

ABSOLUTELY CONQUERING COMPROMISE!

DANIEL 1 - 3.

A series of 3 sermons on conquering compromise, even under the most harsh provocation. Daniel and his friends set an extraordinary example!

The three topics are:

Daniel 1: Conquering compromising in the smallest of things...

Daniel 2: Conquering compromise through God's wisdom!

Daniel 3: Conquering Compromise, even in the fiery furnace!

Sermon outline 1: Daniel 1:1-21. Conquering compromising in the smallest of things...

Introduction:

Spiritual drifting is a slow and hardly noticeable process of compromise. We know it has occurred when we have lost the strong resistance to evil and the passionate desire for truth that we once knew.

Compromise may be defined as;

- a settlement of differences by mutual concessions; an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles.
- the result of such a settlement.
- something intermediate between different things

It is about four men who came to a time of decision in their lives. They could either compromise or go with the flow, or they could stand their ground and live for the Lord. The circumstances they faced and the decisions they made set the course for the rest of their lives. Since this incident occurred, the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have stood tall as the names of heroes of the faith. And, what of Daniel? Who would have ever heard of Daniel if he had compromised at this early stage of life? His name would be unknown to modern man, and we would never have received this wonderful book. With that in mind, it is good to be able to say that these young men stood their test and as a result, we are all blessed today.

As we go through life, there will always be times where we are going to have to make decisions to do the right thing. When these times come, and they most certainly will, we will either decide to go with God - despite the cost. Or, we will choose to compromise.

THE PROBLEMS AT HAND

These Hebrew boys faced several problems. Each of these had the potential to derail them. However, the problems they faced, were not that different from those we face daily in our world.

New Home - These boys had been brought up in and around Jerusalem. There they were constantly reminded of their God and of His importance to life. The Temple with its sacrifices was there. The priests and the scribes were there teaching. The prophets were preaching the message of the Lord. Now, they are slaves and have been taken to Babylon. Here, they are surrounded by heathen worship, heathen images and heathen people. It would be easy to conform - just to fit in.

For the Christian, the danger is just as real. It is easy to be spiritual in church. It is easy to be godly around godly people. However, when we separate from the godly influences around us, we are placing ourselves in a dangerous position. We are opening up our lives to the possibility of compromise.

New Knowledge - These young men were taught a new language and new ways of looking at life. All their lives, they had been exposed to Jewish wisdom. Now, they are being taught the wisdom of

Babylon. They are being exposed to things they have never been exposed to before. It was a dangerous time for them. There is much pressure being exerted on them to conform to the new world around them.

The same dangers face the Christian in this world today. We are constantly being exposed to new ways of thinking and are being told that our way of looking at the world, through the eyes of God in the Bible, is outdated, ancient and intolerant. There is much pressure being placed on the Christian community to conform to the world's way of thinking. We are told to accept alcohol abuse, cursing, promiscuous sexual activity and many other violations of God's commandments. However, God has not changed His mind about a single thing!

New Diet - All their lives, these four young men had lived by the dietary laws handed down by the Lord for the people of Israel. Now, they are faced with new food. Most likely, this food was unclean by Jewish standards, and most of the meat had probably been sacrificed to idols. Therefore, it would have defiled these men and made them ceremonially unclean before the Lord.

As Christians, we too are faced with choices that run contrary to the best that God has in mind for us. There are decisions about our choice of entertainment, our music we listen to, choices in our personal relationships. We are confronted daily by choices to either do or not do certain things that can cause us to be defiled. We are saved, and nothing will ever change that! But, the choices we make in life can either build us up, or tear us down as servants of God.

New Names - When these young men arrived in Babylon, they owned wonderful names. Each name carried with it a testimony to the person of God.

Daniel - God is my judge
Hananiah - God is gracious
Mishael - God is without equal
Azariah - The Lord is my helper

When they arrived in Babylon, they were given new names.

Daniel became Belteshazzar - Which means, "Bel will protect."
Hananiah became Shadrach - Which means, "Inspiration of the Sun."
Mishael became Meshach - Which means, "Belonging to Aku."
Azariah became Abednego - Which means, "Servant of Nego."

Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to change their identity and hopefully their way of thinking. However, it is plain to see as one reads the book of Daniel, that even though their names were changed, their character remained in tact. The world and the devil will try every tactic to force us to fit into their mould. However, no matter what they say to us, call us, do to us or throw at us in life, they will never be able to change what we are, twice born children of the living God!

As we journey through life, there are going to be constant attempts by the enemy to get us to let down our guard, to conform to the world's standards and to do things we know to be wrong. However, these times of testing and trial can be weathered safely and securely. God Himself has promised to help us when we face times of testing - James 1: 1- 8.

THE INTENTION OF THEIR HEARTS

Their Dedication - The Babylonians could change their homes, their diet, their names, and their education, but they could never change their hearts! These men had decided that they were going to serve the Lord, whatever the cost! It would have been easy to say, "Well, it's all right, everyone else is doing it!" Or "We had better do what the king says." Or "We'll obey the king outwardly, but we'll just keep our faith to ourselves." These options weren't good enough for these men! They were willing to commit themselves to God's will despite the consequences.

Their Desire - In an effort to maintain their ceremonial purity before the Lord, they requested that they not be forced to eat the king's meat. They knew they would be fed Ceremonially unclean foods, therefore, they requested that they be allowed to have vegetables and water for a ten-day period. They were willing to put God to the test. This is not always the easiest thing, nor will it be the most popular thing for you to take your stand with God. Those around you will not always understand it. If we will be willing to stand our ground for the Lord, He will certainly honour our stand and bless us.

We easily compromise in many ways. In our speech, in our dress, in our lifestyles, in our music, in our lifestyles. These young Hebrew boys had decided in their hearts that they would die before they would compromise with the world, the flesh or the devil. We need to strive for that same standard in our own lives.

There are a lot of God's children who need to recommit themselves to the Lord. There are many who have let down their guard and have compromised in one or more issues. Others are flirting dangerously close to doing the same thing. It is time for God's children to resolve in their hearts that come what may, they will not disgrace the name of Jesus, and they will not compromise in any area of their life!

The dedication of these men can be summed up in 2 words, **Faith** and **Obedience**. They were willing to trust God to do what He had promised, and they were willing to follow Him, regardless of the personal cost. What about you?

Appeal:

Are there areas in your life where you have begun to let your guard down? Are you allowing things in you life that you used to think were wrong? If you have begun the downward spiral of compromise, I am glad I can tell you that Jesus allows u-turns! He has promised us that we can find unconditional forgiveness when we come home to Him, 1 John 1:9. Where do you find yourself today? If the little beetles of compromise are whittling away at your walk with God, then come back home and allow the Lord to put you back where He wants you to be. Will you look deep inside and do what you need to do today? If so, then come to the Lord and allow Him to have His way in your life.

Sermon Outline 2. Daniel 2. Conquering compromise through God's wisdom!

Introduction:

We find a great story in Daniel 2. Everyone who loves a good story will also be fascinated by the message it entails.

In the second year of his reign, in 603 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's mind was troubled and he couldn't sleep. As the new ruler after his father's recent death, he was quickly coming to realise the weight of the responsibilities that came with being the sovereign over an empire that spanned most of the known world of his day. He was having trouble with uprisings in different parts of the empire. He was having difficulty in securing the taxes he demanded from the countries under his control. And his problems were keeping him awake at night. He was wondering what the future held for him. Would he be able to keep control over the vast empire that he'd inherited? Would he prove to be incapable and lose it all to someone else?

And in the midst of all of that he had a dream. He knew that it seemed important. He just had to know whether it had a special meaning!

God is the true source of answers and wisdom!

Dreams were considered important in ancient Babylon. And so Nebuchadnezzar summoned the wise men of Babylon. They were the people you went to if you had a mystery. And they're given the opportunity to prove themselves. They're given an opportunity to show whether they're the heroes of this story?

It faces us with the question of where we go in search of the answers to the mysteries that we're faced with. When we struggle with questions like, 'Why am I here? What is the purpose of my existence? What am I meant to do with my life? Where did I come from? Where am I going?' Where do we go for answers? Do we follow Nebuchadnezzar's example and go to the popular gurus or sources of knowledge of our day? Or do we have a better source of answers, a more reliable source, a source that doesn't change from generation to generation?

The wise men of Babylon have their opportunity to be the heroes of this story. But they're horrified to find out that not only are they supposed to interpret the dream, they're supposed to tell the king what the dream was as well. And they respond, 'There's not a man on earth who can do what the king asks. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they don't live among men.'

But the consequences of not fulfilling the king's request were drastic. But what could the wise men do? They couldn't tell the king his dream. And so Nebuchadnezzar is left frustrated, furious at his inability to find a reliable interpretation for it. And that gives Daniel an opportunity to minister to him.

And as Daniel approaches the problem, we see him tackle it in a specific way. He speaks to Arioch with wisdom and tact. Then upon hearing the problem, rather than immediately resigning himself to disaster, **he faces it in faith**. And rather than attacking the king's irrational approach, he asks the king for time to minister to his need. **He then explains the matter to his friends so that they might bring the matter to God in prayer.** The context of all that they do is one of faith and prayer.

And God answers their prayer. God reveals the mystery to Daniel in a vision. And Daniel's first inclination is to thank God. Their whole approach brings to mind Philippians 4; the Christian approach to anxiety and difficulty. *'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'*

Daniel's response to God's help is to offer him a psalm of praise and thanks. Daniel has seen something of God's wisdom and might in the revelation that God gave him, and so it's not surprising that that becomes the theme of his psalm. And for us that anticipates the interpretation of the dream. Daniel speaks of God as the one in control of nature and human politics. He sets up kings and does away with them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. Daniel thanks God for making known to him what no one else knows.

God is the true source of answers and wisdom. He reveals the meaning of mysteries. His wisdom does not allow for any compromise with other interpretations. It is supernatural, divine, unique and true - and cannot be compared with any other solution on earth!

We need to commit ourselves to worshipping the One True God and him alone. Expect the final answer only from Him!

Daniel then goes to speak to the king. Daniel's quick to say that no man can do what the king has asked. But there is a God in heaven that reveals mysteries. It's he who can show king Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. And the spotlight comes to rest on God as the one who can give a solution to the dilemma. It's he who is the hero of this story. In fact, when it comes to faithfully understanding the Bible, God is the hero of every story. And we see that that's true again here in Daniel chapter 2.

It turns out that Nebuchadnezzar's dream involved a statue. The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and his empire. The chest of silver represented the empire that followed his, which we know in hindsight to be the Persian Empire. Another empire, which we know, now, to be the Greek empire followed the Persian. And then finally came the Roman Empire, which had the strength of iron, but an inherent disunity, and brittleness that spelt its eventual disaster. But despite the magnificence of this statue, it all came to nothing. And what do we see of these empires today? Only artefacts in a museum, ruins in various places in Europe and the Middle East. They were the superpowers of their day. But their day came to an end and they're no more.

But the kingdom that crushed these kingdoms, and will crush any other kingdom that may arise while time continues, is the kingdom that God himself established and which will endure forever. During the time of the Roman Empire, Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God. When he died on the cross and rose from the dead the kingdom of God entered this world in power and has continued to this day. When Jesus returns again God's kingdom will come in glory. On that day all other kingdoms will cease to exist but the kingdom of God will continue into eternity as the only kingdom.

We're then given the opportunity to witness Nebuchadnezzar's response to knowing all of this. And we see that he acknowledges God to be the God of gods and the Lord of kings, a revealer of mysteries. And it sounds good, but in light of the next chapter, where he sets up an image that must be worshipped on pain of death, it doesn't seem to mean all that much. It would seem that for Nebuchadnezzar, as a polygamist, adding one more God to the many other gods that he worshipped was no big deal. In fact we see Daniel being given more attention than God is. He's grateful for having his dream and its meaning revealed to him, but he's not about to give up his idolatry to worship the one true God.

But then maybe we also need to look at how we respond to all that God has done for us, and especially through Jesus Christ. Do we respond any better than Nebuchadnezzar? Or are our commitments divided too between God and something else? Do we rely on other sources of wisdom in the same way, that we rely on God's revelation of truth? Do we try to compromise what the world come to know to be wisdom, with God's knowledge and insight. Do we compromise God's will and intent with that of others? If we are, we make the same mistake that Nebuchadnezzar made. We too then need to commit ourselves to worshipping the One True God and him alone. Expect the final answer only from Him!

Appeal:

In Daniel chapter 1 we come to see that we will only remain forever we if we do not compromise our faith, with the expectations of the unbelieving world. ***In Daniel chapter 2 we see that because God reveals to us mysteries that no one else can know, He is our only source of true wisdom and knowledge.*** He revealed to Nebuchadnezzar centuries of world history before it happened. And through that he has reminded us again of the life and work of Jesus Christ, whose Kingdom will last forever. In this eternal Kingdom we will find the final answers to our most pressing questions and mysteries.

Knowing God's wisdom and truth is the ultimate resource in absolutely conquering compromise!

Sermon Outline 3. Daniel 3:19-30: Conquering Compromise, even in the fiery furnace!

Introduction:

This is one of those chapters in the Bible that we have been hearing since we were small children in Sunday School. It is one of those passages that we think we know inside out. It is one of those passages that we often neglect in our search for “*deeper truth*” in the Bible. Even though many of us have travelled a long way down the road of life, there are still some valuable lessons to be learned from the familiar stories of the Bible.

We will find help here. We will find that there is help for those who may be enduring some trials in these days. We live in a world that is becoming increasingly unfriendly toward God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, Christianity, the believer and the church. Let’s travel back in time to ancient Babylon, to a kingdom that was also unfriendly toward God and His ways, having a look at three young men with backbones of steel, who would not bend, bow or burn.

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE A PERSECUTED PEOPLE

Nebuchadnezzar reacts in anger to the stand taken by the three Hebrew boys and determines to destroy them in the fiery furnace. He orders them bound up and cast into a furnace heated some seven times hotter than it was normally heated. The fire is so hot that it slays the men who toss them into the fire.

(Why is all this anger levelled at these men? The reasons for the king’s actions are given in verses 9-18.)

They Are Persecuted Because Of Their Standards It would appear that either Nebuchadnezzar has set up an image of his favourite god, or more likely that he has set up an image of himself. Either way, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow to that image. Their faith in God would not allow them to lower themselves to the same level as the pagans around them. In other words, their standards and manner of life made them different from the others around them that day. The believer should have a different standard of living from the world around him. , 2 Cor. 6:14; Col. 3:1-2: *Do not be yoked with unbelievers. For what do wickedness and righteousness have in common!*

They Are Persecuted Because Of Their Saviour - Nebuchadnezzar gives them a second chance. He knows why these boys are refusing to bow, and he mocks the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, v. 15. He implies that he, Nebuchadnezzar, is more powerful than the God they serve. He demands that they bow to his will instead of the will of God. But we are to be totally sold out to God and His will. He is to have first place in our lives. Listen to the Lord’s Own standard for us - Matt. 10:37-38; Luke 14:26-27 - *Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life, will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it*

They Are Persecuted Because Of Their Stand - Even when threatened with a horrible death, these men refuse to bend or to bow. They take their stand in spite of the personal cost. The believer should take his stand for Jesus. We are to be totally committed to Him, 1 Cor. 15:58; Luke 9:62 - *No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. / Decide to follow Jesus, but first calculate the cost.*

If we are going to live for Jesus in this world; if we are going to be His alone; if we are going to refuse to let this world squeeze us into its mould; then we are going to suffer persecution. If we absolutely refuse to compromise - we will be persecuted. That is what the Bible teaches us, 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12. *Everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted.* Here is the bottom line: if you and I are going to live “*godly*”; if we are going to live for Jesus, then we are going to be persecuted. There will be furnaces of criticism, furnaces of intimidation, furnaces of hatred, furnaces of temptation, furnaces of trials like you cannot imagine. That is just the way it is!

The furnaces of life, especially the furnaces of persecution are no fun. However, they are all good for us! Why? The furnaces of life exist to help us become more like Jesus. Just as gold and silver are placed in the furnace and are purified through the process; persecution has the potential to remove the unneeded baggage from our lives.

BUT GOD'S PEOPLE ARE A PRESERVED PEOPLE

The three Hebrews are cast into the fire, but an amazing thing happens. Instead of dying in the flames, they are freed from their bonds and are walking around in the flames. Nebuchadnezzar cannot believe his eyes and commands them to come out, which they do, totally unharmed by the violence of the flames. Notice how this amazing preservation took place:

They Were Preserved By An Ever Present God - When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown in to the flames; they found that they were not alone. The God they had professed faith in earlier met them in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar and the others with him could not believe their eyes! They threw *three* men into the flames and now there are *four* men walking freely around! Even in a furnace in Babylon, God kept His promise to His people. We have the same promise. *Matt. 28:20; And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (18) All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* When the flames go up around you, open your eyes, for Jesus is right there with you! Notice what happened because the Lord met them in the fiery furnace.

They Were Free In The Fire - All the fire did is burn away the things that had them bound. The Lord used the fire to free these men from the ropes that held them. When the fires of persecution and affliction come into your life, you need to remember this truth: The Lord is merely freeing you from some of the things that have had you bound in your life. As the flames burn away the ropes of besetting sins, bad attitudes, bad habits, etc, you will find that you are freer in the fire than you were outside the fire!

They Were Fine In The Fire - We are told that they "*have no hurt.*" The fire did not kill them, it didn't even burn them! God allowed them to go through the fire, but He did not allow the fire to go through them. Again, there is a powerful truth here for those who might be walking through a fiery furnace. The furnace may be frightening, but you were not brought to it for destruction, but for growth. God did not allow it for your hurt, but for your good, Rom. 8:28; - *We know that all things work for the good of those who love God.*

Even though the flames may come, they will only free you from what binds you. You will be fine in the fire, because there will be One with you every inch of the way. He will not leave you, but He will preserve you through the fire and He will keep you for His glory!

Preserved By An All Powerful God - When those boys came out of the furnace, they were inspected by Nebuchadnezzar and his men. We are told that not a hair was singed, there was no soot on them and they didn't even smell like smoke! What a miracle! The power of God operated in this situation and overcame the furnace totally!

Appeal:

That's just God! When He does something, He does it all the way. When He heals, He heals completely! When He saves, He saves completely! When He forgives, He forgives completely. Whatever He does, He does it all the way! How? He is all-powerful, and He is able to use that power in your life and mine.

So, when the world threatens with a fiery if you do not compromise, you absolutely conquer compromise! You may find yourself looking at a fiery furnace. Remember that you serve an all-powerful God, who is able to keep you in the times of hardship and who is able to bring you through for His glory!

Do not compromise - for Christ Jesus lives and reigns - also in the fiery furnace of temptation and victimisation!
To Him all the glory!
In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!
Amen.

To give any feedback on these sermon outlines, contact Andries Combrink, Minister of Centurion West Presbyterian Church at info@cpk.co.za