

We live in strange times. On October 2nd, Brandon Brown, a rookie NASCAR driver, won the Infinity Speedway Series 300 race in Alabama, interviewer Kelli Stavast had the crowd uttering a chant that was clearly heard by viewers on TV, and it should not be repeated. But the chant was swearing at Joe Biden, president of the US. And as the interview went on and the crowd could be clearly heard in the background of the interview, Stavast was wearing a headset and may not have heard the chant clearly, but she made a comment about the crowd chanting, “Let’s go Brandon!” when it was clearly not that at all.

This chant became a meme and it has become a slam against the Mainstream Media for thinking that the people who watch the news are that gullible. And when people stop believing the truth, they don’t believe nothing; as GK Chesterton said, they believe anything.

We clearly live in post-Christian times. In days gone by, to tolerate someone in the West was to tolerate someone from a different Christian denomination. Other religions existed, but they were “over there.” But with increased transportation and communication, “over there” has become “next door.” The Christian ideals and principles that drove much of the West are no longer. And some have suggested that if things do not change, there will be a total collapse of Christianity in the West by 2070.

Now that would be despairing to us if we didn’t have the books of Ezekiel and Daniel. Last week we saw that there is hope for exiles like us in the book of Ezekiel, but it requires us to live in a different way. Today, Daniel helps us to think about how we can live faithfully in a faithful world. So what does faithfulness look like today?

Determine to be Devoted to the Lord

Daniel was one a young man when he was taken off to exile. In 605 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar took the first wave of deportees to Babylon, Daniel and the young men who came with him were brought with the officials of Jerusalem and were given prominent positions within his court. The goal of Nebuchadnezzar was to assimilate captives so that they would become devotees to his goals and ideals.

But from the beginning, Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king’s food (1:8). He would not be assimilated into the culture and accept the ways of the Babylonian education system. He would remain faithful to the Lord.

This decision would prove to be the most important decision for Daniel. He would draw a line in the sand from his earliest days. He would not eat the meat from the king’s table because it may not be meat that was clean. He would eat vegetables.

But faithfulness begins with drawing a line in the sand somewhere. It begins with making a decision, “I have decided to follow Yahweh; no turning back, no turning back.” This was Daniel’s

line. And each one of us has to determine, “ Will I be devoted to the Lord? Will I live for him?” Determine this first and foremost.

Seek the Lord’s Good for the City

Daniel knows the Scriptures. He learns the lessons of Jeremiah, and he takes them to heart. He must have known about the ministry of Jeremiah earlier on, because as an older man he prays to the Lord in light of Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the release after 70 years of captivity (9:1-3). Daniel has had success in Babylon. He was trained for service in the Babylonian government, and when the Babylonians are taken over by the Persians, Daniel remains a leader. Jeremiah’s influence on Daniel seems to have been great.

Early on, Jeremiah had written a letter to the exiles. READ Jeremiah 29:4-10. If anyone exemplifies Jeremiah’s instructions, it is Daniel. Daniel consistently is working for the good of the city of Babylon. He settles down.

But seeking the good of the city of Babylon doesn’t mean that Daniel disobeys God and going along with everything the Babylonians tell him to do. When obeying the king of Babylon or Persia means disobeying the King of the Universe, Daniel disobeys the earthly authorities. Every time he obeys God rather than man, he suffers for a time, the Lord saves him, and he is given a high position, and the unbelievers confess that the Lord is the One True God. This sequence happens over and over in the early chapters of the book. Obey. Suffer. Salvation. God vindicated.

When Daniel and his three friends refuse to be defiled by the king’s food, they do not become weak, but stronger than the others (1:14-15); they end up being the best in the class (1:19-20). When Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and doesn’t share it with anyone to test and see who knows what it truly is, only Daniel can interpret it, and he is made ruler over the province and Nebuchadnezzar confesses that the Lord is God of gods and Lord of lords (2:47-48).

When Daniel’s three friends are told to bow down and worship the statue, they refuse and are thrown into the fiery furnace. The Lord saves them, and Nebuchadnezzar praises the God of these men and decrees that if anyone speaks evil of their God, that they be punished. The result is that these three men are rewarded with high positions of governance (3:28-30).

Later, as an old man, when Daniel receives word that the king of the Medes who rules has decreed that people only pray to him, Daniel still continues to pray to the Lord. He is thrown into a lion’s den, but he is saved. And Darius praises God (6:26-27).

Daniel is an example of what Jeremiah wanted all of Israel to do: Go into exile peacefully, accept the discipline of the Lord, and be a faithful witness to the watching world. If they would

seek the good of the city by following the Lord, working hard, they will be saved from their enemies and people will marvel at the power of the Lord, the God of all of the earth.

These stories are here not so that we would consider Daniel a hero. These accounts tell us that God is faithful to his promises. If God can deliver Israel out of the iron furnace of Egypt (Deut. 4:20), then he can deliver his people out of the fiery trials without having a hair of their head burned (Dan. 3:27).

Seeking the Lord's good for the city means that we cannot be antagonistic, but winsome. It means being respectful and truth-telling. Consider how Daniel interprets the king's dream in chapter 2: he doesn't come at the king with disrespect; he comes and speaks truth about God giving power but also speaking winsomely (2:37-38). He acknowledges Nebuchadnezzar's great power, but in a way that shows that there is a greater power.

Being a Christian in Babylon means being a faithful witness by working hard, determining to follow the Lord, and seeking the Lord's good for the city. It means being winsome and wise, kind and compassionate, honest and honourable. It means being prepared to suffer for what is right, believing that the Lord can do more through our obedience and suffering than by being antagonistic and harsh.

Christian, we need to learn to be winsome now in our workplaces. We need to learn our Bibles better so we can become stronger in the word and witness of the Lord. Knowing our Bibles won't make us less effective but more. It will make us wise unto salvation. It will cause us to seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare, we too, will find our welfare.

See the Glory of Christ

The message of the stories of Daniel is the same message as the visions of Daniel. Often people love the stories in the first half but struggle with the apocalyptic visions in the second half. But the visions of Daniel are just like those of Jeremiah's – Israel will not be its own nation, but it will be under world empires. The visions that Daniel has in chs. 2 and 7 are similar – there will be nations that rise, and there will be nations that fall. Israel will live under their dominion for a long time. In Daniel 2, one kingdom gives way to another: Babylon will give way to Persia, who will give way to Greece, who will give way to Rome. And in chapter 7, the four beasts are the same nations of Daniel 2.

But in Daniel 7, their power will be taken away. READ Daniel 7:13-14. Suddenly, one comes like a son of man on the clouds of heaven. Here comes one who gives the kingdom to his holy ones (7:22, 27). And for Daniel, this vision was to give him and his people patience during exile. Someday the Lord will bring his own kingdom and his King will rule the nations. But for now, Daniel lives in exile and is called to live faithfully.



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

Kingdoms rise, kingdoms fall. But the Lord endures. The Lord is faithful. And one day, the Lord sent the Son of Man to this earth. Jesus, the Son of Man, lived and walked among us. He lived in a land of exile with people who didn't walk faithfully before God. But he did. He walked faithfully. He was fully obedient. And that obedience led him to Caiaphas, the High Priest. And when Jesus stood before him, he said,

“But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt 26:64).
And the end result for him was death on a cross.

But God raised him from the dead, giving him the name above all names (Phil. 2:9-11). And through him he has given him a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28). This kingdom is coming with the Son of Man, who ascended into the clouds and will come back the same way as he left (Acts 1:11). And when he returns, we are told that he will come and bring this kingdom (Rev. 14:14).

And one day, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever (Rev. 11:15ff). He will come back on the clouds, and kings and kingdoms will bow down. He will reign.

So we can endure this short exile. For this exile is the discipline of the Lord. But these trials are a light and momentary affliction that are producing for us an eternal weight of glory (Rom. 8:17). We can be faithful now. Why? Because there is so much more coming. And we will reign with him forever!