

ESF Lord's day service message
9/11/2016

The Source of Real Strength Daniel 1:8-15

⁸ *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.*

⁹ *Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel,*

¹⁰ *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."*

¹¹ *Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.*

¹⁵ *At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.*

¹⁷ *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.*

Where can we find the source of real strength in our lives? Some people find the source of strength from strict self-discipline such as taking healthy food, regular exercise, meditation etc. Of course such self-discipline may be the source of some kinds of strength. But they provide limited, mostly physical strength.

We need another source of strength. To overcome all kinds of troubles and evil powers in our lives, we need mental strength. Mental strength comes from character. Philosopher Herbert Spencer wrote, “Not education but character is man’s greatest need and man’s greatest safeguard.” Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Character is the moral, ethical, and spiritual undergirding that rests on truth, that reinforces a life in stressful times, and resists all temptations to compromise.” That is the kind of character God wants to develop. Through Daniel’s life, God teaches us how to develop character which makes us strong.

Character is shaped by commitment to living a holy life

Character comes from a commitment to living a holy life. When we commit ourselves to live holy lives, God molds our character to receive mental strength which we cannot gain from anything else or anywhere else. Why? Because real mental strength comes from the power of God’s Spirit and God’s Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit anoints us to be strong when we live holy lives.

Living holy lives does not mean that we never sin, or that we always maintain purity in a perfect way. The word “holiness” in the Bible (“gadash” in Hebrew, “haigos” in Greek) means “being separated.” Living holy lives means that believers are separating themselves from the unbelieving world. The unbelieving world constantly ignores and disobeys God and His word. The unbelieving world constantly pursues man’s glory. But God calls believers to obey His word and live for His glory. Living holy lives is to obey God’s word and pursue everything for God’s glory.

That is what Daniel did when he received supernatural strength from God. Daniel’s people had been taken over by a foreign country, Babylon. And the Babylonian king had decided that Daniel’s people, the Israelites, were going to be just like his people, the Babylonians. He was going to teach the Israelites to dress, eat, live and follow all the religious

customs of the Babylonians. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself by eating the food they provided. The food they provided were the best of food, but they would have been dedicated to the Babylonian gods. In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel many times not to tolerate idolatry of any kind (e.g., Deut. 7).

Daniel believed that eating such food was participating in the worship of their idols. Therefore he refused to take the food. He separated himself from the Babylonian practice of idol worshipping. He committed himself to obey God's word even though it might be taken as disobedience to the Babylonian king.

In Babylon, Daniel was a captive. His life and death could be hung on one word of the Babylonian king. Refusing to eat the food and to drink the wine, the king provided, could mean disobedience to the king's word. It could be interpreted as an insult against the king. In finding out his disobedience, the king would be angry, and the king would order him executed. But Daniel feared God more than he feared the powerful Babylonian king. He believed that his God is the king of all kings. So he was determined to obey God's word which was contrary to the king's word.

Then was he killed by the king for his disobedience? No. God protected him from the king's verdict, and God gave him inner strength. *At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.*

When he feared God more than man, he was able to keep the commitment to living a holy life. And God honored his commitment and poured the power of His Holy Spirit on his life.

Prov. 29:25 says: *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*

Peter encouraged us in 1 Peter 4:16, *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. Do not fear man but God.*

The world convinces us that it is ridiculous and harmful to remain pure and separate. But if we fear God more than anything or any power in this world, we can commit ourselves to be different, in order to obey God. Paul said in Romans 12:2 *“Do not confirm any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, and pleasing and perfect will”*

You may have your choice of what to do with your money, your time, and your talent. You may have choice of music, entertainment, and friends. But in all choices fear God always. Commit yourself to make the decision to fear God and stand apart from the world now. True commitment produces evidence through actions.

A young American engineer was sent to Ireland by his company to work in a new electronics plant. It was a two-year assignment that he had accepted because it would enable him to earn enough to marry his long-time girlfriend. She had a job near her home in Tennessee, and their plan was to pool their resources and put a down payment on a house when he returned. They corresponded often, but as the lonely weeks went by, she began expressing doubts that he was being true to her, as he was exposed to pretty Irish girls.

The young engineer wrote back, declaring with some passion that he was paying absolutely no attention to the local girls. "I admit," he wrote,

"that sometimes I'm tempted. But I fight it. I'm keeping myself for you." In the next mail, the engineer received a package. It contained a note from his girl and a harmonica. "I'm sending this to you," she wrote, "so you can learn to play it and have something to take your mind off those girls."

The engineer replied, "Thanks for the harmonica. I'm practicing on it every night and thinking of you."

At the end of his two-year stint, the engineer was transferred back to company headquarters. He took the first plane to Tennessee to be reunited with his girl. Her whole family was with her, but as he rushed forward to embrace her, she held up a restraining hand and said sternly, "Just hold on there a minute, Billy Bob. Before any serious kissin' and huggin' gets started here, let me hear you play that harmonica!"

Let others know about your stand. When it comes right down to it, God will see your commitment to living a holy life. Then He will anoint you with the power of His Holy Spirit which overcomes all the powers in this world.

Character is shaped by trusting in God's goodness in all circumstances

Daniel's character that makes him strong came from trusting God's goodness in all circumstances. Daniel trusted in God's goodness even when bad things happened to his life. At that time Daniel was living in Babylon as an exile. His entire nation Israel was crushed by Babylon. They lost their country and freedom. In such a situation, being a Jew would not be something to be proud of, especially in the land of Babylon. Some people might be ashamed of their identity as Jews. Most of his people, the Israelites might be depressed by the situation. They might doubt God's goodness in such circumstances. They might think: "Who is the God who didn't deliver His people from pagan Babylon?"

Who is the God who didn't help while we are living in exile in a foreign land? Is our God a loving God? Is our God faithful who keeps His promise? We have been so sinful and stubborn against God. That is why God has allowed the Babylonians to destroy our nation and to let us live in exile. Can God still be good to us? Is God still caring for us?"

But Daniel did not hide his identity as a Jew. Actually Daniel was proud of himself as a Jew by demonstrating his obedience to God's dietary laws. How could Daniel still be proud of himself as a Jew? How could Daniel still proudly keep his identity?

He believed in God's goodness and sovereign will in his life. He believed it was God's will that he be born a Jew at that time. He believed that God's plan for his life could not be wrong. He believed that God's plan for his life was the best plan. He believed that the God of Israel was the king of all kings. So although his nation was conquered by Babylon, he believed that God was in control. This faith gave him confidence of who he was.

And, God gave him supernatural strength.

The devil provokes us to give up on trusting God. The Devil bombards us with doubts of God's goodness. When we are passing through trials, the Devil discourages us not to believe in God's goodness for us. "God is not good. Even if He is good you have nothing to do with His goodness. God has punished you for your sins. You are paying the price for your sins." If we listen to such thoughts, we lose our confidence in ourselves as children of God. We lose our precious identity as children of God. We are ashamed of ourselves.

Then how can we trust in God's goodness always? How can we trust in God's goodness even when bad things happen to us, or we are in trials? How can we overcome the fiery condemnation of the Devil in trials? We have to hold on the encouraging promises of God. One promise is this: *...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28). Another promise is: *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all* (Hebrews 12:7-8). If we trust that God is always good, and we are His children, we can have confidence that He cares for us no matter what happens to us, no matter what we have done. When the devil is depressing you with doubts of God's goodness for you, keep holding on to these promises.

Some years ago, there was a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park. After the fire was put out, forest rangers began their trek-up the mountain to assess the damage. One ranger found a bird literally perished in ashes, perched on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat saddened by the sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings.

That is what God is doing for us. God will take you through the fire under His wings. God sacrificed His own son to die for us. Under the wings of the death of Christ, God forgives us, protects us from the death caused by our sins.

Say it "My God is good. God has been good to me. He cares for me. Even if I am sinful, God forgives my sin through the blood of Christ. Even if I am under God's discipline, He is merciful to me. I am a child

of God.” If you trust in God’s goodness, God will always give you strength you need.