

Faithfulness: *The foundation of Greatness*
Daniel 1:8-21

*"Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a **faithful man** who can find?"*
Proverbs 20:6

Introduction: What makes a person successful? How do we measure greatness? How we answer these questions reveal a great deal about how we view life and what we will pursue. If we deem success and greatness as amassing fame and fortune, we will look at celebrities and billionaires as the standard. If we measure greatness by accomplishment or accolade, we may look to a championship player or one who wins awards in their field of expertise. If we gauge these by raising the ranks of power or control, whether in government or business, we'll look at the latest government official or business owner as the pinnacle.

There are a few inherent problems with measuring greatness or success this way. 1) *The end does not justify the means* - Every time a phenomenal success story is covered, whether it is an athlete or a man like Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, the question is asked, "*what about his/her marriage*?" How have they treated people along the way? Did they cut corners to get there? A person who mortgages family, friends, and responsibilities to gain 'success' actually has failed miserably. 2) *This kind of success is performance based and often nullifies faith in the Lord, trust in Him, and giving Him the glory* - If success is based on outcomes, there is a compulsion to rely on myself rather than resting in the work that God will do 3) ***The Bible is abundantly clear that God values faithfulness rather than performance based success.*** This is the essence of what Daniel understood and chose in his early teens that set the course for the rest of his life, including an incredibly **successful life!**

When Jesus taught a parable about success in His kingdom, He framed it in terms of faithfulness. Servants were given different amounts of talents, so the measure of success was not the AMOUNT they ended with, but if they were faithful with what they had been given: **"Well done, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT."** (Matt. 25:21, 23). Paul described the true servant of Christ who would steward the mysteries of God and engage in ministry as those that were **found faithful** (1 Cor. 4:2). Joshua in the Old Testament would find success NOT in conquering the land, BUT RATHER by knowing, meditating on, and keeping the Book of the Law faithfully (Josh 1:8). The writer of Hebrews explained that **Moses was marked as a servant** who faithfully testified of things that were spoken later because he was **faithful in all God's house** (Heb. 3:5). And Christ Himself is seen as **faithful over God's house as a Son** (Heb. 3:6). In other words, faithfulness is of high value for every follower of Christ, even though each of these servants went on to DO GREAT THINGS.

But the reason why faithfulness is foundational to all of our life is that it is a character trait of God Himself. He is by definition faithful, and thus deems faithfulness of His servants a must. God is faithful, who keeps His covenant promises and love (Deut. 7:9) and in His choosing of His people (Isa. 49:7). He is faithful to us when we walk through temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), and remains faithful to us when we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). The One who calls us, promised to us, and guards us IS FAITHFUL (1 Thess. 5:24, Heb. 10:23; 2 Thess. 3:3). Jesus Christ Himself will return one day on a white horse and will bear the name FAITHFUL and TRUE (Rev. 19:11). God is faithful to His promises, and Christ is faithful as our Advocate and propitiation, forgiving us and keeping us even when we sin and fall short, and because of this, we are grateful knowing that even in striving to be faithful, we will fail.

So in coming back to Daniel 1, we see the pathway that God took Daniel down successfully began with a commitment to faithfulness. Daniel did not set out to run a kingdom, he set out

to have full hearted devotion to God. He did not strategize how to climb the ladder of the political machine in Babylon, he simply set out to make sure everything he did lined up with obedience to his God. Faithfulness was the path to greatness, since only God can bring the kind of success that matters.

Faithfulness is Decisive, not Divisive (8)

*"But Daniel **resolved** that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."*

We looked at this last week, where a young teenager and his friends were taken as captives from their home, family, and all that was familiar to them to Babylon, a place of rank idolatry, where they were to live, get brain-washed, and become absorbed into the culture of the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar employed the time tested tactic of indoctrination and inundation, being given a new name, new food, and new worldview to frame life. Most who were taken would have gone through this ringer and come out the other side assimilated instruments for the kings use, managing conquered peoples to keep them in line. Verse 8 is one of the more remarkable verses in the whole book since it was an uncommon choice in the midst of total compromise. Yet Daniel did not just stumble into faithfulness, and it did not simply come out of a vacuum or a whimsical choice. Daniel had to have **resolve, conviction, and surety** to make this call. **Daniel's choice to value faithfulness over success marked the rest of his life**, not simply a one-time decision. He chose faithfulness and whole hearted devotion to the Lord over the pursuit of earthly success, and that shaped all of his life. In other words, Daniel's decision to honor the Lord with all that he had and all that he was started BEFORE he was faced with a life changing decision. So the resolution of Daniel was NOT simply about eating or drinking, it was about the foundational reality of what he deemed as successful and how he measured greatness. Faithfulness to obey God, trust Him, and honor Him was the answer to all those questions.

Now, notice that Daniel made a **decisive decision**: I will not eat or drink of the king's food and wine, but that decision did not mean he would be divisive in carrying that out. Our convictions as believers should be carried out thoughtfully, lovingly, and graciously with others, since we know they will not understand why we are doing the things we are doing. Notice that Daniel did not throw overboard, didn't go and knock over the wine barrels, or just feed the food to the dog. He was **submissive and creative rather than being subversive**. In fact, all through his time serving in Babylon he sought to be a blessing to Nebuchadnezzar, even hesitant to give him bad news (Dan. 4:19). He simply **asked** the chief of the eunuchs, the one overseeing this indoctrination program, if he could be excused from eating. In choosing faithfulness decisively, he also placed himself not only in the hands of those who had temporal authority over him, but ultimately in the Lord's hands, which is always a safe place to be.

Faithfulness Entrusts itself to God's Sovereign Grace (9-16)

*"And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, **"I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? so you would endanger my head with the king."***

Proverbs 16:9 says "The heart of man plans his way, but the **LORD establishes** his steps."

Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in the mind of man, but **it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.**"

Jeremiah 10:23, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps."

It is clear that Daniel understood the heart and principle of these verses. The story is simple but profound. Daniel asked the head overseer, and though he had God given compassion and fondness for Daniel, he also had a fond attachment to his own head, and wanted to keep it where it was presently. So he declined Daniel's request, yet did NOT stand in the way when Daniel went down the rung of managers over him. He asked the **steward** who was assigned direct oversight the same thing, but in a creative plan, asked for 10 days of testing with only vegetables (or that which comes out of the ground) and water. This steward obliged (perhaps he took the steaks for himself!), and the test was afoot. After 10 days, these youths looked better, fatter, more ruddy than the others, and so they were able to continue. Some have seen this as **miraculous**, where God blessed in a supernatural way to allow these boys to look better than the others. Some see this as validation for a **vegan diet**, equating this to the way God would want us to eat. It was clear that God was blessing this decision, but it could be as simple as these young men responding to a Babylonian juice cleanse, just as most of us would feel better after cutting out red meat, dairy, and sugar for 10 days. Either way, their convictions were affirmed, and for the next 3 years they were free to walk whole-heartedly with their God and not be dependent on the king's food. There are a few principles we glean here:

- **How we play out our convictions matters** - Daniel was respectful, not demanding, and was willing to work within the system that he found himself. In verse 8, he *asked* or *simply requested*. In verse 12 to the steward, his request to be tested was no DEMAND, but has the idea of "*please test*". Because our convictions will often stand in complete opposition with those around, we should not needlessly offend. Daniel and the 3 all were willing to stand strong in what they believed AND take the consequences that those brought with them.
- **Conviction plays out in the small before the great** - Most people know Daniel and the lions den, but that was toward the end of his life. Large, convictional decisions are always cultivated in the daily ones, or else they hypocritical. Sinclair Ferguson said,

"True faithfulness in Scripture is first exercised in small things and in private. If we fail there any faithfulness we show in public will be hypocrisy, a PERFORMANCE for the crowd and not an expression of loyalty to our God."

We see this in part today. Some are up in arms about our ability to worship inside, when they themselves did not frequent worship services before the pandemic. Conviction to worship, please, and follow the Lord is ALWAYS forged in private, moving from faithfulness in the small things to the large as God entrusts us with more and more. Desire for public, corporate worship is born out of an ongoing pursuit of God in private worship. The question that each of us should ask, especially in light of all that has gone on the last year: *what do I truly believe about worship? What have my habits and use of time revealed about what I believe about God? What has the restriction of some of my choices revealed about what is most important in life?*

- **Living by conviction embraces ideas of both risk & loss** - Daniel's story could have been quite short. He could have requested to abstain from the king's food and seen as insubordinate and killed for this action. I'd argue that he'd still have lived a successful life at this point, albeit a short one. He also could have been relegated to the back of the line, losing opportunity to move up in the all important ranking system and assignments given by the king. Instead of a manager of many he could have been relegated to desk duty or filing. In living by conviction and choosing faithfulness, we

cannot have it both ways. We give ourselves completely to the **will and purpose of God Himself, and if He delivers, moves us up, or allows us to miss out**, it is all for His purposes. Our job is to walk in faithfulness, knowing He will take care of the greatness.

Faithfulness is Rewarded in God's Economy (17-20)

*"As for these four youths, **God gave them** learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams....And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them **ten times better** than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom."*

- **Faithfulness trusts God's Sovereign hand** - Now, this chapter is about choices these four young men made, but it is really framed by God's sovereign hand of providence. Notice back in verse 2, that it was **God who gave Judah into the hands of Babylon** as part of his judgment, not because of the might and power of Nebuchadnezzar. Notice in verse 9 that **God gave Daniel favor with Ashpenaz**, clearing the path for him to abstain from eating of the king's food. These show both **God's strength and grace, that He was at the center of the story and the main mover with all the action that took place**. Nothing happened in this story without God's hand moving it, directing it, and making it happen. As the **four stood in attention** before the king after 3 years of study, learning, and eating, they were found to be head and shoulders above the rest. There was no other young man who came close to their acumen, intellect, wisdom, and understanding, which paved the way for them to be in high levels of influence and power in the kingdom of Babylon. Now, please note that this is **NOT PRESCRIPTIVE**, but rather descriptive as to what God did. In other words, it does not mean that eating a special diet for 3 years or even living by conviction will help your kids test well on their SAT or whatever test they'll need to take in the years to come. In fact, you'll notice that even among the four there were different gifts given. The three friends got wisdom and understanding, while Daniel **ALSO** received the **ability to understand dreams and visions**. Why? Because God had a specific plan for Daniel. And notice that Daniel did not set out to be a dream interpreter, but simply put himself in a position, by his faithfulness, to be used by God. God is the dispenser of grace, He moves the hearts of people, He sets up kings and tears down kingdoms, and ultimately gets all the glory. What He calls us to do is be ready, be obedient, holy, and ready to be used by Him:

"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

2 Timothy 2:21

- **Faithfulness helps us thrive in cut-throat environments** - Now you may ask the question: *how does this play out in everyday life? I live in the real world, where it is cut-throat, where people do not live by conviction or holiness, and are willing to do whatever it takes to get ahead? How does faithfulness play out there?* Glad you asked. Remember, Daniel was trained under the watchful eye of overseers and there clearly was a ranking system. We know that like any environment like that, there would have been **jealousy, conspiracy, and a desire to cut peoples legs out from under them**. In fact, toward the end of his life, after a successful time in government, saving magicians from certain death, and leading well, there were those who conspired against Daniel to get him out of the way. The king had planned to set him over the whole kingdom, and that meant he was in their way as they tried to climb the

corporate ladder. There is a remarkable verse that shows how Daniel achieved such success:

*"Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, **but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful**, and no error or fault was found in him. (Dan. 6:4)*

In a world and time that compels people to cut corners, lie, find workarounds, and cut others down to get ahead, Daniel gives a vivid illustration to us that God blesses faithfulness, and He gives out rewards based on His good pleasure and purposes. That does not mean that you will become CEO or that your business won't struggle, but it means that God is honored and glorified by how we go about things, and does not bless when we join in the throng of complaining and faithless wrangling that our world engages in.

Faithfulness Sets its Gaze on a Better Future (21)
"And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus."

Chapter 1 concludes with a sentence that can be easily overlooked, but actually bookends the whole chapter, and even provides a framing of the whole book. You'll remember back in **2 Chronicles 36:22-23** that the whole plan of God for Judah was laid out. They would be exiled for a time in Babylon, but then a ruler named Cyrus (who was not even born yet), was going to decree that they could return to the land. As Daniel set his course of faithfulness, God was at work providentially setting events in motion that he would be around, 70 years later, to influence this Medo-Persian king. What the observer of the story would see was Nebuchadnezzar taking young men to Babylon for his political purposes. What God was doing was putting His man in place to fulfill what He had specifically promised to His people. We remember, that when we can only observe what is going on around us, **God is always doing something greater to fulfill His purposes. We can trust that God is using those in power to accomplish His ultimate bidding, even when it seems counter to what seems to be right and true.** Now, just a couple of principles we glean here:

- **Faithfulness is ultimately effective over a lifetime** - Living a faithful life is a long-game. Daniel was consistent over 80 years of life and 70 years in a foreign land. The foundation of faithfulness was set when he was a teenager, but the fruitfulness of that foundation was seen over a lifetime of consistency. Young people, that means the time to make convictional decisions of faithfulness is NOW. Those who are older, the fruitfulness of your faithfulness may still be in front of you, so **DO NOT STOP**, even if it seems like nothing is coming out of it. I will follow faithful every time. I will look to the man who loves his wife for decades faithfully as someone I respect and want to emulate, not the popular pastor who in pride cheats on his wife and divorces her. Paul said it in terms of "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim. 4:7). He said this in light of so many that had veered away and given up the race. Faithfulness over the long haul is the prize.
- **Faithfulness means you may never see the fruit or your labor** - Daniel accomplished exactly what God had for him, was faithful in youth and age, and yet he **never got to go home**. He never tasted of the fruit of his labor. He died in Babylon, never being able to pray at the Temple or worship with his family again. When we trust God with results, when He is the One who gives fruit, we know that we may not be privy to the ultimate results of what God has done through our lives. We all want to know now, see now, and understand now what God will do with our kids, our ministries, even our church. But we trust God is at work to will and to do for His good pleasure, and we trust there is always something better awaiting us, a treasure laid up for us and a reward that will be in a Day to come.

So we choose faithfulness over greatness, knowing that it is God who blesses faithfulness and does great things in and through us for His glory! May we be marked by **faithfulness now and into the future** as we live in a time and place that may become more and more like Babylon, and entrust ourselves to our God who gives His grace for His purposes, pleasure, and glory.