

**Valley View Chapel**  
**February 14, 2016**  
**The Story Part 18**  
**"Daniel in Exile"**  
**Daniel 1:3-21**

**Introduction**

A recent survey conducted by ChristianMingle.com asked its members the question: "Would you have sex before marriage?" Sixty-three percent of single Christian respondents answered "Yes."

Kenny Luck on the *Christian Post* website concluded: "God has nothing to say to them on that subject or at least anything meaningful enough to dissuade them from following their own course."

I don't think I'd get much of an argument if I said that the old Bob Dylan song accurately describes the current state of many self-proclaimed Christians: "The Times They Are A'Changin.'"

Author Bayard Taylor observed: "Used to be, even as recently as World War II, American culture defaulted to something akin to the biblical worldview. Not everybody was a believer, but when you said 'God,' 'Jesus,' 'sin,' or 'heaven,' people pretty much knew what you were talking about. Not true anymore....Now just about everything Christian or biblical is hotly contested. Other worldviews dominate education, the media, the arts, and much of public discourse....."

Christian researcher George Barna tells us that *only nine percent of those who profess to be born-again Christians have a biblical worldview*. Barna stated that the majority of those who *claim* to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ treat the Bible more like *Chicken Soup for the Soul* than the authoritative Word of God.

The Old Testament book of Daniel has a lot to teach us about living in a world that is antagonistic to the values set forth in the Bible.

**Background to Daniel**

Because of continued unfaithfulness to their covenant commitments even after continued warnings from God's prophets, the people of Judah were overrun by the Babylonians in 605 B.C.

Along with three of his friends Daniel, then a 15 year-old teenager, was among the first to be deported to Babylon. We're told of this in Daniel 1:3-7 (p. 249).

Daniel and his friends found themselves in a new country; with new customs; new food; a new language; a new religion; and even with new names.

It is apparent that King Nebuchadnezzar not only wanted to capture their *bodies*. He wanted to capture their *minds*. The king's purpose was to turn these bright, gifted, intelligent, creative Jewish young men into Babylonians through conditioning and indoctrination.

Babylon was not their home but they had to live there for the rest of their lives. In fact Daniel lived for 70 years as an exile; an alien; a resident of a foreign country.

In his book *The Heart of the Story* Randy Frazee declared: "As believers, we're all in exile."

Back in the first century the Apostle Peter wrote to the Christians of his day: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, *strangers* in the world....Dear friends, I urge you, as *aliens* and *strangers* in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11 (NIV)

Yes, we live in New Jersey. Yes, we eat the food, speak the language, and observe many of the customs of the region where we live. But in some significant ways we who follow Jesus Christ are "strangers" and "aliens" living like exiles in a foreign land. Our beliefs, priorities, values, and lifestyles are markedly different from those of most people and that is as it should be because the Church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be a "counter-cultural community."

IN MANY WAYS WE LIVE IN DANIEL'S WORLD.

And like Daniel, we do not have the option of withdrawal and isolation. If we are going to be like Daniel and his friends we will interact every day with people, values and a culture that differs radically from what we believe and teach to our children.

So how did Daniel maintain his moral and spiritual distinctiveness in the midst of a culture that opposed virtually everything that he held dear? And moreover how was Daniel able to win the respect and admiration of 2 powerful pagan kings – Nebuchadnezzar and Darius - without abandoning his core values?

As fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ we are called to be "transformers" and not "conformers." Daniel's example serves us well. He lived in such a way that he was able to make a positive difference in an environment that was characterized by contrary convictions.

So in the time we have left let's discover the secret of Daniel's success. Here are two components to his "difference-making" strategy.

### **He lived by his convictions**

This is clear from Daniel 1:8-14 (pp. 249-250).

"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 compassion 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."

Daniel lived by the laws of Moses set down in the first five books of the Old Testament. Leviticus 17:10-16 prohibited God's people from eating blood found in meat. No doubt the Babylonian chefs would not have taken this precaution when they prepared Daniel's dinner. Now you may think that's a pretty insignificant law but to Daniel it was important enough to risk his standing in the king's court.

The British scholar D.S. Russell offered another reason for Daniel's refusal: "The food made available had no doubt been offered to idols or in some other way associated with idol worship. Thus it was ritually unclean and had to be avoided if a Jew was to remain true to God. The sole purpose of refusal was to demonstrate loyalty to God."

We don't usually accept or reject food based on religious considerations. Some of you might need to be gluten-free or lactose-free. Others may have to refuse a juicy steak or banana cream pie for health reasons. Still others say "No" to a glass of wine with dinner or a cold beer on a hot day because of a bad history with alcoholic beverages. Daniel refused the king's food and drink because in that day God demanded a certain kind of distinctiveness for his people and that distinctiveness was demonstrated by their diet.

And by the way he also commanded them to keep free from anything having to do with idols. To drink wine offered to an idol or eat meat sacrificed to an idol would be to legitimize the existence and the power of that idol.

Now let's bring the point home: Do we have any convictions? Is there any core value that we are willing to take a risk to uphold? Are we ready to suffer social embarrassment or disapproval for a belief or principle that is dear to our hearts?

My guess is that some of us doing it even if we're not aware of it.

Maybe you won't buy a certain brand of clothing because it is made by exploited workers in third-world countries who are paid slaves' wages. Maybe you refuse to buy a certain brand because the company supports a cause that is contrary to your moral standards. Or maybe you won't laugh at told in the company lunch room or school cafeteria because they trivialize sex or demean women or employ coarse language.

My dad had to take such a stand one day.

Ellis Fanning was a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He was also an electrician at a shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts. He listened to cursing all day, day-after-day. One day enough was enough. True to his conscience and his convictions Dad spoke up: "Hey, guys: would you do me a favor? Would you not use the name of 'Jesus Christ' like that? He's the best friend I've got. He died on the cross so that I could go be forgiven of my sins and go to heaven when I die."

Dad had a conviction about how to use the name of "Jesus." Believe it or not, these rough and tough shipbuilders stopped taking Jesus' name in vain when my dad was around.

It wouldn't be a bad idea before we go to sleep tonight to ask ourselves: *Do I have any convictions and what are they?*

### **His convictions improved his quality of life**

We see this clearly in Daniel 1:15-16 (p. 250), "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."

When our convictions improve our quality of life to the degree that skeptics and people who disagree with us are convinced that we're on the right road then we have obtained something that cannot be purchased at any price. It's called "credibility." Daniel's convictions were proven to work in the laboratory of life.

Now let's fast-forward from Daniel's day - the sixth-century before Christ - to twenty-one centuries after Christ.

Does reading our Bible, going to church, taking time to pray, and serving the Lord and other people improve your quality of life to the point where other people who are yet be unconvinced about the power of Jesus Christ consider taking a closer look at our faith? Do they see more joy, more peace, more kindness, more love, and more faith because we live-

out our convictions in the secular arena of the workplace, the school, the gym, and the supermarket?

If our convictions don't improve the quality of our lives to the extent that non-Christians sit up, take notice, and want to investigate what makes us tick, then maybe our "convictions" are "convictions" in name only. Many non-Christians are on the lookout for any disconnect between what Christians *say* we believe and how it plays out in the nitty-gritty of everyday life. And when they see a disconnect they have a word for it: "hypocrisy."

The Greek word for "hypocrite" means "one who wears a mask; an actor who plays a part."

We all know that Peter Mayhew is NOT Chewbacca; that Anthony Daniels is NOT C-3PO; and that Kenny Baker is NOT R2-D2. If you were to follow them around tomorrow you'd see that these guys are NOT who they appear to be when on the screen at the AMC in Rockaway.

Let there be no disconnect, no hypocrisy in those of us who call ourselves "fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ." May our convictions about the Bible, Jesus Christ, moral responsibility and ethical integrity result in a quality of life so convincing that those who know us will be amazed.

The militant and outspoken atheist Frederich Nietzsche who once said about the church of his day: "If they want me to believe in their Redeemer, they'll have to look a lot more redeemed."

*It is possible* to look and live as one who has been "redeemed," set free from a life of selfishness and sin. *It is possible* to be an "exile" in a hostile environment and still be a credible and respected representative of Jesus Christ. *It is possible* to live in a culture that is toxic to their faith and not only survive, but thrive.

We can live like Daniel and have his influence. The Lord has given us the Bible to inform us; the Holy Spirit to empower us; and the family of God to cheer us on.

Let the story of Daniel be our story.