

Living Courageously: The God of Dreams and Destinies

Daniel 2:1-6, 10-23

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at the West University Church of Christ, Houston, Texas,
on January 23, 2011**

In 605 B.C., Daniel was probably 15 years old when he was taken away from his homeland by the Babylonians. He lived the rest of his life 750 miles away from his home, never to see his parents, his family, or Jerusalem again. Daniel served God faithfully while in Babylon. We know he was there until at least the third year of Cyrus, King of the Persians who conquered the Babylonians in 539 B.C. That means that Daniel served God in a foreign land, a land of paganism, witchcraft, and idolatry, for 70 years. Daniel was faithful to God, no matter where he was, no matter what the circumstances were. Daniel is truly one of the great men of the Bible. There is nothing recorded about him that is wrong, sinful or even distrusting of God in any way. This says to me that no matter where you live, no matter which kind of wicked society surrounds you, no matter what government under which you live, that you can be faithful to God. Daniel was faithful to God in this land of 4000 gods. This means that we can be faithful to God today, no matter what.

Daniel was placed in the king's school to learn all the language, literature, and wisdom of the Babylonians. God honors those who honor him, and Daniel honored God while in this three year curriculum, and God honored him.

By the time of our story in chapter 2, Daniel had either graduated from this school or was about to finish. Daniel would be still a teenager, probably about 18 or 19 years old. At this time, Daniel was low man on the totem pole. Our story today shows how God works in human lives and in worldly situations to control even the dreams of kings and the destinies of nations. Our story today is really not about Daniel; it is about God. It is God who works here. Daniel is simply the servant of God and a worshipper of God. The major lesson of the book of Daniel is that God is at work. You could post a sign on every chapter of Daniel that says, "God at Work." The philosophy of "*que sera, sera*," ("whatever will be, will be") is patently false. The key thought of the book of Daniel is that "there is a God in

heaven” who works in the lives, events, and circumstances of our lives. This means that God’s word is certain, our future is secure, and we can serve God with confidence.

The King’s Dream

The king has been troubled by a recurring dream he has been having. Nebuchadnezzar is one of the greatest kings who ever ruled among men. He built the fabulous city of Babylon whose walls were 300 feet high and whose walls encompassed the city for 56 miles. Because his wife was used to mountains, and there were no mountains in Iraq at the Euphrates River, he built one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The Euphrates River ran right through the middle of his capital city. Nebuchadnezzar was famous for his organizational skills and the leadership he exerted.

So the king got to thinking about his future, “What’s going to happen to all this? How long am I going to live? What kind of kings and kingdoms will come after I have gone the way of all the earth?” The king was troubled during the day by these thoughts and dreamed about these things during the night.

His dreams are from God. At one time God worked in the dreams of pagan rulers. He gave dreams to Pharaoh that the young man Joseph interpreted. He gave dreams to Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel interprets here. Nebuchadnezzar does not know God. He does not believe in the one true God of heaven, but God used his mind and body to praise him. This dream is from God and is one of the greatest prophecies ever given. This dream has been called the “A-B-C of prophecy.”

The king wanted his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him the dream and then interpret it for him. The magicians were sacred writers and scholars. The enchanters were priests or wise men. The sorcerers were spiritualists, mediums who claimed contact with the dead, who used witchcraft, herbs and charms to reveal truths. The astrologers were those who used horoscopes and the stars to discern the future. These were the wisest men of this worldly kingdom. We know that they had books on dreams and what different signs and occurrences in dreams meant.

But all these wise men could not interpret the dream because he king would not reveal the dream to them. Maybe the king thought that these wise men were really charlatans and he wanted to see if they really were wise or just fooling around with him. He threatened them. “You either tell me my

dream and the meaning of it or I will turn your houses into rubble and latrines and you will be executed.” The men again say that the king’s command is an impossible one. No one on earth has ever asked such a demand. The wise men could read the stars, and figure the future from observing the liver of sheep, but they could not read minds. The king is angry. Things are going from bad to worse fast. The king threatens them again. The wise men finally respond, “The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” (2:11). They are right. God knows the mind of man. God knows the dream. God knows the meaning of the dream. God reveals his plans to his prophets. The Bible says, “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:7).

Effectual Fervent Prayer

Nebuchadnezzar was angry. He ordered the destruction of all the wise men of the kingdom. At this time, Daniel and his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were only junior level wise men so they were not consulted at first. But the commander of the guard came to take them to death row. Daniel, just a teenager, demonstrated great faith by requesting to see the king in order to interpret the dream. Daniel probably did not see the king himself at this time but through government channels made an appointment to meet with the king to interpret the dream. When Daniel told the government officials he could interpret the dream that put the execution orders on hold until after Daniel had his chance to prove his words true.

I am sure that Daniel’s mother had told him the story of Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams in Egypt and how that Joseph answered the king, “It is not in men. God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.” (Gen. 41:16, 25). When Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar he said the same thing. Notice in verses 27 and 28: “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. “

The difference in the stories of Joseph and Daniel is that Pharaoh told Joseph what he had dreamed but Nebuchadnezzar would not tell Daniel. But to God, to disclose and interpret the dream is no harder than just to interpret the dream. Daniel gave glory to God for everything. Daniel had his eyes on

God just like Peter had his eyes on Jesus when Peter was enabled to walk on water.

In v. 17, the first thing that Daniel did was to go home and call his companions together for a prayer meeting. Here are four teenage boys on their knees talking to God. Prayer is talking to God. The greatest thing that we ever do is to pray. Jesus was constantly praying and he left us the model and example of fervent prayer. The Bible says, “The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16). The apostle Paul constantly requested prayer for himself in his ministries. We can do more than pray but we cannot do more until we have prayed.

Here’s an important spiritual principle for us: Daniel prayed before he did anything else. Daniel depended on God. When we depend on man, we get what man can do; when we depend on God we get what God can do. Daniel did not say, “I’m wise. I’ve been trained. I can figure out a plan, just give me time. I can use my best diplomacy and tact. I am skilled with words. I can handle this.” No, Daniel did none of that. When the bottom fell out, Daniel fell to his knees.

The hardest thing that we do is to pray. The reason it is so hard to pray is that we are realizing that we cannot handle life, that we need help, that we must depend on God. That’s a hard lesson for me. I want to take the reins. I want to be in control. I like to trust my mind. I line up my strategies. I can fix this problem. I look over my life and I can see crucial passages and changes where I did that very thing. In everything, in all things, we need to pray.

Brain Chappell of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, tells that

Recently, a young man sat in my office. He was broke, out of work, and trying to find some direction for his life. According to society’s agenda, he should have been traumatized and troubled, but he was bubbling with joy as he told his story.

Pastor, for two months I’ve been doing everything possible I know to do to get back on track. I have tried to get a job, using every skill I have. I have searched the want ads, hit the bricks, called all my contacts, mailed resumes, driven what seemed like a million miles. Nothing was happening. I was so wound up in job hunting that I didn’t realize how spiritually dry I had become.

Then I realized I had not had a conversation with a Christian friend in weeks. My devotional life was ‘zilch.’ My church attendance was ‘in and out’ as fast as I could manage, so I didn’t

waste any job-hunting time. I need God now more than I have ever needed him, but I wasn't even giving him a moment. When I realized that, it was as though I heard God say to me, 'Stop trying to do this your way. Depend on me. Read my word and talk to me.' Ever since that moment, I've been praying regularly, and it's hard to fathom the difference it's made. Suddenly God is opening doors I never dreamed would be opened for me. But, even more important than that, I realize now that God will provide for my needs even if all these doors close. For the first time in my life I know how good it feels to be absolutely confident in God.

[Brian Chappell, Standing Your Ground: A Call to Courage in an Age of Compromise. Messages from Daniel. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989, pp. 49-50]

Chappell then commented:

Prayer represents the confession of our need for God. It does not mean that we are to become irresponsible about our duties, actions, and plans. But prayer does acknowledge our dependency: "Apart from you, Lord, my actions and plans mean nothing. On my own, Lord, I can't fix this. I can't put it together again, heal the wound, correct the fault, or clean up the mess. God, you must take control if any good is to result. Use me if you will, but you must do what I confess I cannot do alone, despite my power, my brains, and my connections. Only you, Lord, are truly able. I depend on you alone."

[Standing Your Ground, p. 50]

So when you face a problem before you pick up the phone, line up your plans, gather your support team, call a meeting, and create a priority list, pray. And then take action. Action taken with God's guidance and help is so much more peaceful, confident and successful than trying to manage it all by yourself.

To God Be the Glory

God answers Daniel and his friend's prayer. What is the first thing that Daniel does when he gets the answers? Does he immediately rush into the king's chambers in the middle of the night? Does he trumpet his success

to the commander of the guard? No. The first thing Daniel does is to praise God. Notice what the Bible says in verse 19b through verse 23: [read]

Daniel praises God. Prayer is asking God; ministry is God answering that prayer; praise is worshipping God. We pray, God answers, and we praise God. There is not one request in these verses. They are all praise. We are often short on praise. This praise is general and specific. Daniel praises God in general and praises him for the answer to the dream (v. 23). We need both in our praise. When the Samaritan leper was healed by Jesus, he came back to Jesus and thanked him profusely for his healing. That was specific (Lk. 17:11-18). We need to be specific in our praise.

- Think of one good thing God has put in your life right now and praise him.
- Now remember a second good thing he has done for you in the past and praise him.

There are three themes in the praise of Daniel. The first is the sovereignty and power of God. God is stronger than all the potentates of earth. The fortunes of men and the affairs of men are subject to God's decrees. The miracles in chapters one through six show that God is in control:

*In chapter one, God gives surpassing health to Daniel and his friends after they had eaten only vegetables and water.

*In chapter two, God discloses to Daniel of the meaning of the king's dream

*In chapter 3, God delivers Daniel's friends from the furnace of fire.

*In chapter 4, God puts Nebuchadnezzar through seven years of dehumanizing insanity because of his pride.

*In chapter 5, God writes on the wall and destroys the power of Belshazzar.

*In chapter 6, God delivers Daniel from the lions' den.

What does all this say? God is in control. He is the God of dreams and destinies. This book is not about Daniel; it is about God.

The book of Daniel is not intended to give an account of the life of Daniel. It gives neither his lineage, nor his age, and recounts but a few of the events of his long career. Nor is it meant to give a record of the history of Israel during the exile, nor even of the captivity of Babylon. Its purpose is to show how by his providential guidance, his miraculous intervention, His foreknowledge and almighty power, the God of heaven controls and directs the forces of nature and the history of nations, the lives of Hebrew captives and of the mightiest

of the kings of the earth, for the accomplishment of his divine and beneficent plans for his servants and people.

[Robert Dick Wilson, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, II:5785-86.p. 784].

In the book of Daniel, God works in people's thoughts and feelings. He changes people's intentions, hearts and plans and thus alters history. God rules in the conscious and the subconscious mind. He works through dreams and visions. He directs people's preferences one way or the other. He controls the thoughts and appetites of lions as well as men.

[The thoughts of the above paragraph are paraphrased from Ronald S. Wallace, The Message of Daniel: The Lord Is King. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979, pp. 46-47].

Later on, Nebuchadnezzar confesses that God is in control. Hear the king's words in chapter 4, verses 34-35: [read].

The second theme in Daniel's praise is the wisdom of God. Notice in verses 21-22: [read]. God's Spirit makes God's wisdom known [read I Cor. 2:14].

The third theme of Daniel's praise is that this wisdom and power is given to Daniel personally (2:23). God does not speak in dreams today. He speaks through his son [read Heb. 11]. "In Jesus all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (Col. 2:3). In Jesus, God answers the big questions of "What is man?", "What is man's relationship to God?", and "What is man's relationship to others?" We praise God for all the wisdom he has given us in Jesus. We don't need to bite our nails wondering how everything is going to turn out. Two men were once listening to a delayed broadcast of a basketball game. It was a crucial game against a rival university, like A & M versus U.T. Suddenly one man says, "Why am I so nervous? I know how it comes out." His friend said, "Now you know how God must feel when we fret and get so depressed."

Our message today says that God gives direction to both our individual histories and our world history. Babylon is typical of our world societies that deny God. Even though Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon appear to be winning, God is really in control of all things. Daniel and his friends did not compromise. They were hated and plotted against but they were faithful to God in all things. In their pagan world, their attitude and convictions were to obey God, no matter what. Their faith is summarized in these words from chapter 3 [read vs. 16-18]. May God help us to stand our ground just like they did.

-cwarpula@westchurch.com