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NBC – AM Service
8/27/17

With a View From Inside: The Fear of the Lord in Daniel
Daniel 1-6 – Part 1
Series: *Why Everything Matters*

Introduction: It is our great joy this morning to be considering the life of one of the heroes of the faith – Daniel. Would you turn with me to the book that bears his name – the book of Daniel in your Old Testament? You may have thought that last Sunday was our last sermon in the series on the book of Ecclesiastes, but actually, I want to finish out that series by pointing you to a real-life example of someone who lived out the Biblical worldview of Ecclesiastes that we all must adopt.

The message of the book of Ecclesiastes is intended to disenchant us away from the dominating worldview which comes so naturally to our sin-stained hearts. This worldview helps us filter through our life experiences and it helps us to know what is important and valuable in all of life. Left to ourselves we will adopt a worldview which tries to take the here and now realities of the people and the stuff of life and put those pieces of the puzzle together in a way which makes sense and makes meaning of it all. What Solomon did in his sermon in Ecclesiastes was to show us that this simply doesn't work. All the things in this life that we look to, to help us make meaning and find value, leave us empty handed in the end. But there is a way forward. Having been deconstructed by the truth, we are now ready to be reconstructed. And the way forward is to fear God and keep His commandments. This is the way to find meaning and eternal value in this life under the sun – to fear the Lord in every area of life and to then live out that fear of the Lord through obedience to Him.

But what does that look like? Last week we took a view from the end of life as we considered the final words of Solomon, and today I want to take a look from within a life – the life of Daniel. I want to show you from the pages of Scripture, and from the actions of a godly man, what it looks like in the context of real life to fear God and keep His commandments. The book of Daniel is like the hall of fame of those who fear the Lord. Outside of our Lord Jesus in the Gospels, I don't know of another book in the Bible where the fear of the Lord is more clearly illustrated. And the amazing thing about Daniel's situation is that he was living in a culture which was consumed with the fear of man – which is true of every culture, I know – but the Babylonian culture in particular was drunk on the power and success of man. The people of the kingdom lived in constant fear of the King – which we will see over and over again – and no people of any consequence were outside of the King of Babylon's authority. He was the heathen counterpart to Solomon in his influence, the Bible time's equivalent to the absolute power of Hitler, and the Babylonian version of the unstoppable power of the world's greatest army. You can't rightly understand the fear of the Lord which was displayed in Daniel until you understand what kind of a kingdom he was operating within.

In other words, Daniel and his three companions lived in the perfect environment for the fear of man to abound in their hearts. And by “fear” here, I am speaking not just of the dread and terror of not wanting to get your head chopped off by the king, but I mean also, the valuing and the respect and the awe which controls your actions and your words. If you were going to get caught up with the awesome power and glorious display of an earthly kingdom and an earthly king, then ancient Babylon would be a good place to do it. If ever your heart was going to be captured by the splendor of human achievement and human glory – then where Daniel finds himself in chapter 1 is a good place to be.

In Daniel chapter 1, Daniel and his three friends – Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah – are taken into captivity, and they are probably somewhere between the ages of 14-19 years old. The first 6 chapters of the book of Daniel record the span of Daniel’s life as it is lived in this pagan kingdom, and one chapter after another shows us the mountaintop experiences of these men of God who stood firm in the face of a godless culture full of unbelievable pressure. By the time we get to the end of chapter 6 Daniel is somewhere north of 80 years of age and the testimony of his life has not changed – but only strengthened. He fears the Lord more and this reputation precedes him. He is God’s man, no matter the cost, and he had to prove that in his youth as a teenager and in his old age as a well-established man. The clear testimony from chapter 1 to chapter 6 is that Daniel feared the Lord from beginning to end, no matter the cost.

This is especially helpful for us in the Church today. Men and women in the Old Testament who had to operate under the rule of a pagan king and who remained faithful to the one true God give us much to learn from their example. So, people like Joseph and Moses and Mordecai and Esther and Nehemiah and Ezra and Daniel. They are so instructive for us because they lived parallel lives to what we are living. The details of the circumstances have changed, but the principal elements are the same. So, for instance:

- They were living in a kingdom and under a ruler which was not controlled by, nor concerned with, the truth of God. The human authorities under which they operated their everyday lives were absent of a right view of God and therefore of any kind of a right worship of God. They were godless and rampantly idolatrous. Well, the details have changed, but this is what we operate under today as well. Our human governments are largely godless and idolatrous. They are largely not concerned with the truth of God, nor with the truth about God. Many of them are their own gods and they are in power for personally exalting reasons. That is not true of all of them, just like I’m sure it wasn’t true of all in Babylon (like Daniel for instance), but it is true of most.
- Secondly, these OT saints were pilgrims and strangers in these foreign lands. They were there because of exile and deportation and they were aliens on foreign soil. They weren’t home yet. Their current residence was not their true home – they belonged to another country. Well, this is exactly what the NT tells us we are as Christians – we are citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom. We are not home yet, we are strangers and pilgrims on this foreign soil. Our loyalties belong elsewhere.

- Thirdly, these OT saints also faced unending opportunities to abandon their singular worship of God and pursue the pleasures all these earthly kingdoms had to offer. The opportunity for failure was as vast as the ocean is for the fish. There was simply no end to the opportunity for them to turn away and give themselves to the lusts of their flesh. This was the air they breathed in these foreign cultures. And yet, they stood firm. Yet, they remained full of Christ-honoring worship of our great God. And so, they stand as giants of walking by faith in a sight-driven world, and they are worthy of our consideration.

Of all of those we should consider from the OT, Daniel and his three friends best exemplify this fear of the Lord which we long to see in our own hearts.

So, Daniel 1 starts us off by telling us this – *Read 1:1-8.*

Sometimes the familiarity we have with these OT texts keeps us from appreciating what is really going on. Many of us have heard this account told to us since we were little kids. We've heard it preached a hundred different ways, and not all of them exactly on point with what is happening in the text. I specifically remember being in college and having a guest preacher come and preach from Daniel 1:8 to tell us that we also should purpose in our hearts to not eat meat or the delicacies of our culture, but that we should be vegetarians. He went on for a few days in chapel about this, and for about the next week or so the salad bar was ravaged as hungry college students tried to live by his unbiblical standard. After a few days we were all so hungry and so sick of eating like rabbits that we soon returned to eating normally.

So, I'm sure you've heard this text presented and applied and you can imagine where we are going next, but can we take one more look at Daniel's life, and this time through the lens of a man who fears God? Here is a man who shows us what it means to live a godly life in a godless culture. Here is a man who marks out for us the path of faithfulness in a culture where truth has long been abandoned. So, what do we see? Well, I originally was going to cover the first 6 chapters of Daniel this week and give you the broad overview of his life with four marks of a life that fears God and keeps his commandments. But, that's not gonna happen, so, let's consider two of these marks this morning – A life that fears God is a life that resists conformity, no matter the costs, and speaks boldly, no matter the cost.

The life that Fears the Lord:

- I. **Resists Conformity – No Matter the Cost – 1:8**
 - a. We see this first mark in Daniel 1. The life that fears the Lord resists conformity no matter the cost. This is the where fear of the Lord surfaces in everyday life. There is a great chunk of ice under the sea, but the tip that sticks up and shows itself every day in the context of life is this. The man or woman who fears God refuses to be conformed to the worldly way of thinking and living which abounds around them. At the heart of this conformity is a fear of man which demands worship of men and men's systems of thought and value. The ungodly around us are putting constant and often unnoticed pressure on all people to value what they value and to love what they love and to act the way that they act. This push

for conformity presses upon the soul of the redeemed in every cultural context and calls us to be just like everyone else.

- b. And so, this conforming pressure has a long history of success throughout history and throughout the Scriptures. People who were God's people were pressed into words and actions which were contrary to their standing because they allowed themselves to be conformed to the values and views of this world. So, Adam allowed himself to be pressed into the mold of the Serpent's deceit and it cost him paradise. Abraham conformed himself to the ways of the heathen and lied about Sarah being his wife so that he wouldn't be killed, and he almost lost his wife anyways. David was pressed by the delights of a here and now world and committed adultery and murder and lost his infant son. Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, was conformed to the lusts of his passions and the lure of the worldly value system and he lost his kingdom and all purpose and meaning to his life.
- c. But here stands Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah. They were sons of nobility from the tribe of Judah. They were chosen from among the others because they were good looking – which we know has a lot of sway and influence in any culture – and because they were skillful in all wisdom and endowed with knowledge, understanding, and learning. These guys were the *crème de la crème* – the top of the class – the best of the best. And what an opportunity lay before them. Here they were, in the greatest city on the planet, under the tutelage of the best of human wisdom and knowledge in the greatest kingdom Earth had known to this point. They are in the Who's Who society as they gather with the best and brightest from around the world. What a great opportunity for these men to make a name for themselves, to be filled with youthful ambitions and self-exalting motives. What a spot to be in for the power hungry and fame craving heart of a teenager. Dad and mom are absent, the display of human prowess and power are overwhelming and the opportunity for advancement and greater influence are abounding. What a place for a 16 year old young man to find himself!
- d. In this environment of conformity and high pressure development, Daniel purposes in his heart that the approval of God is going to matter supremely to him, no matter the cost. He is far away from the manifest presence of God in the Temple of Jerusalem. He is far away from those who molded his life with the Hebrew Scriptures. He is far away from anyone who would be able to blow the religious whistle on him. And yet, he is determined to resist conformity. And so, in verse 8 he resolves himself to not be defiled with the king's meat and the king's wine.
- e. Now, this is a really interesting choice by Daniel. Why take a stand here – in the area of food and drink. You will notice that he doesn't refuse to receive the education of Babylon. So, he enters into their three year indoctrination program which was intended to make them a Babylonian sympathizer and a good ambassador of Babylon to their own native people. They were taught the language – which is the building block of a worldview by the way. We teach our worldview in the earliest forms of language acquisition. Our stories and ditties

and poems which help our kids catch onto language are also teaching key factors of a worldview. And this is what Daniel and his friends were going to be exposed to for the next three years. They also were given new names as a way to strip them of their old identity. All four of them have names which in the Hebrew speak to some aspect of the God of Israel, but Nebuchadnezzar renames them in honor of his gods. But the point of drawing a line in the sand comes when they are going to be forced to partake fully of the king's table.

- f. So, why here? Why resist conformity here at the line of food and drink? Well, there is nothing in the Law of God about where young men can be educated. Deuteronomy 6 calls parents to teach them about God and foster in them a love for God in every area of life, but this does not restrict them from being educated in formal ways in other places. And there is nothing in the Law about the requirements for naming your child – though if you track through the book of Daniel, he didn't really adopt this new name either. But there are obvious and clear instructions in the Law about what God's people were supposed to eat and not eat. They were to be marked off from other nations by their diet. And so, Daniel and his three friends resolve to follow those Laws, and the easiest way to follow them was to ask to be excused from the normal fare of food. On top of that, it was usually around the mealtimes – especially the evening meal – where the decadence and the frivolity and the indulgence in sin often started. Just read the account in chapter 5 of Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, and his drunken orgy which was the precursor to his demise. This kind of thing was not uncommon for the royalty in the Babylonian empire, and Daniel resolved himself to remain as absent from that decadence as he possibly could.
- g. But, there is more here. I think Daniel and his three friends also chose food and drink as a daily and physical sign to themselves and to others that they were not fully entrenched in the culture around them. They were going to remain absent from the conforming pressure cooker of food and drink which could easily capture their affections and lure them into fuller assimilation. They saw this as a hook which they could daily resist so as to keep themselves from being reeled in. It was a daily way to be physically reminded that they were not settling in here, even if they were here for a long time – they never truly belonged.
- h. And notice that Daniel and his friends did this in the context of great fear of the human king. So, in verse 10, the chief of the eunuchs tells Daniel that he basically doesn't see removing the King's food and drink from Daniel because the chief is afraid of what the king might do. He thinks that Daniel will be worse off physically and then the king will have his own head for this. This fear of man is self-protecting and self-centered. The chief won't hardly listen to Daniel because he is worried about himself and he won't take the risk of doing what Daniel is requesting because he is self-protecting. He thinks that he himself has freedom here – that somehow, he is keeping himself safe and living a more fulfilling life by fearing the king. But in reality, he is in bondage. He needs the king's approval and he needs the king's protection and so he is controlled by the king's potential response. This is what the fear of man does to our hearts. It controls us because

we look to others and place undue value upon them or unreal expectations on them and then they control us. So, the husband who is newly married struggles with wanting his wife to fill him with love by making much of him in every way. His overvaluing of his wife controls his words and actions and commands his affections and emotions. Or the employee is so consumed by a desire to be noticed that she is driven to gain the approval of co-workers and especially of her supervisor. So, her success at work is really an expression of her fear of man which controls her every thought and effort. Or the student athlete is caught up in the acceptance and pride of accomplishment and so he taxes himself to succeed in his sport and in his school work because he lives for the recognition of others. This fear of man is consuming and controlling.

- i. And it is exactly this control that Daniel refuses. He resists the conforming control of those around him. Rather than the double-minded man of James 1, Daniel shows himself to be the man of 1 Peter 3 who reveres the Lord as holy in his heart and willingly suffers for doing good rather than offending conscience and suffering for doing evil.
 - j. And he did this because he has resolved to not be conformed to the world's value system or the worldview of those around him. And he did this no matter the cost. This could have easily meant an early exit for Daniel and his three friends. You simply never know who you will make mad with a request like this, but Daniel was resolved to remain pure and undefiled, and even if that cost him his life – he valued God more than life. Men and women who fear the Lord have this mark in their life. They understand their pilgrim status and they are vigilant in keeping themselves from getting too comfortable and being stamped into the mold of the world's value systems.
- II. Speaks Boldly, No Matter the Cost – 2:27-28, 36-38, 45**
- a. The second obvious mark of the life lived in the fear of the Lord from the book of Daniel is that it speaks boldly, no matter the cost. This specifically is seen in chapter 2, and what we see is Daniel willing to speak boldly about God in the face of a godless situation, even when his own life was on the line.
 - b. I'm sure you remember the details of chapter 2, but let me set the stage for you quickly. Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had a dream which unsettled him in the worst kind of way. His spirit was troubled and he could no longer sleep. And so he calls for an emergency intervention by all of his magicians and sorcerers and enchanters and Chaldeans, or wise men. In other words, he is throwing the kitchen sink at this thing – he wants all hands on deck as he tries to figure out what in the world his dream means. But this isn't going to be the usual smoke and mirrors game where the king tells these men the dream and then they come up with their best guess as to what it might possibly mean. Rather, he wants them to come up with the details of the dream and then give him their interpretation. The wise men, who were used to leaning upon their own ability to interpret dreams and sound smart were suddenly left standing in the rain without an umbrella. They were all wet and had no idea what to do.

- c. And so they respond by appealing to the king with how ridiculous and impossible this whole scenario is. Look in verse 8 – this is Nebuchadnezzar’s response to their first protest. *Read 2:8-11.*
- d. Did you hear that – there is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand? This is the epitome of a man-centered, man-dependent, man-driven worldview. They are operating in a here and now world with an under the sun perspective. They have no hope outside of themselves and their own wisdom and skill. This is fear of man. This is a high estimation of man that has met its obvious limit. Their man-centered, man-dependent way is demanded by the king to perform its best dance and it trips over its own feet and falls flat on its face. And so, this failure to perform sprays gasoline on the fire of the King’s rage. He goes from upset and unsettled to unhinged in about .2 seconds and demands that all of the wise men in all of the land of Babylon be killed. If they can’t answer him then they obviously deserve death. This is the unreasonable and out of control anger which flows out of the heart of a man who worships his own greatness and expects others to fear him as much as he does. He thinks that he is in control of them, but in reality, they are in control of him because by their lack of an answer he is incited to unstoppable rage.
- e. But then there is Daniel and his three friends. Daniel is told that he is going to die because the king has gone crazy and Daniel replies with prudence and discretion. Look at verse 13. *Read 13-23.* Notice the vast difference here between Daniel and the rest of the wise men. They are running around in a crazed panic because of the violent reaction of their King. They are hopeless and helpless. But Daniel is wise and prudent and calm because he is dependent. He is not confident in himself or his ability, but he is dependent upon God. So he calls his three friends to pray and plead with the God of Heaven for mercy so that they will not be slaughtered by this lunatic king. They plead with God to show Daniel the dream and its interpretation. Take note of some things here about their fear of the Lord.
- f. Because they feared God and had a right view of God they were not sent into a panic when circumstances seemed to point to their impending death. They were able, because of their right and large view of God, to wisely and discerningly weed through the issue and see a way forward in pleading with God for mercy. This will come into play again when the three friends are put before the gold statue and told to bow down and worship it. They will act with calm certainty in the God of Heaven even when it looks certain that they will die for doing that. Their valuing of God, their love for God, their commitment to God, their desire to obey God, their singular worship of God all outweighed the value they placed on their own lives. They would rather be faithful and dead than unfaithful and alive. And this made them unbelievably calm in the face of certain death.
- g. Notice also that their fear of the Lord put them on their knees seeking God’s mercy in the face of an impossible situation. They were not paralyzed or handicapped by circumstances, but they were mobilized to prayer. Their God was the God of the impossible, and so this was the time they needed God more

than ever. And this comes out then in Daniel's prayer of praise and thanksgiving afterward. He doesn't give a lighthearted and limp testament of praise and then go on his merry way. No, his words are dripping with deep praise of the God who has graciously intervened. Great intervention led to words of great praise!

- h. But the main point I want to make to you is built upon those. So, their calm response and their pleas for mercy to the God of Heaven and their theologically rich praise of God after he answers all are the foundation upon which this main point builds its house. When Daniel appears before the king to give him the dream and its interpretation he speaks boldly about God in front of a godless man who is able at that very moment to order his execution if he doesn't like what he hears. So, look at what he says. *Read 2:24-30.*
- i. Can you imagine how easy it would have been at that very moment for Daniel to simply say – well, yes, I can make known to you the dream and the interpretation. I have surpassed the wisdom and insight of all the others and I can tell you what you want to know. But this would have been the path that a man-fearer would have taken. This is how someone who is infatuated with their own greatness would have responded. But Daniel is captivated by the greatness of God here, and so he speaks accordingly. He rightly fears God and honors God and reveres God as having shown him great mercy and so here he extols the greatness of God even in front of a pagan king who has no knowledge of His God.
- j. This seems to me to be a pretty risky proposition. Here is an unhinged king who has ordered the death of all of his wise men because they can't do the impossible task he has given. It would seem to my fear of man oriented heart that giving a short and simple answer here and not provoking the king to wrath would have been the smarter way to go. But not Daniel! He sees here a once in a lifetime opportunity to magnify the Lord God of Heaven no matter what it may cost him. And so he takes a bold risk and extols the merciful intervention and the unsurpassed wisdom of God. And he doesn't just do that here at the beginning of his explanation. So, in verses 36-38 when he is beginning to give the interpretation of the dream he tells Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Heaven is the One who has given him such great wealth and authority in his kingdom. And then he ends the interpretation by telling him that all of these kingdoms of men will one day be obliterated by the unstoppable kingdom of God which shall never be destroyed. And then, on top of this, he says to Nebuchadnezzar in his final words in verse 45 – A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.
- k. In other words – you can take this one to the bank Nebuchadnezzar. God has spoken and God will do this! Now friends – he has just told the most powerful king in the whole world that his kingdom isn't going to last. That is one of the most devastating predictions you can make to a man-fearing, self-absorbed, eminently successful king like Nebuchadnezzar. Their meaning and purpose was often wrapped around building a kingdom that would last for centuries, if not millennia. And here Daniel is telling him that another kingdom will rise to power after him. Your greatness will not continue forever. This is akin to John the

Baptist telling Herod that he was wrong for taking his brother's wife as his wife. It eventually cost John his head. This statement by Daniel could easily cost him his head! But he is consumed here with the fear of the Lord. He rides the high of the mercy of God shown to him in giving him the dream and the interpretation right into the king's presence and makes much of God.

- l. Now beloved, I understand that you are not going to have this kind of opportunity to speak to the Nebuchadnezzar of our day. But every day you interact with a godless culture which is consumed with the fear of man and is absent of any kind of a right view of God. And everywhere you turn you see the overreactions which are caused by a godless view of life. So the Weather Channel tells you that the next storm could be Mother Nature's Armageddon, and the political pundits on talk radio tell you that this or that policy or legislation could mark the end of our great nation, and the military minded fret over the North Korean despot and his threat of nuclear war, and your co-worker bemoans the fact that his life is out of control and he has no answer for all the problems he is facing, and your cousin wallows in the pain of sinful choices with no obvious way out, and on and on the examples could go. We live in a panic-stricken world full of fear because we are dominated by a high view of man and a low view of God. We fear man therefore we are in a state of dread about our circumstances.
- m. It is this fear-stricken world which needs calm and wise and discerning Daniel's to speak boldly to it about God. Brothers and sisters – we have the answer. There is not a man who can make sense of all of this, but there is a God in Heaven who knows the end from the beginning and who is working all things together according to His great plan. These godless days are ripe with the opportunity to speak boldly about the God we know and fear. And this is a mark of a heart that is captured by God – it speaks boldly and clearly about the God of Heaven, no matter the cost!

Conclusion: Did you take note of how both of these marks of a life of godly fear touch upon your interactions with the culture around you? In other words, fear of the Lord is not some private experience of spiritual ecstasy in your personal devotions, and then you go about your daily business. No, the fear of the Lord like what Daniel knew is a life-altering, life-shaping, life-directing characteristic. His love for God and his commitment to God informed how he made choices about even the most mundane of things like food and drink and it informed how he spoke at the most crucial of moments – like when his life was on the line in front of a crazy king. What controls you in those moments? May it increasingly be the fear of God! Let's pray.