

A Man of Integrity

Opening Hymn: #125—“Trust in Christ”

If you were to select one man from the Old Testament that personified “integrity,” whom would it be? My dictionary says:

Integrity is moral soundness, especially as it is revealed in dealings that test steadfastness of purpose, responsibility, or trust.

So who would you choose as one possessing “moral soundness, especially as revealed in dealings that test steadfastness of purposes, responsibility, or trust”? My choice is Daniel. Here is a man so morally steadfast that there is not a single flaw, a single fault recorded about him. He has been praised in ways that are almost unique:

- ◆ Three times in the book of Daniel he is called “greatly beloved.” This is not said to anyone else in the Bible.
- ◆ Twice in Ezekiel (14:14,20) Daniel is said to be one of three who could “deliver their own souls by their righteousness.” (The other two are Noah and Job.)
- ◆ When we think of a really wise man, we think of Solomon. But in Ezekiel 28:3 the prince of Tyrus is described as a man who thinks he is “wiser than Daniel” because he has become so rich.

Most of us know something about Daniel. Let’s see if we can find some things you might not know about him.

What does his name mean? God must be a part of his name’s meaning because of the “-el.” Daniel means “God is my judge.” We find “-el” in the names **Bethel**, **Gabriel**, **Ezekiel**, **Ishmael**, **Immanuel**, **Joel**, **Samuel**, [of course] **Michael**, and **Israel**. It is also found also as a prefix: **Elijah**, **Elisha**, **Eldad**, **Eliphaz**, **Eleazar**. Daniel was his Hebrew name. When he got to Babylon, he was given the name “Belteshazzar” [Dan. 1:7].

How old was Daniel when he was carried away as a captive by Nebuchadnezzar’s army? Undoubtedly he was in his mid-teens. He was an exceptional young man: “Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.”—Dan. 1:4 He probably died at around the age of 100.

What language was used to record the words of this book? If you say Hebrew, you’re partly right. It was written in Hebrew until 2:4 where the language is Chaldean or Aramaic; at 7:28 it reverts back to Hebrew.

Integrity

Think back to when you were 15 years old. If at that age you were carried off to some foreign land, had your name changed, were forced to learn a new language and new customs, what, if anything, would you still have that you could call your own? You would have only what we frequently refer to

as your “core values.” We need not probe too deeply as to what those might have been when you were 15, but we know from the account that Daniel and three others definitely brought their core values with them.

Daniel 1:5,8,12 The king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank. [vs. 8] But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. [vs. 12, Daniel says] Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse [vegetables] to eat, and water to drink.

What was so bad about the “king’s meat”? Probably it included things that were prohibited by Jewish law. It is possible many of the Jewish captives decided that “once in Rome, do as the Romans do” and they ate whatever food was offered to them. But one thing generally does lead to another, and soon it is not a question of what one eats.

Daniel 3:3,5,6 Then ... all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. [vs. 5 they are told that] at what time ye hear the sound of ... all kinds of musick, fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

We don’t know why Daniel was not present at this special religious ceremony, but the integrity he has for maintaining faithfulness to God is certainly shared by his three companions. They could have said to themselves that what they did outwardly did not matter. God read their hearts and in their hearts they were loyal to God. But they didn’t do this. They were brought before the king, he asked if it was true that they refused to worship his image, and he repeated what would happen to them if they didn’t. He says...

Daniel 3:15-18 [Knox] You are in my power; what God can deliver you? ... There is no need for any answer of ours to that question; thou wilt see for thyself whether the God we worship is able to rescue us from the raging fire, and from thy royal power. But, whether he rescues us or not, be assured, sir king, here are men who do not reverence thy gods, or worship any image of thine.

THIS is integrity. It shows a love for God that transcends a love for life itself. Would we do as well if we had been there? As we go through the experiences of each day, does the love we claim to have for God motivate us to put our lives on the line? How important is it that you live to see tomorrow? You might not say you would do anything to preserve your life, but where would you draw the line? In Rev. 12:11 overcomers are those that... “did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” [NIV].

Chapter six tells us about Daniel’s position in the government:

Daniel 6:1-3 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three presidents, **of whom Daniel was first**: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

The king had divided his empire into three regions, each administered by a president. Under these three presidents were princes each with responsibility for a state. But out of all of these people, one stood out above the others: Daniel was preferred because “an excellent spirit was in him.” As we read more, we find that all these presidents and princes hated Daniel. Why? Prejudice runs deep in the hearts of men. Daniel was a Jew, not a Persian. When someone else does better than you, it is easy to hate the person. Prejudice drives the fires of hatred. But there was more than simple prejudice.

The clue is probably in the words “the king should have no damage.” Corruption has always been a part of many governments. If you have power, you have ways to make money often at the expense of the government itself. We have all heard how officials in some countries have siphoned money and deposited it in Swiss bank accounts. It would have been the same in the Babylonian empire except for one man: Daniel. He would have none of it. His integrity was far more important to him than wealth. His core values, his love for God, would not allow him to compromise his principles. So he made it difficult for cheating to take place, or at least to the extent the administrators would have liked. No wonder they hated Daniel. They could be very rich if it were not for him.

Since they could not accuse Daniel directly and make any charge stick, they devised a clever plot. They came before the king and suggested a new law:

Daniel 6:6-8 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

ALL the presidents of the kingdom? There were only three and Daniel knew nothing about this. But they were hardly going to say, “All the presidents—except Daniel of course because he’s the problem—have consulted together.”

Amazingly the king signs the decree. Why does he do this? Why doesn’t he ask his trusted administrator Daniel for his opinion? Daniel wasn’t there.

Flattery

There are many ways to manipulate people. One of the most effective is flattery which is excessive or insincere praise, especially to win favor. Everyone likes to hear good things about themselves, and kings are the most vulnerable. These princes were essentially telling the king he should be the “god” of the kingdom. To make his deification official, one needs a decree and here it is, just waiting for his signature. Why shouldn’t the king sign it? He suspects nothing. He has been told that ALL his officials endorse it. Now that one thinks about it, for all practical purposes he IS the “god” of this empire.

Do you use flattery on others to attain goals you think are worthwhile? Can you be manipulated by flattery? Just because you think no-one has tried doesn't mean you're right. Your children might have a different opinion. Warning flags should go up when you are told that you are special so you should therefore do this or do that.

Proverbs 28:23 [NIV] He who **rebukes** a man will in the end gain more favour than he who has a **flattering** tongue.

Not in the short run! Think back to someone who in the past told you what you didn't want to hear. Did you welcome it? Did you thank them for it? Probably not, but perhaps you might now agree that it was much better to hear the truth than to hear only what you wanted to hear.

Suppose a man tells his mother-in-law that he loves her cooking when in fact he despises it. Why does he do this? He might say he does it to protect her feelings, that it makes no sense to say what he really thinks because it would only hurt her. A little flattery never hurt anyone. Really?

Suppose one day the mother-in-law discovers what her son-in-law really thought about her cooking. Will she commend him for "protecting her feelings," will she be grateful that she was not hurt by what he could have said? I don't think so. She will feel betrayed and the damage done to their relationship might never be repaired. How could she ever believe another word he utters?

Think twice before you become the bearer of flattering words. Be among those who can honestly say you won't do it because your personal integrity prohibits it. Paul in fact made such a statement about himself:

1 Thes. 2:4-6 [NIV] We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

Daniel's Reaction

Once Daniel returns from his business trip and sees what has happened, he must have been overwhelmed by the display of so much hatred. He might have thought that a few would understand that a kingdom run on righteous principles would be good for everyone. Yet this decree was not the work of a few. It was the work of all of them. They all hated him.

So what did Daniel do? He did not suddenly take another business trip to some distant frontier of the kingdom, one where business would detain him for perhaps 30 days. What he did sealed his death warrant and he knew it.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Is this "suffering for foolishness' sake" (which is often said but not a scripture)? Would this be appropriate behavior for a Christian who has, after all, these wise words from the Master himself:

Matthew 6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Why did Daniel do this? I think it was a matter of personal integrity; it was his character. Since the time he had been brought captive to Babylon against his will, he had served his God openly and faithfully. He always knew his relationship with God was a close one. If God had not revealed that dream the king could not remember, Daniel and all the other wise men would have been executed.

But it was not just integrity. Daniel was the highest-ranking Jew in the kingdom. He was a role model for all the other Jews who were there in exile. The non-Jews had their idols which were their gods. The Jews had none. If Daniel shut his doors, it would be equivalent to saying he no longer worshipped at all. If he were ashamed of his God, the others would be too. Just as the three Hebrews were quite willing to die rather than worship some false god, Daniel was willing to die rather than compromise his integrity.

His enemies had what they wanted. Daniel was seized and thrown into the den of lions. I don't know what your mental image is of this event. Here is the way Bro. Seklemian described this event:

“Let us try to picture what transpired in the den of lions when Daniel dropped through the opening. Suppose Adam, when he was still in Eden, walked into a den of lions. Would they have hurt him? Of course not. He was their king and benefactor. He had power over them. He was their master. They would have loved his visit. I think it is very likely that God endowed his servant Daniel with this attribute of a perfect man—that of dominion over brute beasts. If so, those enormous cats must have come to him purring with delight! They must have rolled on the ground, playing at his feet like kittens. Daniel immediately realized that something most unusual was happening, that the angel of the Lord was present with him. Daniel must have at that moment lifted his voice in thanks to God. Later we can imagine that Daniel went to sleep, his head pillowed on the flank of an erstwhile man-eater, his feet warmed against the back of another, and lulled by the soft purring of them all!”—*Discourses of Robert Seklemian*, p. 289

When Paul makes his list of ancient worthies (Hebrews 11), he doesn't list Daniel directly. But he does list him indirectly just as he says he's running out of time to talk about those who...

Hebrews 11:33 through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, **stopped the mouths of lions.**

It is a fact of life: everybody has influence on everybody else. You are being watched whether you know it or not. Mothers and fathers are painfully aware of this of course. You may be the lowest ranking person in an office, the youngest one in a class, you may be an absolute “nobody”—yet you have influence. What you do, what you say, how you react to the things in your environment affect others. So what kind of role model are you? If you knew that what you did and said today would be written up in the newspapers tomorrow, would you act differently? If the answer is yes, perhaps you ought to act differently without it being written up in the papers.

Daniel's Prophecies

We have not discussed the marvelous prophecies of Daniel. One of everyone's favorites is Daniel 9:25 where we read: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

I suspect that this was one of the favorite prophecies even in the time of our Lord for we read that "the people were in expectation of the Messiah" [Luke 3:15]. Why did they think they were living when Messiah would appear? Perhaps it was from Daniel's prophecy. They probably understood the principle that one prophetic day equals one literal year, and thus the fulfillment of that prophecy should occur in their day. It was fulfilled, but not quite as they expected it.

Daniel chapter 11 is a prophecy so precise in its predictions of future events that even critics acknowledge it. Brother David Rice has spoken on this chapter and found little disagreement among scholars about what these verses describe. I recommend his article in the July-August [2000] issue of *The Herald* if you want to know more about this prophecy. One of the many proofs we have for the inspiration of the Bible is the clear, unambiguous descriptions of events before they occur. Daniel's book contains some of the best examples of this.

Conclusion

Just as we are role models for others, Daniel is a role model for us. Paul writes in Rom. 13:1 that we are to be subject to the higher powers, that these are ordained by God. But in Daniel's life we see that being subject to higher earthly powers is something that has its limits. Our primary allegiance is to God. If the demands of the "higher powers" (earthly governments) conflict with the demands of our God, we will obey our God.

Hebrews 13:14 Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Don't prize your earthly life so much that you lose your integrity. No matter what you do, no matter how many compromises you make with others around you, you will die anyway. But one of the great paradoxes of the Bible is that not trying to save your life will, in fact, preserve it. Jesus himself said,

Matthew 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

You will find this statement repeated in exactly this form in all four gospels.

May the Lord help us find the strength to do those things that are right. May we have the integrity of character to say, as did Peter and John:

Acts 4:19,20 [Today's English Version] "You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight, to obey you or to obey God. For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard."

Closing Hymn: #186—"All in Thy Hand"

Psalm 26

O Lord, do thou me try, in pureness I abide;
I also on thy name rely, nor shall my footsteps slide.
Examine me, and prove, try thou my reins and heart;
Before my eyes I set thy love, from truth did not depart.
I sat not with the vain, nor with the false will meet;
I shunned the throng of wicked men, with such I will not sit.
My hands I'll cleanse, O God, so to thy altar go.
With voice of thanks proclaim abroad, and all thy wonder show.
I in thy house delight, where is thy honor seen:
My soul, my life, do not unite with wicked, bloody men.
Their hands with crimes they fill, their right hands bribes retain;
But I in all my way shall still integrity maintain.
Redeem me from distress, thy grace to me afford.
I stand upon an even place; with saints I'll bless the Lord.