

Trusting God in a Hostile World

It s not easy to keep trusting God in a hostile world. According to LUKE TATTERSALL, the book of Daniel is full of encouragement when we re finding it tough

Daniel was a book that I had wanted to preach on for some time, but given that I ve been preaching through the Old Testament, it had to wait its turn. When I finished preaching through 2 Kings, it was time. It was nice to be able to look at a more positive and encouraging story following on from the message of 2 Kings.

In the face of such despair and hopelessness (Judah now having gone the same way as Israel) the book of Daniel offers hope. There s no doubt that the message of the book was intended to *show Israel how to live as God s people in a foreign land*. The other clear message from the book is: KEEP WAITING AND HOPING - GOD HASN T FINISHED YET. That is what the message would have been to the original readers. But both of those messages apply to us in our situation today. They are things we need to hear when we are living in a country where less than 10% of the people believe what we believe.

It has been pointed out that Daniel 7 is the key to understanding the book. Structurally, the whole book hinges around this chapter. There is

a contrast between the way things look from down here, and what is really happening at a heavenly level.

Resources

I have relied heavily on Bryson Smith s unpublished Daniel outlines, though I covered the book in fewer sermons. The other commentaries I used were:

- *DANIEL* (Tyndale) - J Baldwin
- *THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL* (BST) - J A Motyer
- *DARE TO STAND ALONE* (Welwyn) - Stuart Olyott

Breakup

DANIEL 1-2

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

MAIN POINT - God is not dead. Even in the midst of tragedy God is still at work and with his people. God s Kingdom will last forever.

DANIEL 3-5

FOUR MEN IN THE FIRE

MAIN POINT - NO COMPROMISE. GOD IS THE KING OF KINGS - GOD is the one who allows the rulers of this world to RULE. That does not mean they are all Christians. And

sometimes it means you will have to say NO to them.

DANIEL 6

DANIEL & THE LIONS

MAIN POINT - We should not be surprised if PERSECUTION might come our way. But we should remember that Kingdoms come and go. God s Kingdom lasts forever and OUR GOD is a GOD WHO SAVES.

DANIEL 7-9

LOOKING BEHIND THE SCENES

MAIN POINT - Despite the apparent impressiveness and power of earthly kingdoms the real power belongs to one like the SON OF MAN. Jesus is the SON OF MAN. He has the power and authority - no matter how things look.

DANIEL 10-12

DESTRUCTION & DELIVERANCE

MAIN POINT - I do not consider that our present sufferings . God will raise us from the dead to share eternity with him

Talk Outlines

TALK 1

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

DANIEL 1-2

DANIEL, DEBBIE & CASABLANCA

- *Story about watching Casablanca with Debbie. 20 minutes from the end in a tense and rather moving moment of the film Deb said NOW WHO S THAT AGAIN? referring to RICK (Humphrey Bogart).*

- It is IMPORTANT to know who the characters are and WHERE WE ARE UP TO IN THE STORY.

THE STORY SO FAR

- A quick recap from Creation through Abraham to the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Israel. You are left asking the QUESTION: IS THAT THE END FOR GOD S PEOPLE? WHAT S HAPPENED TO GOD S PLAN? HAS HE GIVEN UP ON THE IDEA OF HAVING HIS KINGDOM? HAS HE GIVEN UP ON THE IDEA OF HAVING PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

DANIEL & HIS FRIENDS

- Book opens on HOPELESS and PATHETIC NOTE. Judah OVER-RUN by the BABYLONIANS. Nebuchadnezzar plundering Jerusalem.
- Young men of Judah taken captive - including Daniel & his 3 friends. Difficult for them:
 - to know exactly what was going on
 - to know if God had ABANDONED them to know how they should LIVE in this STRANGE LAND.
- DANIEL and his friends are DETERMINED to REMAIN FAITHFUL TO GOD in this new land. - 1ST TEST? Eating food from the King s Table.
- It is interesting to note that DANIEL and his friends were willing to:
 - WORK WITH THE BABYLONIANS
 - allow their names to be

changed adopt Babylonian ways and customs

- There came a point where they had to say NO . Probably would have been a voice inside Daniel s head saying: Why make a fuss about such a little thing as food? Why risk getting the King off-side? Why not just eat what they give you - it would taste better than fruit & vegetables. But it was a matter of FAITHFULNESS TO GOD. He and his friends are learning how to live out their faith in God in a FOREIGN COUNTRY.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR S DREAM

- NEBUCHADNEZZAR has had a bad dream. Calls the wise men to

comfort to Daniel than it was to Nebuchadnezzar. Through this dream Daniel has been reminded that God s still at work to establish his kingdom. God will put in place a kingdom that will be bigger than anything that has gone before.

CONCLUSION

- It s hard serving God is a HOSTILE WORLD. Our situation is similar to Daniel s. Three things we can learn.

GOD ISN T MISSING IN ACTION -

Sometimes it may be hard to see God in the world around us. But that does not mean he is not there. He certainly IS. This is his

Keep waiting and hoping God hasn t finished yet!

tell him what this dream means - but they have to do it without being told what the dream was.

- *Psychic connection. I have often wondered what they would do if you tried this. Ring them. Tell them you want your dream interpreted - but tell them that they have to tell you what the dream is.*
- Daniel interprets the dream. God is going to establish his kingdom - a kingdom that will overshadow all the other kingdoms of the world - a kingdom where the king will rule forever.
- Nebuchadnezzar was grateful to Daniel and promoted him.
- But strangely, i am sure that this dream would have been of more

world and he is working to fulfill his plan.

BE READY TO DRAW THE LINE

- Like Daniel we need to be READY TO DRAW THE LINE. For Daniel it was not eating the food from the King s table. But what are the issues for us? Don t fall into the trap of fitting in rather than being FAITHFUL TO GOD. NB Daniel was willing to live in Babylon. He was happy to WORK for the Babylonian Empire. But there came a point where he KNEW that he had to DRAW THE LINE.

GOD HAS PUT HIS KING IN PLACE

- Daniel had to look ahead to a kingdom God would establish - the kingdom over which Jesus is the

king. If we trust in Jesus then we are part of his kingdom. We are part of a greater kingdom than any that exists on earth. Daniel was able to draw confidence from knowing that this kingdom would one day be established. How much more confidence should we have knowing that we are part of that kingdom.

TALK 2

FOUR MEN IN THE FIRE?

Daniel 3-5

Their confidence does not spring from knowing what God's plan is. Their confidence comes from simply knowing that God has a plan.

INTRODUCTION

- World powers. There are plenty of countries who think they rule the world. Well, who does rule the world? Who is the most powerful leader in the world? Which is the most powerful country?

FOUR MEN IN THE FIRE

- One of the top ten Sunday School stories. This one would be right up there with the story of David and Goliath. It would rate very close to Moses parting the Red Sea.
- But this is not simply a story about trusting God. This is more than an example of God saving his people.
- Recap the story of the men in the fire. Bold response to Nebuchadnezzar (3:16-18).
- The choice for the three men was simple. They could obey the most

powerful man on the face of the earth at that time or they could be faithful to the God and creator of the universe.

- *The idea of people suffering because of their faith is somewhat foreign to us in Australia in 1998 - but it does happen throughout the world.*
- There is a fascinating lesson for us on the issue of guidance in the way that Shadrach and his mates handle this. They tell the king that they won't bow down to his image. And they tell Nebuchadnezzar that they

have complete confidence in their God. But what is their confidence? They are confident that God *can* save them - but they also know that he *may not*.

- Their confidence does not spring from knowing what God's plan is. Their confidence comes from simply knowing that God has a plan. They are confident because they know that their God has it under control - even if they don't know what the outcome will be.

NEBUCHAD - DREAMING AGAIN

- The next two stories following this incident *MAY* seem to be UNREALIZED - but I don't think they are. Nebuchadnezzar's next dream is about a tree. The King has become TOO PROUD. The King is HUMBLED until he finally acknowledges who is REALLY the KING.

THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL

- Similar to the previous incident. Belshazzar is now king. He is showing off the objects of worship taken from the temple. A hand appears from nowhere - a REAL PARTY STOPPER. Daniel interprets the writing on the wall.

CONCLUSION

- These three chapters all fit together. And as we look at them together there are two things that stand out for us today:

1. GOD IS THE ONE WHO PUTS KINGS & D RULERS IN THEIR PLACE

- There is no king on a throne, no government in a parliament, that is not there because God allowed it to be. That is not to say that all governments are good. There are still governments today who work at persecuting Christians. In Albania between 1946 and 1990 it was illegal to believe in God. As you walked from the plane at the airport into the terminal there was a sign that said God does not exist in Albania. In Nepal today - and in many other countries - it is illegal to try to convert someone to Christianity. If you are convicted of trying to do so you can go to jail for 12 months.
- And we need to live in the clear and certain knowledge that God is the king of kings.

2. WE ARE TO SERVE THE KING OF KINGS - NO COMPROMISE

- Like S M & A we may have to say NO COMPROMISE. It may cost FRIENDS, BUSINESS CONTACTS, JOBS, and the list could go on. We may not be THROWN IN A FURNACE. But we MAY be RIDICULED.

We may not be THROWN IN PRISON. But we may SUFFER in OTHER WAYS. I DOUBT that any of us will face a situation like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We will only face SMALL SCALE THINGS compared to what they faced. But I wonder how many of us will be able to show HALF their courage when we DO FACE our SMALL SCALE problems. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego we need to be TOTALLY convinced that there is ONLY ONE SUPER POWER - and thats GOD.

TALK 3

DANIEL & THE LIONS

Daniel 6

INTRODUCTION

- Repetition is a good teaching technique. This story is similar to last week: in both stories the king issues a decree that encourages of God's people to be unfaithful to God. In both stories the punishment for the crime is death. In both stories God's men remain faithful to him. In both stories God is able to bring about rescue.

DANIEL AND A NEW KINGDOM

- Babylonians overtaken by the Persians. Daniel wins respect of Persian king.
- *What do you think you would have done if you were in Daniel's shoes? I wonder if you would have been tempted to just do what the king said. After all it was only for 30 days. Maybe you could just put your prayer-time on hold for a month. That would certainly save any trouble or embarrassment. You could*

even justify not praying. You could say i have a very influential position where I can help a lot of people and have lots of opportunities to witness. It's not worth losing this job just over a simple thing like not praying for a month.

- Daniel knows that that being a faithful member of God's kingdom is something worth risking your life over.
- *If you learn nothing else from looking at Daniel over these few weeks I hope you are challenged by the example of Daniel and his friends. Here were ordinary men who were willing to risk their lives in order to remain faithful to God. Too often in our Christian lives we will place anything ahead of being part of God's kingdom. We will value our personal happiness and security, our bank balance, our jobs or our friendships or our reputation ahead of being faithful to God. Those things and many others will be given higher priority than being part of God's kingdom. Being part of God's kingdom will often slip right down on our list of priorities. We can sing a chorus like *Seek ye first the kingdom of God* but we really mean is that we are only willing to seek it if that doesn't interfere with other things in our lives.*

THE GOD WHO SAVES

- God rescues Daniel from the Lions.

CONCLUSION

Lessons to learn:

Governments come and Go. But our faithfulness to God should remain

- One DIFFERENCE between this story and the story of S M & A is

that Daniel's incident happens under a different King. Kingdoms COME and kingdoms GO. But for GOD'S people his kingdom remains.

- Daniel was willing to be the BEST CITIZEN he COULD in WHATEVER KINGDOM. But ABOVE ALL he was going to be FAITHFUL TO GOD - because THAT is the Kingdom that REALLY COUNTS.

Expect Persecution - Jesus said to

- John 15:18-19.
- You may look at the story of DANIEL and think that he DIDN'T SUFFER - GOD RESCUED HIM FROM THE LIONS. That is true - but think about what else Daniel went through: He knew what it was to endure living through WAR. He knew the suffering of being torn away from his own land. He knew what it was to be hated by his work mates because of his faith in God.
- If we're serious about following Jesus then we can EXPECT that SUFFERING will come our way.

- John 15:20-21

Our God is a God who SAVES

- Jesus has rescued us from something worse than a FIRE or LIONS. He has saved us from HELL. You may be sitting there this morning thinking YEAH! YEAH! WE KNOW THAT! But if that is the way that you view the death of Jesus on the cross then you need to have a SERIOUS RE-THINK. We should NEVER GROW TIRED of recalling what God has GIVEN US. Darius DECREED that EVERYONE should FEAR and REVERENCE Daniel's God because of his POWER TO SAVE. How much more should WE ourselves

REVERE God because of the SALVATION he has given us. How much more should we want OTHERS to know that SALVATION for themselves.

TALK 4 LOOKING BEHIND THE SCENES Daniel 7

INTRODUCTION

- I'm not sure if you've been to the David Jones store near Hyde Park in Sydney. It is a very classy store. They have a door man with white gloves. A guy playing a grand piano in the foyer, beautiful marble floors, soothing quiet music, calm and helpful assistants. But I had a friend who worked there over the Christmas holidays. He worked in the storeroom and he said that working there completely changed his idea of the place. He said it was total chaos. Half opened boxes spilled all over the floor, staff running everywhere, no-one knew where anything was. What was happening out the front was a complete contrast to what was happening behind the scenes.
- In some ways that is similar to what we see in these chapters of Daniel. Daniel is shown behind the scenes but for Daniel he is living in what looks like chaos, and when he looks behind the scenes he sees something different..
- OFTEN what is BEHIND THE SCENES is DIFFERENT to how things appear on the surface.
- Daniel 7 is the central chapter of the book according to LANGUAGE and STYLE. (I had a little chart on the Notice Sheet showing this)

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE AND HOW TO READ IT

1. GET A FEEL FOR WHAT IS HAPPENING - DON'T TRY TO FOCUS ON MINOR DETAILS
2. TAKE NUMBERS SYMBOLICALLY
3. DON'T MAKE STRICT IDENTIFICATIONS UNLESS THE TEXT TELLS YOU TO

THE VISION

VISION that happened during the 1st year of KING BELSHAZZAR.

THE BEASTS

- Four of them. Each progressively worse.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

• Daniel is trying to understand what the beasts are about when suddenly he sees a throne being set in place. We are told that the Ancient of Days takes his seat (7:9-10). The court is now in session. The books are opened and the trial is about to begin.

- This beast that seemed to reign with terror is now destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. And this seems to happen without any real effort. The Ancient of Days destroys the beast and throws it in the fire.

The Son of Man

- Daniel sees one like a son of man coming before the Ancient of Days (7:13-14). This person is given all authority and power. Everyone worships him. His kingdom lasts forever.

THE INTERPRETATION

- The four beasts - Daniel is told - represent four kingdoms of the earth.
- NB chapter 8 we are told about an-

other two beasts - a goat and a ram. In that vision we're told those beasts also represent two kingdoms - and we are told which kingdoms they represent. We are told they represent the Persian and Greek empires. That is our rule at work: If you NEED TO KNOW the DIRECT IDENTIFICATION then the TEXT WILL TELL YOU.

- Daniel is concerned about the 4th beast. But again no direct identification is made.
- Don't waste your time trying to make an identification of the 4th beast. The text doesn't. It is essentially un-identifiable and it doesn't need to be identified. And after all, the beast is not something that God's people need to worry about. Did you see what happened in the court scene? God is not intimidated by this beast.
- Daniel lived at a time when the KINGDOMS of the world LOOKED POWERFUL and TERRIFYING. Yet neither Daniel, nor Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego feared what the KINGS of this WORLD MIGHT DO.

THE SON OF MAN

- No direct identification is made in the text.
- Read Mark 14:61b-62. Jesus is saying *I am the Son of Man*. I am the one to whom all authority and power is given. I am the one who has an everlasting dominion. I am the one who all should bow down and worship.
- But again it is an amazing scene. Here stands Jesus who has been beaten and is bloodied.
- He is spat on and ridiculed by his

opponents. On the surface it looks like things are out of control. It looks like Jesus is about to lose. But when we look behind the scenes we know that he is the king. He is the one to whom every knee should bow.

- As Christians we are going to live in a world where we may look weak and even at times defeated. We may be ridiculed for what we believe. We may be thought of as stupid and pathetic. But we are the ones who have been shown behind the scenes. The things that look powerful and impressive now are going to be wiped away.
- All authority and power has been given to Jesus. We belong to a kingdom that will never be overthrown. We belong to a king who will rule forever. There is nothing that we need fear in this world. And we should live like that. Not ashamed of what we believe. Not embarrassed to be a Christian - not intimidated by those who think we are silly.

TALK 5
DESTRUCTION & DELIVERANCE
Dan 10-12

INTRODUCTION

- *Tell a Good news - bad news joke.*
- What makes those jokes funny is that they are trying to put a positive side to what is otherwise completely hopeless news.
- Daniel 10-12 may look like that - an attempt to put a positive side to a hopeless situation.

THE GOOD NEWS

- In chapter 1 Daniel was 14 years of

age living under the Babylonians. In chapter 10 he is 70 and living under the Persians. He has been through a lot. Daniel has learned how to live faithfully as one of God's people in a foreign land. But God's people are still longing to return home.

- In Daniel 10 we are told that Cyrus is the Persian ruler. NB the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2-4. God has made it possible for his people to go home.
- But Daniel was no doubt wondering what the future would be for God's people. And that is the vision that Daniel is given in these closing chapters of the book.

THE BAD NEWS

- Different type of vision from chapters 7-9.
- What is laid out for Daniel in this chapter is the future of the Persian and Greek kingdoms. Daniel is given a fairly detailed account of what was going to happen in that corner of the Mediterranean sea over the next 300 or 400 years.
- But it is not the detail of the vision that would have been of concern to Daniel. He's seen kingdoms come and go. He has lived under four kings and two different empires during his captivity. He knows that God has got all that under control. It was the future of God's people Israel that was of interest to him. Sadly the news is not good. They are in for a difficult time. They may have returned to the land - but their life will not be peaceful.
- A fair amount of the vision is taken up with what seems to be a description of the brutal reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. There is a brief

resistance (11:29-31)

THE GOOD NEWS

- After Daniel has been shown the vision of the struggle between the Greek and Persian empires he is given one final glimpse into the future. (Daniel 12:1b-2). Beyond all the political pushing & shoving Daniel is shown that God still has all things under control. His people are not forgotten. His people are not abandoned forever.
- Daniel is shown that there will be a resurrection and final judgement.
- There are two things to note from this vision:
 1. Everyone will be raised - but some will be raised to life and others will be raised to what Daniel calls everlasting contempt.
 2. The basis for being given life is that you have your name written in the book
- No matter what may happen in the future, Daniel - and all God's people - can be assured that those who trust God can look forward to spending eternity with him. More than that, Daniel is told that there will be an inheritance for those who trust in God. (Daniel 12:13)
- If Daniel were to compare the difficulty that may be faced by God's people with the future that God has in store at the end of time then there is no comparison.
- The apostle Paul says the same thing in Romans 8 (read Romans 8:21)
- *It was great to watch the rugby league grand final last year - for a number of different reasons. It was great to see Manly get beaten. It was*

amazing to see the response of the Newcastle team when they won the game. There were many of the team who walked off the field bruised and battered. There were many who were sporting cuts and gashes - lots of blood flowing. But if you were to ask them is all this pain worth it? there would not have been a single Newcastle player who would have said no.

- They were happy to go through all that pain because they knew what it would be like to hold up that trophy.
- That is what Daniel is shown in this vision. That is what Paul is saying in Romans. That is what we need to have clearly in our minds.
- As people who trust in Jesus we have a wonderful future ahead of us. The day will come when Jesus will return to this earth. He will come to judge. He will come to reward those who have placed their trust in him. He will come to punish those who have ignored him and shut him out of their life.
- Knowing that should lead us to do two things:

1. Hope

- As people who trust in Jesus we have an incredible hope. We look forward to the day that Jesus will return to take us to be with him. Our future is not uncertain - it is guaranteed. Probably some of the most comforting words in the bible are found when Jesus is talking to them about their future - read John 14:1-3.
- Jesus has gone to prepare a place for all those who have their trust placed in him. This is no small mat-

ter. This should shape who we are. It should shape how we live

2. Persevere

- Knowing this should also help us to persevere. We can know for certain that nothing we face in this life will compare to what God has in store for us in heaven. When you face those seemingly insurmountable problems then you need to remember that.
- Our present difficulties don't even compare to what God has in store for us. When we face a time of pain or suffering we need to remember that it doesn't compare to what God has in store for us. It doesn't compare to the reward that God has for those who trust in his son.
- I don't want to downplay how serious some of the things are that we face in this life. I have no doubt that many of us will face great tragedies and hardships in life. I know that there are many in our church who have already had to face great suffering. I don't want to trivialize those problems.
- But nor do I want to trivialize what God has got in store for us in heaven. God has prepared eternity for those who believe in Jesus. He has promised that he will take us to be with him forever to a place where there will be no more suffering or pain.
- Knowing that should help us to persevere as Christians - to keep going, to keep on believing and to keep on living out of faith in Jesus.
- Let me finish by reading from my favourite passage in the bible a passage where God describes what he has in store for those who have

their trust placed in his son Jesus.

- Read Rev 21:1-4.

Luke Tattersall ministers in Mullumbimby, on the North Coast of New South Wales