

Series: **The Courageous Life** – week 6

CDOBC – beginning on 9/13/15

Today's Title: **"Courage to Stand Alone for Christ"**

October 18, 2015 ~ Life of Daniel

OBJECTIVE: To help believers have courage to stand for Christ despite pressures to compromise or danger.

Opening prayer

Throughout human history, one of the cruelest realities of war has been the treatment of POW's. The 2014 film "Unbroken" – the true story of 1936 Olympian and WWII Prisoner of War Louie Zamperini portrays many of these evils.

Last Sunday, I talked about the evil and unbelievable cruelty of the Assyrians and what they did to the POW's they captured in war.

This morning, we're looking at a well-known Prisoner of War – but unlike most POW stories, this young man thrived in captivity – he remained faithful to God – and actually became a powerful ruler in the nation that took him captive.

This is the final message in our series: "The Courageous Life" – and today's message is titled:

"Courage to Stand Alone for Christ"

This morning, we're looking at the life of Daniel and his friends.

Daniel is one of the great success stories in the bible – someone who has a completely positive record of his life and leadership.

Daniel 1 is our text today – in your bible or device – find Daniel 1 and follow along as I read.

Read chapter 1

The courage to stand for Christ and resist compromise

Daniel 1

Vs. 8 - “But Daniel resolved”

Have you resolved to stand for the truth of Christ no matter what beliefs and values the culture embraces?

Have you resolved to be faithful to God and His commands no matter what the culture permits and applauds?

Have you resolved to love others and be gracious to others?

Have you resolved to know the truth of Christ and obey the truth of Christ each day?

Have you resolved to share the Gospel with your Circle – to live your faith with intentionality?

When taken captive, Daniel and his 3 friends were approx. 15-17 years old, and their names contained a form of God’s name. Their names were not simply taken from a list of popular Jewish names in 620 B.C., but there was deep religious conviction in their names.

This was likely an indication of the devout nature of their parents and family. If they came from families who were devout and faithful to God, this is likely the foundation these 4 teenagers were able to stand on when they were taken captive.

DaniEL – God my judge (El = name of God – El Shaddai, El Elyon)

HananIAH – God is gracious ('iah' = Yahweh)

MishaEL – Who is what God is? (El = name of God – El Shaddai, El Elyon)

AzarIAH – Yahweh has helped ('iah' = Yahweh)

However, when Jerusalem was sieged and defeated, and these teenagers were taken captive as POW's, the Babylonian authorities gave them new names – names which contain a form of the false gods of Babylon.

DaniEL – God my judge (El = name of God – El Shaddai, El Elyon)

BELteshazzar – May Bel protect his life (Bel – Babylonian form of Baal)

HananIAH – God is gracious ('iah' = Yahweh)

ShadrACH – Servant of Aku (Aku = moon god)

MishaEL – Who is what God is? (El = name of God – El Shaddai, El Elyon)

MeshACH – Who is what Aku is? (Aku = moon god)

AzarIAH – Yahweh has helped ('iah' = Yahweh)

AbedNEGO – Servant of Nebo (Nebo = Babylonian god of learning – Baal's son? – see Is. 46:1)

This was done in an attempt to integrate the young men from their monotheistic, Jewish faith and culture to the polytheistic faith and culture of the Babylonians.

Changing their name was an attempt to change their identity – to cause the young men to identify not with their God, but with Babylon.

Changing their clothing would have been another way to integrate them into Babylonian culture.

Changing their diet was also used as a way to integrate these young men into Babylonian culture and beliefs.

If you want to be a Christian and live a Christian life in 2015 and beyond, it is going to require more courage than ever before.

When the culture becomes opposed to Christianity and biased against those who claim the name of Christ, there will be countless areas in life that we will be urged to compromise our faith / belief in order to accommodate the culture. We already see some areas where the culture is saying “*Stop – you can’t say these things!*”

The culture wants you to compromise your beliefs.

- Jesus is the only way to heaven – Christianity only true faith
- Bible is exclusively God’s Word
- heterosexual immorality / homosexuality is sin
- Marriage is between 1 (genetic) man, 1 (genetic) woman

Daniel and his friends were facing a dilemma that was not simply a new menu, but the new menu was full of religious compromise.

This may be difficult for us to fully comprehend due to the freedom we have in Christ (see Acts 10), but for the O.T. Jewish person, there were certain animals they could eat – and certain animals they couldn't eat. You have heard of 'Kosher' foods that modern day Jews will eat – and they stay away from 'non-Kosher' foods. In ancient Israel, the commands about food were strictly adhered to, and Daniel and his friends likely faced 2 issues regarding the food they were given.

First (we don't know this for sure – not in the text), they might have been given food that was on the “*do not eat list*” – food that was “*unclean*” according to Mosaic Law.

Second, they were given food that had been sacrificed to the Babylonian gods – which was forbidden in the Jewish Scriptures.

Exodus 34:15 – commands not to make a treaty with those in the Promised Land because they will “invite you and you will eat their sacrifices” (see also the preceding context of 34:12-14)

Compromise was the issue before Daniel and his friends.

Now you could probably make the case that they had no choice – they are POW's after all! Remember,

Jerusalem had been under siege for some time, and when a city was under siege, nothing got in, and nothing got out. The attacking army would many times simply wait until the food and water supply in the city ran out – and then after the people in the city were starving and in a weakened state, they would scale the walls and bust down the city gates – and the people in the city were so drained physically due to the lack of food and water they couldn't put up much of a fight.

These are teenage boys – do you know how a teenage boy eats! They devour food – they inhale their food – they love their food!

Here are 4 teenage boys – boys who come from the royal households in Jerusalem – boys who grew up on the finer things in life – boys who had been living on siege rations, been taken captive, names changed, clothing probably changed, and now a nice, juicy steak is put in front of them!

But their physical appetites didn't drive them – their devotion to God drove them.

What lesson can we take away from this?

In our own life, the culture will bring things to us – and in a figurative way – they will put it on our table right in front of us.

“Go ahead – sex is supposed to be enjoyed! How will you know if you’re compatible if you don’t try things out for a while first?”

“Watching that movie is fine – it’s the hottest movie right now – everyone’s talking about it – it’s a great movie!”

What is the culture putting before you that is tempting you to say ‘no’ to God and His Word?

After some negotiating, Daniel strikes a deal with the guard (1:12) to feed them vegetables and water for 10 days – and after 10 days if they aren’t looking as good as the other POW’s, then they will eat the “royal food and wine”.

In vs. 15 we see the results of the 10 day test:

“At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.”

Vs. 15 - Literal word order in the Hebrew - *Appeared / their countenances / fairer / and fatter / in flesh / than / all / the children / that did eat / choice / of the king.*

Talk about courage!

There would have been dozens...likely hundreds of other Jewish teenagers from the royal families that were taken as POW’s, but we’re not told anything about them. Many scholars and theologians believe the other POW’s gave in to the pressures of the Babylonians and they compromised their faith.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah didn't compromise – they trusted God and remained faithful to the Scriptures.

Will I be able – when the time comes and it is coming – will I be able to stand for the truths I claim each Sunday and each day of my life?

If a gun was put to my head – or if I was threatened with prison or financial hazards – will I be faithful to the truth of Jesus and His Word?

Dr. Martin Luther King said, *“If a person hasn't found something he will die for, he isn't fit to live.”*

Dr. King's words have their origin in what the **Apostle Paul** wrote in **Philippians 1:21** - “...to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

King David wrote in **Psalms 56:4** –

“In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”

In other words...I'm on God's side – what can any human being do to me? If they kill me – I'm in heaven – that's a win for me! If they don't kill me, I will continue to praise God and trust Him! I'm in a 'win – win' situation!

Will you resolve to stand tall for Christ – will you resolve to never compromise your faith?

The courage to stand for Christ when it puts you in danger

Daniel 3 & 6

As our culture continues to move away from God and increases its opposition to Christ and its opposition to Christians, we might feel like the unfortunate deer in the Far Side cartoon that had a very unlucky birthmark!

Read Daniel 3:1-2, 4-6, 8-18

Read Daniel 6:1-10, 13-16

Will you stand when everyone else is bowing?

Will you bow when everyone else is standing?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's refusal to worship an idol – and Daniel's refusal to stop worshipping God – shows great courage in the face of great danger.

They were determined to obey God – to remain faithful even though everyone else around them was flowing along with the current.

I love what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said when the king was questioning them.

3:16-17

“...we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

They didn't allow the pressures around them to dictate what they had resolved to do. (1:8)

In **Daniel 6:10**, Daniel's response to King Darius' decree was just as bold and courageous:

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

Nothing changed regarding his obedience and his devotion to God.

Worshiping the one true God was now illegal, but Daniel continued to worship the one true God!

He was ‘resolved’ to worship God no matter what the price was.

People often try and prove their devotion by saying “I’ll die for my faith.” However, I believe that’s the easy dilemma. The dilemma that’s much more difficult is: Will you live your faith and be obedient – even when it’s dangerous to do so.

The danger may not be death – it may be:

- A loss of a job / promotion
- A loss of a relationship
- A loss of friends / social
- A loss of respect in the eyes of others
- Labeled as hateful or ignorant

Matthew 10:28, 32-33, 39

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell...Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in

heaven... Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

One writer says, “*Courage is the ability to master our fears in the face of danger.*”

Plato defined courage as knowing what to fear and what not to fear. A paraphrase of what he said about courage: “*Be afraid of being either unjust, or uncaring, or ungodly – rather than to be afraid of the ridicule, abuse, or discrimination that often comes to people who devote their lives to justice, love and Godliness.*”

(Source: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/why-christians-need-to-have-great-courage-living-today-in-the-world-108509/>)

Hebrews 12:4

“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

We have enjoyed a time of great comfort and peace in our country / culture for many years – and we have learned to love our comfort and we often pray for:

Protection

Safety

Comfort

Blessing

Protection **OR** power

Safety **OR** success

Comfort **OR** courage

Blessing **OR** boldness

Philip Brooks, 1835-1893, pastor, author, lyricists of "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

"Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks."

"Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering it, will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings."

Apply it...

Will you accept the challenge to live The Courageous Life?
When the culture is moving away from Christ, will you have the courage to move toward Him and embrace Him?

Have the courage to put your faith in Christ.

Admit your sins / sinner

Believe in Jesus as your Savior

Commit each day to Christ

Have the courage to be counter-culture

Have the courage to believe what the Bible says, not what the culture preaches.

Have the courage and resolve to stand for Christ – alone if necessary!

Close in prayer