

# VEGGIE TALE

DANIEL 1.1-20 JULY 12, 2015

Good morning! It is a pleasure and privilege to be with you. We are going to be taking a break from our study through Revelation today. Our pastor was asked to go down and teach at Calvary Chapel of Tehachapi. He's been there once or twice and we're glad to have a relationship with the folks down there and with Pastor Mike.

Today we are going to take a look at Daniel chapter 1. It's one of those stories we get excited about as we see a child of God taking a stand for God and being sustained by God. Today as we go through it, I'm hoping it serves somewhat as a parable for us.

Here's what I mean by that: The details of this story absolutely happened. What we'll read is a true event in history. Real people, real situation, real stakes. But, as we read it, we can also see the Christian life typified for us as we put ourselves in the place of these young men and see how to live faithfully under the pressure of a God-hating world.

If we want to know how to live a faithful life, Daniel and his friends give us some of the most profound demonstrations of how to do it. And, the conclusion I hope we come to is that if *they* can do it, *we* can do it. Starting in verse 1 here's what we read:

**Daniel 1.1 - <sup>1</sup>In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.**

The northern nation of Israel had fallen to Assyria because of their sin and refusal to repent. The southern kingdom of Judah wasn't far behind. Because of their sin and their idolatry and their unwillingness to listen to the prophets or to the Word of God, God sent them into exile in Babylon for 70 years. This is the first of 3 sieges that Nebuchadnezzar laid against Jerusalem.

And right off the bat we should notice the backdrop of the stories of Daniel. We're familiar with the lions' den and the fiery furnace, even this opening story in chapter 1. All of them demonstrate for us *profound* faithfulness. But notice that these great examples of faithfulness and spiritual triumph come not out of the comfort of blessing, but the captivity of Babylon. Daniel and his 3 friends show us how to trust God and live faithfully, even in times of despair.

I'd say we currently find ourselves in a type of Babylon. It certainly isn't as severe as what Daniel experienced, but we find ourselves in a world and a world culture that is anti-God, self-seeking, a world that celebrates perversion and worships the creation rather than Creator.

This is the backdrop of the book. This is the stage on which Daniel will live out his life. What we find is that Daniel never has an attitude that says, "Let's just go along and not get noticed. Let's just ride it out." No, right from the beginning, we'll see that his heart and his mind were fixed on serving the Lord despite what his circumstances were. The same is true of his 3 friends. They were there, together, and said, "We're going to serve God. Maybe we'll die for it, but no matter what, *that's* what we're going to do."

They demonstrate to us that there is something much greater for each of us than finding material success in life or getting to comfort and security. We never even see them *thinking* about those sorts of things. Instead, they show us that remarkable faith, the kind of faith we all want as Christians, is

not when we seek to protect our lives, but when we forfeit them into the will of God, at His discretion, by His direction. That is when incredible things happen in and through us.

So, here at the start we can put ourselves right in this place. Because we're all captives in one sense. If you're not a Christian, the Bible reveals that you're not free. You are held captive by the Devil to do his will. Jesus Christ came and died and rose again to rescue you and set you free and give you life. But until you receive salvation, you are a captive.

But those of us who are Christians are also captives in a similar way that Daniel was, in that we would rather not be in Babylon. We know that heaven is our true home. Jesus is our true King. Given the option, I think we'd agree that we'd rather be in heaven! Certainly, Daniel would rather be back where he belonged, in the land of his inheritance, but for now he was captive in Babylon and he could still follow God and serve Him while there. Faithfulness is not limited to circumstance.

**Daniel 1.2 - <sup>2</sup> And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.**

Nebuchadnezzar came into the Temple and took some of these articles and said, "These are mine now. They're for my god." But of course we know that wasn't true. They still were Jehovah's. They had been created for worship and for service in the house of the Lord and He had not forgotten. They had been stolen, but they had not lost their purpose.

Maybe something has taken you out of that closeness to God. He has not forgotten you. He hasn't written you off. He's not just going to replace you. He wants to *restore* you. Because you and I are His treasures. The book of Ephesians declares that we are God's *masterpieces*. That's amazing!

Some of you have seen some of the remarkable wonders in creation. The Grand Canyon. The Northern Lights. the Glow Worm Cave in New Zealand. Stack all of those things up, mix in the planets and the constellations. And then realize that God says, "Sure, all that's great, but *YOU* are My masterpiece." God talks about His people in the Bible as being treasures and jewels. That, to Him, we shine like stars in the heavens. What a comfort when we find ourselves besieged or trapped. The Lord has not abandoned us.

**Daniel 1.3-4 - <sup>3</sup> Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, <sup>4</sup> young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.**

The question eventually comes up here: Was Daniel a eunuch? The truth is, we're not sure. On the one hand, this is often what happened to people who were going to serve around the king. On the other hand, the word there for 'eunuchs' is sometimes translated simply as 'officer' or 'official'. Whatever the case may be, here's what's clear: It was Babylon's intention to redefine these young men and conform them to Babylon's culture, training and thinking. A new language, new literature, new culture, new life. They even gave them new names.

We find ourselves in the world. There's nothing we can do about that. We are here to glorify God, to serve Him and to spread the Gospel. But there's one thing that is key for us to remember: We're to

be in the world but not *of* the world. The world is out to redefine you. As Christians, we've been made new creations by Jesus Christ. We're given a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit, a new purpose in life. In fact, Paul said in Romans 6 that now we walk in 'newness of life.' But the world meets that work with resistance. It wants to re-define us. And very quickly you can figure out that what the world celebrates is contrary to what God celebrates. This is why Jesus drew a very plain line in the sand. He said, "You can serve God, or you can serve Mammon. You cannot serve both." God's plan goes one way, the world's goes the other. And all of us are presented with this tension just about every day, as the world offers us its culture and training and language and literature, while the Lord has offered something much different.

We see there that the intention was to repurpose these young men and use them for the benefit of the Babylonian kingdom. But of course, there was a problem there. Because they already belonged to another kingdom. And so do we. We don't believe we're *in* the Kingdom now, but we believe we *belong* to the Kingdom now. Like these Jewish boys in verses 3 and 4 we Christians are sons and daughters of a King, who have already been given a purpose and a promised inheritance.

You know one other way we're like these guys? We read it there in verse 4: They were young men in whom there was no blemish. If you are a Christian here today the Bible declares that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed you and that you are presented without spot or blemish. There is no condemnation in Jesus because He has made us righteous and drawn us near to Himself.

But what could Daniel do? He was a captive after all. On the one hand there were the pressures of being a prisoner. On the other, there were the perks of compromise.

**Daniel 1.5-7 - <sup>5</sup> And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. <sup>6</sup> Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.**

Not only were they going to be given a free education and a promised, cushy job in the palace, but the king also offered them some of the finer things. Things tastier than some of them had ever had.

The prospect of plenty can be very dangerous for a Christian. One of the things we should realize about this story is that it wasn't just the four of these boys who were taken. There were many more. All the rest took the deal. But the problem is what I already mentioned a moment ago: We cannot serve two masters. We have to choose faithfulness or choose unfaithfulness.

Now, notice that the king himself appointed these delicacies to them. Nebuchadnezzar here is a great type for us of our enemy the Devil. He comes pretending to offer, but he's here to conquer. He comes as a friend, but in reality he's a killer. There are few people in history as vengeful or brutal as Nebuchadnezzar. At a whim he'd take your life.

At this point, the deck is stacked pretty firmly against Daniel and his buddies. They had very little say in what was going on in their lives and what was going to come next.

But you know, you and I *do* have a significant amount of say in what we're given over to. We may be here in the world, but Christ has overcome the world. Christians aren't prisoners, we're operatives

and we're *more than conquerors* in every situation. And so we do have a lot of say in what we're given over to and what our daily provision is going to be. So for us, a lot of being faithful is about giving ourselves over to Christ each day and receiving His provision for us. What does that mean? It means we're feeding our minds and bodies and hearts on things that are good, rather than things that are evil. Right now, we live in the land of freedom. No one is coming to us and forcing us to eat something that God asks us not to eat. Or click something God asks us not to click. We make those decisions. Faithfulness begins in small things, where we choose to pursue Christ and not turn back.

This program Daniel found himself in was a 3 year program. At the end, they were telling him he would serve the king of Babylon.

Now, let's take a look at our lives and examine what we're pointed towards. We don't know whether we'll live for 3 more years or whether the rapture will happen today or tomorrow, but all of us are pointing in some direction. We're each moving toward something. Maybe it's a career or a relationship or accomplishment. Of course there are all kinds of different levels to that. We've got today, this week, next year, a 5 year plan, a "one-day I'll be here or doing that" plan, all that kind of stuff. But over all of that, Daniel demonstrates to us that faithfulness means that, at the highest level, we're working towards God and towards greater service to Him. We see it here in verse 8.

**Daniel 1.8 - <sup>8</sup> But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.**

You see, above everything that was happening, Daniel's goal was to pursue God and honor Him. I find it interesting that we wasn't planning some great escape. He wasn't wailing in despair because of his situation. Compared to most of the other Biblical prophets, he was really calm and evenhanded. Even though armies are besieging his city and kings are trying to kill him and his coworkers are trying to kill him and all this other stuff is happening, we see him stable and resolute. He is one of the finest examples in the Bible of trusting God. And it wasn't because he discovered some magic formula or that he had some secret, mutant spiritual DNA. The key is given to us right there: *He purposed in his heart*. It wasn't anything that any of us can't have. It was a belief that God was in charge and that He could be trusted. Because of that, we see that Daniel's heart belonged to heaven. It didn't belong to Israel. Had that been the case, I suspect Daniel would've been trying to plan a prison break. His heart didn't belong to himself, because had that been the case he would've given in to the rich delicacies that the other boys did. No, Daniel had made the decision to give his heart to the Lord. Like David, he could say:

**Psalm 27.8 - *When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."***

He not only purposed to honor God, he purposed not to defile himself. This food was not what we would call Kosher. There were probably restricted meats like pork and the other meat was almost certainly improperly prepared. But on top of that, it was likely meat and wine that had been sacrificed to an idol. This was the way of things, similar to what Paul addresses in the New Testament.

But here we can notice how Daniel applied his faithfulness in the situation. First of all, he met it head on. He did not side step, he did not try to find some kind of loop hole. [*Colombia lunch story?*] He

got his faith and his spirituality out in the open. He said to the overseer, “I don’t want to defile myself.” Of course, the follow up question to a statement like that is, “What do you mean?”

We also should take note that not only did Daniel meet this head on, he did so in a tactful, humble, even respectful way. He was meek like our Lord.

There are a lot of angry Christians out there right now. Christians who are furious and showing their fury. I’m thankful the Lord approaches me with grace, rather than fury. We’re commanded in Titus chapter 3: “to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”

### **Daniel 1.9 - Now God had brought Daniel into the favor & goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.**

I love the passages of Scripture that remind us that God is working on His end. The Lord doesn’t say, “Come to Me!” And then jump over to the other side of a mountain, expecting us to make it on our own. He enables us and carves a path and walks *with* us.

This is why we have to go *God’s* way through life. Because God has something He’s doing. He has a destination in mind. He has a resolution to the situations we find ourselves in, especially the trials. If we try to go our own way, we’re probably not going to connect with *His* way.

Back in 1999, NASA lost a \$125 million Mars obiter because one engineering team was doing their computations with the metric system and the other team was using the standard system. When it finally came for the 2 plans to overlap, the obiter crashed! The day they were hoping to get the thing into orbit, it burned up. Because the two teams weren’t on the same page.

We need to go God’s way. Luckily, God’s way is detailed specifically for us throughout the Bible.

David understood this. Again in Psalms we read:

**Psalms 25.4, 10 - <sup>4</sup> Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths...<sup>10</sup>All the paths of the Lord *are* mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.**

Daniel determined to walk in faithfulness, and just as he suspected, God was working from His end.

**Daniel 1.10 - <sup>10</sup> And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.”**

Now we get to another opponent to our faithfulness. There’s the allure of worldly plenty, there’s the captivity of Babylon. And here we see another layer, as the overseer comes and says to him, “Your faith is going to be a problem for me.”

Following the Lord is eventually going to be met with resistance. Maybe at your job, maybe in a relationship. For many Christians around the world, we see them met with violent resistance. When that moment of compromise comes, we can be faithful by doing what these guys did.

**Daniel 1.11-14 - <sup>11</sup> So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup>“Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance be examined before**

**you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." <sup>14</sup> So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.**

What these boys did (*and scholars suspect they were only about 15 years old*) was put their trust and the responsibility squarely on God. They realized that God had allowed them to be brought to Babylon. He had asked them to live a certain life. Now they were being pressured to rebel against that. So, their answer was to stand in faith, not give ground, and trust the Lord to fight for them.

They thought spiritually. That's the only explanation. Because this plan is not a good plan. You can argue all you want about diets, but a vegetarian diet is not going to make you fatter than a diet with meat. It's not the natural way things happen! We're going to see that they are found to be *fatter*.

We can pull at least two lessons about faithfulness from their plan. First, they approached their daily life with a spiritual mindset. There wasn't a separation between what they ate and how they worshipped. Their faith touched every area of their lives. And second, their faithfulness was rooted in the understanding of what their position really was. Understand, they're saying 'no' to Nebuchadnezzar. They're saying, "You..the guy who kills everyone and told us to eat this...we're not eating that." But they understood their true position. They did not think of themselves as being on the brink of death (though they were), but they thought of themselves as still being in the fold of God. Right from the start they took a stand and said, "I'm not going to live a Babylonian life. I may have to live here, but you can't have my heart." And they were willing to die in humility for their faith.

Now, in this case, the Lord wasn't going to ask them to die. He was working this problem out. So, the overseer agreed to their plan.

There must've been some tense moments in the locker room for the next week and a half. Remember, there were plenty of *other* Jewish boys who had given up going God's way. And each day, the weigh in was getting closer. The *deadline* was approaching. And, in many ways, it really was a *dead* line. Because notice what they said. They said to the guy, "We're not eating this. At the end of 10 days, do as you see fit." Meaning, they *still* weren't going to do what they were being asked to do. I love this about Daniel and his 3 friends. Here and at the fiery furnace and when facing the lions' den, they all say, "You can kill us if you want, but we're not going to kneel to you. We belong to God and we serve *His* Kingdom, no matter what."

That's faithfulness. Something Daniel could express later in his life when he wrote:

**Daniel 9.4 - "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.**

We can be faithful because our God is faithful. We don't leap into the dark, we're following a God who goes before us.

**Daniel 1.15-16 - <sup>15</sup> And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. <sup>16</sup> Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.**

I didn't think about it at first, but then realized that they determined to do the hard thing for 10 days...so that they could then *keep* doing the hard thing for 3 more years. It wasn't just a 2 week

deal, it was from then on. They weren't making a stand once for good show, they were going to live this way from here on out.

Being faithful can be difficult. It can be taxing. God doesn't always give us ease, but He always gives us empowering. His yoke is easy and light not in and of itself, but because He puts the harness on and plows along with us.

Veggies and water for 3 years. Here we can see that faithfulness means getting ourselves into a frame of mind where we're content and satisfied with God's provision. We don't see Daniel worried. We don't see him complaining. We see them satisfied because they could continue serving the Lord. We may think, "Well God was being withholding! Why didn't He give them some meat?" Oh, He gave them something much better.

**Daniel 1.17 - <sup>17</sup> As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.**

Like these guys, we Christians have been given supernatural gifting for practical use. We're gifted to serve one another and build up the Church. To build up the Kingdom. These were gifts they'd be able to use all the time. A good question we can each ask is whether we're allowing the gifts we've been given to operate for their intended purposes.

**Daniel 1.18-20 - <sup>18</sup> Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who were in all his realm.**

I love how it says there, "they served before the king." In reality, they were serving a different King, the King of heaven and earth. It may have been in the courts of Babylon, but their loyalty went to God.

And you know what, God didn't tell them to escape. He didn't tell them they had to go somewhere else. He used these guys to accomplish incredible ministry there in Babylon for decades. Not least of all was the eventual conversion of Nebuchadnezzar himself!

The key to all of it was simple faithfulness. To do what God has asked us to do. To go His way.

Through no fault of their own, Daniel and his friends found themselves in the most pagan empire in the world. They were constantly in danger of compromise, in danger of death.

If *they* could live a faithful life, we most certainly can. And that is an encouraging thought. We serve the same King. He still gives gifts. He still empowers. He still sustains. He still leads.

The world may try to define you and put demands on you or even destroy you, but our God is the God who defends and directs. He will walk with you in mercy and truth. If we purpose ourselves to follow Him, then He will lead us in faithfulness. He'll lead us in truth. He'll keep the enemy from caving in on us. He'll put us on display as shining treasures for His glory. He'll bring a testimony out of our lives and do more than we could ask or imagine.

