

A VICTORIOUS LIFE

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the princes of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." Daniel 1:8.

When we read the biography of Daniel we discover that the story of his life is one of the grandest on record. Through thousands of years of history his name blazes like the sun in mid-heaven. Many yet unborn will behold him from afar towering high among the greatest of men.

This text is one of the most stirring and inspiring records which can be found. It is one which can be studied with pleasure and profit today. This is especially true in the case of our young people who need lessons in courage and fortitude.

Daniel was a Jew. We know nothing of his parents, but, judging from his character as a lad, Daniel must have been reared in a God-fearing home.

In the heart of the Judean hills was the city of Jerusalem. It was the political and religious capital of the Jewish people, who have been, above all others, the religious teachers of the world. Five hundred miles to the east was the city of Babylon. It was a city which had grown rich and strong at the expense of those whom it had captured.

In the first captivity under Nebuchadnezzar many of the Jews were carried from Jerusalem to Babylon. From the Psalms we learn that these captive Jews were without a song, so their harps were hung on the willows. Daniel was among the captives who had been carried to Babylon. There his environment was radically different. How would he respond to the lure of his new environment? On numerous occasions it has been said, "When you are in Rome, you must do as the Romans do." But here was a young man in Babylon who refused to do what the Babylonians did. He certainly did not appreciate the fact that his God and his religion were held up to ridicule.

The king issued an order to the effect that certain blameless young men, who were both skillful and wise, should be selected to take the honored place of students at the Royal College. A three-year course was offered, during which the language of the Chaldeans was to be learned. The Chaldeans were the politicians, philosophers, theologians and teachers of the nation. What an opportunity for a young man like Daniel, who was both bright and hopeful! The king saw in these young men those whom he could use in his court. Daniel was marked for state service and promotion.

From that hour to the end of his life Daniel lived a victorious spiritual life. Concerning his victorious life I should like to mention seven things:

I. Its Purpose.

Daniel was not responsible for his captivity. Neither was it due to any sin on his part. He could not help being in captivity, but, at the very beginning of that experience, he purposed in his heart that nothing would hinder God's glory through his life. He preferred death to permitting his testimony for God to be marred by anything questionable or sinful. Daniel was controlled by a noble and holy purpose. It was not a purpose of the intellect, but he "purposed in his heart." "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."

A high and noble purpose is to a successful life what the rudder is to the ocean liner. Purpose largely differentiates the illustrious from others of their time. A life without purpose, ambition and aspiration is powerless. An uncompromising purpose is one of the greatest contributing factors to success. Life itself is a gift of God, but the character of each life is determined by the purpose of its possessor. A life without a purpose will prove to be a failure.

"He who aims at nothing is apt to hit it." The sportsman who shoots at random may make a noise, but he will never bag the game. A story is told of a Chinaman who stood by the wayside, hacking at a log. He never struck twice in the same place. A traveler came along and, seeing the uncertain hacking, said, "Well, John, what are you making?" "Oh, I don't know," said John, "maybe idol; maybe bedstead." Just so aimlessly is life often lived that people do not know the real object of their toil.

Some people find it difficult to reach a decision. It is hard for them to say "yes" or "no." Indecision always means inner conflict, and therefore wretchedness. No undecided man can be really happy. Our most wretched moments are those when we are torn between choices. Indecision means ineffectiveness.

II. Its Purity.

Darius, the king, appointed one hundred twenty men as princes over his whole kingdom. Over these princes he set in authority three presidents, and over the entire group Daniel was placed. Before he elevated these presidents to the positions which he wished them to fill, the king wanted them to be prepared physically, mentally and socially, so he placed them in the care of an eunuch and instructed him to feed them with food from the king's table. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." Daniel 1:8. There were three reasons why Daniel refused to eat from the royal table: first, because the Babylonians ate unclean beasts, which were forbidden in the case of the Jews; second, because they ate beasts which had been strangled instead of bled properly; and thirdly, because the animals which were being eaten were first offered as victims to heathen gods. Daniel resolved to keep himself free from the taint of idolatry. Furthermore, he and his companions refused these royal dainties because they did not want to take anything that would obscure their thinking. They resolved to keep their bodies clean.

While Daniel became a highly educated man, he managed to keep his thinking pure. He was aware that he could not render efficient service if his mind was clouded and obscured by evil thoughts. He kept his soul undefiled also. He was not a compromising, shifting, easy-going weakling, who gave way to temptation under the pressure of trying circumstances, and then when he had failed excused himself saying, "It could not be helped, I was forced into it." He was determined not to allow any fleshly indulgence to cut the nerve of his spiritual endeavor. It was not an easy thing for Daniel to take the stand which he took, but this brave, courageous and heroic young man refused to turn aside from implicit obedience to the Word of God.

The first stage of testing in his life was the trial of the flesh. The curtain rises on a banquet hall in Babylon. There we see him dining with the rich in a city where the tables groan with luxuries and when it was fashionable to be dissipated. But, he joined the guests without joining in their revelry, he reined himself in, he avoided all excess, and he went out from the banquet just as sober as when he came. He was temperate when it was considered "good form" to be intemperate. It requires a daring man to say, "I decline to be in fashion; I elect to stand alone." Daniel chose to do right when it meant standing alone.

"To every man there openeth a high way and a low,
And everyman decideth which way his soul shall go."

Daniel's decision caused him to stand alone. That made him seem to be peculiar. He stated frankly, "I cannot eat the king's meat nor drink the king's wine." In indignant amazement somebody said, "But why not? Everybody else is doing it." There you have it. What courage is required for us to dress our lives by our own mirror instead of doing so by the one that is held up before us by someone else! If we have to compromise to win friends, we are buying them at too high a price. If we have to sell out in order to hold our jobs, they are not worth that much.

III. Its Promotion.

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm." Daniel 6:1-3.

From exile and slavery Daniel rose to a post of highest influence under a monarch in the Babylonian Empire. This elevation to fame was not by any sudden leap. Through the reigns of three succeeding kings his character was proved to be so fine and consistent that he came at length to be the virtual ruler of the land. But, as he advanced in power he kept a clear head, a strong hand and a pure heart. He rose through much testing and tempering. Each choice that he made pointed the way to fuller life and broader service.

A second stage of testing came in the quietness of his study where he faced a real problem. The king had experienced a dream and had summoned the scholars to interpret it. If they failed in the attempt, they would be put to death. Daniel knew that upon his success in solving the problem of the king's dream depended the lives of his fellows, as well as his own. Moved with concern for the security of others and relying upon God, he interpreted the king's dream.

IV. Its Persecution.

The one hundred twenty princes and the presidents were highly displeased because Daniel was promoted. The favor of Daniel with the king fomented the seething jealousies of the presidents and princes. They despised his honest and upright administration. So, they called in the last reserve of their diabolical ingenuity for plans to get rid of him. They sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom. After all their secret scrutiny, they failed to find anything questionable. Their thorough search revealed that he was faithful to all the interests of the kingdom.

Naturally, they had to turn elsewhere to find accusation against him. "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Daniel 6:5. What a compliment to Daniel! What a testimony to his integrity! What praise, though they were seeking censure! What cleanness, though they searched for smut! What honor, though they sought shame! What straightness, though they hoped to find crookedness!

Daniel's enemies went to the king and flattered him by asking him to sign a decree binding all men for thirty days to abstain from worshipping any god, or asking a petition of any god or man, except the king himself. The decree contained the stipulation that anyone violating it should be cast into the lions' den. In substance they said to the king, we would not dispense with prayer, but when folks pray for the next month, let them pray only to you. And the flattered king yielded and signed the decree by which these jealous courtiers hoped to bring about the ruin of their hated superior.

V. Its Prayerfulness.

Daniel was unaffected by the decree. Knowing that when human laws are found to clash with the divine commands it is right to "obey God rather than man," Daniel maintained his regular prayer habits. He refused to be swayed by popular opinion. He refused to be coerced to do wrong, even by a king's decree. Even though he knew that a decree had been signed which made it unlawful to pray, he carried on as he had before.

From the center of mighty Babylon, Daniel's heart went out to a little land beyond the mountains. In his mansion Daniel had windows placed that enabled him to look toward Jerusalem, which was beyond the hills. Living by principle instead of policy, Daniel went into his room, committed himself to God, and prayed in the freshness of the dawn, in the splendor of the noontide, and in the shadows of the evening. He prayed three times daily, knowing full well that there was a death penalty for it. That is religion with the windows open.

While there before those windows, Daniel recalled the days and scenes of his childhood before he was carried away to a strange and distant land. The memory of those experiences meant much in the life of the busy and burdened man.

Daniel showed utter obliviousness to consequences. He lived dangerously, but victoriously. He was not careful for his life, but he was very particular about his conduct. Someone has said, "To be unwilling to bleed is to be incapacitated to bless." Dr. John Gill, predecessor to Spurgeon in London, was gored by a member of his church that if he published his book, "The Cause of God and Truth," he would lose some of his best friends and that his income would decrease. Dr. Gill replied, "I can afford to be poor, but I cannot afford to injure my conscience." In the days when preachers were put in jail for their convictions things happened. Things happened in Virginia when preachers were jailed for preaching the gospel. Patrick Henry defended one. He held up the bill of indictment and said something to this effect: "My client has been put in jail--and for what? Preaching the gospel; preaching the gospel! He was put in jail for preaching the glorious gospel of the Son of God." And his client went free.

VI. Its Protection.

There was but one thought in the minds of all these men who had kept their malicious eyes on Daniel, and that was to put him out of the way. So, with triumphant tread they went to the king and informed him of the violation of his decree. When the king heard it he "was sore displeased with himself." So, he went to work to undo what he had done, but the law was unalterable.

As the sun was disappearing behind the curtains of the night, Daniel was cast into the lions' den and "a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den." To his malicious enemies that closed den meant the end of Daniel's career. But the king went to his palace dreadfully and depressingly disturbed. He could not sleep. Due to the activity of his conscience, all through the night he imagined that he heard the crunching of bones in the jaws of the lions. To him his palace was a torture chamber that night. Early next morning he went in haste to the lions' den. To his surprise Daniel was alive and unharmed. The king said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Daniel 6:20. Daniel told him that God had sent His angel and had shut the lions' mouths so that they had not injured him, and this had been done because of his innocency. Then the king ordered Daniel released from the den.

VII. Its Prosperity.

"Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." Daniel 6:25-28.

In this book of the Bible we see the value of one man. After all the greatest works have been done by individuals. You are just one. And I am just one. But each one counts. Each counts as does one link in a chain. You count, just as one letter in the alphabet counts. Each counts, just as one brick in the wall does. If just one man, like Daniel, meant so much in the cause of righteousness in his day, how much more can we together mean in these tremendous days of our generation!