

DANIEL'S UNDAUNTED COURAGE

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

Daniel had been exalted to very great worldly prosperity, but his soul had prospered too. Oftentimes outward advancement means inward decline. Tens of thousands have been intoxicated by success. Though they bade fair in starting in the race of life to win the prize, they were tempted to turn aside to gather the golden apples, and so they missed the crown. It was not so with Daniel—he was as perfect before God in his high estate as in his lowlier days; and this is to be accounted for by the fact that he sustained the energy of his outward profession by constant secret communion with God. He was, we are told, a man of an excellent spirit, and a man abundant in prayer; hence his head was not turned by his elevation, but the Lord fulfilled in him his promise to “make his servant’s feet like hinds’ feet, that they may stand upon their high places.” Yet, although Daniel preserved his integrity, he did not find a position of greatness to be one of rest. As the birds peck at the ripest fruit, so his envious enemies assailed him; and as the most conspicuous warriors most attract the arrows of the foe, so the honors of Daniel brought upon him the enmities of many.

Seek not then, beloved, seek not then, with an excess of desire, or an unrest of ambition, to be great among the great ones of the earth. There are more precious things than honor and wealth. A Persian king, wising to give

two of his courtiers a token of his regard, gave to one of them a golden cup and to the other a kiss: he who had obtained the golden cup considered that he was hardly done by, and envied the courtier who received the kiss from the monarch's own mouth. And let me say, let who will receive the wealth and honors of the world, which make up her golden cup, if you receive a kiss of favor from the lip of God, and feel the sweetness of it in your inmost soul, you have received more than they; you have no reason whatsoever to repine though that kiss should come to you in poverty and sickness, but rather to rejoice that God has counted you worthy, in his infinite grace, to receive the more of spirituals though you have the less of temporals.

Luther declared that all the greatness of the world was but a bone which God threw to a dog, "For," says he, "he gives more to the Pope and to the Turk than to all his saints put together," and so verily it is. To be great, distinguished, and wealthy, may be the lot of a Haman, who shall be hanged upon a gallows, while God's true servant may sit at the gate and bear contempt as did Mordecai. Better to pine with Lazarus than feast with Dives, for the love of God more than compensates for temporary disadvantages. Better an ounce of divine grace than a tone of worldly goods. Though the good things come not as the left-handed blessings of outward prosperity, be thou more than content if thou win the right-handed benediction of spiritual joy.

The example of Daniel I present you for your observation today, believing that these are times when we need to be as firm and resolute as he, and that at any rate, occasions will come to every one of us before we win our crown, when we shall need to put our foot down firmly, and be steadfast and unflinching for the Lord and his truth.

First, let me invite your attention to Daniel's habitual devotion: it is worthy of our study. We might never have known of it if he had not been so sorely tried, but fire reveals the hidden gold.

Daniel's habitual devotion. We are told that aforetime, before the trial, he had been in the constant habit of prayer. He prayed much. There are some forms of spiritual life which are not absolutely essential, but prayer is of the very essence of spirituality. He that hath no prayer lacks the very breath of the life of God in the soul. I will not say that every man who prays is a Christian, but I will say that every man who prays sincerely is so; for, recollect, men may pray after a fashion, and even practice private prayer

too, and yet may be deceiving themselves; for as the frogs of Egypt came up into the bedchambers, so doth hypocrisy intrude itself even into the private places where men pretend to worship God; but I do say that a cheerful constancy in sincere private devotion is such a mark of grace, that he who hath it may fairly conclude himself to be one of the Lord's family.

Daniel always had subjects for prayer and reasons for prayer. He prayed for himself that in his eminent position he might not be uplifted with pride, might not be taken in the snares of those who envied him, might not be permitted to fall into the usual oppressions and dishonesties of Eastern rulers. He prayed for his people. He saw many of the house of Judah who were not in such prosperous circumstances as himself. He remembered those who were in bonds, as being bound with them. Those who were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, he brought in the arms of faith before his God. He interceded for Jerusalem. It grieved him that the city was laid waste, that still the brand of the Chaldean destroyer was upon Mount Zion, so beautiful, and once the joy of the whole earth. He pleaded for the return from the captivity, which he knew was ordained of his God. He prayed for the glory of his God, that the day might come when the idols should be utterly abolished, and when the whole earth should know that Jehovah ruleth in heaven, and among the sons of men. It would have been a delightful thing to have listened at the keyhole of Daniel's closet, and to have heard the mighty intercessions which went up to the Lord God of Hosts.

We read next, that with all his prayers he mingled thanksgiving. Do observe it, for so many forget this, "He prayed and gave thanks to God." Surely, it is poor devotion which is always asking and never returning its gratitude! Am I to live upon the bounty of God, and never to thank him for what I receive? Surely, prayers in which there is no thanksgiving are selfish things: they rob God; and will a man rob God-rob God even in his prayers-and yet expect that his prayers should be successful? Have I not often said in this place that prayer and praise resemble the process by which we live? We breathe in the atmospheric air, and then breathe it out again: prayer takes in deep drafts of the love and grace of God, and then praise breathes it out again.

*Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven,
Bring down to earth the bliss of heaven.*

Good Daniel had learned to praise as well as to pray, and to offer to God that sweet incense which was made of diverse spices, of earnest desires and longings mingled with thanksgivings and adorations.

It is worthy of notice, that the text says, “Daniel prayed and gave thanks before his God.” This enters into the very soul of prayer-this getting before God. O brethren, do you not often catch yourselves praying to the wind, and in private uttering words as though you were only to be heard by the four walls which bound your little room? But prayer, when it is right, comes before God, in realizing the majesty of the throne of his grace, and seeing the blood of the eternal covenant sprinkled thereon; in discerning that God is gazing right through you, reading every thought and interpreting every desire; in feeling that you yourself are speaking into the ear of God, and are now, as it were,

*Plunged in the Godhead’s deepest sea,
And lost in his immensity.*

This is praying, when we draw near to God. I shall not care if you do not use a single word, if you feel the majesty of God to be so overwhelming that words are out of place; and silence becomes far more expressive when you bow with sobs, and tears, and groanings that cannot be uttered. That is the prayer which wins its suit of God, and is dear to the majesty of heaven. Thus Daniel prayed and gave thanks, not before men to be seen of them, nor yet in private before himself to satisfy his conscience, but “before God,” of whom he had an audience thrice each day.

That little word “his” I must not let slip, however. He prayed and gave thanks before his God. He spake not to God merely as God who might belong to any man and every man, but unto his God, whom he had espoused by a solemn determination that he would not turn aside from his service, that determination having resulted from God’s having determined to select him and to make him his own man, peculiarly set apart unto his own praise. “His God.” Why, it seems to me to bring up that word “covenant”-his “covenant God,” as though he had entered into covenant with God according to the language of the Most High, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” True son of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, was this Daniel when he looked upon God as being his own, his property, could claim him, could say as we sometimes sing in that sweet psalm, “Yea, mine own God is he!” Oh, to feel that the Lord belongs wholly to me! My God, my God, if no other man can claim him; my Father, my

Shepherd, my Friend, my Lord, and my God! Yes, here lies power in prayer, when a man can talk with God as his covenant God. That man cannot miss; every arrow sticks in the center of the target when he pleads “before his God.” That man must conquer the angel at Jabbok’s brook who grips him with both hands by a faith which knows its heaven-wrought claims. It is not winning mercies from another’s God, nor pleading outside the covenant, but the believer feels that he is asking of his own God mercies already promised and made sure to him by oaths, and covenant, and blood.

Some other particulars in the text are not quite so important; nevertheless, observe that he prayed three times a day. That does not tell you how often he prayed, but how often he was in the posture of prayer. Doubtless he prayed 300 times a day if necessary-his heart was always having commerce with the skies; but thrice a day he prayed formally. It has been well said that we usually take three meals in the day, and that it is well to give the soul as many meals as the body. We want the morning’s guidance, we need the eventide’s forgiveness, do we not also require the noontide’s refreshment? Might we not well say at noontide, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.” If you find from morn till eve too long an interval between prayer, put in another golden link at midday. There is no rule in Scripture as to how often you should pray, and there is no rule as to when you should pray; it is left to the man’s own gracious spirit to suggest season. We need not come back to the bondage of the Mosaic covenant, to be under rule and rubric; we are left to that free Spirit who leads his saints aright. Yet, three times a day is a commendable number.

Notice, also, the posture. That, also, is of little consequence, since we read in Scripture of men who prayed on the bed, with their face to the wall. We read of David sitting before the Lord. How very common and acceptable a posture was that of standing before God in prayer! Yet there is a peculiar appropriateness, especially in private prayer, in the posture of kneeling. It seems to say, “I cannot stand upright before thy majesty; I am a beggar, and I put myself in the position of a beggar; I sue of thee, great God, on bended knee, in the posture of one who owns that he deserves nothing, but humbles himself before thy gracious majesty.” The reason why he kneeled on the particular occasion mentioned in the text was, no doubt, because he always had kneeled, and therefore always would kneel, and he would not be driven from the posture, little as that might be, at a tyrant’s word. Nay,

if all earth and hell should be against him, if he had found it more to God's honor to kneel, then kneel still he would, even though he should be cast into the lions' den for it.

One more observation. We are told that Daniel kneeled upon his knees with his window open towards Jerusalem. This was not done with any view to publicity. It may be that nobody could see him, even when his window was open, except the servants in the court. I suppose the house to have been erected as most Eastern houses were, with an open square in the center; and though he would be looking towards Jerusalem, the windows would be looking into the court, where he could only be observed by those who might be residents in the house or visitors on business. Probably his fellow counselors knew the hour which he usually set apart for devotion, and therefore called in so as to find him in the act. Besides, you must recollect that, though it would be strange here for a man to pray with his windows open, where he could be heard, it was not at all strange among the Orientals, since you will find the Pharisees and others not at all slow to perform their devotions in any place, when the hour of prayer comes, and therefore it would not be regarded at all as being of a Pharisaic nature, that he should pray with his window open.

The window being open towards Jerusalem, may have been suggested by the prayer of Solomon, when he asked that if the Lord's people were banished at any time, when they sought the Lord with their faces towards that holy place, God would hear them. It may have helped him also to recollect that dear city towards which every Jew's heart turns with affection, even as the needle trembles towards its pole. The thought of its ruin assisted his earnestness, the recollection of its sin humbled him, and the promises concerning it comforted him. He turned towards Jerusalem. And what does this say to us? Men and brethren, it tells us that we ought to take care when we pray, to have our window open towards Calvary. Neither turn you to the East, nor to the West, but let your spirits turn towards the cross of Christ. That is the great point towards which all the faces of the faithful must continually be turned, where Jesus died, where Jesus rose, where Jesus intercedes before the throne of mercy. There it is that the eyes of faith must look. With your windows open towards Calvary always pray; look upon the precious blood; gaze steadfastly upon the risen Lord; behold the authority of his plea, as before his Father he wins his suit for his people, and you will grow strong to wrestle until you prevail.

We must now turn to a second consideration, Daniel's action under trial.

There is nothing that kings and queens are much fonder of than meddling with religion. Though the Prussian king tried to make a number of watches all tick together, and could not do it, yet notwithstanding the experiment and its failure, there are always evil counselors who would force men's consciences to keep stroke. Folly is in the throne when monarchs patronize or oppress religion. Caesar always muddles when he meddles with the things of God. In Daniel's day there was an act of uniformity passed in some respects similar to the famous act which was thrust upon this land. Darius ordained that no man should pray for thirty days: the other Act of Uniformity commanded that no man should pray at any time in public without his book. There is not very much to prefer between the two. When this act of uniformity was passed, several courses were open to Daniel. He might, for instance, have said, "This does not answer my purpose. I have a high position in society. I am chief president over all these dominions, and though I am willing to suffer something for my religion, yet gold may be bought too dear, and therefore I shall cease to pray." He might have found many precedents and many companions. What crowds, when it has come to a question between life and truth, between honor and Christ, have made the evil choice and perished infamously? Daniel does not seem to have raised that question. Yet he might have said, "Well, well, we must be prudent; God must be worshiped certainly, but there is no particular reason for my worshiping him in the usual room, nor even in the city where I live; I can retire in the evening, or find some more secret spot in my own house, and especially there is no occasion to open the window. I can pray with the window shut, and I shall be just as acceptable before God. I think, therefore, I shall keep my conscience clear, but not obtrude my religion in these evil days."

Daniel did not so reason; he was a lion-like man, and scorned to lower his standard in the presence of the foe; for see, in his position, if he had not prayed as before, it would have been a scandal to the weak and a scorn to the wicked; for the weak would have said, "See, Daniel is cowed by the decree." Then every poor Jew throughout the realm would have found excuse for forsaking his principles; and the wicked would have said, "Note, he serves his God when all goes well, but see where he drifts when trouble comes!" He would not seek the secrecy which prudence might have suggested. Still, it might have suggested to him that he could pray inwardly. Prayers without words are just as acceptable to God: could he

not do this? He felt he could not, inasmuch as the decree was not inward, and the king's opposition to religion was not inward. He did not believe in opposing outward falsehood by an inward truth. He did, in the language of the hymn we were singing, "strength to strength oppose." He would give distinct outward avowal of his own convictions in opposition to the outward persecuting edict.

As Daniel did not happen to have one of those rotating, double-acting consciences, he did not try to import a new meaning into the terms of the decree, or invent a compromise between it and his own convictions, but he went straightforward in the plain path. He knew what the edict meant, and therefore down on his knees he went before his God in direct defiance of it. Whether the edict might be read in a milder sense or not, did not trouble him; he knew what Darius meant by it, and what the captains and the counselors meant by it, and he knew also what he himself intended to do, and therefore he did the right thing, and before his God he dared the lions, rather than soil his conscience with aught of ill.

Observe with care what Daniel did. He made up his mind to act as he had done aforetime. Note how quietly he acted. He did not say to any of his enemies, "I mean to carry out my convictions." Not at all; he knew that talk was lost upon them, so he resorted to actions instead of words. He quietly went home when he found the law was passed—though grieved that such a thing was done—without a single word of repining or caviling he sought his chamber. I do not find that he was at all distracted or disturbed. The words, "As he had done aforetime," seem to imply that he went upstairs as calmly as he had been accustomed to do. His servants would not have known from his behavior that any law had been made. He always had gone at that hour to pray, and they could hear him pray just as earnestly as he ever had done. He was stayed on God, therefore continued at perfect peace.

Note again, how he acted unhesitatingly—immediately! He did not pause; he did not ask for time to consider what he should do. In matters of perilous duty, our first thoughts are best. When there is anything to be lost by religion, follow out the first thought of conscience, namely, "Do the right." Who needs to question where duty points the way? Where God commands, there is no room for reason to raise cavils. Yet I have no doubt, if the devil could have whispered into the prophet's ear, he would have said, "Now, Daniel, you had better consider a little while. You are in a position where

you can materially help your friends. You are of very great authority in this court; you may be of assistance to the true religion. You do not know how many may be converted by your example. You ought not lightly to give up a position where you can do so much good." That argument I have heard hundreds of times when people have been urged to come out of false positions and do the right. But what have you and I to do with maintaining our influence and position at the expense of truth? It is never right to do a little wrong, to obtain the greatest possible good. Your duty is to do the right: consequences are with God; and after all it never can be, in the long run, a good thing either for you or for others to do wrong.

You will observe also, that Daniel did not act under excitement, but with a full knowledge of the result. The record expressly hath it—"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed." Many people will do right in a hurry, and under strong excitement will go further than they would have done in cold blood; but Daniel, probably shut out from the council by some crafty device of the counselors, no sooner heard that the statute stood good than, without parley, his resolution was formed and his mind made up. It was not for him to delay and to hesitate; he had all the data before him, and obedience made her determination known. Count the cost, young man, before you profess to be a Christian; do not espouse, upon a sudden, an enterprise for which you will be unequal. Devote yourselves to the Lord your God by his grace, but let it be according to the command of Christ, after having first made an estimate of that which will be required of you, and seek grace from on high that you may accomplish what otherwise will be impossible.

I like that word, and must go back to it again, "as he had done aforetime." Here he makes no alteration; he takes not the slightest possible notice of the king's decree. At the same place, at the same hour, in the same posture, and in the same spirit, the prophet is found. This indicates to us the Christian's duty under persecution—he should act under persecution as he would have done if none had arisen. If you have worshiped God under the smile of your Christian friends, worship him under the crown of the ungodly. If you have, as a tradesman, pursued a course of honest action in more prosperous times, do not for God's sake, for Christ's sake, tamper with that honest course because the times have changed. What has been right is right, and therefore abide by it. What you have done sincerely still do, and God will give you a blessing in it. Daniel could not have performed that act of praying, when the lions' den was to be the penalty, if he had not

fallen into the habit of constant prayer beforehand. It was his secret communion with God which gave him strength and vigor to push on. Because he was right, he found it easier to keep right, whatever the penalty might be. I dare say I address some young man who has come from the country from a godly family where true religion has been daily set before him, and now he is placed in a workshop where he is startled to find that Jesus is ridiculed, and religion is a by-word. Now, friend, so as you used to do at home; make no difference to please vain men; take care that you begin as you mean to go on. I would not say merely, "Do not give up the spirit of religion," but "Do not even yield the form." The devil never gives up to us; do not give up to him. He takes care to fight us with all his might; let us do the same to him.

I believe hundreds of Christian men make a hard lot to themselves by little yieldings at first, for generally is it so in this world, that if a man is determined and makes up his mind, after a while the world will let him alone. In the barrack-room, when the soldier kneels to pray, how often has he been the subject of a thousand ribald jests, and so have given up all thought of bowing the knee! Yet we have heard of a real convert, who, when he came into the regiment, having been converted, knelt down to pray, and as he persisted in so doing, his comrades said, "Ah! he's one of the plucky ones; he's a genuine fellow"; and they left him alone afterwards; whereas, if he had once sneaked into his bed without prayer, he would never after that have dared to kneel. There is nothing like following Daniel's example, by never giving in, for thus you will win the respect of those who otherwise would have sneered at you. How soon the world will find out our real meaning! We may think we are playing our game so prettily that they cannot make us out, and that we shall be pleasing the world and pleasing God too, but it always comes to a dead failure, and then, while the world despises, we have not the comfort of our conscience to sustain us.

Oh, if our fathers, the Puritans, would but have yielded a little; if they could have made but a nick in their consciences, as some are now doing, then, instead of being cast out of house and home, and prevented from opening their mouths to preach Christ, their yielding and consenting would have kept them in ease and honor; but where, then, would have been that Gospel light which gladdens the nations? Where those pure and sacred institutions which they have handed down to us? Now, at this hour, through their intrepid resolution, they remain amongst the blessed, and men

honor them. Let us not, the sons of brave fathers, let us not be craven. Recollect the days of Cromwell, and the times when the godless Cavaliers felt the edge of the Roundheads' sword, and though we take not carnal weapons, but eschew them utterly, let us show our foemen that the manhood of England is in us still, and we are of the same metal as our sires.

Let us turn to the third point, with which we conclude, the secret support of Daniel. There was something in the man which gave him this backbone; there was a secret something which made him so magnanimous. What was it? It resulted from several things. It sprang from the fact that Daniel's religion was not the offspring of passion, but of deep-seated principle.

There are some men whose religion is like the flower which lives upon the surface—they soon dry up when the sun of persecution burns; but there are others who, like the forest trees, send down their roots into the deep soil of principle, who know what they know, have learned thoroughly what they have learned, and hold fast what they have received, and these, in the time of trial, are sustained by springs of secret grace, and their leaf is not withered. Because the Holy Ghost had inwrought into Daniel's spirit the principles of faith, he was sustained in the time of trial; but I doubt not that Daniel was also supported by what he had read of the works of God in the olden times. He was a great searcher of books, and he had found that in olden times Jehovah was always victorious. The prophet's eye gleamed as he thought of Pharaoh and the Red Sea, as he remembered Og, king of Bashan, and the books of Arnon, and as his mind flew on to Sennacherib and the hook put into leviathan's jaws to turn him back by the way which he came. Recollecting the works of the Lord, for which his spirit made diligent search, he felt quite certain that the living God would prove himself true to his own.

Besides, the prophet's spirit was sustained by what he had himself seen. He had been brought in close contact with the three holy children who were brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Where Daniel was at that time we do not precisely know, but he must have been well aware of that heroic deed. He had seen king Nebuchadnezzar defied, had beheld the Son of God walking in the furnace with the three heroes, and had seen them come forth with not so much as the smell of fire passed upon them: here was grand encouragement. Besides, Daniel had personal experience of his God. He stood before Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the dream, and the interpretation

thereof; yea, on a yet more dread occasion, without fear and trembling, he had faced the king Belshazzar, when the thousands of his guests were shouting to their gods, and the king and his wives and concubines in gorgeous state were drinking wine out of the bowls consecrated to Jehovah. That lone man stood erect amid the ribald crew, and pointing to the mysterious letters, read the terrible sentence, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," a monarch's doom proclaimed in his presence by a man unarmed! Was such a one likely now to be afraid! He that trembled not before tens of thousands of fierce soldiery, shall he fear now, when nothing but lions are in his way? Not he. He had looked into the face of his God, and would not fear the face of a lion; Jehovah had overshadowed him, and the den into which he would be cast had nothing in it terrible to him. His own experience helped to strengthen him. He had this conviction, that God could deliver him, and that if God did not deliver him, yet still such was his love to the God of Israel that he would be content to give himself to die.

It is blessed to have such a confidence as this. You good people who are tried, and who may expect to be tried yet more, you will never stand unless you come to this: "God can deliver me; but if he does not deliver me, still I am well content to be a sacrifice for Jesus' sake." Ah! some of you would fain be Christians, but in the time of trial you give it up; like the freshwater sailor, who, seeing the ship decked with all her colors, and her fair white sails bellying to the wind, thinks it must be a fine thing to be a mariner, but he is not far out to sea before qualms have come upon him; he dreads the storm, and vows, "IF I can but once get safe to shore, I had done with sailing forever." Many have said, "We will follow the Lord with Daniel." Yes, and well-content they are to be with Daniel at Shushan, in the king's palace, but when it comes to the lions' den, then, "Daniel, good-bye." Take heed to yourselves that ye be not deceived with a fair profession which shall afterwards fail you. Daniel failed not, because his love to his God rested deep in his inmost heart: it had become part and parcel of himself, and sustained by the two hands of love and faith, he was graciously upborne over the rough and thorny places.

Remember that Daniel is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had enemies who sought to destroy him; they could find nothing against him except, "touching his God." They accused him of blasphemy, and then afterwards, as they did Daniel, they brought a charge of sedition. He was cast into the den, into the grave: his soul was among the lions. They sealed his tomb with their signet, lest any should steal him by night, but he arose

as Daniel did, alive and unhurt, and his enemies were destroyed. Now, if Daniel is a type of Christ, and the Lord Jesus is the great representative Man for all who are in him, you, believer, must expect that there will be those who will attack you, who will assail you especially in your religion. You must expect, too, that they will prevail against you for a time, so that you may be cast into the den, that they will seek to fasten you in as though you were destroyed forever; but there will be a resurrection not only of bodies but of reputations, and you shall arise. When the trumpet shall sound, not merely the corporeal particles, which make the man, but the man's memory shall rise; his good name, which has been buried beneath the clods of slander, shall rise to life, while as to his enemies, they and their reputations shall find devouring destruction from the presence of the Lord. Oh, to be a follower of Jesus, the great Daniel! To tread in his footsteps wherever he goes! To be much with him, whether in private or public! This is a thing to be desired, and though I exhort you to it, I do not expect you to attain to it in your own strength, but I point you to the Holy Ghost, who can work this in you, and make you to be greatly beloved as was this prophet of old.