

Lessons from Daniel

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I would like to read just a few more verses. The 7th chapter of Hebrews in verse 26 it says of the blessed Lord Jesus. Jesus is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Now let me read you something from Matthew's Gospel chapter 11 verse 19. The Son of Man came, a friend of publicans and sinners, separate from sinners, but a friend of publicans and sinners. And how very up to [00:01:06] date is this book, the Bible, the Word of God. And perhaps tonight my message is a simpler application of the Word and therefore to people younger than myself.

People who are very young may be, and that's usually an excuse I discovered for saying things that one would be ashamed to address to one's equals or one's elders. It isn't so tonight. So up to date is the Word of God that this man Daniel, whose history throughout the book I would like to have read, but I spare you. I'll rely upon your knowledge of this vivid book. This man Daniel found [00:02:05] himself in the same position that we find ourselves this evening if we're earnest servants of God. He was in captivity. He was an important person before God. He belonged to the people of God, but he was held down. He was taken captive. He found himself not exactly in chains, but in a seeming impossible position. He found that the ruling power was a very strict and vicious ruling power. Nebuchadnezzar was extremely powerful and he was a heathen.

[00:03:03] The ruling power was heathen. The ruling power of the world, let us never forget, is heathen. It tolerates you and me, if it knows anything about us at all, and that's about all it does and the more it learns about the reality of our position and the more it opposes and the more it dislikes us. And I want to suggest tonight that this young man Daniel, who found himself in that position, has many lessons to teach us, but I want to speak of just three streams of lessons. What did he do? He lived in holy separation from this evil [00:04:08] world in which he found himself, did he? Yes, but not a holier-than-thou separation.

I feel fairly strongly about this. Our blessed Lord Jesus, who is the example of course, was indeed separate from sinners, but I never cease to marvel at the way that it emphasizes in the Gospels that he was the kind of man that as he sat down on a bench, publicans and sinners found it easy to sit down on the same bench and shuffle talks him, till it was obvious to those who looked on that he [00:05:06] was a friend of publicans and sinners. This should be true of you and me in this world tonight. Separate from sinners, but a friend of publicans and sinners.

May we examine for a few moments some of the details as they are presented in Daniel. I want to speak of his selfless preparation. I want to speak after that of his sacrificial service and finally of his suffering readiness, his readiness to suffer. Daniel did not choose his career. He had it chosen for

him. I dare [00:06:13] say, my dear young brother, that you are being pressed to choose your career. It's a normal, seemingly good thing to do. I would much rather think that you were going to have it chosen for you, and if you go on your knees about it like Daniel went on his, you will find that it is chosen for you. You say, it doesn't seem to me to be as easy as that. And I remember very well indeed, when I was coming to the end of my school career, my father said, well what do you want to be? What do you want to do? I said to him, what is there to be? What is there to do? [00:07:09] I don't know. I don't know. It's a difficult thing to decide sometimes, but not for the believer who recognizes this, that he is not just now that he belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, now that he is one indisputably of the family, the children of God, he belongs to the nation of God in this world, that he is not stepping out into an exciting, adventurous, delightful, beckoning world, which is a challenge to him, but that he is in captivity from the start, that he [00:08:01] finds himself in a world which is hostile, and the people who have the power act like heathens. And this makes me afraid. I had no doubt that Daniel was afraid. Ha, you say, but Daniel had every good right to be afraid. Look what a man Nebuchadnezzar was. Yes, but look what God made Daniel. I said Daniel's career was not chosen for, was chosen for him. So it was. He was picked out and sent on a three-year course. The world said, we want you, and there's a training period. Three long years it will take us to teach you what we need you to do. What did he do? [00:09:03] He accepted it. He took his education, he took his schooling, he took everything they demanded of him in the world in which he lived. I think you've done that up to now. You've accepted your schooling, you've accepted your place in this country, in the position in which you find yourself. Don't lose sight, my dear young brother, young sister, older brother, older sister, that we hold a very tenuous position. We hold an impossible position. By all worldly standards in the world tonight, his life, Daniel's life wasn't worth trying to start to live if he looked at it in relation to all he'd ever been taught so far. He was a prince. [00:10:04] He was a prince of a very important house and here he was suddenly taken and put under the yoke as it were. But he accepted his position and he looked upon every opportunity as something that if he pursued, God could turn it into channels which were important. He took his three-year course but he found a major snag right at the beginning. Part of the course was to accept the king's food. Now he would listen to the king's instructors in Kaldian, in Kaldi, and in [00:11:02] the languages and the arts of the Kaldians, but when he saw the implications of eating the same food, he rebelled. He would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat. He would not allow himself to be fed with this defiling meat, defiling meat. The king, the supreme king of all the earth, as Nebuchadnezzar was, was his meat to be turned down without two thoughts? It was. You and I know, don't we, that it was defiling not because it was not hygienically clean. It was defiling because it had been offered to idols.

[00:12:02] It was connected with the heathen king's worship. And it seems to me that it's quite true to say that if people thrived on the portion of the king's meat, then the glory of the heathen gods would be enhanced. That's what meat offered to these gods of ours means. Look how they thrive. Of course, this is no condemnation of nice food, but it is a warning about our spiritual food, is it not? You will find that what your rulers, our rulers, our ruling authority requires of us for our souls is defiling. But what they feed their souls on we can't touch without [00:13:03] being defiled. I'm speaking now spiritually again for a moment, of course. This has no meaning to us tonight unless we see a spiritual lesson in it. It's often been pointed out the way in which Daniel went about it. He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself, though it cost his life. But there was no noisy demonstration of protest from Daniel. He purposed in his heart and then he asked to be excused. He treated with great deference his new masters. He asked politely to be excused. Having purposed in his heart he wouldn't do it. This was a great help to me many years ago when pointed out by an older brother. I was [00:14:02] not the kind, as you may imagine, to purpose in my heart and be polite about it exteriorly, but it's a lesson to learn. And God noted how Daniel went about this and God brought

Daniel, it says here, brought Daniel. I only noticed it as I read it tonight. He brought, God brought Daniel into favor with this man who had so much power over him. I know an old brother who when he was younger used to ask, as he set off every morning, for favor in the eyes of those with whom he had to do. He was a selling agent and he asked the God in heaven to give him favor in the eyes of the heathen power that he was to serve. But he served them, so did Daniel. Mind you, Daniel had an alternative in his heart as well. There [00:15:12] was nothing hasty and simply clever about Daniel. He knew exactly what kind of food to ask for. Porridge and water, a cereal which would not tickle the palate of Nebuchadnezzar, and water. Very dull fare for the heathen king. Reminds me of the bread of life. Bread. Jesus said I am the bread sent down from heaven which if a man eat thereof he shall not die and so on. You know the scripture. The water of the word. Just a word. The Bible which brings to us the bread of life. The Bible [00:16:16] which is the water, the word, the water of life. Does seem dull compared with the things there are on the station book stalls to read. It does seem dull. It seems dull but it's a matter of taste. And you'll find as you feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ and the books which minister him, the books that may seem old now and out of date in their language, give them a second thought. Read them earnestly. Keep on with this. Look to the Lord about it. Because I can tell you that the food [00:17:04] of a power under which we labour is defiling. Just defiling for the child of God. I'm not speaking of your equally dull technical books. You know I'm not don't you. I'm speaking of that which titillates the palate. It's a matter of taste. But now you're a child of God you know exactly, if you're honest with yourself, you know exactly what Daniel, this figure in Daniel is speaking about when he said, Melzar, this request is to be relieved of that food that the king thinks necessary to my education for his service and to be put on pulse and water bread and water. Marvellously enough the God in heaven so arranged it in that [00:18:07] heathen land that Daniel and his companions were permitted their request. You get nothing if you don't ask. You try asking that master of yours for something which seems outlandish in the world but you know to be right spiritually. In this day and age, today, you'll find that the God in heaven is still there. That he still holds the affairs of the world in his hands and he can carve a passage through this world for you like he did for Daniel. But what about the end of a trial period? I've never heard of such an examination result in my life. One thousand percent pass. Ten times better than the others [00:19:08] who had stayed the course. This is in the Word of God. Daniel and his three companions passed their examination at the end with honours upon honours upon honours until the heathen king picked them out and said these are the men for me. And you'll find that the heathen king today, of the world today, if we play to the rules, will be much inclined to pick these sort of servants out. They're the sort of people he's looking for. Why? Because they found a way round or through or under the regulations of the court inspectors and came out with flying colours. God saw to it. Why? Because he had important work to be done. [00:20:07] Therefore it's not long before, and in chapter 2 we come to it, Daniel is called into service, well qualified spiritually, having not fallen foul of the leading power. He is used to it. You know the story of that wonderful, that marvellous dream of Nebuchadnezzar and how that Daniel was the only man who had the key. I wonder often whether Daniel realised the important work he was on. I don't know. But Daniel not only served Nebuchadnezzar, but he served the world. That dream of Nebuchadnezzar's turned out to be an outline of world history, not by HG Wells, [00:21:09] but by God, who knows the end from the beginning and is not yet finished. It turned out to be God's outline of world history, forecasting the world powers from that time on and beyond our time to the end. Yes, Daniel's service was real service. God used him. Who hasn't read in chapter 3 that story, what child doesn't know it, of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? What a superb chance and opportunity for [00:22:06] witness they had. Dangerous mission, of course. But then, my dear young brother and sister, you're on a dangerous mission too. You're no safer than those men, than Daniel. And the more faithful you are, the more determined you are after careful, selfless preparation of the kind we've looked briefly at, putting your all into it, you're no safer than any of these men at any time. What a

privilege. What a privilege. When the great Nebuchadnezzar overstepped the mark, these quiet servants of God, carefully prepared, were there in [00:23:08] quiet, in submission, once again. They were at the point when they just had to say no.

They couldn't bow down to a golden image, could they? But look at the cost. Look at the pressure of the power of the world upon them. Look at the threat. If it had been a threat, it wouldn't have been so bad. What are you and I going to do when some hostile power takes over this land? We stand in stark reality as those who can be proved to have attended Catford on an evening like this, and opened our Bibles, and worshipped God [00:24:02] And this hostile power says, well, for everybody who does that, there's a concentration camp nicely prepared and ready. It has happened in the lifetime of most of us here. It could happen again. I sometimes have a feeling in my bones, which could be wrong, that some of us will yet see such conditions. I tremble. But I am certain that given careful, careful preparation, honestly before God, we will be able to serve our generation. These men did. They stood. It overtook them. They were cast into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace. And the record is so strong here, that there's not a child that's ever had a Bible, that's ever been to a Sunday school, who couldn't tell you the story with their [00:25:05] names to. They came out, as we know, miraculously, unscathed, and the power of the world temporally crawling at their feet, in acknowledgement of the God of heaven. It's an instance of their sacrificial service. I believe there's no service to our Master, our Lord, our God, that is not, in essence, sacrificial. What do I mean by that? It costs something, but the cost isn't to be compared with the value of the service. But it costs something. You are not going to be able to get through your life, my dear young Christian friend, who loves the Lord Jesus and realises a little of what it costs God to bring you into his [00:26:01] family. You're not going to get life, through life, easily, if you're really going to do the job that God has put you down here to do. It's a wonderful thing. I must come to chapter four, which I look upon as the tree story. And Daniel had the onerous task of cutting down to size the greatest monarch the world has ever seen. You do know, don't you? Forgive me, my older brethren, for being elementary. You do know that Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch that has ever been. He was the only man that God has put into his hands world dominion. Others have tried to snatch it. Others have [00:27:06] fought for it. Others have claimed it. But none have had it. God doesn't let men take things by force beyond the point which suits him. But he gave Nebuchadnezzar total command of the whole of the world, of the birds that flew, of the beasts that crept, everything. And Daniel, the man in captivity, the man of God who had taken the trouble to take life seriously and to prepare himself before his God, is used to bring down that monarch.

The dream of the tree that Nebuchadnezzar has. The trees of scripture are exceedingly instructive. I believe the tree is, is it not, the largest living thing in God's creation [00:28:07] in this world. The largest living thing. It doesn't move very far. It's very well rooted. It's much heavier than most of us think as we look at it. It used to be some of my task to estimate by measurement weight round timber, as they call it. You'll be surprised at the bow of a tree, a big tree, can weigh ten tons. Enormously heavy. Very powerful. Last a long time too. Can live for a thousand years. It's a wonderful illustration of Nebuchadnezzar in all the grandeur and the pomp of his power, his stability. What did God say to Daniel?

What did God say to Nebuchadnezzar? Cut it down. And it was cut down. The terrible, heart-rending [00:29:12] story of a great man brought down to the level of a beast for seven solid years and then restored. Then restored. In passing, what a picture. You gospel preachers should never forget. It ties in with what our brother was saying this afternoon. That if I'm going to be saved, I must be broken. If I'm going to be used, I've got to be broken. Very difficult.

I didn't believe this for many years. I heard brethren speak about it, of course. But you don't believe all that brethren say, do you? Not just like that. You learn it from the [00:30:02] Word of Life, the Bible. If it's there, believe it. Hang on to it. But let us, when we preach the gospel, young men, when we speak to the Bible class, young women, when we minister to the world, to the man sitting next to us, to those we know, let us avoid the mistake of supposing that one is ever saved by adhering to Christianity. Or that one is ever saved by naming the name of Jesus. One is only saved by being cut down and started again.

By recognition that I am such a hopeless, guilty sinner, though I'm like the spreading [00:31:02] chestnut tree. Though I'm like a cedar of Lebanon in the world. No, I'm not. Nebuchadnezzar was. There's no hope for me unless I'm cut down so that God can restore. It's the principle of salvation at its roots. Why the very person, bless his holy name, who took my place before God as a man, was cut down. As soon as he stepped into my shoes before God, he was cut down. He went to Calvary's cross. You know the story. He rose again. And our salvation, if there's anybody here who hasn't thought as far as this yet, who is tinkering about [00:32:01] on the sidelines of Christian profession, let me ask you to think of this, that your salvation depends on being recognized as worthless before God so that God can give you a new life, can make you again. Every saved soul here tonight is a new creation in Christ Jesus.

I really believe myself, though there may be some here who think it's going too far, I bow to them on their thought. I believe myself that Nebuchadnezzar was actually converted to God. If so, what a job Daniel did in his service. How he was used to this great man.

Suffering though, his readiness to suffer. I think it was Mr. Hocking I heard many years [00:33:06] ago, who himself was a high-ranking civil servant, said in his quiet, calm way, a Christian is not worth his salt unless he knows what it is. After having obtained popularity, usefulness, being demanded in high quarters, if he doesn't know what it is, to then be forgotten. And Daniel did. He was prepared to be forgotten. How do I know that? Because, of course, in that chapter, in the chapter of the writing on the wall, which is so well known that men quote it today, the writing on the wall, you know the story of course, how God spoke to this impious, soon-to-die Belshazzar by writing on the wall. Belshazzar didn't know what to do for an [00:34:06] explanation until he was reminded by the Queen Mother that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had known a man called Daniel. About 60, over 50 years had elapsed, and Belshazzar was so far adrift from his grandfather's history that he didn't even know Daniel. But Daniel was still there. I love that. He went on, did Daniel. He went right through to the reign of Cyrus, did Daniel, in captivity. But he was still there, and he was available, ready to be called on. And when they brought him in, there is Daniel, as though there had been no lapse of years, saying, Am thou, O Belshazzar? Hast not thou thou new stories? You ought to have known Belshazzar. [00:35:09] And tonight, tonight, Daniel had the exact answer. Of course he knew. We humble believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we know, don't we? We only know because it's here. Daniel only knew because it was here, and because he was in touch with the one who wrote this, and you and I can be in as close touch with the very same person. Said Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, There is a God in heaven. Your gods are on earth, but there is a God in heaven. And he said a similar thing to Belshazzar. My point in naming that was that he had been [00:36:01] ignored. He suffered under the world, but he's ready to suffer. He was serving a higher authority than the highest and most powerful authority on earth. So are you. So am I. In our humble measure, so are we. Let us be exhorted to make sure we think on this line and act on this line. At 80 plus, Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. I'm amazed at some of the older brethren under whom I've served. How they hang on, they do more than that. They're there 50 years after I first knew them. They're there. They've been ignored.

The world doesn't know they exist until [00:37:02] occasionally they're called to stand in the limelight maybe. They still can stand in the limelight, still with the ready help, practical help, that the heathen power needs. They've got it there. God knows when to bring them out again. They come out not as skeletons from the cupboard, they come out as young virile men. Most people seem to think, until they've read a bit, that Daniel was a nice little boy thrown into the den of lions. At most a teenager, maybe 20 or so. The pictures portray him as such. It was a shock to me years ago to find he was over 80 thrown into the den of lions. And listen, by a worldly power that this time wanted to save him.

Darius didn't want to throw him to the lions, but Darius could not help himself. King of this great [00:38:09] empire as he was. Of course we fail to mention that there'd been a political change by now. Babylon that had captivated Daniel had moved on. There's not only a change from Labour to Conservative, from one political power to another, there was a change of occupying power. And Daniel was still there. And Daniel was still the same. And Daniel couldn't even be saved by the man who wanted to save him. Have you ever had that experience? When your chief, if you're not a chief yourself, when your chief would like to do something for you. Pretty good fellow so-and-so. Served the company an awful long time. I wish I could do something for him. What is it that stops him doing something for you? Is it your insistence on praying three times a day? Is it your insistence, [00:39:08] quiet insistence, on being a man of God? Come what may. Is that what stops the heathen power helping you? It's what stopped Daniel's promotion and what got him into the den of lions. But the God in heaven had influence in the lion's den that the greatest man on earth had not. You know the story once again in this wonderful book of Daniel. I'm going to close with the final thing, this I wonder at in suffering Daniel. How in chapter 9, the serious, the real work of Daniel it seems to me, was in the second half of the book, when after all this experience and all this training at the [00:40:08] hands of the God of heaven, passing him through all kinds of unpleasant things in this world, he reaches the time when he's the man to receive the prophecy which shall be the key for you and me to unlock the very ways of God for the future. A man through whom we have received a knowledge of what is stored in the very mind of God for the future. He takes his place with a sinful, failing, appallingly weak people of God. And as he prays, that's chapter 9 it is, [00:41:01] as he prays he keeps saying we and us. You've noticed it. Daniel does not go down on his knees and say oh God, fancy me being linked with people that do this kind of thing. Look at the life I've lived for 80 years. I'm going to pray for them. I'm going to act as a priest standing between them and God and pray for these worthless guilty people. Now he goes down on his face and he says, to us, neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord. Oh Lord, to us, to us belongeth confusion of face. He took his place with them. He bowed himself with them. He said we are guilty. He linked himself with the people of God. It might be your privilege one day to link yourself, [00:42:01] perhaps it is now, to link yourself not in haughty separation from those who are so failing, but linked with those who are in such need and join them in bowing before God to ask for forgiveness and help and blessing and restoration. So you see Daniel. Daniel after his preparation, after, and we've only touched on his service, was able to join in the sufferings and he served. He served his heathen masters up to the hilt. He served his failing brethren up to the hilt. He served his, he served you and me marvellously. All the time he had the privilege of serving his [00:43:01] God. I come back to a wish to be like Daniel's greater master, the one who came long after Daniel had done all this without the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who was holy, undefiled, separate from sinners, but who was the friend of publicans and sinners.

Oh for that balance which would enable me to be free from the defilement but available for the service, for his glory.