

Daniel 1:9-21 “When We Honor the One Who Deserves Honor”<sup>\*\*1</sup>

Main Idea: In Daniel 1:9-21, we find out that something amazing happens when we honor the One who deserves honor. After Daniel and his three friends chose to honor the Lord, the Lord sent two blessings that resulted in further honor to His name.

- I. We see the Lord’s provision (9-16).
  - A. He provided for their interpersonal needs (9-14).
    - 1. He gave them favor with the supervisor (9-10).
    - 2. He gave them wisdom for a plan (11-14).
  - B. He provided for their physical needs (15-16).
    - 1. They passed the test.
    - 2. They brought glory to God.
- II. We see the Lord’s promotion (17-21).
  - A. He blessed them in their training (17).
  - B. He blessed them in their testing (18-20).
  - C. He blessed Daniel in his influence (21).

Implications: Three lessons from Daniel 1...

- 1. We learn about Christ.
- 2. We learn about ourselves.
- 3. We learn about what matters most.

Something amazing happens when we honor the One who deserves honor. We’ll see what that is as we read and then hear a message from today’s text.

*Scripture Reading: Daniel 1:8-21*

I love the story of Eric Liddell. It’s always worth repeating.

Eric Liddell was a man who honored God, an athlete who used his speed to bring honor to the One from whom that speed came.

Liddell's most famous decision came at the Paris Olympics in 1924. Representing the nation of Scotland, he had a solid chance to win the 100-meter race. Yet he refused to compete. Why? Because the event was held on a Sunday, and to Liddell, the idea of participating in sports on the Lord's Day was a violation of conscience..

His decision led the press and a majority of public opinion to criticize him harshly. Some said he was unpatriotic, since his decision kept Scotland from a chance at glory. Others attacked him for being legalistic, saying he took the letter of the law to an absurd extreme. Yet no matter what you think of Liddell's decision, he was no legalist.

Liddell offered this challenge to all Christians: "Ask yourself: If I know something to be true, am I prepared to follow it, even though it is contrary to what I want, [or] to what I have previously held to be true? Will I follow it if it means being laughed at, if it means personal financial loss, or some kind of hardship?"<sup>2</sup>

By the way, Liddell didn't write those words in Paris. He wrote them fifteen years after the Olympics while serving God as a missionary in China. In fact, during World War II, Liddell chose to stay in China in service to Christ, until he was captured by the Japanese and placed in an internment camp, where he died of a brain tumor on February 21, 1945.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

<sup>2</sup> taken from *More Than Conquerors*, p. 223

When Eric Liddell refused to run the 100, he did so for one reason. He obeyed what he believed his Master asked of him, no matter what his peers thought.

Though he removed himself from the 100, Liddell was given the opportunity to compete in the 400-meter race. Just before that event, one of the men who assisted Eric's trainer slipped him a note that read: "In the old book it says, 'He that honours me, I will honour.' Wishing you the best of success always."

The note turned out to be prophetic, and providentially Liddell won the gold medal for the 400 instead of the 100. In truth, not only did he win the 400, which he was not expected to, but he set the world record for it.

He that honors me, I will honor.

What happens when we choose to honor God in our lives? The world may ridicule us, yes, but God gives us an amazing promise in 1 Samuel 2:30, "Them who honor Me, I will honor." Sometimes by giving the platform of a gold medal. And sometimes by giving the platform of a brain tumor in a prison camp.

God honors those who honor Him by giving them yet other opportunities to honor Him. We've been seeing that as a church recently with Matt, Abby, and little Ivy, as well as with Elmer and Judy, and Joey and Elaine and their little one.

Those who honor Me I will honor, with further opportunities to honor Me.

This morning, it will be our privilege to see this promise fulfilled in the true account of Daniel, and his three teenage friends.

Last week we began a new series in the Old Testament book of Daniel, in a study entitled "When the Sovereign Lord Doesn't Seem Sovereign." We watched with fascination as God allowed four young Hebrew teens to encounter a challenging test.

They faced the *unfamiliar*--a new country (Babylon, 800 miles away from their homeland), a new language, a new leader, and a new culture. They also faced the *ungodly*--they were given pagan names (7), and thus tempted to lose their identity as the people of God. A more subtle temptation, however, had to do with eating from the king's menu. It was there that Daniel drew the line, and chose the *unpopular*.

Verse 8 informs us, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." The issue for Daniel was his allegiance, "I will not compromise my devotion to the LORD God, not for the king, not for anyone."

What happened to Daniel when he made this unpopular decision to honor God? The answer is that God honored him, as well as his three friends who made the same commitment. In Daniel 1:9-21, the Lord sent two blessings into their lives that resulted in further honor to His name.

So why does what happened to these four young men 2500 years ago matter to us? First, because 1 Corinthians 10:11 says these things in the OT happened as examples for us. There's a vital lesson here for us. But secondly and more importantly, this points us to the Lord Jesus Christ, for all the OT points us to Him, as we'll see.

### I. We see the Lord's provision (9-16).

Daniel's decision to not eat the king's food created a dilemma. What WOULD he eat? God gave Daniel a plan, as we'll see. In fact, the words "God gave" are the key to understanding the significance of Daniel 1 (see v 2, v 9, v 17). You see, this really isn't a

story about four Hebrew teens as much as it is a story about the God of those teens. We see God at work, God behind the scenes, controlling, leading, providing.

Don't miss the provision of God in what happens next. He provided for two needs.

**A. He provided for their interpersonal needs (9-14).**

Verse 9 informs us, "Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel." What a key statement. It tells us that Daniel had a great testimony with his supervisor. It tells us why Daniel was well-favored with his boss, because God was at work. In fact, God provided for the interpersonal needs of the Hebrew teens in two ways.

*1. He gave them favor with the supervisor (9-10).*

Did you realize that God has access to the heart of your boss? Now don't misunderstand. God doesn't use that access to make life easy for you. His aim is to bring honor to Himself through your relationship with your boss. That's what he did in Daniel's life.

Notice again, verse 9, "Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel." Verse 10 tells us what happened, "But the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'"

The official was a rather pragmatic fellow. He liked Daniel all right, but he was found of his own neck too. The essence of his fear was this: "Daniel, if you don't eat, you'll look peaked. And if you look peaked, I'll lose my head!" In other words, "Listen, as a person I like you, but this menu-monitoring is pushing things too far. You could get yourself in a whole lot of trouble, not to mention *me*."

Have you ever seen God change a boss's heart? I remember when I was working on Kibbutz Ma'agan in the date plantation, along with ten other Americans who were in Israel for a semester. We had an Israeli supervisor named Ram who, for some unknown reason, didn't like us, and made no bones about it. We decided to keep working hard, to treat Ram with kindness, and to pray. We prayed for that man. And God changed him. By the time we left Israel, Ram was one of our most devoted allies.

Beloved, God is sovereign. He is at work behind the scenes, orchestrating His plan. In Daniel's life, He raised up king Nebuchadnezzar, took down king Jehoiakim, and even touched the heart of a pagan boss. He's doing the same in our lives too.

The question is, are we cooperating with Him? Daniel chose to honor Him, so He honored Daniel by providing for him.

God provided for the interpersonal needs of Daniel and his friends. He gave them favor with their supervisor. He also provided in a second way.

*2. He gave them wisdom for a plan (11-14).*

Let's read again the account of the plan in verses 11-14, "Daniel then said to the guard<sup>3</sup> whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup>"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup>Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat

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<sup>3</sup> The AV says "Then said Daniel to Melzar [Melzar could either be a name or a title; it means "guardian"]."

the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.”<sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.”

Where did this plan come from? God gave Daniel wisdom for it. Daniel's suggestion was simple. Give us a ten day test. Feed us only "pulse," says the AV (a vegetable or grain food) and water, while the rest of the training class has the king's meat and wine. Then compare us with them.

This of course was a step of faith on Daniel's part, and his three friends. Daniel wasn't a dietitian, nor should we take his actions as an endorsement for being vegetarians (the Old Testament law endorsed the eating of meat; see also Col 2:16, 20-23). Daniel wasn't saying that a non-meat, non-wine diet would produce a better complexion. Rather, his aim was to honor God, and since he believed that eating the king's food would be a violation of God's Word which would dishonor God, Daniel took a step of faith, and trusted God to intervene.

Did he know for sure God would? I suppose Daniel's thoughts were the same as his three friends as described in chapter 3. When faced with the choice of bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image or being burned in the fiery furnace, remember what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said? "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will...but if not, be it known that we will not serve thy gods... (3:17-18)."

Peter follows this pattern in his counsel to suffering Christians in 1 Peter 4:19, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

The thing that strikes me the most about Daniel's plan is the way Daniel talked to his pagan supervisor. He showed respect and courtesy (In the AV, "I beseech thee," v 12; NIV says "Please"). He didn't get nasty and spit out, "My religious rights have been violated! The king has no right to make me eat his food!"

Oh yes he does. He is the king. Daniel could choose not to eat, but even then he exhibited both conviction and courtesy. In fact, he was willing to take the civil consequences that might have come.

Daniel here provides us with a great model. He shows us how to live for God in a pagan context.

So how should we respond when our government officials make decisions with which we disagree? Or how about when a company official makes a policy that violates our Christian beliefs? Like Daniel, we should exhibit conviction, yes, but grace as well.

Frankly, some Christians in our day are not suffering because of Christ, as they claim, but because they are rude and disrespectful.

For instance, the student that says, "I got an 'F' on my paper because my teacher's an atheist and I'm a Christian." Maybe that's the reason. Maybe not. Maybe the reason is he failed to follow the instructions on the assignment. Maybe his beliefs didn't irritate the teacher nearly as much as his haughty attitude.

You see, Daniel was pleasant and respectful, even when bad things happened to him. He honored God, and God blessed him in his interpersonal relationships.

But the Lord also provided in a second way.

**B. He provided for their physical needs (15-16).**

What was the outcome of Daniel's proposed ten-day test? There were two results.

### *1. They passed the test.*

Notice verses 15-16, "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. <sup>16</sup> So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead."

The four Hebrews passed the test. Why? Because God provided for their physical needs. God blessed their choice nutritionally.

But the second result was even more noteworthy. Not only did they pass the test...

### *2. They brought glory to God.*

Imagine the impact this event had on the Babylonian supervisor. Can't you hear the report he gave to the chief official? "Boss, there's something different about those four Hebrew teens. Without question, their God is real to them. But it's not just in their heads. Their God is *real*. I mean, He's really involved in their lives, too."

So let's ponder a question. Is God real to you? Can others see that the Lord is real to you? A lot of people say they believe in God, but are we showing His reality by the way we live?

How can you tell? You can't on Sunday alone. You can on Tuesday morning at the staff meeting when the off-colored joke is told. You can on Saturday evening when your buddy from school calls to let you know his parents are gone and invites you to the big party at his house.

Brothers and sisters, like Daniel, we face tests every day. Every test is an opportunity to demonstrate whether God is real in our lives or not.

When I was battling migraine pain once again this past Tuesday, I faced a test, and didn't do so well, honestly, as I questioned God's plan for me. I'm so thankful for the cross, where Jesus took my sinful questioning and paid its penalty.

Dear friends, the One Who gave His Son for us deserves more than our lip service on Sunday. Jesus didn't shed His blood to free us to do our own thing. He paid our debt so we could choose to trust and serve and honor Him.

"For from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever (Romans 11:36)."

And here's the stunning beauty of it all. When by God's grace we honor God, He honors us. He gives us further opportunities to honor Him.

In the case of Daniel and his friends, He blessed them in two ways. First, He gave them a provision. Second...

## II. We see the Lord's promotion (17-21).

God promoted the four young men who chose to honor Him in three ways.

### **A. He blessed them in their training (17).**

Verse 17 makes it clear that the hand of God was upon them, "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."<sup>4</sup>

God gave it to them. God blessed them with knowledge and understanding in their training. That doesn't mean they didn't study. It does reveal the source of their abilities.

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<sup>4</sup> AV, "As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

Young people, never forget Who gave you your abilities. If you've got a great mind, remember Who gave it to you. If you have a special talent, remember its source. Work hard and use what God has given you for His honor. You are a steward.

“God made me fast,” said Eric Liddell. So he ran, for the glory of God. How has God made you?

I appreciate so much Matt Fawcett’s post after he learned his precious daughter Ivy has a heart abnormality. He wrote this from the Children’s Hospital ICU.

I am overwhelmed. God is so good. Every step of the way He has known since before time began. Before a breathe was in my lungs He knew my heart. He knows Ivy’s heart. He made it. He designed it that way on purpose. God knew we needed this.

Someone mentioned that this must be a hard way to start life. I’d have to respectfully disagree. Ivy has been brought before God, in prayer, from around the world so many times throughout the past two days. What a way to start life dedicated to the God who created you. <sup>5</sup>

So again, I ask. How has God made you? He has a plan for everything He gives us. Physical features. Talents. Home situations. Including the pleasant and the painful. He intends for every piece of our story to bring glory to Himself.

For from Him, through Him, and to Him, are all things.

God gave Daniel special abilities in the interpretation of dreams. We'll see Daniel use that gift for God several times in future episodes in this book.

Are you using what He has given you for His honor? You say, “I’ve fallen short.” We all have. That’s why we need more than just abilities and experiences. We need His saving grace. Only by the cross can our other gifts from God be used for the glory of God. Without Christ we waste everything else God has given us, foolishly thinking that this life is all about us. Christ took our sin and conquered our foe of death so we can now, by His grace, recognize all things as from Him, through Him, and to Him.

There’s a second blessing.

### **B. He blessed them in their testing (18-20).**

We saw the ten day test in verses 9-16. In case you're still wondering if it was a fluke, let's take a look at the outcome of the three year test recorded in verses 18-20. Notice verse 18, “At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.”

So the three year training period climaxed with an oral exam before the most powerful man in the world at the time. And what did the king discover about our four friends? Two things.

#### *1. They excelled in ability.*

Verse 19 informs us, “The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah [their Hebrew names]; so they entered the king’s service.”

In fact, to say they excelled is an understatement, according to verse 20, “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.”

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Fawcett, “Fatherhood Day #3.”

The phrase "ten times better," literally "ten hands," at first glance may sound extravagant hyperbole, but the point is simply, these four young men were outstandingly different.<sup>6</sup> In a class by themselves.

And why did they excel? It was no mere coincidence, but a dramatic tribute to the influence of the living God.

It's sad in our day that so many are turning to that which is "ten times" less significant. Even a pagan like Nebuchadnezzar recognized that godly wisdom far exceeds the wisdom of astrologers and magicians. Yet in America today, it is estimated that 50 to 60 million people are involved in some form of the occult. A 2005 Gallup Poll revealed that 25 % of Americans believe that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives.<sup>7</sup> Another estimate says that over 50 million Americans read their horoscopes every morning to see what they should do that day.<sup>8</sup>

Please consider this. 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Daniel and his friends excelled in ability and because of it, excelled in another area.

## 2. *They excelled in service.*

The last phrase of verse 19 states, in the AV, "Therefore they stood before the king." The NIV says, "So they entered the king's service." In other words, God promoted them. They honored God, and God honored them, in their training and in their testing.

The chapter ends with a rather mundane sounding verse 21, "And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." Don't gloss over that little piece of narrative, for herein we see the third of God's promotions.

### **C. He blessed Daniel in his influence (21).**

*And Daniel remained.* Just ponder that for a moment. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Daniel's career in public service lasted until the first year of King Cyrus. He outlasted the Babylonian empire, and the Median empire, and outlived two or three royal dynasties. The first year of Cyrus would have been around 537 B.C. Estimating that Daniel was taken into captivity in the year 601 B.C., we can surmise that Daniel served God for some 65 years.

And Daniel remained. There's something to be said for perseverance.

God's promise is true, "Them that honor me, I will honor." God takes care of those who put Him first. I've seen God work out this principle in my own life.

I played basketball when I was in High School. In fact, I was devoted to being the best point-guard I could be. I was also, by the grace of God, devoted to Christ. Eventually, there came a time when those two devotions came in conflict. The coach scheduled a late practice on Wednesday evening, the same night our church youth group met. Coach K was not a Christian, but he knew I was. It's amazing to think that he actually worked with me so I wouldn't have to miss the youth group. I learned that when I put God first, He takes care of me. I wish I could say I always practiced that truth.

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<sup>6</sup> Walvoord, 42

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.astrology.co.uk/news/astrostats.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Carlson, 233

I remember the conflict I faced in High School English class when the teacher assigned the reading of a classic book. I started to read it, and discovered it was full of profanity. I didn't want to fill my mind with words I knew displeased my Savior. When I shared my struggle with my teacher, I was amazed at his response. He allowed me to read another book, and in fact, that teacher became a real support to me throughout the rest of High School. Them that honor me, I will honor.

About thirty years ago, a friend of mine became a pastor of a church. When the church started to grow, a few cliquish members came to him and said, "We don't want the church to grow, and we want you to stop doing evangelism." He chose to honor God, and did it anyway. As a result the antagonists created a stir and voted him out. Even in the turmoil God was at work. The spiritually minded majority came to their ousted pastor, and together they began a new work for God. And God blessed. The last I heard there is a growing, vibrant church committed to doing things God's way in that community.

God honors those who choose to honor Him.

### Implications: Three lessons from Daniel 1...

#### *1. We learn about Christ.*

Jesus said in John 6:39, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me." According to Jesus, what we call the Old Testament testifies about Him. That includes Daniel 1.

So what do we learn about Christ from today's text? First, we learn about why we need Christ. Sin. There were more than four Hebrew boys taken into captivity, but only these four resolved not to defile themselves. And they did so only by divine grace.

We are all sinners. We do not honor God as He deserves. That's why we need a Savior.

Secondly, in this text we see what God did to provide a Savior. Five centuries before Christ He sent His wayward chosen nation, Israel, into captivity because of their sin. But He didn't throw in the towel on His purpose for this nation. He preserved a remnant of God-fearers—we've seen four of them today—so that through them He would preserve this nation. Ultimately, 500 years later He would send into the world His own Son, as a member of this nation. And His Son would live a perfect life, and then offer His life as a ransom payment on a cross for those from every nation who would repent of their sin and believe on Him. And He conquered death to provide for His people eternal life.

And what does it look like when we embrace the Christ? It looks like what we have just seen. True believers in Christ want to do what these four Hebrew believers did, live for the honor of the One who deserves honor.

#### *2. We learn about ourselves.*

Look again at Daniel and his friends. *It is possible to have a godly testimony in an ungodly world.* The next time you wonder, "Is it worth it to say no to sin, to break step with the crowd?", remember Daniel. It is worth it! His quiet decision to not defile himself resulted in nations being influenced for God!

If you know Christ, you too can do what Daniel did. You have the potential to live a godly life. You can have a godly testimony in this ungodly world. How? Make a decision that you are going to honor God, every day, in every situation.

And know this. God takes care of those who put Him first. Hymnwriter Philip Bliss summed it up well:

*Standing by a purpose true, heeding God's command;*

*Honor them, the faithful few, all hail to Daniel's band!*

*Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone.*

*Dare to have a purpose firm. Dare to make it known!*

3. *We learn about what matters most.*

There is One who deserves honor, and that's what matters most in life, giving Him honor. "Hallowed be thy name," Jesus taught us to pray. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

So let's pray that. And do that this week. Let's give honor to the One who deserves honor. And watch what He does to maximize even more honor to His name!