be conferred on folk like you and me.

Then we spoke of skillful in wisdom we spoke of Christ the power of God the wisdom of God and further on in that chapter chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians it says he's made unto us wisdom righteousness,

sanctification and redemption. [00:46:01] That list to me at my point of living seems to be inverted because the first thing I need is redemption cleansing by the precious blood of Christ and if there's one amongst us who isn't convinced that they know Jesus as Saviour time is getting short and it's something you need to do to come to see that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is a Redeemer who has a place for you in his plan of salvation and don't, don't I beg you be foolish enough to fritter away your life into an eternal loss but rather to be translated into the kingdom of his dear Son [00:47:01] and to be there then you've got to be well-favoured you've got to be gracious in appearance I was reading some time ago in the course of my business a short article written by what was supposed to be at that time the leading man on the cosmetic business in this country and I only read the few opening paragraphs but it said to have a lovely face but first of all have a lovely soul cosmetics can do nothing for you unless you have a lovely soul that's a man who's selling paint and powder he should know it is that inner change it is that cleansing by the precious blood of Jesus Christ [00:48:04] that can give you a position of grace and favour our Lord had it by right it's there for every believer and eventually thank God will be our portion made wise the wisdom of God the righteousness of God the sanctification of God and the redemption of God redeemed, sanctified made righteous and then given wisdom wisdom that is from above that's why some of us fail, isn't it? we're sure of our redemption our sanctification never quite satisfactory [00:49:03] our righteousness before God absolute but our righteousness in this world in behaviour still in doubt and wisdom not always wise but Christ has these and is ready to confer them so the scripture tells me we speak of the person who's going to stand before God is to be cunning in knowledge and when the Lord Jesus Christ said that he as a son was the only one who knew the Father he added a rider to it and he to whom a son will reveal him have you got on to that line of communication? do you know the Father? [00:50:01] if you do, it is because the Holy Spirit is resident in your heart the spirit of adoption which enables you to look up and say, Abba Father these are the wonders that come in a practical way as we contemplate the perfections of Christ but you say, understanding signs what are you going to do with that? well, this was mentioned on Saturday, wasn't it? where John says, ye have an unction and know all things ye know the truth this is one of the graces one of the wonders of Christianity that the person who grows as a believer [00:51:01] it isn't the student though you must study to show yourself approved it isn't as a student that we grow it is as a believer as we come to know experimentally the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ and walk in association with him and now the ability to stand what have we got there? well, Paul speaks to us in Romans of the grace wherein we stand given the law to keep we would have fallen we would have tripped on the very first commandment and gone to pieces on the last but it's grace and it is by grace that we stand [00:52:05] and Peter speaks of the true grace wherein we stand there is a standing before God even for men and women like you and me in this world a standing and a security and a knowledge and then lastly these men were to be men of potential who could learn a new language well, there's a new language in heaven, isn't there? or you may say in Revelation chapter 4 and chapter 5 they're singing, aren't they? well, read it again when they sang, they said says so in both cases, doesn't it? [00:53:03] they sang a new song, saying one of the directors in my office fortunately I was not the culprit on this occasion he'd read a long letter that someone had written to a customer and he wrote a stinging comment across the top of it in red ink when we write a letter, I think we should say something when we sing a hymn, we should say something how often we can sing a hymn and say nothing I heard a woman with a beautiful voice one who sang in some of the greatest theaters of the world [00:54:01] say, oh the words don't mean anything to me, it's the note she could sing, jeez you lover of my soul but it was the notes that mattered may I just say when we sing, we should say something and if we're going to say something, we've got to know the language and in heaven, there will be a universal language of praise to the Lamb because it says you've redeemed us out of every kindred and tongue so we won't be stulted by the inefficiency of the English language we'll be able to speak in unison and say in words that carry

the meaning fully worthy is the Lamb that was slain