

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups July 22nd 2007

"Dare to be Daniel" Daniel Chapter 1



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

We believe the author of this book was Daniel. Jesus concurred, as is clear from his reference in Matt. 24:15. The book was probably completed around 530 B.C. shortly after the capture of Babylon in 539 B.C. The theological theme of the book is God's sovereignty and the first 6 chapters are made up primarily of historical narrative. In this series we shall be exploring the first 6 chapters, which look at the famous Daniel stories. The story tells of a young Israelite taken from Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Despite being exiled Daniel remained faithful to God.

Around 605 B.C. the kingdom of Judah and their whole theological perspective and understanding was turned upside down. They had believed that the temple and all it stood for would remain standing free and inviolate until the glorious second David, the Messiah assumed the throne. Therefore when it all happened otherwise and the city and temple were destroyed, it was hard for them to accept that part of God's future for them was to involve this humiliation. The context in which the life of Daniel is set is summed up in the question asked by the exiles in Babylon, recorded in Ps 137: *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion ...our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*

Daniel had been brought into a culture which was into all kinds of evil and where he and his friends would face persecution of the kind that would terrify you and me. Daniel and his 3 companions could have decided to compromise, but even at a young age Daniel, who may have only been 15 at the time of his capture, made a choice that was to have ramifications for his whole life. The choice he made is recorded in verse 8: *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself.* Because of this we see that he outlived Nebuchadnezzar and lived for something over 60 years to the reign of Cyrus the Great. While history and Daniel's world was turned upside down God is still in control. Through Daniel's ability and God's blessing he rose to the post of prime minister of Babylon. Yet he remained an outsider. The higher he rose, the more prominent a target of persecution he became.

Chapter. 1 enables us to see and understand at least **4 lessons (1)** he remained true to his commitment with politeness (v8b), **(2)** he did it with God's help (v9), **(3)** through persistence (v10&11) **(4)** through willingness to test his faith (v12-15). **Overall** the book of Daniel reminds us that the continuity of a peoples' faith depends in the last resort on the reality of its lay witness and lay religion rather than on the survival of its official clergy or its institutions.

The New Testament bears witness to the truth that we are living as aliens and foreigners in this world. In John 17:15-17, Jesus prays that his disciples are not taken out of the world, but are protected from the evil one. We are not of this world, as Jesus is not, but we are sanctified by the truth of God's word. In Ephesians 2:19 Paul speaks of Jesus' followers no longer being foreigners and aliens because we are God's people and members of his household. That's our true home and nationality. In 1Peter 2:11, Peter urges the Christians to whom he is writing, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires and live good lives among the pagans. Why? Because then, even if we are accused of doing wrong unjustly, just like Daniel, the world will see our good deeds and glorify God.



Witness: questions to discuss

1. As you reflect on the principles Daniel lived by, far from home and in dangerous circumstances, ask yourselves what he can teach us about faithfulness to God in 'alien' circumstances?
2. Has anyone in the group been in a situation, maybe at work, where they have been asked to compromise their principles? Share what you think about this kind of dilemma.
3. Reflect together on the four lessons in chapter 1, and how they might influence your daily life.
4. What implications does it have for us if we consider ourselves primarily as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven rather than 'British'?
5. What does the young man Daniel teach us about the importance of lay witness? Do we need clergy?!!

“Dare to be Daniel” John Joseph’s Story

The story begins in Pakistan in 1993 with a group of Christians who were fearless in their faith and witness. John Joseph used to visit Christians in prison on blasphemy charges. He would even stand alongside them when they stood in the dock before the judge. In Pakistan this is a very dangerous thing to do. In 1993, in a village called Gujrnawala, near to Lahore, a 10 year old boy called Salamat and a farmer called Rehmat, were unjustly charged with scribbling blasphemy against the prophet Mohammed on the local mosque wall. The Mullahs went to the police and lodged a complaint. They were both innocent of all the charges for the simple reason that they could neither read nor write. But the charges brought against them meant that they faced the death sentence. Salamat’s uncle Manzoor, a very devout man, intervened to get his nephew out of detention, but the police turned on him and charged him with the same offence. Now there were 3 Christians facing blasphemy charges. The news spread like wild fire, throughout Pakistan and also went world wide – the headlines in the UK Press read “boy of 10 facing execution.”

John Joseph visited them in prison and escorted them to and from the court, but because of the high profile of this case, he himself became a target. Christians in Pakistan were extremely concerned that they were not getting a fair hearing. One of the lawyers defending the case was a wonderful Moslem woman named Asma Jiyangar (she is now the highest UN official representing Religious Liberty issues around the world.) Their Barrister was also a Moslem, called Abid Minto and he would defend Christians on a pro bono basis. Both the Church and their legal team asked for the case to be moved to Lahore in the hope of getting a fairer hearing.

On 13th April 1994 the case came to the High Court in Lahore. The 3 together with John Joseph came to court. The judge refused to hear the charges because they in themselves were a blasphemy against the prophet Mohammed. He charged the two teams of lawyers to leave the court and to settle the dispute between them. As the 4 were leaving the court, the Mullahs armed with Kalashnikovs drove up on motorbikes and began shooting at them. Manzoor Masih was shot dead immediately and the other 2 accused were badly injured. John Joseph was also shot and badly injured but he managed to identify the mullahs who had perpetrated this crime. As John Joseph lay on the ground, a group of Moslem extremists drove a van over him, breaking his ribs and bruising his internal organs and they left him lying there. John was taken to hospital where the Mullahs went to try to finish them all off. But this time the police prevailed against them. Despite the assassination and shootings, the charges against the 2 still remained.

In February 1995 following their recovery, they were back in court again to face blasphemy charges – but no evidence was offered against them. The night before the judge was going to deliver his verdict, the farmer Rehmat saw a vision of the Lord sitting on a white horse as depicted in the book of Revelation and Jesus told him, “You’re going to be free tomorrow”. Judge Bhatti released them. Both the boy, Salamat and the farmer, Rehmat were spirited out of the country to Germany by Caritas a Catholic relief agency, for their own safety, where they still remain.

John Joseph had to go into hiding as he was to be a witness against the mullahs at their trial in November 1995. Whilst the case was being heard CSW continued to work behind the scenes and together with Michael Howard the then Home Secretary, they managed to arrange for John Joseph to be moved for his own safety to the UK. When the trial came to court John was flanked by 4 policemen for his own protection. John gave his evidence and immediately afterwards CSW covertly moved him from Pakistan to the UK. He is now settled with his wife in the UK.

In October 1998 Moslem extremists walked into the office of Judge Bhatti and shot him dead because he had had the audacity to release the two ‘Kafirs’ (unbelievers).

To this day John Joseph still has a bullet lodged in him and suffers pain and trauma as a result of all he suffered.