

## **AN EXEMPLARY LIFE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout our lives, we face many hills and valleys. There are times when life is just great, and others, when our whole world starts falling apart. Jesus Himself said "In this world you will have troubles".

Many people in our congregation are facing such troubles in their lives. The challenge to us today is this: How are we responding to what we are going through? Is our response good for us or bad? What does it say about us as believers? Are we living EXEMPLARY lives?

God's word has answers for us and today we will have a look at some of those so that by the end of this message, we will be able to make some godly decisions on how to deal with the circumstances we find ourselves in.

### **MESSAGE**

#### **A FUTURE LOST**

There once was a young man. He was of noble birth, he came from the top echelons of society. Life was great, he had a great future, he would become something great in his lifetime. He probably had great hopes and dreams.

Suddenly, everything changed, his whole world came crashing down around him, his country was attacked, many of his friends and family were probably killed, and this young man was dragged off into exile... no hope, no future, no family! Instead of nobility was the prospect of slavery. To top it all, this young man was a servant of the Most High God, surely he never expected God to allow his life to become such a disaster so unexpectedly!

This young man's name was Daniel.

Let's take a moment to think about Daniel... can we identify with things in our lives coming crashing down around us? We may not have experienced the extremities of what Daniel did, but possibly, we have known or even know right now what it feels like to wonder what lays ahead. We may even be wondering if there is a future.

#### **BUT GOD HAD A PLAN**

King Nebuchadnezzar was victorious over Judah and in 605 BC, he carried Daniel and some of his friends into exile

**Daniel 1:3-7** (NLT) Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. 4 "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good

judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon.” 5 The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service. 6 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. 7 The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

- It appeared that God had a plan for these young men even in the midst of their circumstances.

***God’s first encouragement for us is this: “I have a plan for you in the midst of your circumstances”.***

**We may be suffering from a setback, but God is lining us up for a comeback!**

### **TO BE ASSIMILATED OR NOT**

God had a plan for Daniel and his friends, but the enemy did too – his plan was one of **“assimilating”** them into the pagan Babylonian ways and robbing them of their spiritual birthright. It would start with something simple:

- They were to eat out of the king’s kitchen.
- The food would make them fat, obesity was seen as a sign of prosperity.
- Surely that wasn’t so bad???

**Daniel 1:8** (NLT) But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.

- Just a small thing, after all, it was just food!
- But Daniel saw it for what it was, it was defilement!
- We know that Daniel and his friends continued to eat their Kosher diet and at the end, they were smarter, stronger and healthier than all the other young men. God had honoured their decision!

Here’s the point...In the situation we face, it may seem to make life better if we just go with the flow. A little compromise may make everything better.

- So what if a young person dates an unbeliever, at least they won’t be lonely?
- So what if we are slightly dishonest so that we can put food on the table, at least we won’t be hungry?
- So what if I take a little alcohol to make me feel better?

But with each small compromise, there are consequences... failed marriages and broken hearts, dismissal, prison, alcoholism...is it really so what?

On the other hand, if we are able to stand our ground on the small issues, we will be able to stand our ground with the big issues!

- ***God encourages us today not to compromise to get out of our circumstances. It will lead to us becoming just like the world and we are not of this world, we will always be different!***
- ***Are we determined not to defile ourselves in order to escape our trials?***

***We need to place our trust in our Lord! He will bring us to a point where the consequences are good! Just as He did for Daniel and His friends.***

## **STAND BY YOUR CONVICTIONS**

Daniel and his friends' troubles didn't end there though. Because of the choices they made, they had much favour with the king, but they also lived in the midst of a pagan society that worshipped idols. We know the story of Nebuchadnezzar making the golden statue of himself and forcing people to bow to it. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down and it landed them in the fiery furnace.

Under the reign of king Darius, Daniel continued praying 3 times a day even though there was a decree that only Darius could be prayed to. It landed him in the lion's den.

- There were times when their faith was severely tested, but these men would rather have died than to have compromised on their convictions.
- Right was right and wrong was wrong to them, there was no middle ground.
- Life would have been much easier for them if they just temporarily compromised, but what would it have said about their characters?

***There are people here today who need to make decisions.***

- ***Will we compromise our faith?***
- ***Are we accepting the ungodly just to remain in favour in our workplaces?***
- ***Are we choosing to look the other way?***

***God challenges us to stand for our faith and steadfastly serve Him regardless of our circumstances.***

In both incidents God helped these men. In both circumstances, the kings decreed that the God these men served was the true God.

## **CONSISTENCY IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE**

Many people face restructuring in the workplace, or other changes which take them out of their comfort zone. Daniel's life was like that; he was taken into exile as a young man, he then served under kings Nebuchadnezzar,

Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. If anyone faced change and dealt with adversity, it was Daniel!

Each time a new king came in, Daniel had to once again prove his worth, he also faced jealous colleagues! He could have lost hope, slacked off and become unemployed but look what the Bible says:

**Daniel 6:3** (NLT) Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.

**Daniel 6:28** (NLT) So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel kept bouncing back. He had an excellent attitude and start again or not, as Daniel trusted God and worked hard, he proved himself capable over and over again!

- ***What changes are we facing today?***
- ***Are we willing to prove ourselves more capable by working hard and trusting God?***
- ***Are we willing to be consistent in trusting God?***

***If we are, we can trust God to give us favour no matter what. We can turn life's lemons into lemonade! God is with us!***

## **DANIEL PRAYED STEADFASTLY**

Daniel also knew what it was like to pray and not receive an immediate answer. At one stage he had been fasting and praying for three weeks and only then did he receive a vision and an angel visit and we know these famous words spoken by the angel:

**Daniel 10:12-13** (NLT) Then he said, "Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. 13 But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia.

***Daniel prayed and fasted without giving up and he finally got his answer. Psalm 138:3 says "as soon as I pray You answer me and encourage me by giving me strength"... there may be reason for the delay, but we must pray steadfastly until we get our breakthrough.***

## **THE RESULT OF AN EXEMPLARY LIFE**

Daniel lived an amazing life. He truly knew how to turn the lemons of life into lemonade. He lived an uncompromising and steadfast life and he received an amazing promise!

**Daniel 12:13** (NLT) "As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you."

What a promise! Daniel had lived an exemplary life:

- Three times in Daniel 9 and 10 the angel told him, "you are precious to God".
- Now he received the promise that he would rise again and receive the inheritance kept aside for him! Let us learn from Daniel.

***God makes the same promise to us if we choose to live an exemplary life before Him!***

## **CONCLUSION**

Daniel and his friends had the answer for dealing with adversity... they would serve God wholeheartedly and uncompromisingly. In summary, this is what we can learn from them:

***To live exemplary lives, even in the midst of trying circumstances, we don't need to watch our P's & Q's, we need to focus on our P's & C's:***

***Plan – god has a plan for us.***

***Pray – we need to pray for the Lord's help.***

***Compromise – Don't compromise.***

***Convictions – Stand by our convictions.***

***Consistent – Be consistent in trusting God in the midst of change.***

***We are precious to God. We need to trust Him in the midst of our troubles, He loves us, He has a future for us. It's not time to give up, it's time to get up in Christ and live the abundant life He promised us!***