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[0 : 00] As I say, we're going to be looking at Daniel 1 and 4 this evening, and the title I've given it is Be a Daniel. I'll explain that in a minute, but, you know, this morning we did look at the incredible sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. You know, the price he paid for us, the way the world abandoned him, that God had to abandon him because of the sins that he carried for us. And so what's our response going to be? Now, the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself. And in Mark 6 verse 34, when Jesus landed and he saw a huge crowd, it says that he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. What are we trying to get at here? I'm trying to say that we're commanded to love our neighbours. And that includes compassion on them because they're lost. You know, what if that isn't the case? What if it's just a kind of a token love we have for them, and not a real love that mourns that they're lost, that's desperate to see them come to find life. You know, if you've forgotten that real love, not a fake love, but a real love, then this evening is a good time to shake off the cobwebs, to really refresh your hearts, and to get back our passion for their lives. You know, we've got to love them to help them find life. You know, that's surely what we're here to do, to tell people that there's a saviour. A saviour that's actually able to lift them out of this pit of evil, and to give them everlasting life. So, tonight we're going to have a look at the life of Daniel.

We're going to have a look at the way Daniel lived, and see if we should be living like Daniel here in Whitby, in the context of making disciples. You know, Daniel was, he was a faint, he's one of my favourite Bible characters when I was a kid, as like Jonah and Moses, but he's famous for the lion's den incident, isn't he? He's famous for being radical in his uncompromising worship of God. But, as I've studied the passages, I see that he's also radical in the way that he lived and got involved in the Babylonian world. I've given us a subtitle tonight of A Good Life in a Bad World. Now, isn't this a topic we all kind of try and think through at times? Or, maybe we don't think through it enough. You know, how to be in the world, but not of the world. Where do we draw our lines? You know, most of us have jobs with non-Christians, don't we? Most of us live next to non-Christians. For some of us, even our close family and friends and non-Christians. So, tonight is a very real thing to consider of how to be in the world, but not of the world. How to live a good life in a bad world. But, before we get started, there's going to be lots of things that we can't see in this passage. You know, it'd have been great to know what Daniel did in his spare time. You know, it'd have been good to know how well he knew his Babylonian work colleagues. Whether he knew his neighbours. But, I suppose this lack of specifics is going to be good for us. Because it's mean we're not going to go away with a to-do list of different ways to act. Rather, from principles, it's going to mean that you can apply this to your life and to your specific context. So, I've got a question for us to start thinking about how to engage the world meaningfully without compromising the integrity of our Christianity. I want us to read together from Daniel 1. Daniel 1, if you're having trouble finding it, you'll keep having trouble finding it. It's a bit further past Psalms. If you go past Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then you'll eventually come to Daniel. But we'll read from Daniel 1 together, starting at verse 1. It says,

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia and put in the treasury house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, king of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility. Young men, without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among these were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names. To Daniel the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.

He asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. But the official told Daniel, I am afraid of my lord the king. Who was assigned your food and drink? Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men of your age? The king would then have my head because of you. Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, please test your servants for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.

[6 : 27] So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these young men, poor young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. So they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Now, Jehoiakim, king of Judah, he's provoked the siege on Jerusalem in 597 BC. He's breaking their existing submission under Babylon and trying to set a rebellion going. And so Nebuchadnezzar,

Nebuchadnezzar came to teach him a lesson, you know, to discipline them. And to do that, as we see in verse 3 and 4, he takes some of the brightest and best from Jerusalem to be trained and work in his courts. Among these young, good-looking and intelligent men was Daniel. He was taken. It wasn't a choice. He was taken to Babylon to learn, live and work.

Now, I hope this doesn't seem too strange, but to kind of understand Daniel and the impact he had on Nebuchadnezzar, we're going to start at the end of our passages tonight, in Daniel chapter 4. And then we're going to kind of work our way back towards the beginning, kind of deconstructing the final product to see what really went into it. So let's look first at the last sentence of chapter 4. Verse 37 says, the last sentence says, And those who walk in pride, he, being God, is able to humble.

So, point 1, that God can change the heart of kings. That's what my mum always said. You know, they'll never become a Christian. She'd always remind me that God can change the heart of kings. You know, God's able to bring even the most arrogant and stubborn, the most successful person to come and honour him. Nebuchadnezzar's the example of that. You know, God does something supernatural in Nebuchadnezzar's heart. If you move backwards a bit, we'll look at chapter 4, verse 34 to 37. You know, in chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had been given a dream from God.

And he had got to again get Daniel to interpret it. And God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar for ignoring God was that his kingdom would be taken from him. And he'd go mad, basically.

[9 : 39] Actually, verse 25 predicts it. And then in verse 32, it actually happens. And he goes so mad that for a while he goes and eats grass like an ox. And then, when his sanity is restored to him, he says this in verse 34 to 37. At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High. I honoured and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and with the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, what have you done? At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honour and my splendour were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and nobles sought me out. And I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I,

Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exult and glorify the King of heaven. Because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. Isn't that what we're aiming for? You know, I would love to hear some of my mates say that. Imagine that for a moment. Put your friend's name into verse 37. Put whoever's name into verse 37 and just envisage them saying that. Envisage what it would sound like. That they, I, praise and exult and glorify the King of heaven.

Because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. That's King Nebuchadnezzar talking. The King of Babylon. Like, King of the massive pagan city. And he's confessing his praise of God. That is our goal, isn't it? To see people in Whitby confessing that Jesus is Lord. Now Romans 10 verse 9 says, if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Wouldn't that be amazing? Like, I had an experience like this a few years ago. An old school friend of mine, actually one of my best mates from school. We did maths and further maths together.

We were geeks those days. But one day he emailed me, about two years ago he emailed me. And he emailed me just to say, just so you know, I became a Christian tonight. Now, he still remembers the first time we met up after that. And he couldn't get over how I couldn't get over that he was now a Christian. Like, God had completely changed his heart. Since then, I've stood next to him in church singing. He's led Bible studies. He's disciplined people. That's phenomenal.

Like, this is God's work. Like, everything we do is God's work. He has to open people's eyes. We can't. And Daniel couldn't. You know, see at the end of verse 37 again. In the end, it wasn't Daniel that was the key.

[13 : 00] It was God. Daniel was used by God. He was God's instrument. God's mouthpiece. And then it was God that did something incredible. Only God can open people's eyes to see him. We couldn't do it for ourselves.

And we can't do it for anybody else. Only God can humble them. You know, what a ridiculous mission would be on otherwise, if it was actually us that had to persuade people to believe in God. You know, we are his instruments. We have a responsibility to do something. Not just to sit back and let God's work do it stuff. God chose to work through Daniel. And I think he chooses to work through us. We're not insignificant. Not at all. But we're just not as significant as God is.

Well, so, I first don't want you to get worried or arrogant about evangelizing either. You know, we'd be nothing without God's work. But he is also there to support us. And also just don't remember that the unmissable preparation of all evangelism is to pray. Because this is God's work. It's he that can change the heart of kings. Well, let's start to have a look at actually the world that Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel were living in. The city of Babylon. So point two is a bad world. Babylon was the center of the Chaldean kingdom. It was an earlier version of the Roman Empire. But Babylon wasn't in God's good books. Just because God was using them to bring punishment on Judah doesn't mean that they were good people. Actually, God punishes and breaks the Chaldean empire kingdom later on. You know, they had a pluralistic religion of loads of gods. Many of them were just set up after key parts of nature. They had a sun and a moon god. You know, we'll see this as we start moving back through the book a bit. If you look at chapter 4 verse 7. Before seeking Daniel's advice, he checked with his magicians and enchanters. You know, alongside normal advisors in the court of the king would also have been sorcerers, magicians and even exorcists. Using different types of magic and spells to understand dreams. To warn off evil spirits. This was a dark and messed up world for king Nebuchadnezzar. Still move back a bit. If you go to chapter 3 verse 1 and 5,

Nebuchadnezzar sets up a massive gold statue and commands everyone to worship it. The idea of one god being sacred for them wasn't a concept in their minds. They could make new gods when they liked. Design them, the gods themselves. And practice all sorts of worship and divination for them. Again, if you move back again to chapter 2 verse 2. With Nebuchadnezzar's first recorded dream. And he first starts out with consulting all the sorcerers and magicians.

And when they can't answer him, verse 12 to 13 says, he orders for the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. What an odd and perverse world. But I do wonder if we remember that our world isn't much better. Or maybe it's harder to notice because just things aren't as explicit.

[16 : 30] You know, in the UK, some of the biggest religions apart from Christianity include Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, paganism and Jainism. I don't know if any of you have heard of the Edinburgh Beltane Fire Festival. As I say, I live in Edinburgh and probably about 15 minutes walk from my house or two minutes walk from the city centre on one of the hills. They have a pagan festival each year to celebrate the end of winter with lots of crazy dancing and fire and all sorts of worshipping nature nature and the sun and the moon and who knows what else. About 12,000 people attend that each year.

12,000. And from what I know of Whitby, I'm sure it's not that different here. So, you know, other religions maybe aren't as explicit and as radical as pagans.

But all the other religions that are listed there, all other religions that surround us ignore the God of heaven and Jesus Christ's son. They make a mockery of him by worshipping some man-made God and religion.

We live in a bad world. Whitby is a messed up town. You know, loads of this town will be non-religious, maybe atheist, maybe agnostic or maybe nothing. Maybe their own pluralistic kind of blend of different beliefs and ideals. More people ignoring God. Burying themselves in a world that means they can block out the reality of God. Whether that's through the extremes of sex, drugs and rock and roll. Or maybe it's just through normal things. Like fame, money, popularity, family and friends, sports and music, shopping, consumerism, anything to block out God.

You know, Whitby is a place that will predominantly ignore the God of heaven. Everyone has found their own way of having as pleasurable life as possible. You know, I'm not trying to be all doom and gloom, but we're not normal in this town or in this country. Actually, we're pretty much aliens compared to the way everyone else lives if we're Christians. You know, unfortunately, the majority of this town will be destined for hell. Without Jesus Christ, they're bound for hell. Some of them don't believe that and some of them just don't care. So point two is that both Babylon and Whitby are bad worlds.

[19 : 21] So it's about time we actually turned to see how Daniel handled it. So point three, a good life. Daniel was committed to being holy in the midst of all of that.

God came first. He wasn't swayed to worship their gods. He wasn't put off from worshipping the real God. He wasn't distracted from having a good life. In chapter six, he carried on praying to God three times a day despite being threatened with execution in a lion's den. In chapter three, his three friends refused to bow down to the statue despite being threatened with execution in a furnace.

In chapter two, he attributed the interpretation of the dreams to God's glory, even when he was surrounded with sorcerers and exorcists. And right at the beginning, in chapter one, verse eight, he chose not to defile himself with eating food from the king's table.

Now, commentators don't seem to agree on why it was that the food would have particularly defiled him. Some say that the meat would have been offered to idols. Others say it would have been, it's because non-Jews have prepared it. Some say it's because it would have shown allegiance to the king.

But what we do know is that Daniel was a man of God. He was a prophet of God. And he says it would have defiled him. So for this evening, we'll just take it as that and believe him.

[20 : 50] Daniel called a limit so that he didn't get carried away into the king's world. That was the king's intention in giving him royal delicacies, in changing his name. But whatever was quite going through Daniel's head, he was willing to make a fuss so that he wouldn't defile himself.

That was his priority. You know, this wasn't done for giving a good witness to the people around him. The king wouldn't have even known that he asked not to eat the food.

Daniel chose to do this for his holiness, his personal holiness with God. You know, we're told to imitate Christ and imitate people who are like Christ in their holiness.

Isn't Daniel a great example of that? We're meant to be holy as Christians, set apart. Sorry. 1 Peter 1.15-16 says, You know, our salvation doesn't depend on us living a good life.

We're saved by forgiveness, by Jesus' death. But a good life is what God commands us to do as Christians. As his sons and daughters were meant to be holy, uncompromising, refusing to compromise if it puts our holiness on the line.

[22 : 19] You know, I was writing an essay earlier this year, looking at this kind of topic. And I sent a questionnaire to quite a few people in my church in Edinburgh. Now, 60% of people admitted to compromising their values to fit in with people.

And one person actually said, in response to that, Personally, I reckon anyone who answers no isn't telling the truth. Now, because the sad matter is, for most of us, at some point, we've felt the pressure.

We've had our conscience telling us not to do it. But we've buckled and compromised our holiness. You know, compromise other things, but not your holiness.

Not just to aid your witness, or to be distinct, but because it's what pleases God. Glorifying God is our central aim for eternity.

Now, this is a bad world. And we're men that live good lives. So, the logical reaction would be to kind of like, just barricade ourselves.

[23 : 27] Maybe even bubble wrap ourselves. You know, get in a nice Christian community. And just aim for the perfection of holiness.

That sounds a bit like monks, doesn't it? You know? It'd make sense to do that, if it wasn't for the Great Commission. To go into all the world and make disciples. So, if this is a bad world, and we need to live a good life, then the key word that pulls these two together, is my fourth point.

In. We need to live a good life in a bad world. We need to be in the world, but not of the world. You know, the ideal Christian life, would actually be saved one day.

Maybe in church, say. To walk out the door, go to cross the road, and get knocked down by a car. Straight to heaven, to praise God, and to never sin again. But that's not what God's plan is, is it?

We're not transported to heaven, the moment we believe. God has left us, in this world, to be his ambassadors. He's aware it's more dangerous for us.

[24 : 37] He's aware there's the potential to stumble, and to be tempted into sin. But he has left us, in the world. In fact, Jesus sent us into the world.

That's what we read in John 17. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. We need to be in the world. Let's have a look at Daniel again.

Daniel gets right in there, right at the beginning, studying the literature and language of the Babylonians in verse 4. See, Jews at that time refused to even read the Greek writings.

And I promise you, the Babylonian literature wasn't just philosophy and medicine. One commentator explains it, saying, their accumulated literature included omens, magic incantations, prayers and hymns, myths and legends, scientific formula for skills such as glass making, mathematics and astrology.

[25 : 47] Now Daniel accepted the situation he'd been placed in and committed himself to studying, the studying and excellence in Babylonian knowledge and culture.

How strange. How radical. Daniel was really in the world, not merely by location. So often, we think that's our duty done, you know, just working in a non-Christian office.

But, he was so much in the world that he understood their culture, what they were thinking. He witnessed their sorcery and their satanic incantations.

He was counted among these enchanter and exorcists. Actually, he was counted above them. In verse 20 of chapter 1, he says that he was better than all in his kingdom.

And, though we don't know the specifics of what Daniel actually did, what he did or didn't do, we know that the abilities that Daniel used in the court of the king were God approved because they were God given in verse 17.

[26 : 53] See, Daniel was deep in the Babylonian world. So much so that he could really smell the danger. He could feel the temptation on his skin and the wickedness surrounding him.

But, he made sure not to defile himself. He kept close in his daily walk and worship of God. And then, when he was deep in the lair of this pagan and evil world, listed among the king's sorcerers, and enchanter, he was called upon to interpret the dream of the king.

And then, he glorified the one true God for his gifts and talents. He told the king bravely the judgment of the God of heaven. Daniel had a huge impact.

Rescuing Nebuchadnezzar from the gates of hell. And Nebuchadnezzar came to praise the God of heaven. You know, after Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel continued with the same engaging life.

And later on, another king comes to know God. In chapter 6, verse 25 to 27, King Darius makes the same proclamation that Nebuchadnezzar makes. Darius came to praise the God of heaven as well.

[28 : 09] Because, Daniel lived in the danger zone for them. Daniel lived there for God. That's where God has sent us to. He sent us into the danger zone.

Into the bad world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. But, it's not our location that immediately makes us a Daniel.

To be a Daniel, we need to have a balanced diet. Okay? Specifically for Daniel, this was actually, literally, the food he ate. But, generally for us, it's to be in the world but not of the world.

What do I mean by a balanced diet? Well, one unhealthy combination is cultural gluttony. Okay? Maybe this is you. Maybe you've done really well at getting into the world.

You've really engaged with non-Christians, but you begin to love the world. The pleasures of the world start to make you salivate. And, they take over you. And, in the end, you just start pigging out.

[29 : 17] Have you forgotten yourself? Have you defiled yourself and forgotten your holiness? You know, I started out on a noble mission just like that to reach non-Christians.

For my university years, I knew more non-Christians than Christians. I understood their lives. I lived and ate and worked with non-Christians. But, then I lost my holiness.

I enjoyed the taste of the world. And, at times, and in different ways, I compromised my holiness. I became a cultural glutton.

This is the side that's massively looked down on. The sin is so much more apparent. And, fair enough, how stupid, how careless. Our effectiveness is in proportion to our sanctification and our holiness.

If you throw that away, then you throw away all the salt and light that you took into the world. But, there's just as a healthy diet on the other side.

[30 : 22] Cultural glutton, cultural anorexia. You know, maybe you've seen the dangers and the temptations of the world. And, to protect your holiness, you back off surrounding yourself with Christians, Christian activities, and just, you know, Christian stuff.

How can you disciple then? Jesus didn't back off. He spent most of his time with fishermen and tax collectors. We've got to be in, we've got to make disciples, and so we have to be in the world.

Otherwise, what's the point of being here? If you're not engaging with people and with the world like Daniel was, if you're not trying to make disciples, then you might as well be in heaven because you're not doing your job here.

You have to get back in the danger zone. Yes, where temptation exists, but so do the people that need the gospel. Jesus prays that we'll be protected from the evil one.

So go in, wearing all your spiritual armour, but don't you dare not go in at all. How selfish. How distorted. God, Jesus has sent us into the world.

[31 : 40] He's left us here to do his work. Are you going to disobey him and starve yourself of the culture and the people around you?

If that's what you want to do, then go live in a monastery. But this church is here on Skinner Street in the centre of Whitby, a messed up town.

Hopefully, because we're desperate to save people from the gates of hell. We'll feel the heat and we'll see the dirt. But our God will keep us and hold us.

Together, we'll keep each other and hold each other. aliens in the world. A different breed that says the God of heaven is the one true God.

But aliens that could whisper it to their neighbours. To be authentically Christian requires us to be meaningfully worldly. We have to choose to be in the world.

[32 : 45] We need to be conscious about it. To be in the world but not of the world. a balanced diet, neither culturally gluttonous or culturally anorexic. To live a good life in a bad world.

You know, we started at the end tonight. You know, seeing it was God's work that humbles people's hearts and opens blind eyes. So let's start at the beginning.

Sorry, let's finish at the beginning with chapter 1 verse 1 and 2. All of this was in God's control. God placed Daniel there and God has placed us here.

King Nebuchadnezzar didn't beat God's plan. See in verse 2, God gave Jehoi King into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. God was punishing the Israelites because of their disobedience and ignorance towards him.

Do you know, all of this is God's work. He's planned everything. Working with us in every situation, before and after we notice it.

[33 : 53] And so when talk about evangelism is scary, when we realise that we need to get out of our comfort zone, when we need to take off our bubble wrap and go back into the danger zone, we've got someone holding the rope, holding our hand with us.

I want you to turn to Matthew 28 as we close. Matthew 28 verse 19, the Great Commission.

It says, Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Now look at the two verses on either side of that. Verse 18, Jesus had all authority in heaven and on earth. And verse 20, And surely I am with you always.

That is the Great Commission sandwich. The Great Commission is sandwiched between Jesus' expression of his ultimate authority and that he'll be with us always.

[35 : 07] Jesus has prayed for us in John 17. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth in Matthew 28 18. Jesus is with us always in Matthew 28 20.

We can do this with him. You know, I've not given you any specifics tonight of how to do this. I realise that. But you've got to work these out for yourself.

You know your situation and you know your weaknesses. But don't become careless. Don't become careless with your holiness and don't become careless about the people that need Christ.

we need to be a Daniel because that's what we've been commanded to do because that's our purpose of still being on earth.

We need to live a good life in a bad world. So let's pray together. Dear Lord, I pray that you'd really help us to think all of this through.

[36 : 22] Lord, it is scary to realise that you've left us in a world that is full of temptation. It's full of potential for sin and yet you've sent us there to tell others about the gospel.

Lord, help us to think through how we can do this. How to make sure that we still live a good life. And make sure that we can do it so close that we could whisper the gospel to our neighbours so that they could come and know you.

Lord, I pray that you really help us not to defile ourselves. Lord, help us not to get carried away with the things of the world, with the culture that surrounds us, with the nice things that offers, money and everything, the pleasures of the world that surround us.

Help us not to get distracted with that, but to remain holy. But Lord, help us to be brave enough to step into the world, to put on all the spiritual armour in the morning, so that you'll protect us from the evil one, so that we may go out and tell the people that have no idea about you, or don't even care about you, that they will be judged for their actions, that they need you as their saviour, Lord, give us confidence, give us an absolutely radical spirit that says, we want to obey the great commission, we want to obey the great commandment, and we want to live a good life in a bad world.

Lord, I pray that you'd really help us as we try and do this, and you just help us to consider it tonight, help us to think it through, and I just pray that you'd really help us to honour you in all that we do.

[38 : 07] As we try and do this, that our lives really speak of your greatness, that we wouldn't lose our salt and light, and our lives would be something that praised you and honoured you.

Lord, I pray that our lives would honour you this evening. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.