

**Joke:** Jesus is wandering around Jerusalem when he decides he really needs a new robe. After looking around, he sees a sign for "Finkelstein, the Tailor." He goes in and Finkelstein prepares a new robe for him it was a perfect fit.

When he asks how much he owes, Finkelstein brushes him off. "No, no, there's no charge. But, may I ask a small favor? Maybe whenever you give a sermon you could just mention a little something about how your robe was prepared by Finkelstein the Tailor."

Jesus agrees and, as promised, plugs Finkelstein's robes every time he preaches.

Some months later, He is wandering through Jerusalem and happens by Finkelstein's shop. He is amazed to see a huge line of people waiting for Finkelstein's robes. He pushes his way through the crowd to speak to Finkelstein himself.

"Jesus, Jesus, look what a marvel you've been for business," gushes Finkelstein. "Would you consider a partnership?"

Sure, replies Jesus.

"Jesus & Finkelstein it is."

"Uh, no" says Finkelstein. "Finkelstein & Jesus."

The two of them argue for some time about the name. Finally, they came to a compromise and they decide to name the new business "Lord & Taylor."

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Happy Star Wars day, May the 4th be with you.

Talk about planning on coming early for parking.

Has anybody noticed the tension or witnessed some of the craziness on social media.

I don't know about all of you, but it seems like it's more difficult to faithfully follow Jesus, to stay close to Jesus in a culture that's constantly trying to pull us away from following Jesus.

Think about it, just look at the messages we hear over and over again from our culture.

Things like how in a world that devalues marriage, do you honor marriage ?

How do you raise your kids to love and follow Jesus when their friends don't see any need for Jesus?

How do you love your neighbor when they won't even acknowledge your existence?

The list could go on and on.

And when you look at our culture today, it seems like more and more people are becoming increasingly hostile toward the values that we look at in God's Word, and it raises the question, how do we stand strong? What should we do?

Do we just like dig our feet in and say, "This is truth, you just can't handle the truth." and lose relationships? Or do we sort of compromise a little bit here and there, maybe just on a few of our convictions and just roll with the current of the culture and just blend in?

Before I get to far along in the message I want to remind you today of an important truth. And that is this, if we trade our convictions for convenience, we risk losing the very foundation of who we are in Christ.

If we start to compromise and we start to drift and conform to the image of this world, we become less like who Jesus calls us to be, and become more like the world, and the impact that we have on the culture to encounter Jesus becomes less.

So what do we do? How do we navigate it? How do we stand strong for our faith and love well?

And what I hope to do over the next few weeks, as we look at Daniel along with some of his friends in the Old Testament, is let their story teach us how to live with conviction in a culture of compromise.

We're going to start in Daniel chapter one, and let's start by meeting a few of the main players in the book of Daniel.

The first guy I want to talk about is King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar was an evil king, and we see him right out of the gate in verse 1. . .

Daniel 1:1 (NIV) - In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Now for context, Babylon was the most dominant superpower in the ancient world, and they were bullies. In 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and demolished it. They even destroyed the walls. The walls that were for protection now are demolished.

It was the most humiliating, brutal attack, and probably the hardest thing is they not only destroyed the walls but they also destroyed Solomon's temple, they also took all of the things of the Jewish faith, their symbols, the things they used to worship God.

And they destroyed those things to mock the Jews' faith in God.

So there's King Nebuchadnezzar, but he's not the main character of the book of Daniel.

Who do you think the main character is in the book?

Now before you answer, here's a hint it isn't Daniel either.

So, who do you think the main character is? It's God.

Sure, Daniel takes center stage, but God is orchestrating every moment in the book. Daniel is our example, but God is the main character.

Oh by the way, in every book of the Bible, God is the main character.

So here we have this culture where there's evil, and there's chaos, and the people are afraid and didn't know what was going to happen.

And the key verse in all of the book of Daniel may just be Daniel 2:28.

Here's what it says. . .

Daniel 2:28 (NIV) - but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

I need you to catch this, look again at what it says. . .But there is a God in heaven.

And I don't know who this is for but if you are here, or watching online and you're in the middle of what seems like a hopeless situation and you feel like you don't know where to turn, I want you to remember. . .there is a God in heaven.

High five the person next to you and tell them there is a God in heaven.

Listen church I don't know the situation, the trouble or struggle you are going through right now but I came to tell you today that there is a God in heaven.

Whatever you're going through, you can have confidence that our King is still on the throne. He is not against you but for you.

And no matter what you're going through, there is a God in heaven.

So, Daniel and the people were in a bad place, and the evil king besieged Jerusalem.

Verse 3 of chapter 1 tells us this. . .

Daniel 1:3 (NIV) - Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility

I want you to notice who they bring?

Look at verse 4. . .

Daniel 1:4 (NIV) - 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.

They wanted the 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.

Isn't it just amazing how they are describing your pastor right there in Daniel, who knew.

Seriously, they choose the guy voted to be prom king. Go get the quarterback. Go find the valedictorian. Go find the one voted most likely to succeed. Go get the best of the best of the Jewish nation and choose them and bring them in.

Then it says the king was to to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

So, we're going to pick the brightest, steal them from you, and then indoctrinate them in the Babylonian ways.

Next verse. . .

Daniel 1:5 (NIV) - 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.

I don't want you to miss this. There is a lot here to unpack.

But, after destroying the city, the king took the most talented, the most popular, the best educated young boys, and Daniel was one of them along with his three friends.

They were probably, according to most scholars, teenagers. So imagine a 14 or 15 year old being taken out of their home, their parents possibly killed, being taken into this government, and indoctrinated in the Babylonian ways.

And really what the king wanted to do is he wanted to strip these boys of their identity, take everything away from their heritage and their faith in God.

So what was the king's strategy? He started by changing their names.

His thought. . .if I can change their names, I can change their identity.

Verses 6 and 7. . .

Daniel 1:6–7 (NIV) - Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

And here's the thing their original Hebrew names, all related to Yahweh, the true God.

1. Daniel = Judge of God or God is my judge; he that judges
2. Hananiah = Jehovah is gracious or graciously given of the LORD
3. Misheal = Prayer; entreaty; to become like; to speak in proverbs
4. Azariah (az-a-ri'-ah) = Helped of the LORD; whom Jehovah aids; Jehovah is keeper; Jehovah has helped.

But the new names that the king gave them each one related to Babylonian gods.

He stripped their names that were worshiping their God and gave them new names hoping to change who they thought themselves to be.

Remember Daniel, means God is my judge. He changed his name to Belteshazzar.

Bel is a false God. Bel protect the king.

So, their original names related to Yahweh. Their new names all related to Babylonian gods.

Would you like to hear something interesting? Every time Daniel referred to himself in writing, he spelled his name correctly.

When Daniel was used it was always spelled the right way.

But, every time he refers to his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, he misspells it. . .every time.

Now, Bible scholars thought for years that what happened is, when the scribes were copying a manuscript, and the scribe would copy word for word, line for line, they thought that the scribes probably made a mistake, a typo, until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947.

The oldest known manuscript of Daniel, and guess what? The name was spelled wrong there as well. And most scholars think this was a jab.

He was he intentionally poking back saying, you can change my name, but you can't change who I am. You can change my name, but you can't change the God I serve.

And so, every time he misspelled that other name, why?

Because they couldn't label him what he was not.

And listen church, that's why it is so important for you to know who you are in Christ.

When we talk about knowing God's Word, it's not just so you can be academic and be like, the first one to turn to the book of Ezekiel and win the Bible quiz game.

No, it's so that you can know who God says you are in order to live out His purpose and calling in your life because the devil is almost always going to attack first, your identity.

He did it with Jesus. . .



Matthew 4:1–3 (NIV) - Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Then again in verses 5 and 6. . . ,

Matthew 4:5–6 (NIV) - Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’

And listen the devil's probably not going to say, "Hey, you're such a Belteshazzar," and you're like, "Ya, I know, I'm a Belteshazzar."

No, what he will probably say is something more like this. . .

You're worthless. You're pathetic. You'll never make a difference. They would never love you if they know what you are really like, what you're really thinking. God will never forgive you. God doesn't want you. God can't use you.

And that's why, whenever the devil tries to tell you what you're not, you have to remind yourself of who God says you are, and the good news is, if you are in Christ, God says. . .

You are a new creation, the old is gone and everything is new. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are an overcomer by the blood of the lamb and by the words of your testimony, you are more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus. You are forgiven and free. You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

Whenever the devil tries to change your name, you need to say get behind Satan, I belong to Jesus. I'm a child of the living God. I'm a spirit-filled, Bible-believing, redeemed by the blood, love-giving ambassador of the most high God.

You have to remember who you are.

When the devil tries to change your identity, remind yourself, this is who God says I am.

Now, this is a part of the story I don't want you to miss. Verse 5 says this, "The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table."

Now why does that even matter?

And here's the thing, the food would've been delicious, the best of the best, the richest and finest food possible, and the king said, "Hey, you guys eat this food."

He was wanting them to dishonor their God.

And the reason is because this delicious food was dedicated to pagan gods, and so for Daniel and his friends to eat this would actually be a betrayal to the one true God.

I want you to think about this. In our story we have teenage boys that were stripped from their homes, taken as slaves to a new land, given new names in a new culture surrounded by Babylonians, and they're hungry, and the king puts some delicious food in front of them.

Do you know how easy it would be at that moment to compromise your values and just say, "Well, I mean, I'm doing everything else. I'm still serving God, you know, and the food is really delicious, and who's gonna really even know? I mean, I can just take a little bit," how tempting it would be to compromise their values.

And the truth of the matter is if you haven't been there recently, you just might be there tomorrow, and in that moment the devil's going to tempt you.

"Hey, you can do it. Nobody's going to know. What's the big deal? Everybody else is doing it. Nobody's watching."

But I need you to remember, if we trade our convictions for convenience, we risk losing the very foundation of who we are in Christ.

So the king wants Daniel to give in and eat this pagan food, but he stays faithful to his God, and this next verse is really important.

Scripture says. . .

Daniel 1:8 (NIV) - 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.

But Daniel resolved. . .

He decided, he resolved, he was firm in his commitment, he 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.

He resolved. No matter what, I'm not going to compromise.

Don't miss that, that word is translated a few different ways.

The NIV says, "He resolved not to defile himself."

The NLT says, "He was determined."

The NASB says, "He made up his mind."

The King James says, "He purposed in his heart."

I love that. He resolved. He determined. He made up his mind. He purposed in his heart not to do anything to dishonor God.

And hear this church at some point, you're going to need to resolve, determine and make up your mind and purpose in your heart.

I will do what God calls me to do and that alone. And let me say you need to do that before the temptation arises. You need to make draw that line in the sand before the situation shows itself.

Daniel was forced to live in Babylon, but he wouldn't let Babylon into him.

He was forced to be in a foreign culture, but he wouldn't let the foreign culture into him, and the reality is, we are always going to live in this world until we don't, but even though we are in this world, we don't have to be of this world.

1 Peter 2:11–12 (NLT) - Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. 12 Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.\*

We don't have to be sucked into the hate and the division and all of the stuff that dishonors God but you need to purpose in your heart and make up your mind, today that I'm going do what honors God.

Romans 12:2 (NLT) - Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

So if we're going to love well and live with conviction in a culture of compromise, we're gonna want to make some predetermined resolutions.

In other words, we need to decide ahead of time.

Before Daniel got even considered, wow that strawberry shortcake looks good, maybe just one bite, before he ever saw that whipped cream on that fluffy cake and fresh ripe strawberries made in the king's kitchen, before any of that, he determined what he would do and what he wouldn't do.

And church to faithfully follow Jesus, we should decide ahead of time, and I don't know what it would look like for you, but you need to have predetermined, I've resolved to honor God.

Maybe for you the first thing I do before you start your day is spend some time in God's Word and invite His Spirit to guide your day so you can honor Him as you do whatever it is you need to do.

Maybe you need to decide I know Tulip Time is inconvenient for parking but I've purposed in my heart to be with the people of God anyway. And so, you decide that no matter what, I'm going to worship God together in church, and if we're out of town, we're watching church online.

You may decide not to do some things. You might decide, "Hey, there's a lot of gossip in my office so before I go in there, when they start talking, I've resolved I'm not joining in.

You might predetermine, Hey, I like Facebook, but I'm not going to spend more time scrolling the feeds than I do God's Word,

Maybe this might seem a little old fashioned and crazy but scripture says that we should reserve the gift of lovemaking until the gift of marriage, and so you may have to pre-decide, I'm not going to have sex until I'm married.

Don't wait until you're on the sofa watching Netflix and the temptation arises to forget what God says about it. Don't decide then. Thinking oh wait, let me pray about it. Let me think about it. No, you resolve. You're determined. You make up your mind. You purposed in your heart. I will always honor God.

So how do we do this in a world full of cray cray?

How do we stand strong and love well?

Let me show you what Daniel did not do.

He didn't make a public protest. He didn't take the food and say, This food is dedicated to pagan gods. You sickos. He didn't run out of the room and then send a text with all capital letters, I hate all y'all. You're going to hell. It didn't stand out the gates waving signs of how much God disapproves of the life they're living.

No, he respectfully asked, and what you're going to see is because of how he did what he did he made a difference.

And let me say this as lovingly as I possibly can some of you have to ask yourself do you wanna make a point or do you wanna make a difference?

Because they're not the same thing.

He was respectful, he was honoring, and he asked a question. He didn't throw a fit and storm out. No, he came in and said, Hey, do you mind if we try something different?

Daniel 1:11–14 (NIV) - 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.

And do you know what happened?

Daniel 1:15 (NIV) - At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

And so what do we do? We speak the truth in love with compassion and with caring.

We speak the truth in love, that is what Daniel did.

Daniel was rock solid. He wasn't bending at all, but he was loving, and he was strategic, and he was very prayerful in his resolutions.

He made a kind request and asked the leader there, Hey, can I have permission not to do that which goes against my values?

And so he says, please test your servants for 10 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 to what you see.

Give it a test.

The chief official agreed and tested them for 10 days. At the end of the 10 days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

What happened? They honored God and God honored them.

They were healthier, and they were stronger, and they were more vibrant, and they stood out.

And what did God do? God gave Daniel knowledge. He gave him the ability to interpret dreams and visions, and then in verse 19, scripture says. . .

Daniel 1:19 (NIV) - The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaal and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.

I don't know if you noticed this or not but look at those names.

Those are the names of the Hebrew God not the Babylonian names.

He found none equal to the one who says, Daniel, "God is my judge," to Hananiah, to Mishaal, and to Azariah.

What did they do? These guys stood strong, they stood out, and they were different.

They were close to God, and they were loving, and they were strong and they were healthy!

John 13:35 (NLT) - Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

They took care of themselves, and they were a witness, and they were bold, and they were strong, and they stood strong, and they loved well, and they didn't compromise.

They weren't just different! They were better, even though all hell had broken loose in their lives. I mean these boys were ripped from their homes.

Imagine your kids taken from here to another nation and they're on their own. They're kidnapped. They're slaves. They're separated from their family. They have no support system whatsoever. They're called by pagan names and they're indoctrinated by a false worldview.



What do you do then?

When it seems like there's no hope and your life's over.

How are you going to worship God?

How are you going to make a difference?

You've been stripped of everything that matters.

I've got a message for somebody here today who's hurting and afraid and doesn't know what you're going to do and don't know where to turn.

You need to remember that scripture says, But there is a God in heaven.

No matter what you're going through and no matter where you are, there is a God in heaven.

And what the devil meant for evil against these boys, God used for good, and God is going to use a few teenage boys to turn the heart of an evil king and change the course of a nation.

Think about it. If Daniel and his buddies had simply compromised, compromised their values, just blended in, thinking it's no big deal.

We're just gonna be like the rest of the world. We're just going to believe what everybody believes and not stand by our God-honoring values.

If they had compromised their convictions, nothing historic would've happened and nothing would've changed.

Or if they had been Facebook warriors, letting everyone know they don't care what ya all think. Truth is truth just deal with it. I have at least my other three friends that see things my way.

If they had been blasting out that kind of truth but not truth in love, they'd have been executed.

But what'd they do? They stood strong. They didn't compromise at all. They stood by their values, and they loved well.

Listen church, it would've been so easy for them and even tempting to compromise somewhere along the way.

It would've been easy for them to throw a fit and stood up and stormed out and been angry, and it's true for us as well.

Every single day, we're going to have the chance to compromise and do things that are opposed to the will and the heart of God, or we're going to be tempted to stand up and yell back.

But if we trade our convictions for convenience, we risk losing the very foundation of who we are in Christ.

And so church, please remember this, we have a spiritual enemy.

He is the father of lies. He is attacking and scheming to come against you. His mission is to steal, kill, and destroy. His greatest weapon is to lie to you, to attack your identity, to tell you who you're not and what you can't do, to lure you away, to be desensitized and go with the currents of culture and the current message of this world instead of standing true to God's Word.

And before you're tempted to sin, the devil will whisper to you, Hey, it's no big deal. Everybody does it. Go ahead, it doesn't matter.

And after you do that thing, he shouts at you condemnation.

And church hear this, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Oh listen God might convict you, but not condemn you. And there's a big difference between the two.

But the enemy will tell you that you should be ashamed of yourself and that God doesn't love you.

And he's going to put you in an environment where you just become anxious and overwhelmed and isolated and depressed and afraid.

That's why I want to remind you that there is a God in heaven.

There is a God in heaven and he is still on the throne, and no matter what happened before you arrived here, no matter what happens when you leave here, no matter what happens next month, he's still gonna be on the throne.

There is a God in heaven, and you need to remember that greater is he. If you're in Christ, greater is he that is within you than he that is in this world.

No matter what you face, there is a God in heaven, and that's why God is the main character of this story.

And because our God is a good God, a loving God, a righteous God, a God of compassion and a God of mercy and a God of justice, because our God is always faithful, you can stand firm and you can love well because you may be forced to live in Babylon, but you don't have to let Babylon live in you.

And so Father, help us to be a church that stands firm but also loves well.

God, empower us with your Holy Spirit to be wise in the moment like Daniel and his friends were, not reacting to whatever's going but responding with a heart of prayer and with love.

Papa, give us influence because we care and because we serve. Help us never to just blend in but always stand out

To stand out with marriages that honor you, with finances that are generous to others, and with integrity in the way that we live.

God, help us to be different in a good way, standing strong and loving well.