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Preacher: Derek Carr

[0 : 0 0] All right. Let's come to God in prayer before we hear the sermon. Let's pray. Father, we read about a man many hundreds of years ago who stood for you, a young man, barely in his twenties, a late teenager, called Daniel.

Father, we are going to read about him. And we ask you as we read of what he did, how he prayed, how he acted, that we might learn not just from him, but the one who is the greater and the better Daniel, who always stood and never failed, our Lord Jesus.

And we pray this in his name. Amen. If you're a Christian, then the time will come, if it hasn't come already, when your resolve to follow Jesus Christ, will be tested.

Mark my words. They're not my words. They're the words of Scripture. They're the words that were given to a church in Ephesus. They're the words that are written throughout the New Testament.

And examples of the testing of the people of God are in the Old Testament. The time will come, if it hasn't come already, when your faith, my faith, will be tested.

[1 : 5 5] And when, not if, when, as it will, that time comes, what are you, and what am I, going to do?

Because we are decidedly followers of Jesus. We may look at other Christians and say, they are following the crowd.

But how are we to stand? How are we to resist the course of this world? How are we to swim against the tide of increasing, long word, secularization, in the society we live and work and grow up in?

We need a model. We need an example of someone who stands and someone who stands distinctively, who is distinctively godly in a godless culture.

And Scripture, God the Holy Spirit, in His wisdom, greater than ours, has given us Daniel as one example among several of a man who stood in a godless culture, who was godly in the midst of a godless day.

[3 : 1 5] Let's pick up the background of Daniel chapter 1 first. The first three verses, first two or three verses, give us a bit of background. Daniel is actually writing this. He's recounting his own story with his three friends.

He tells us how he is in Babylon, this city in Scripture that typifies the godless world that is in conflict with the people of God. And he tells us he's there because the Jewish nation has been overthrown by the superpower of the day.

Babylon, led by this great king, Nebuchadnezzar. The nation of Israel have been overthrown because they've offended God to the point of doing detestable things in 2 Chronicles 36 verse 8.

You can read about this at the end of Chronicles and Kings. In 2 Kings 24 verse 20, we read that it is because of the Lord's anger. And in 2 Kings 21 verse 6, we realize that one of these kings of Israel had sacrificed his own son in the fire.

In 2 Kings 24 verse 3, it's because of the sins of this king Manasseh. The warnings of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah are ignored.

[4 : 42] God in his grace has warned his people what's going to happen. It's not as though this has been sprung on them out of the blue. No, they knew this would come. They were warned right back in the days of Moses that this would happen.

You can read about this in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. And so it has happened that Nebuchadnezzar has invaded and captured the king of Judah and made him to serve Babylon.

his name is and I was glad you read this Barry and I didn't have to read it Jehiakim I've got it wrong already Jehiakim king of Judah the Lord delivered Jehiakim king of Judah into the hand of into the power is the word the word is power there in the Hebrew into his power the power of Nebuchadnezzar along with some of the articles from the temple of God verse 2 Nebuchadnezzar has taken plunder from the Lord's temple in Jerusalem back to his God's own God's temple in Babylon and he exiles some of the elite people in the government of Judah the interns who are being prepared for leadership and among that group is Daniel and his three friends they are young guys they're barely 20 they're probably 16 or 17 years old and they're going to be assimilated now forgive me but if you're a

Star Trek fan you'll know what assimilate means because if you're sorry if you're not a Trekkie I apologise but if you are a Trekkie as my wife is and if she was here I would be now embarrassing her but if she was here she would know and if you're a Trekkie you will know that the word assimilate in Star Trek refers to the Borg and the Borg are these aliens that take every other alien culture and turn it into their own which is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar was going to do with Daniel if he could he was going to turn Daniel a Jew a worshipper of the living God into a Babylonian idol worshipper he was going to assimilate him and his three friends that's the conflict that's in the background of Daniel 1 you might feel as you read your newspaper as you watch the BBC or the ITV news or as you consider what's going on in the world you might feel a similar kind of pressure to conform to the kind of culture and the kind of world in which we live to those voices of godlessness the anti-Christian spirit that is rising in the world we seem to see in the West particularly in this country in particular you may feel too that attempts are being made to assimilate you into that kind of a world it's a very relevant chapter

Daniel chapter 1 and of course if they resisted these guys Daniel his three friends Nebuchadnezzar was very willing to kill people who wouldn't serve his purposes and wouldn't fit in so Daniel finds himself in Babylon he's been taken the 600 miles or so from Jerusalem that's over here in the map here's the Mediterranean here's Israel here's Babylon round about the middle of Iraq 600 miles and there he is a Jew in an alien culture or a Christian in an anti-Christian an anti-Christian world maybe it's like you leave a sheltered Christian home to join the military or maybe you start at university in an utterly non-Christian environment you're in a hall of residence and you're the only Christian who goes down to breakfast on that first morning and you're looking around to find someone you know and there's no

[9 : 08] Christians as far as you know you've been to the Christian Union on the Saturday and it's Sunday morning and you don't see a friendly face anyway there was no one at the Christian Union in your hall of residence but actually as I've said already we're all in that kind of a situation how do you handle it how do you handle it you've been in that situation some of you I'm sure how did you handle it five things five things the one awareness the world is out to conform you that's verses three to seven two resistance is called for that's verse eight you draw the line that's also verse eight the second half you trust the saviour that's nine to sixteen in this chapter and five fifthly you wait on God to honour you that's seventeen to twenty one so there it is there it is there's the sermon the world is out to conform you resistance is called for you draw the line you trust the saviour you wait on God to honour you that's it shall I go home let's carry on okay right first point the world is out to conform you the world is out to conform you let's emphasise it if the world had

Jesus in its sights the world has the Christian in its sights and we know the world had Jesus in its sights when he was here the world designs to suck you into its way of thinking the world intends to shape your attitudes and actions the world will stifle your love for Jesus it will extinguish the fire that burns in your heart for him Daniel and his three friends are put under great pressure to conform to Babylonian way of life look at verse three and the king ordered Ashpenaz chief of his court officials to bringing some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility young men here they are this is Daniel and his three mates without any physical defect handsome showing aptitude for every kind of learning well informed quick to understand qualified to serve in the king's palace that's it one of the interns that were going to become part of the government of Judah and 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 and they were to be trained for three years and after that they were to enter the king's service it was a three year degree in assimilation into

Babylonian culture and practice and among these were some from Judah Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah the chief official gave them new names it's already started we've given you new names we're going to give you a new identity to back up that name Daniel you're going to be called Belteshazzar Hananiah Shadrach Mishael Mishak and to Azariah Abednego we're going to make Babylonians of you and we're going to use the language and the literature the media that's what it is the media of the Babylonians and today what's that mean TV the books the films the blogs the internet the education system advertising magazines newsprint powerpoint very powerful conformers so you watch Richard Attenborough on planet earth and you come away awed by the natural world that he has displayed to you and if you're not careful you miss the subtle evolutionary message of his teaching in that program and that's why most 11 year olds that I meet in school as a chemistry teacher in year 7 those children at school are avid evolutionists it's not a theory as far as they're concerned as it actually is and not a very substantial one to be honest it's a hard fact as far as they are concerned which is what it actually isn't they're already assimilated

Ian Garrett wrote this how many people now doubt the historical credibility of Christianity because of reading Dan Brown's grinding acts against the Roman Catholic Church in the Da Vinci Code and sequels how many people have come to accept as normal all sorts of lifestyles and beliefs because they're slowly drip fed to us through Coronation Street Emmerdale and East Enders and always the Christians in those programs are drips are they not we need to realise what is happening to us as we watch read and listen to the world around us if you are reading Richard Dawkins realise he has not taken an objective scientific view there isn't any such thing by the way he's out to make you an atheist because he is one but if you're reading good housekeeping if you're reading good housekeeping realise that they are out to sell you consumerism and the sole purpose in life in consumerism is to make you look thirty when you are seventy got you the world is out to squeeze you into its mould so what are you going to do and I'm not saying don't you go

I'm not saying you should shut down your subscription to good housekeeping or to new scientists or to scientific American I am saying read and watch and listen with your eyes of your mind and your heart wide open attuned to the messages in the media we need to be much more savvy in the pulpit and in the church about the culture we live in and draw the text to the culture and judge the culture with the text that's what we're doing tonight so secondly resistance is called for that's verse 8 look at verse 8 but Daniel resolved there it is he resolved he had a resolve in his heart he resolved not stop there he resolved not that's resistance he resists we'll see how in a moment but resistance the Bible resists the world that's the paradigm that's the context the

[15 : 57] New Testament is full of exhortations to Christians to resist the world the world is this nuanced thing to resist the influence of the here we go this is the world the systems of thought and behaviour in the world that are anything but biblical I'll say it again the systems of thought and behaviour in the world that are anything but biblical here are a few verses just to illustrate what I'm saying 1 John 2 15 and following do not love the world or anything in the world anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him everything in the world the cravings of sinful man the lust of his eyes the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the father but from the world 1 Peter 4 1 to 3 therefore since Christ suffered in his body arm yourselves also with the same attitude because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin as a reality doesn't live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires but rather for the will of God here we go for you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans do that's it doing what pagans do that's the world he has given us his very great and precious promises we sang it so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires you see we can't help but be part of this world we're in it

I'm not one of those who thinks that and believes in some kind of escapist doctrine or escapist kind of theology once you converted you don't get anywhere near the world you don't get involved in the world you just wait for the rapture and you'll disappear into heaven with Jesus I don't believe that escapism I don't think the bible talks about that escapism either Jesus wants us to be in the world as his witnesses in it to win it Daniel shows we can and we should be part of it he didn't think huh he didn't think did he that a Christian mustn't go to university for three years because they'll be swamped by the stuff they learn that's totally opposed to the bible and if they study biology they'll come out as rampant evolutionists and lose their faith some faith or that they shouldn't go to university to study an english degree because they'll read about corrupt writers and become hedonists used to be said

Daniel studied for three years but he didn't swallow it all hook line and sinker he wasn't conformed to the beliefs of Babylon we must resist but what's that mean in practice well we've got to filter out the anti-god propaganda in the media we must learn to see through the propaganda we must think and train ourselves and our children and our church to be critical about everything we read and hear and watch including sermons this sermon to see if they are saying really what the bible says and expose them where they are not biblical I think the practice of taking a bible to church is in decline but the non-conformists traditionally have taken the bible to church to check the sermons biblical that's what we are supposed to be doing and it's not just reading chunks of scripture

I'm not a great advocate of reading chunks of scripture for its own sake what is the point in reading scripture and trying to get through the bible in a year if I don't understand what the scripture is teaching me what it's saying to me what it's meaning to me how it makes me understand the world I live in and the savior I worship if I'm just reading chunks of scripture I'm not saying you don't read your bible what I am saying is we use and apply scripture in our world and in our church and we read it and think about what it's saying and take time to meditate upon it and to absorb its teaching if it takes you six months to go through the first twenty psalms that's not a bad thing and you shouldn't feel guilty if that's all your bible reading has been for the last six months because that's all my bible reading has been for the last six months every morning next psalm since september the 19th to march the whatever it was end of beginning of march the first twenty psalms we're to understand the scripture and it is to be taken into our hearts as well as our minds and to change us it's not magical we have to work at it to understand it and to have it so understanding to be so understanding it that it grabs us and takes us by the scruff of the neck and takes us and moves us to be the people of God

God wants us to be that's what scripture is meant to be it's a living book there's no book like this it is the living oracles of the living God and the risen Christ works through this book and he takes a hold of you and he grabs you and he moves you if you're not picking up the scripture and it isn't having that kind of an action on you then you need to stop and repent and take it slowly through the book really really wait at what God is saying to you when you open this book Daniel shows we can enter a secular career with a secular vocation as a believer in God he entered Babylonians Babylon's civil service and acted for the good of a pagan society made mistakes I'm sure but that's what he did and we can we must as a witness at the very least enter the workforce actively engage it study it work in it witness to it serve it and bring the light of Jesus

[22 : 27] Christ into it and we may even become models role models and leaders in our field God be praised if we are for his glory alone and our churches must do more to support all Christians active in private and public companies and the public services that their witness shine robustly in such a challenging environment we need to think as a church about creative ways of supporting those in work in whatever role they play in society you know all Christians spend more hours in the week in work than they ever do in church and we don't even think about that in the church and we need to resistance is called for sometimes you've got to draw the line

Daniel drew the line do you see that verse 8 Daniel resolved not what there's the line to defile himself with royal food and wine verse 8 and he asked the chief official permission not to defile himself in this way there's the line drew the line no food and wine he drew the line we're to be part of the world but ultimately our loyalty and devotion is not to the company or to our vocation but to the Lord who is God and King I am constantly asking myself can I do what the world is wanting me to do in my case in my job is it demanding of me things that would mean I would not be serving the Lord Jesus as my king and when I have to answer no that's when

I must draw the line so for example if the school asks me to participate in a program actively promoting gay lifestyle as a valid and as an equivalent lifestyle as a heterosexual married lifestyle I'll draw the line and say no can't do that it's not biblical gay lifestyle isn't biblical that's coming in the education system that's coming hasn't happened yet but it will come Daniel drew the line wisely judiciously notice what he said he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way that's him being judicious and wise people disagree commentators disagree over exactly why he drew the line there it's clear in verse 8 that Daniel believed it would defile him it would make him the opposite of being set apart to serve the lord the opposite of holy some scholars there are two main views some scholars think he refused food and wine because to eat it would mean breaking old testament food laws like the babylons ate pork whereas god told israelites not to they were to be distinctive in that way as part of the way they were to stand out for god from other nations and this way

Daniel would keep the law as far as possibly could the lesson is this for us this is the case whenever the world commands us to do or pressurizes us to do something against god's will we swim against the tide we stand my school advocating teaching the equivalence of gay lifestyles is an example of that if it came to that however the biblical there are biblical problems with that first explanation the old testament doesn't outlaw wine babylonian vegetables might also be defiling and in daniel 10 2 to 3 it seems daniel may have met in babylon so maybe the explanation is the alternative both are valid alternatives incidentally both teachers daniel refused food from the king's table to show he wasn't the king's property or puppet in other words he's saying to himself and anyone who will listen that his ultimate loyalty is to god and not to nebuchadnezzar because in that culture eating from the king's table symbolised total allegiance to the king if that's the case then the lesson for us is this when we could do something without going against god's will there are times when it's best to draw the line and not to do it to say at least to ourselves if not to others my ultimate loyalty is to

Jesus and not to the world and its desires now we'll find ourselves in situations where real peer pressure is put on us to conform to fit in to be like the rest like the christian who played football for his team after the match the team really tried to get him to drink himself silly and for a while he just had a pint a christian is free to do this and then he stopped but the taunting went on and on it's only your christianity that's stopping you that sort of thing so what did he do he went teetotal drew the line swimming against the tide standing up and being counted for Jesus you let them know where your ultimate loyalty lies with Jesus alone you draw the line you resist the world is out to conform you fourthly trust the saviour look at verses 9 to 16 now god had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to daniel but the official told daniel i'm afraid of my lord the king who's assigned your food and drink why should he see me 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 and hananiah mishel and azariah please test your servants for 10 days give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink and so on there was this test daniel comes up with this test trust the saviour what do i mean i'm a christian you say yes but look what's happening here daniel has implicitly put himself here in this test in the hands of god how do we know he has well he suggests the test of eating vegetables and god is with him verse 9 now god had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to daniel god is on daniel's side here that's what daniel is saying to us and god brings him through the test verses 15 and 16 at the end of the 10 days they looked healthier and better nourished etc you see what the bible is doing here it's pointing us away from daniel as our example to follow it's saying you cannot draw the line alone you cannot stand alone if you try you'll ultimately fail unless and until you see jesus is the greater and the better daniel who always stood against the world in the world but not of the world you'll never be able to stand for christ against the world unless and until you see jesus stand against the scribes and the pharisees and the chief priests and the romans and the people and pass every test of faith you'll never be able to pass the tests of faith god presents you with because you only stand trusting in him that's the only way unless and until you see the big sacrifices jesus made in drawing the line for you and look what it meant it meant ultimately him going to the cross of calvary for you shedding his blood for you that's the ultimate line drawn because it's drawn between heaven and hell unless and until you see that you'll never be able to make the ordinary sacrifices of faith god calls on from you consider him

[31 : 41] who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you won't grow weary and lose heart in your struggle against sin you've not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood but he did he did for you he resisted and stood and he shed his blood for you and until and unless and until you see that you won't stand properly you won't stand by faith you won't trust him you see this the bible what's the bible basically about is the bible you know like here about you or is it basically about Jesus in other words is it basically about what you and I must do or basically about what he has done you see what you're going to do you see when you fail you're going to fail and realistically you will fail the test of faith at some point the test that

God will put in front of you Daniel would have done and Daniel did he's not perfect it's no good me speaking as if I have always passed the test of faith that God has put before me if that day comes and that gay lifestyle issue arrives is in my school I tell you I am scared and I'm going to have a struggle to say I can't do that and I'm going to be hanging on to every word of Jesus waiting for that moment when I have to face the head and say what I think about it it's no good me speaking as if I have always passed the test of faith that God has put me before me I have not neither of you the simple answer is that I like you have often failed him but Jesus never failed us that's the point

Jesus never fails you haven't yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood but he did because he never failed the test of faith of his faith in God his father he never failed when we fail we find his grace is sufficient for us to repent and resolve to trust him afresh if you've made a mess if you feel if you feel of your Christian witness and you didn't draw the line when you think you should have done if that has happened to you and if we confess our sins he is faithful always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness we can begin again because he always stood and he never failed he's the greater and better Daniel and lastly maybe you didn't draw the line because you yourself were afraid to do so did you see that in the text the official there he asked the official for permission not to defile himself in this way now God had caused the official to show favour to

Daniel but the official told Daniel I'm afraid of my lord the king was assigned you your food and drink why should he see you looking worse than the other young men the official was afraid to withhold the food and drink refusing to advocate the gay lifestyle might even earn me the head's disapproval it might even lose me my job but refusing Nebuchadnezzar order will lose you your life so I think we can understand the fear but even that's not the worst thing that could happen to you the worst thing is not having Nebuchadnezzar or your boss or your family or your friends against you a lot of people say in our culture there's nothing worse than death well I want to tell you something tonight that there is the worst thing is having God against you and our culture our society doesn't yet realise that it's lost that fear that the worst thing is having

God against you the worst thing is dying when you're shut out of the presence of God and being on the wrong side of Jesus forever are you glad we're on the right side on his side with him who never failed who always stood he said don't be afraid of those who kill the body don't be afraid of those who kill the body that cannot kill the soul rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell that's why he came our Jesus our saviour that's why he descended from heaven to earth that's why he took upon himself human flesh that's why he walked this earth that's why he lived a human life that's why he died that death upon the cross suffering in pain and agony and took the punishment for sins upon the cross he took the punishment for you to spare you the reality and the pain and the suffering of eternal hell that's why he came that's why he stood that's why he's so beautiful beautiful saviour we sang we're in the world yes part of it but we draw the line let's ask some questions are there some jobs that a

[38 : 03] Christian cannot do in all good faith and good conscience yes there are suppose you converted whilst working in the drinks industry this Christian I heard of used to work for a vodka company now he works for Coleman's Mustard it's a good one but I recognise it's not that easy to change employment these days no it isn't easy is it and I think our heavenly father understands that too try as we might some of us can't move out of the awkward difficult jobs we're in and God grants us I think the grace to persevere under such circumstances are there practices here's another question are there practices or activities or advice that medical professionals who are Christians could not endorse I ask you I also ask you this question are there activities policies strategies that those in the police force or the prison service could not endorse and must withdraw from there's some suggestions for you to think about and to consider and to reflect upon so swimming against the tide standing for Jesus drawing the line is hard it's difficult it's potentially scary try telling your boss you won't do what he tells you to do

I know it's scary there is real fear that it won't just be that we're ostracized but we're out of a job not just out on the limb and we'll be hurt and be the losers and how do we deal with that how do we deal with that what did Daniel do he trusted in God God had caused the official to show favour and Daniel's trusting God in this test that's how he comes up with the test he's trusting God in the test and God honours him in the test trust the saviour is the message here it is so much more costly not to and in trusting him moment by moment you'll have the strength and the courage to draw the line when the test does come as it will you see that's what Daniel did why was the official afraid but Daniel doesn't seem to have been it's because Daniel trusted and rested secure in

God his champion and keeper and lastly fifthly we've talked about the world is out to conform you that resistance is called for that we need to draw the line and we need to trust the saviour and lastly we need to wait on God to honour us that's verses 17 to 21 that's what you see in those verses Daniel doesn't make a song and dance does he about the test Daniel simply with his three friends he realises that that's always the way the people of God are in a majority because God is on their side for with God is a majority even in Babylon even in this world we are on the Lord's side and after three years of hard study of language and literature of the Babylonians in this degree in an attempt to assimilate them into the Babylonian culture after three years of eating vegetables and drinking water after three years presumably of engaging and analysing and criticising and challenging and understanding the

Babylonian history its politics its geography its theology its economics but remaining distinctively Jewish in their thinking godly in their thinking God honours those four men because they sought to honour him by faith look at verse 17 the four men God gave God gave notice that knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kind God honours him because he has honoured God and then verse 19 the king talked with them of course they've learned the language haven't they you see after three years they know the language so they just talk the king talked with them no translators and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah so they entered the king's service the interview was searching they passed with flying colours verse 20 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 ten times better in your work in your role your learning put yourself in the hand of God that's what

Daniel did trust yourself to him stand when you must and he will honour your faith and your trust in him let's pray father we thank you for the lord Jesus who resisted and stood for us to save us and resisted to the point of shedding his blood for us on the cross grant us such grace lord we pray that we might believe in him and trust in him and stand for him our small sacrifices are nothing compared to what he did for us give us this perspective we pray in all our dealings with the world grant us the strength and the grace to stand and having done all to stand for Jesus and for his sake amen So this is a story that is by to our so we are many things we we are