

**Introduction:**

1. This morning, starting a brand new series entitled **(PP)** “Countering Culture.” | “Courage to Go Against the Culture”
2. A Series through the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 chapters of the book of Daniel.
3. The Book of Daniel is radical
  1. We’ll take a look at this book in the 2 portions... the 2 portions through which it’s presented
  2. It’s about the prophet & the prophecies of Daniel ... and friends...
  3. In our 1<sup>st</sup> series we’ll consider Daniel & others (Shad, Mesh, Abe)
    1. How he (they) lived a surrendered life to God, in the midst of living in a strange land – Babylon.
    2. Living surrendered to God = living in a way that counters culture we’re in...
4. This is such a perfect parallel to who we are as believers.
  1. **(PP) 1 Peter 2.9-11: 9** *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10* *who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11* *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...*
  2. **(PP) Romans 12.1-2 (NLT) 1** *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2* *Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*
  3. As those who’ve been **SAVED** by God from our sin & give **NEW** purpose and meaning in life
    1. Our lives are not our own.... We’ve **SURRENDERED** them over to Jesus.
      1. Our values... How we define success
      2. Where we spend our time .... How we prioritize
      3. Jesus changes **EVERYTHING!**
    2. It’s a life that’s surrendered
  4. And the more and more we spend time w/ Jesus, the more and more we surrender to Him,
    1. Well, this life, those things that used to be so normal to us — — They become strange.
    2. Like Peter encouraged those early believers – we’re temporary residents & foreigners in this world.
5. In this series, we’ll see how Daniel truly lived a **SURRENDERED** life to the Lord in a very **STRANGE** land (Babylon).
  1. And he didn’t retreat from the world
  2. But lived a Godly life in the world & had great impact for the kingdom of God in the world... living surrendered... countering culture...
  3. **(PP)** Next week, we’ll be sharing these reminders of this truth that this book serves a pathway of example ...
6. This morning, we’ll overview together, Daniel 1 —
7. There are 4 life-lessons... 4 take-away-truths, that I hope & pray are helpful in this journey that we’re in together of following Jesus, surrendering to Him... and living in a way that truly is countering culture...

**1** During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. **2** The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

**(PP) Life Can Be Working Out Naturally, but God is ALWAYS Working Supernaturally**

1. Get the setting of what's happening in the book of Daniel.
  1. Babylonians attack the city of Jerusalem, kill and take people into captivity
  2. This happened during the reign of Jehoiakim,
    1. He was the 17th king of Judah
    2. He was the oldest son of one of greatest kings – Josiah.
    3. Jeremiah had warned Jehoiakim about the invasion of Babylon.
  3. God made a covenant w/ Israel before they entered the land (Deut. 29:1).
    1. Their obedience to Him would bring blessing (Deut.28:1–14)
    2. But their disobedience would bring discipline (Deut.28:15–68).
      1. To correct them
      2. To conform them to His ways so they could be blessed.
    3. But, if they continued to disobey...
      1. He would use the invasion of Gentile nations... to conquer them
      2. To bring them under their authority & remove them from their land (Deut. 28:49–68).
    4. Only when they repented from their sin, turned in faith to God, & obeyed Him would they be restored.
4. Israel ended up being divided into two nations:
  1. The Northern Kingdom
    1. Fell in 722 B.C. to the Assyrians
    2. Many of those that remained in the region became what's known as the Samaritans
  2. Southern Kingdom (also known as Judah)
    1. Mentioned here in v2
    2. They ignored God's covenant
      1. Neglected the Sabbath Day
      2. Neglected the sabbatical year
      3. Lived idolatrous lifestyle.
    3. God chose Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument to bring discipline on His disobedient people in 586 B.C. (Jer. 27:6; Hab. 1:6).<sup>1</sup>
    4. This would've been seen as an utter defeat for the people of God.
5. **(PP)** *The fall of Jerusalem looked like the triumph of the pagan gods over the true God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple of God and even took the sacred furnishings and put them into the temple of his own god in*

<sup>1</sup> Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1328–1329). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

*Babylon. But it was actually a victory for the Lord! He kept His covenant with Israel and He fulfilled His promises. In fact, the same God who raised up the Babylonians to defeat Judah later raised up the Medes and Persians to conquer Babylon. The Lord also ordained that a pagan ruler decree that the Jews could return to their land and rebuild their temple. As missionary leader A.T. Pierson used to say, "History is His story."<sup>2</sup>*

2. Here's what I want you to catch

1. There are 2 sides to history

1. The simple facts / Secular history

2. And... at the same time... What God is doing / Biblical theology

2. What does v2 say? *"The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand"*

3. Here's the reality,

1. On one hand: man is active in history

2. On the other hand: God is also active in history

3. There's always 2 sides of history

1. The FACTS : when, how, what, where

2. The FAITH : why

4. God is the orchestra director ... .... Nebuchadnezzar is a pawn on the board

3. **(PP) Life Can Be Working Out Naturally, but God is ALWAYS Working Supernaturally**

1. Things can happen in life that seem

1. Unexpected

2. Difficult / Bewildering

2. But, Calm down, God is behind the scenes

3. **(PP)** One author said, *"God's ways are behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes He is behind"*

4. Why would God let the bad guys attack the good guys?

5. I think Daniel would have said the same thing as

1. Paul the apostle, *"The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel"* Philippians 1:12

2. Joseph said regarding his sale and captivity, *"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good"* Genesis 50:20

6. That's what's happening here... and that's what's happening here... NOW.

7. **Life Can Be Working Out Naturally, but God is ALWAYS Working Supernaturally**

4. Now, as we read on in ch1 we'll see a 2nd truth that must be owned by us....

**(PP) The World is VYING for Our Conformity (v3-7)**

**3** *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*

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 12). Colorado Springs, CO: Victor.

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.

**(PP) The World is VYING for Our Conformity (v3-7)**

1. We live in a world that has standards, ideals, priorities, and desires that they want us to conform to
2. That’s why Peter says, **(PP) 1 Peter 2.9,11:**<sup>9</sup> *For you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.* <sup>11</sup> *Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.*
3. It was that way in Babylon also.. they took the cream of the crop of the captives — Brainwashed them & put them to service in the King's palace
4. It was 4-pronged approach—still effective today
  1. **Isolation**
    1. Take them from their Homeland, Family, & Worship of their God
    2. Don’t you see that as the ploy of the enemy today? – to get us out community w/ God’s people and make us feel alone & isolated.
  2. **Indoctrination**
    1. Challenge everything they learned growing up
      1. They’d seek to brainwash them
      2. Steep them in literature that would challenge their worldview
    2. Everything they learned growing up would be challenged by a Babylonian, pagan worldview
    3. Archeology shows they would have been trained in divination
      1. Fortune-telling
      2. Babylonians believed in omens... .. They were very superstitious.
      3. They believed that there were terrestrial as well as celestial signs, and when those signs happened they were either bad omens or good omens
    4. **(PP)** Pastor Skip Heitzig, *“This is basically a three-year graduate course to make them forget everything they had learned growing up and supplant that with new ideas. It's not terribly unlike what many Christian college students find on many secular university campuses. I've always founded it interesting, and I've experienced it, why teachers who are paid to teach English, or chemistry, or biology go out of their way to undermine the belief system of some of the young people in their class; targeting them, zeroing in, trying to dismantle everything they've learned.”*
      4. 4 pronged-approach – **isolation, indoctrination, next concession.**
  3. **Concession**—make things so amazing that they wouldn't want to go back

1. They were given food fit for a king
  1. Look at verse 5, they were given "daily provisions of the king's delicacies and wine which he drank."
  2. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar brought in the best caterers with the finest menu, the royal menu.
  3. Food fit for a king, literally, was given to them. Why?
    1. So they'd go, "We never ate like this in Jerusalem. It was all about falafels and hummus. Now, this is food!"
    2. You just have to imagine what, what kind of impression Babylon would make on a young teenager.
2. Not only was the food amazing, but the place was phenomenal
  1. Historians tell us that the city of Babylon at that time,
    1. Had walls 300 feet high, 85 feet thick, 56 miles long
    2. The Euphrates River running through town
    3. In the middle of the city
      1. Were the Hanging Gardens of Babylon
      2. One of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World
      3. Tier upon tier of lush greenery.
  2. May have lead the young Jewish guys to say,
    1. "Wow! Man, this is amazing.
    2. And we're being treated royally.
    3. And besides that, our God didn't protect us from these guys.
    4. Maybe it's not real; everything that we learned maybe isn't real.
  3. Isolation... Indoctrination... Confession... and 4th...

#### 4. **Confusion**

1. They changed their names, seeking to take away their identity
  1. Daniel — God is my judge — to Beltashazzar - "Bel protect his life."
  2. Hananiah — Beloved of the Lord — to Shadrach — "command of Aku" (the moon-god)
  3. Mishael — Who is like God — to Meshach — "Who is as Aku is?"
  4. Azariah — The Lord is my help — to Abednego — "Servant of Nebo (Nego)"
2. This is ultimately what the world is after
  1. To have us forsake who we are ... For something so much less.
  2. Jesus put it best – (PP) *"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."*
5. The Word is **VYING** for Our **Conformity**... what's the plan... **Isolation, Indoctrination, Confession, Confusion.**
6. If it's true that **The World Wants Our Conformity (v3-7)** ... Here's our next point...

#### (PP) **The Lord Wants Our Commitment (v8-16)**

**8** 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. **9** Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. **10** But he responded, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded."

**11** Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. **12** "Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said. **13** "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see." **14** The attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.

**15** At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. **16** So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

### The Lord Wants Our Commitment (v8-16)

1. Daniel made a choice—this choice made Daniel become the man that he was
2. One author puts it this way... **(PP)** *"All of life is filled with crisis and decisions. There are right decisions and wrong decisions—high roads and low roads—almost every day there will be a fork in the road. Where you are today is due to the turn in the road that you took yesterday."*
3. The fork in the road that Daniel took was to not go along with the crowd—to be distinct; to not "defile" himself
4. There are things in life that can defile you
  1. Daniel drew the line at the food
    1. What's the big deal? No one's there to see you
    2. Daniel wasn't looking for an excuse, Daniel had a purpose
    3. It's been said that an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie
  2. Daniel made an inward commitment to be distinct
    1. Proverbs 4:23 "Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it springs the issues of life."
    2. Question: What's defiling to you?
      1. The stuff you read?
      2. The shows that you stream into your home?
      3. The community you allow yourself to hang out with?
      4. Relationships that you're toying with?
    3. The secret is this: Living a life with the awareness of HIS there-ness...
      1. Proverbs 5:21 "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths."
      2. Hebrews 4:13 "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."
3. **(PP)** *How can God's people resist the pressures that can "squeeze" them into conformity with the world? According to Romans 12:1-2, "conformers" are people whose lives are controlled by pressure from without, but "transformers" are people whose lives are controlled by power from within. Daniel and his three friends were transformers: instead*

*of being changed, they did the changing! God used them to transform the minds of powerful rulers and to bring great glory to His name in a pagan land.<sup>3</sup>*

5. They faced a problem

1. 1<sup>st</sup> thing they did was give themselves totally over to the Lord — surrendered to Him...
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> thing they did was be gracious toward those in authority over them.
3. Wiersbe...

1. **(PP)** *When it comes to solving the problems of life, we must ask God for the courage to face the problem humbly and honestly, the wisdom to understand it, the strength to do what He tells us to do, and the faith to trust Him to do the rest. Our motive must be the glory of God and not finding a way of escape. The important question isn't, "How can I get out of this?" but, "What can I get out of this?"*
2. **(PP)** *The Lord used this private test to prepare Daniel and his friends for the public tests they would face in years to come. The best thing about this experience wasn't that they were delivered from compromise, as wonderful as that was, but that they were developed in character.<sup>4</sup>*

6. Here's the reality:

1. **Commitment** brings **Enrichment**
2. **Obedience** brings **Blessings**
3. **Integrity** brings Superior **Quality** to your life

7. Why does Jesus want your commitment?

1. Jesus put it best – *"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."*
2. Look at what **15** *At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. 16* *So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.*
3. God's **ENRICHMENT** followed their **COMMITMENT**.

8. Now, let's wrap this up, remember we're looking at this chapter — this series —

1. **(PP)** "Countering Culture." | "Courage to Go Against the Culture"
2. So far we've seen 3 things:
  1. **Life Can Be Working Out Naturally, but God is ALWAYS Working Supernaturally (v1-2)**
  2. **The World is VYING for Our Conformity (v3-7)**
  3. **The Lord Wants Our Commitment (v8-16)**
  4. **(PP) When We Do Our Part, God Always Does His Part (v17-21)**

**17** *God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams. 18* *When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. 19* *The king talked with them, and*

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (pp. 15–16). Colorado Springs, CO: Victor.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 17). Colorado Springs, CO: Victor.

*no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. 20 Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom. 21 Daniel remained in the royal service until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.*

**When We Do Our Part, God Always Does His Part (v17-21)**

1. You know 2 Chronicles 16:9 *"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him."*
  1. This is so true
  2. These guys did their part... they stayed committed, they studied,
  3. But God was the one who brought the favor.
  4. When we do our part, God always does His part!
2. After 3 years of graduate school, Daniel is about 20 years old
  1. God's favor and grace is upon them
  2. And we see 3 powerful results
    1. **Reverence**
      1. v. 19; -- there were NONE like Daniel.
      2. Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."
    2. **Preference** — They were at the top of the class
    3. **Influence** — 70 years— Daniel has influence through the reign of 4 kings

**Conclusion:**

1. Daniel/Friends — lived in a strange world — world of Babylon — but, he lived a surrendered life.
2. Countering Culture by simply surrendering their lives into the capable hands of God.
3. Instead of being **conformed**, they were **committed**.
  1. *One act of obedience is better than listening to 100 sermons.* – Dietrich Bonhoeffer
  2. We experience the pressure to conform to worldly standards in so many ways don't we...
4. Having **purpose inside you** will help keep the **pressure outside you** from controlling you.
5. Here's the reality: **Commitment** brings **Enrichment** ... **Obedience** brings **Blessings** ... **Integrity** brings Superior **Quality** to your life
6. Surrender afresh your life to JESUS:
  1. **Realize, Recognize, Repent, Receive, & Release...**
  2. **Confess** w/ your mouth & **Believe** in your heart!