

Talks – Stand Out – myfishbites.com

Introduction

This is a session about standing out in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christianity and the Bible. If you want to stand out as a Christian, it comes with persecution of different levels – in schools, in the work place and across society. For many people in the world, it costs them their lives. In 2019 a report was done showing 80% of religious persecution worldwide was towards Christians. Every year around 4200 people are killed simply because they are Christians. Others are abandoned, rejected, tortured, imprisoned, lose jobs and lose friends – even in the UK and often in the name of ‘equality’ ! This is something we should take a stand against and pray for God to change the hearts of people across the world.

This talk looks at the life of Daniel. He was taken from his home and placed in a secular society that didn’t know God, didn’t want to know God and had its own rules. Daniel had a choice to make – follow the ways of Babylonian society, or follow God’s ways. Let’s find out more...

Daniel 1

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility- young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.

Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

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. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, 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.”

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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.” So

he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

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

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.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 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.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Stuff happens

The hardest times in our lives often show what we're made of. These are the times when we really get closer to God or we walk away. Think of some different things that have happened in your life. Did it make you ask God for his help, or did it push you away? I've seen different people react in different ways, but those people who go to God always end up best because he says that he'll work all things for good for those who love him – even if the thing that happens isn't good!

Daniel and his friends had seen their city defeated and smashed up by a foreign army. These Babylonian enemies robbed even the temple of God (as God had said would happen if Israel kept on rejecting God). Then Daniel and other gifted Israelite men were taken from the city and brought to Babylon to serve a foreign king with foreign gods. Imagine your city being robbed, your church being smashed up and you being taken to another nation to serve a king who worshipped idols. They were going to be trained in his ways of doing things, not in the ways of the God of Israel. Worse still, their new boss gave them all a new (secular) name! (We often talk about Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Why? Their real names were Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah! See Daniel 1.6-7)

This was going to be a tough test for Daniel and his friends. How would they react? Would they blend in with everyone around them, or would they stand out?

There are moments and decisions that can affect our lives and other people too. In a world that seems hostile to Christians, are you going to blend in with all the other people around you, or are you going to stand out? Are you going to be a clone or an individual? Are you going to stand for God, knowing that he's standing for you – or not?

God has told us to be 'strong and courageous' (see Joshua 1.6 and 1.9). God's also told us that he'll never leave us (see Deuteronomy 31.8 / Hebrews 13.5). He's said that the battle belongs to him (see 2 Chronicles 20.17). He's let us know that when people come against us, it's not them but evil forces behind them that we need to confront (Ephesians 6.12). But we know that God has already defeated the evil powers at the Cross (Colossians 1.15), and

that one day Jesus will return as King (Mark 13.24-37) and that we will be with him forever in a place of unbelievable joy and good (Revelation 21.1-4).

The Decision

“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.”

Have you ever got angry about an injustice or about taking a stand for God and said something like, “Someone should do something!” Who should do something? Have you ever considered that the person to do something should be you? Don’t let your age, your background, or anything else get in the way. If you feel passionately about some injustice or want to make a difference for God, give it to God and then ask other people to help you. Then you be the person who makes a difference – God is calling some of you today to be history makers and people who do something.

Daniel determined to do something to take a stand for God. He didn’t just decide not to take the royal food, he asked the chief official (he did something) and then went on to helpfully explain why he felt that way. Sometimes Christians tell people what they believe – but they don’t tell people why they believe it and why what God says is the best way. But Daniel did – he even said the chief official, “look, we’ll eat what we eat and you allow the others to eat what you feed people and we’ll see at the end of 10 days who looks the most healthy.

Sometimes we need to explain to others what we believe and why. For example, people think the 10 commandments are rules Christians have to follow because of their religion. But the truth is that if you are a Christian, Jesus changes you from the inside -> out and you want to obey him because of your love for him. The 10 commandments give us boundaries and a guidance that mean if we obey them, we will have a better life, more freedom and more happiness. For example if we don’t kill someone, we won’t go to prison, two families won’t be destroyed and evil will be halted.

Daniel acted, God gave him favour and he took a stand for his 3 mates, as well as himself. Your actions when you stand up for God make a huge difference for others.

A youth pastor told a story of how one guy in his youth group couldn’t sleep and he was getting so fed up with not sleeping, it was really draining the poor guy. One day he shared this with the youth group saying he’d had enough and felt a bit useless because he couldn’t do anything as he was so tired. One girl piped up and explained how one night about 3am she’d been feeling so low she wanted to end her life but this guy was online so she messaged him. As a result of him being awake and messaging back, she didn’t kill herself. Then another lad said something similar thinking that he’d see if anyone was online before he did anything silly. This guy was online and again, the depressed teen didn’t kill himself. Other teens in the group spoke up – this guy who found he couldn’t sleep and hadn’t made a difference to anyone – found he’d made a difference to many if not all the others in the youth group. But it took courage for him to speak up. Because he spoke up, lots of others spoke up and lives were changed.

Daniel spoke up and lives were also changed. Not just lives, but a nation. Daniel influenced his 3 friends – who then also helped him in Daniel 2.17 in seeking God (you reap what you sow!)

Before anything else happens in our world, we have to resolve (be totally committed) to only do what God says, never to be dishonest, lie or go against the Bible. If we decide this now and make it clear to people in a kind way, it will make things much easier when situations come at you – eg parties, drugs, drink, sex. Make a stand today and stay standing with God's help – and your Christian friends and leaders around you.

The Best Way

God's way is always the best way. The Babylonian king had his ways of doing things according to his ideas and customs. But God's way is always the best and the right way.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14.6).

So if we want to find the right way – if we want to find the truth and if we want to have life – we follow Jesus. He is always the way, he is always the truth and he is always the life. If we want to have any of those things, we ask God, look in the Bible and do what God says because we love him and know he's got our backs and is always looking out for us. We don't know what's best most of the time as we can only see a bit of our life and our world. But God sees and knows everything. How stupid are we not to follow God's ways, when he is the creator of the universe, knows what's going on and what's best for us! How wise are we if we do follow God's ways!

Daniel followed the way of God. And guess what? Verse 15 says this:

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

God's way was best. But why didn't Daniel want to eat the king's food? Well a number of possible reasons. Firstly, it may have been food that was not allowed under Jewish law (eg pork). It may well have been offered to idols first, or may have been a sign of Daniel allowing himself to be under the king, rather than under God's rule.

Sometimes, God allows us to be tested to see our hearts. We may say, "God I will obey you always" but what happens when someone asks you to lie, to steal something or offers you drugs? What happens when friends walk away from you because you won't do something wrong? This is where the 'rubber hits the road' as they say – the point of impact – the decision time. Will you stand for God? You know from the story of Daniel that God's way is the best, but it can be hard when those times come. But Jesus gives us promises:

Mark 10.29-30, "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

John 16:33 – “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 also says this: And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Finally, God's favour

Back to the story of Daniel, the Bible continues:

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.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 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.

Zechariah and Malachi (2 Old Testament books) talk about God purifying like gold and silver, testing his people (in this case Israel, but we can apply this to the church as well). The result in Malachi 3:3 is that “Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness.” So the purpose of the testing that God allows is to purify us and make us more like God.

When God allows things to happen, he gives us the strength to stand (if we work with God and obey him). But the end result is something incredible – he then gives his favour. Think about this. If you want to trust someone with something, you want to make sure they can be trusted. You don't leave your bike with someone off the street saying, ‘look after this for a minute would you’. But you would leave your bike with one of your friends. It's the same with God but on another level. He needs to know he can trust you and be sure you can be trusted. When he knows you can, he will give you an increase in his power, gifting etc.

Daniel and his friends took a stand – then God gave them knowledge and understanding. Daniel was given the gift of understanding visions and dreams. In every area, the king found Daniel and his friends ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in the whole kingdom.

God's favour is so much greater than anything else this world offers. When you take a stand for God, obey him and can be trusted by him, God will do incredible things through you. There is a price to be paid, but the result is worth it. Daniel and his 3 friends became the King's top advisors – God gave Daniel influence because of his faithfulness (becoming ruler over Babylon, see Daniel 2) – and Daniel was able to continually stand for God and see God's name honoured. God will work things for good, for our benefit sure, but mainly because he wants to see his name glorified in the world. That's why he needs to trust you before letting you loose. If you're in a place of God dealing with you, be excited. He has big plans for you!

1 John 5.4 – This is what overcomes the world – our faith!