

Eric Liddell was a man who honored God. He was an athlete, or stated more correctly, a *Christian* 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 abhorrent.

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?" (taken from More Than Conquerors, p. 223)

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.

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, true, but what else? God gives us an amazing promise in 1 Samuel 2:30, "Them who honor Me, I will honor." God honors those who honor Him.

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 "Character in a World of Compromise." 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

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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.

V 8 informs us, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's food, nor with the wine which he drank." 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 the unpopular decision to honor God? The answer is that God honored him.

Proposition: In Daniel 1:9-21, we learn that God honors those who honor Him. After Daniel chose to honor God, God blessed Daniel in two ways.

- I. We see the provision of God (9-16).
 - A. He provided for their inter-personal 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 promotion of God (17-21).
 - A. He blessed them in their training (17).
 - B. He blessed them in their testing (18-20).
 - 1. They excelled in ability.
 - 2. They excelled in service.
 - C. He blessed Daniel in his influence (21).

Lessons: How does this apply to us?

- 1. It's possible to have a godly testimony in an ungodly world.
- 2. God takes care of those who put Him first.

I. We see the provision of God (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 inter-personal needs (9-14).

V 9 informs us, "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and compassion with the prince of the eunuchs." 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 inter-personal 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? Don't misunderstand. God's goal is not to make it 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, "God had brought Daniel into favor and compassion with the prince (9)." V 10 tells us what happened, "And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my Lord, the king, who has appointed your food and your drink..." The official was a rather pragmatic fellow. He liked Daniel all right, but he liked his 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 going 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 your life, too. The question is are you cooperating with Him? Daniel chose to honor Him, so He honored Daniel by providing for him.

God provided for the inter-personal 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).*

Take a moment and read the account of the plan (vv 11-14), "Then said Daniel to Melzar [Melzar could either be a name or a title; it means "guardian"]...Test thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the youths that eat of the portion of the king's food; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and tested them ten days."

God gave Daniel wisdom for a plan. Daniel's suggestion was simple. Give us a ten-day test. Feed us only "pulse" (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.

Simply put, this was a step of faith on Daniel's part. 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 diet would produce a better complexion. No, his aim was to honor God, and since 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 (3:17-18)? "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..."

Peter follows this pattern in his counsel to suffering Christians in 1 Pet 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 ("I beseech thee," v 12; NIV says "Please"). He didn't get nasty and say, "My religious rights have been violated! That king has no right to make me eat his food!" Oh yes he does. He's the king! True, Daniel could choose to not 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 is a great model for us. 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 was he failed to follow the instructions on the assignment. Maybe his beliefs didn't irritate the teacher nearly as much as his haughty, disrespectful attitude.

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

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, "And at the end of ten days, their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the youths who did eat the portion of the king's food. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their food, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them vegetables." The four Hebrews passed the test. Why? Because God provided for their physical needs. Apparently, God reversed the laws of nutrition in their behalf. But the second result was even more noteworthy. Not only did they pass the test, but...

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. Their God is real to them. And He's really involved in their lives, too."

May I ask you a question? Is God real to you? Can others see it? Most people say they believe in God, but is He real in your life? 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 classmate calls to let you know his parents are gone, and invites you to the beer-bash at his house.

You see, like Daniel, we face tests every day. Every test is an opportunity to show whether God is real or not in our lives. Beloved, 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 serve Him (Eph 2:10).

Here's the beauty of it. When we honor God, He honors us. 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 promotion of God (17-21).

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

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

V 17 makes it clear that the hand of God was upon them, "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." GOD gave it to them. God blessed them with knowledge in their training. That doesn't mean they didn't study. It does reveal the source of their abilities.

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.

Note: 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 the book.

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, "Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar."

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

1. They excelled in ability.

V 19 informs us, "And the king conversed with them, and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah [their Hebrew names]." In fact, to say they excelled is an understatement, according to v 20, "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm."

The phrase "ten times better," literally "ten hands," at first glance sounds extravagant, but simply means they were outstandingly different (Walvoord, 42). Why did they excel? It was no mere coincidence, but a dramatic tribute to the influence of the Living God.

Sidelight: 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 recent survey estimated that over 50 million Americans read their horoscopes every morning to see what they should do that day (Carlson, 233). Don't shortchange yourself. 1 Cor 1:25 states, "Because 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 v 19 states, "Therefore they stood before the king." What does that mean? The NIV translates, "So they entered the king's service." 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, "And Daniel continued unto the first year of King Cyrus." Don't be lulled to sleep by this narrative, for herein we see the third of God's promotions.

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

And Daniel continued. Ponder that statement. Prov 16:7 reveals, "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 continued.

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.

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 couldn't read it. 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.

A few years ago, a friend of mine became a pastor of a church in Wapakoneta. 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. Today there is a growing, vibrant church committed to doing things God's way.

God honors those who choose to honor Him.

Lessons: How does this apply to us?

Consider two lessons.

1. *It's 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.

2. *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!"