

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 6 & 7, 2020**

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, along with some of the vessels of the House of God, and he brought them to the land of Shinar, into the house of his god. He brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.*

*<sup>3</sup> The king told Ashpenaz, the chief of his court officials, to bring some young Israelite men from the royal family or from the nobility. <sup>4</sup> He was to choose young men who had no blemish, who were good looking, who had insight into all kinds of wisdom, who possessed knowledge, understanding, and learning, and who were capable of serving in the king's palace, in order to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them daily rations from the special royal food and from the king's own wine. He ordered that they should be trained for three years. At the end of training they were to serve the king. <sup>6</sup> In this group of young men were the Judeans Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief of the officials gave them new names. He gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar, Hananiah the name Shadrak, Mishael the name Meshak, and Azariah the name Abednego.*

*<sup>8</sup> Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the special food of the king or with the wine that he drank. So he sought permission from the chief official, so that he would not have to defile himself. <sup>9</sup> God made the chief of the officials favorable and sympathetic toward Daniel. <sup>10</sup> Then the chief of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink. Why should he see your faces looking less healthy than those of the other young men who are your age? You put my life at risk before the king."*

*<sup>11</sup> Daniel said to the superintendent whom the chief of the officials had placed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days. Tell them to give us only vegetables, and we will eat them and drink water. <sup>13</sup> Observe our appearance and the appearance of the young men who eat the special royal food. Then deal with your servants based on what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he listened to what they said about this and tested them for ten days.*

*<sup>15</sup> At the end of ten days, their appearance was noticeably better than that of the others. They were healthier than any of the young men who had been eating the special royal food. <sup>16</sup> So the superintendent permanently took away the special royal food and the wine they were to drink and gave them only vegetables. <sup>17</sup> As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and insight into all kinds of literature, as well as wisdom. In addition, Daniel also understood every kind of vision and dream.*

*<sup>18</sup> At the end of the time which the king had set for them to be brought to him, the chief of the officials brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king spoke with them, and none of the others were found to be comparable to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they served the king. <sup>20</sup> In every matter concerning wisdom and understanding that the king sought from them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and spell casters in his entire kingdom. <sup>21</sup> So Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. (Daniel 1, EHV)*

You may have heard of a book entitled, "The Daniel Plan," subtitled "God's Prescription for Good Health." Today's message is not about that. You will never hear a message about that from this pulpit. Good health is important, it's a stewardship issue as we care for the body God's given us, but nowhere does the Bible prescribe for all time a specific diet or recommend Eastern meditation practices as essential to good health (as The Daniel Plan book does).

The Bible's primary focus is not nutritional, it's spiritual. Daniel 1, gives an account of Daniel's diet at the time, but it is not a prescription. It is a powerful description of Daniel's faith in action. The whole message of Daniel is about staying spiritually healthy in the presence of our Savior for all eternity, even when faith is

under fire. As important as it is to take in adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables, there's something far more important for us to take in. And this is **THE DANIEL PLAN**.

Daniel was a mere teenager when his life fell apart, when everything he knew about life changed forever in an epic collapse. 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, having just defeated Egypt in an epic battle for supremacy in the region, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. He would toy with the Jews for 20 years before completely destroying the city.

Already in 605, he deported some Jews to Babylon, especially some of their best and brightest young people to be trained for government service. Among these first exiles were young Daniel and his three friends: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Consider the challenges these young men had to face, as life as they knew it collapsed all around them:

- 1) They were sent to a foreign land, far from home, against their will; and they were likely only teenagers
- 2) They were to immerse themselves in the study of a heathen culture, and learn the language and literature of the Babylonians
- 3) They were given heathen names, all of which had the names of Babylonian gods embedded in them: Daniel "God is my Judge" became "Belteshazzar;" Hananiah "The LORD is gracious" became Shadrach; Mishael "Who is what God is?" became Meshach; Azariah "The LORD helps me" became Abednego.
- 4) Finally, for the three years of their training, they were to eat food and wine from the king's table, in other words, heathen food.

How did these young men react to these changes and challenges? Well, they couldn't do much about the exile. It wasn't wrong to learn the language and literature of another culture, just make sure they didn't believe the ungodly aspects of it; even Moses had been educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Name change? They still knew their true identity, who they truly were in the one true God.

But the food thing was a problem. ***"Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the special food of the king or with the wine that he drank."*** (v.8) Dietary restrictions were part of the covenant God had made with the Israelites at the time of Moses. This challenge was an attack on their faith for two reasons: 1) Jews could only eat clean animals, much of the Babylonian diet violated this; 2) It's likely that a portion of the meat and wine would be dedicated to Babylonian idols. Consuming it would give them impression that Daniel was participating in worship of false gods. This he refused to do.

***"So he sought permission from the chief official, so that he would not have to defile himself... "Please test your servants for ten days. Tell them to give us only vegetables, and we will eat them and drink water. <sup>13</sup> Observe our appearance and the appearance of the young men who eat the special royal food... So he listened to what they said about this and tested them for ten days."*** (vv. 8b, 12-14)

What's he doing? What is "the Daniel plan" for keeping one's faith under fire?

- 1) Daniel trusts that God is in control, whether it looked like it or not All the evidence seemed to indicate that the God of Israel was weak and ineffective, certainly losing bigtime at the moment to the Babylonian gods. But Daniel knew the words of King David – ***"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"*** (Psalm 27:1) ***"The LORD is my Shepherd – I shall not be in want."*** (Psalm 23:1) Psalm 118:6,7a,8 – ***The LORD is with me, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper...It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man."***
- 2) Thus Daniel takes the Lord at his word. Joshua 1:9 – ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*** ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."*** (Psalm 119:105)
- 3) So, Daniel refuses to compromise. Rather than succumb to the convenience of compromise, he took a stand, he did what was right in the eyes of God. Again the words of David, ***"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*** (Psalm 119:11)

When was the last time your faith was under fire? When's the last time life fell apart? Everything just collapsed. When's the last time the address on the mailbox of your life simply said, Babylon? Perhaps that describes you right now. If not now, the only question is when will it happen again. Examples....

- When a relationship gets conflicted and it appears to be beyond restoration
- When a marriage starts to skid sideways, and love isn't what comes to mind when you think of your spouse
- When you're worried about your kids, whether they're 4 or 44
- When work issues disappoint and overwhelm
- When the culture we live in hammers away at our core Christian values to get us to see them as optional, even extreme, and begin to let down our guard and drift away
- When a loved one is terminally ill, or you find yourself fighting chronic illness
- When the money runs out but the bills keep coming
- When your fears seem bigger than your faith

We're not talking stubbed toes and hangnails here. A flat tire, a favorite team in last place, a traffic jam, or blueberry jam on a white dress shirt. We talking real challenges to faith as Satan, the world, and an ungodly seek to undermine and chip away the faith that clings to Christ and his Word. What do you do? What can you do when faith is under fire? Follow Daniel's lead:

- 1) Trust that God is in control, whether it looks like it or not. You know the Scriptures, ***"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** (Romans 8:28)
- 2) Take the Lord at his Word, as Daniel did. Jesus said, ***"Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or what shall we wear?' But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*** (Matthew 6:31,33) We have our Lord's solemn promise – "Christian, put me first in your life, and I guarantee that you will lack nothing that you need for body and soul."
- 3) Refuse to compromise. Romans 12:2 comes to mind – ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Resist by renewing your minds in the Word of God. Paul's advice to Timothy is also worth noting: flee temptation, run the other way, don't look back and don't leave a forwarding address.
- 4) Know that there is forgiveness for failure. We know failure. We know sin and doubt and rebellion. Each of us is a poster child for spectacular examples of failure and faithlessness. Yet ***"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 5:8, 8:1) A crucified and risen Savior provides motive and strength to continue on. Paul wrote, ***"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."*** (Philippians 4:13)

God blessed the commitment of Daniel and his three friends: ***"At the end of ten days, their appearance was noticeably better than that of the others. They were healthier than any of the young men who had been eating the special royal food. So the superintendent permanently took away the special royal food and the wine they were to drink and gave them only vegetables."*** (vv. 15,16) God's power was at work here, and he continued to bless these young Hebrews. Daniel was given the special ability to understand visions and dreams, which would come in handy throughout his life. Also, ***"In every matter concerning wisdom and understanding that the king sought from them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and spell casters in his entire kingdom."*** (v. 20) All four rose to prominent positions in government – Daniel actually made it to #2 in the whole Babylonian empire. And there's this at the very end of chapter 1 – ***"Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus."*** (v. 21) Cyrus was the Persian king who conquered Babylon 66 years after Daniel was exiled. By the grace of God, Daniel outlasted the Babylonian empire, served well into his 80s.

We talk about the Daniel plan as if it was all Daniel's thinking, doing, and prioritizing. Which to a large and sanctified degree, it was. But there's another way to look at the Daniel plan – God had a plan for Daniel. To serve God and God's people in exile across the span of two powerful empires – Babylon & Persia. God has a plan for me and for you. Mine we could call "the Stephen plan." Yours, well, put your name in the blank. God has a plan for you and through you. Don't miss it. Be a part of it. Live it fully by fueling faith through God's powerful Word.

What do we do with Daniel's example and God's encouragement? Put it to use. Don't be passive. Be active. Pursue spiritual integrity. Press on, hold on, cling tightly, and be bold. Here's an example. This creed/confession is known as "The Fellowship of the Unashamed." The author is unknown, but is believed to be a young African pastor who was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ....

**"I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit's power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made -- I'm a disciple of his.**

**I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure.**

**I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals."**

**"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean in his presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and I labor with power."**

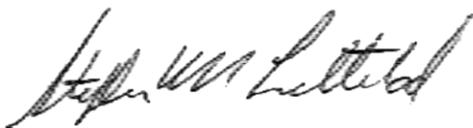
**"My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear.**

**I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifices, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity."**

**"I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me.**

**And, when he comes for his own, he will have no problem recognizing me ... my banner will be clear."**

**"Lord, give us such a faith as this, and then whate'er may come; we' taste e'en now the hallowed bliss of an eternal home."**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
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