

[1] STAND: when things change ~ Daniel 1

What do you do when it feels like everything in your world is falling apart? An earthquake shakes the foundation of our security, a tornado blows away a lifetime of treasures, an assassin's bullet changes national history, a drunk driver claims an innocent victim, a divorce shatters a home, terrorism frightens a nation, a diagnosis leaves you reeling. International and personal tragedies make our world seem a fearful place, overflowing with evil and seemingly out of control. Sometimes it causes us to think God is powerless, absent or maybe even non-existing.

Twenty-five centuries ago, Daniel could have despaired. He and thousands of his countrymen had been deported to a foreign land after their country, Judah, was conquered by the Babylonians. But this courageous young man held fast to his faith in God and was able to STAND despite the circumstances.

The story of Daniel in the Bible begins when Daniel was just a teen. The prophets had been warning the people of Judah for hundreds of years that they needed to get their act together or they would lose the Promised Land. Their problem was idolatry, immorality and injustice.

But they didn't listen to the prophets and in about 600 BC, Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar invaded and took over. They destroyed beloved Jerusalem, pillaged the temple and took about 25% of the population as prisoners of war keeping them for 70 years. It was a disaster and God's chosen ones lost everything because they were not paying attention or being obedient to God. Daniel was one of these Israelites who was taken into captivity.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a savvy guy – he took the brightest and the best young people and put them into a 3 year indoctrination program in order to become his servants. They were systematically reprogrammed. Away from home and family, they were forced to learn a new language and a new culture. They were most likely made Eunuchs in order to be in the king's service – this involved the removing of male organs and the loss of any possible future family. Their names were changed from their Hebrew

names that identified them as follows of God to Babylonian names that referred to pagan gods and they were assigned a new diet that violated what we would call their Kosher food laws. They lost everything – their home, family, religion, customs, language – their whole identity.

Put yourself in their shoes. If you were a teenager and all this happened, how would you respond?

[2] In a message I was listening to this week, the speaker suggests there are 4 general ways in which Christians respond to problems.

Passive assimilation – “oh, there’s nothing we can do,” the momentum of the culture is so strong, we don’t want to be marginalized any more than we already are. We’re just moved along with the current and do little or nothing at all.

Belligerent opposition – get angry, confrontational against any or anything that seems to be against the word of God and soon find yourself an angry person and turning people away.

Avoidant isolation – want to keep the values of the word of God but in isolation from the rest of the world and avoid being a part of the culture in which we live.

Gospel engagement – recognize that Christians are actually a kingdom inside a kingdom. They seek to live faithfully and in obedience to their God, while engaging with the culture in which they live. This is the approach Daniel takes.

The reality of life in this broken world is that we will have problems, we will face changes we don’t like, our world does get turned upside down at times. So how do we stand when that happens? That’s what we are going to cover in this whole series as we look at the example of Daniel and his friends.

[3] In our reading today, we see in verse 8, Daniel “*resolved not to defile himself*”. Defile is a strong word and probably not one you use everyday. Imagine a glass of drinking water and adding in sewage - it is no longer pure, it is defiled. Daniel resolved, determined, made up his mind, decided he was going to remain

faithful to God by being obedient to the food laws God had given the Jewish people. So, he made a request that he would be able to eat only vegetables –he didn't cause a rebellion or become defiant, he asked for permission and when the chief official was reluctant because he feared the king, Daniel suggested a trial to see if worked or not. He could have just gone along with things thinking oh, there's nothing I can do about this, but Daniel didn't do that. He was aware that God was always with him and Daniel would remain faithful to God, no matter what.

You know, if you want to be a world-class soccer player, you have to make up your mind, resolve to be committed to practice. If you want to be a great physician, you must make up your mind to study and go through extra years of school to become a doctor. If you want to stand when everything in your life falls apart, you must resolve to trust in God no matter what. It doesn't work to take God for granted when everything is going good and then wonder what happened to God when the going gets tough. We need to resolve to trust God, to seek the Lord, and to do what he says.

[4] I'm reminded of Eric Liddell who was a competitor in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Liddell was a celebrated rugby player and runner. His best event was the 100 meter dash. But many people were shocked when Liddell announced that he would not participate in his best event, the 100 meter dash because the trials for the race were scheduled for a Sunday!

Liddell was a devout Christian preparing for the mission field and he had always believed Sunday to be "the Lord's Day" set aside for worship and reflection. Running in the Olympic trials on a Sunday would violate what Liddell believed – so he chose not to run in the event at all.

Some people were angry with Eric Liddell for choosing to stand by his convictions. But they were just as pleasantly surprised by his success at the Paris Olympics. Liddell won both the bronze medal in the 200 meter dash and the gold medal in the 400 meter dash. Liddell's stand for his beliefs and the impact of his faith as a young man are shown in the motion picture Chariots of Fire.

Liddell and Daniel both faced difficult decisions. They risked being ridiculed. They risked the status and favor they'd earned. But they both knew that by choosing to obey God, they would gain even more strength than if they gave in to things that could dishonor God. (Dare to Be A Daniel Leader's Guide © 2006 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, pg. 7-8)

So, how can we be like Eric Liddell and Daniel? How can we stand when everything around us is changing? 3 things you can do.

[5] First, **we trust God's sovereignty**, that God is in control, that our God has a plan. In verse 2, "*the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand.*" Notice who is at work? God. God is the one who delivers the king of Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish his purposes.

[6] Reminds me of a promise from Ro 8:28 "*God works all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose*". While we may not be able to see how it is all working out, God is working in all things – good and bad. We are never outside God's grace, care or provision. God is constantly working all things together for us because God has a plan for all things.

[7] You may know the familiar verse from Jeremiah 29:11 "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*"

We can be at peace, trust and have courage, not because the circumstances are good, but because God is in control. And because God is in control, you have the upper hand. God loves you and God provides for you.

[8] Second, **we trust in God's faithfulness**. We trust that God's promises are faithful and true. That God keeps his promise, that God does what he says and that God is always with us.

Think about how Daniel, Shadrach, Messhach and Abednego respond. With all the things they could have done, what they do is peaceful and gentle – the only thing they request is that instead of

the king's food, that they could eat only their vegetables because they want to be faithful to their God.

God loves our obedience. Now how in the world could they be so gracious, so peaceful, so gentle in the midst of all of this? You see they trusted God. They believed their God would do what he said, that their God would be with them and would honor their obedience. And God does.

What about you and me? Do you know and trust the promises of our God? One of the reasons I urge you over and over again to be in God's Word is not for literacy but because we need to hear God's promises over and over and over again so we can trust them.

Life changes, stuff happens, we get turned upside down on a regular basis, things are changing at such a rapid pace but the one thing we can count on, that we can build our hope on are the promises of God, of God's love for us in Christ Jesus, of God's presence with us always. Just hearing it on Sunday morning is not enough. We need to be in God's word every day so those promises become part of who we are so we can trust like Daniel trusted.

I've been with a number of people who are going through life changing circumstances and the one thing I see over and over again is that those who have built their lives on the promises of God's word have an extraordinary peace about them. They know that whatever might change, God's promises do not. I urge you to be in the Word so you can have the same confidence as Daniel and his friends.

[9] Third, **we can trust in God's insight.** It's interesting Daniel and his friends are trusting in God and God honors their obedience. Verse 17 says *"to these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."* God gave them an extraordinary insight and perception.

Friends, we have a God who gives us this same extraordinary insight and perception and the place where it is given is in the very

word of God. God's Word, the Bible, gives us clarity in the midst of a world that sometimes does not make sense at all.

You know when things change, it can be difficult, but there is one change that we treasure. It is the change that happens in our hearts and lives by the power of God's word.

[10] Romans 8:29 *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"* God has planned that you and I would be conformed into the likeness of his son. That word conformed comes from the Greek word *symmorphus* and means is to be transformed.

How many of you remember the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers? These were ordinary kids who experienced this power that changed them into superheroes. From what I remember of the tv show in the 90's, it was quite dramatic, one of the kids would say "it's morphing time" and then "kapow!", they were changed into these superheroes. Do you realize the change that happens in our lives is every bit dramatic?

You and I are trapped in our sin, trying to be gods of our own little universe, people who are trapped in darkness, who are far away from God, serving our own interest and desires, self-centered. And literally, God comes into our lives and through the power of his spirit and by the blood of his son, Jesus Christ, he works this transformation, this *symmorphus*. We come out of the darkness and into the light, we have a whole new perspective. We are reconnected and restored to our God. We're living this life of trust and faith where we are not pretending to be gods of our own universe but trusting in the real God who is working within us daily transforming us to be more and more like his Son. Where instead of living for ourselves, we have a global perspective and we stand for what we believe, we love the people around us and we make a difference in eternity.

[11] Dear friends, in a world that is constantly changing, sometimes in ways we don't like, we trust in God's sovereignty, God's faithfulness and God's insight so that we can Stand.