

STANDING FOR GOD PUBLICALLY

A man walked into a small antique shop in San Francisco. It was mostly just old junk. However, in the corner he noticed an old bowl laying on the floor with water in it that a cat was drinking from. On closer inspection he realized that the bowl was an ancient Chinese vase, a priceless relic from Ming dynasty. It was worth a lot of money. Obviously the owner had no idea about the value of this possession since the cat was drinking out of it. The man saw an opportunity and came up with a plan to get the vase for a fraction of its worth.

"That's an extraordinary cat you have," he said to the owner. "How much would you sell her for?" "Oh, the cat is not really for sale," said the owner. "She keeps the store free of mice." "I really must have her," the man countered. "Tell you what -- I'll give you a hundred dollars for her." "She's not really worth it," laughed the owner. The man replied "two hundred." Again, the owner laughed but then the man said "three hundred." The owner thought for a minute and then said "well, if you want her that badly, she's yours." They shook on the deal. Then the man said "Oh, and by the way, I need something to feed her from as well. Let me throw in another ten dollars for that saucer she's drinking out of." "Oh, I could never do that. That saucer is an ancient Chinese bowl from the Ming dynasty. I would never sell it, but the funny thing is that ever since I put it out I have been selling dozens of cats."

Smart guy. Today we are continuing in our series No Compromise looking at the book of Daniel. The story picks up again when Daniel is about 82 years old. He has survived three kings over two different empires. Nebuchadnezzar had been succeeded by his grandson Belshazzar. Darius the Mede had killed Belshazzar and ransacked the city of Babylon. The Persian Empire was now in power.

Daniel was such an amazing leader and man of integrity that every ruler who met him wanted to keep him on. Usually when you get a new administration they clear house. Everyone who was serving and loyal to the previous administration is removed. That is not the case with Daniel. He keeps getting rehired and promoted.

Daniel 6:1-5 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

Daniel is now the third highest ruler in the kingdom. What was it about Daniel that made him so unique that he kept getting promoted at work? This scripture tells us three reasons why Daniel kept getting promoted. There were three things that made Daniel stand out;

a. His Professional Competence

It is clear this Daniel was a gifted leader. His training set him apart. He was competent. At the beginning of series we talked about the fact that Daniel had excelled in his education. Daniel was a learner, and all good leaders are learners. It says that Daniel "distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities."

There were 120 provinces in the Persian Empire. Darius decided to appoint a satrap or governor over each one of them, but then have 3 administrators to look over the satraps. This was one of the most powerful positions in the Empire.

Automaker Henry Ford asked electrical genius Charlie Steinmetz to build the generators for his factory. One day the generators ground to a halt, and the repairmen couldn't find the problem. So Ford called Steinmetz, who tinkered with the machines for a few minutes, and then threw the switch. The generators came roaring back to life. Later Ford got a bill for an astounding \$10,000 from Steinmetz. Flabbergasted the rather tight-fisted carmaker inquired why the bill was so high when it only required a few minutes work. Steinmetz's reply: For tinkering with the generators, \$10, and for knowing where to tinker, \$9,990. Competence is a rare and costly commodity.

b. His Personal Character

It was not just Daniel's training and competence that made him stand out, but also his character. He was a man of integrity. When the people who were jealous of him tried to find a way to accuse him it says they "could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." That is character. He had no hidden secrets, no skeletons in his closet. He was honest, reliable, hard-working, and incorruptible. He was never lazy, or negligent in any task.

No wonder he kept getting promoted! How about you? What are you known for at work? If the people at your work wanted to accuse you of something, what could they find?

Winston Churchill exemplified integrity and respect in the face of opposition. During his last year in office, he attended an official ceremony. Several rows behind him two gentlemen began whispering. "That's Winston Churchill." "They say he is getting senile." "They say he should step aside and leave the running of the nation to more dynamic and capable men." After the ceremony, Churchill turned to the men and said, "Gentlemen, they also say he is hard of hearing!" What are you known for?

c. His Public Commitment

When those that were jealous of Daniel realized there was no legitimate way of removing him, they turned to his faith. They said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." They knew that Daniel was Jewish. Everyone knew it because his commitment to God was very public. He just didn't just have professional competence and personal character, he had a public commitment to God. Everyone knew it.

Daniel was open about his faith. He shared his love for God. We see all through the book of Daniel that he was always pointing people to God. Everybody knew where Daniel stood religiously, where his faith was, where his allegiance was. Daniel's enemies did that only thing they could, they decided to use Daniel's faith against him.

Daniel 6:7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

They play on the pride and vanity of Darius and trick him into issuing an edict that went against Daniel's faith. This put Daniel in a very difficult place. Would he stop praying to God out of fear, would he try to hide himself away? How did he respond?

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

He just kept doing what he had always done. He did not allow fear to get in the way of his faith.

It's one thing to stand strong for God at church, but what about at work or in school? You stand for God on Sunday mornings, but will you also stand for God in the classroom, or at the office or in the community or on the golf course? Remember that old Lady Clairol commercial? Only her hairdresser knows for sure. Unfortunately there are many Christians like that. Are they believers? Only God knows for sure. Nothing in their life gives you any indication that they are followers of Christ.

Daniel 6:11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

What are the odds that the group just happened to find Daniel praying? If someone was to break into your home, what are the odds that they would find you praying? This implies that Daniel was not just spending a few minutes a day in prayer. Daniel is caught and, because the decree cannot be revoked, he is thrown into the lion's den.

However, the story does not end there. What does standing in faith for God accomplish? 5 things;

1. Defeats Fear

Even though Daniel knew what would happen to him if he prayed, he did not allow fear to get in the way of his faith. Every time you stand in faith for God publically you have a victory over fear.

What is fear? It is False Evidence Appearing Real. Fear grows when you give into it, but lessens when you stand up and move against it. Courage is not the absence of fear. If you're not afraid to do something, you don't need any courage. You're only courageous when you do the thing you're scared to death to do. That's courage. Fear grows when I give into it. It dies when you move against it. It's like when you open the door and you realize the boogie man is just a teddy bear.

Every time you take a stand for God, you have a victory over fear. It makes you more confident, more courageous. The first Christians had reason to fear. In those days, in the Roman Empire, it was against the law to be a Christian. If you announced that you are a Christian, it was very likely that you would be fed to lions in the Colosseum, or strung up and hung on a cross on the Appian Way. It was a death sentence. So how did the early Christians pray?

Acts 4:29-30 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

The result was that the place where they were meeting was shaken. Standing for God is always a victory over fear.

When we were on the Doulos we went to the city of Dubai. We had been warned to be very careful, it was the first time the ship had been to the gulf in a long time, and we did not want the authorities to know it's background. The first Thursday a Muslim man walked on during our prayer meeting. I tried to stop him, only to find out he was the speaker for the meeting! I learned to relax a bit.

2. Deepens Faith

Faith is like a muscle. The more you use it the stronger it becomes. The less you use it, the weaker you become. In terms of faith you are either pumping iron at the gym spiritually or you are sitting in front of the TV eating chocolate spiritually. You are using it, or you are not using it. People always ask "why is God moving so powerfully around the world but we do not see that here in Canada?" The simple answer is that the Canadian church is not exercising it's faith.

When you stand in faith and you see the power of God move in your life, it changes you. It spoils you to the ordinary. That is the power of short term missions trips. They spoil people for the ordinary. This is what we see happened to Daniel. He put his faith in God, and God shows up in a big way!

Daniel 6:20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"
21 Daniel answered, "O king, live forever!
22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

You will never see miracles in your life until you step out and you walk on the water. If you live a life of safety all you will ever know is the comfortable ride in the boat. It is not until you jump out of it that you will experience the miracle of walking on the waves. In my life I have seen a lot of miracles because I have tried to not play it safe. I have done some very crazy things and have found myself painted into a corner saying, "OK God, how are we going to get out of this?" You get yourself so far out on the limb that you know you are doomed unless God shows up.

You will never know that God can solve all your problems until you have problems. You will never know that God can do miracles in your life until you risk everything. You have to be willing to follow God no matter where he sends you and do whatever he calls you to do. What is the outcome?

Daniel 6:23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out, and there was not a scratch on him. That is what God is able to do. He is able to do the impossible through us, if we will let him. We have to believe in the impossible. Trust God to do the impossible through you.

A woman went to the doctor's office, where she was seen by one of the new doctors. After a few minutes she burst out of the examination room screaming as she ran down the hall. An older doctor stopped her and asked what the problem was, and she told him her story. After listening, he had her sit down and told her to go relax in another room. The older doctor marched down the hallway back to the first doctor and demanded, "What's the matter with you? Mrs. Terry is 63 years old, she has four grown children and seven grandchildren, and you told her she was pregnant?" The new doctor looked up from his desk and said, "Does she still have the hiccups?"

3. Disarms Foes

Daniel 6: 24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

The people that had plotted against Daniel got what they deserved. Life is not always like that. Often it can seem in life that evil people prosper. However, integrity is a powerful witness to others. How you handle pain when you are hurting, and how you show integrity when no one is watching, they are both a powerful witness to others.

One Sunday a pastor preached a sermon on honesty. Tuesday morning he took the bus to get to his office. He paid the fare, and the bus driver gave him back too much change. During the rest of the journey, the pastor was rationalizing how God had provided him with some extra money he needed for the week. But he just could not live with himself, so before he got off the bus, he proceeded to give back the extra money and said to the driver, "You have made a mistake. You've given me too much change." The driver smiled and said, "There was no mistake. I attended your church last Sunday and I wanted to see if you really practiced what you preached, so I decided to put you to a test this morning."

Remember the time in the New Testament when Peter and John went to the temple and healed the crippled man. The guy gets up and starts jumping around and praising God. It causes so much commotion that Peter and John were arrested and had to appear before the religious leaders;

Acts 4:13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Peter and John were just ordinary unschooled fishermen from Galilee. But they noted "these men had been with Jesus." I can't think of a finer thing to be said about you. This is just an ordinary guy, but it is obvious that he has been with Jesus... The more time we spend with Jesus, the more people will be able to see Jesus in us.

Daniel trusted in God, and his trust was a powerful witness to Darius. Daniel's faith shook Darius to the core, and led to an amazing declaration;

Daniel 6: 25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly! 26 I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. 27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

Again, it is unclear if this is a saving faith, but it certainly pointed Darius in the right direction. It is impossible to truly understand the impact that Daniel had on the nations of Persia and Babylon, but we do know that 18 generations later, when a star rose to mark the birth of Jesus, that even though the Jews living in Israel missed the sign, there were those in Babylon and Persia who did not. The wise men came from the East bearing gifts for the newborn king. Perhaps that was the lasting impact of Daniel's faith. That shows the long-term impact of standing for Christ. Generations were affected by the faith of this one man.

4. Develops Followers

As a result of Daniel's faith, King Darius issued a decree that went out everywhere. When you stand up for God, people see it. They see your courage. Courage is contagious. When one person is willing to stand up for Christ others take note, and that courage spreads. Look again at verse 25;

Daniel 6:25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land...

Remember the movie Braveheart? Everyone hated and complained about the unjust treatment they received, but did nothing because they were fearful. It was not until one man had the guts to stand up and do something about it that things changed. Courage is contagious. When you stand up for God and say "I have had enough. I'll speak up for God." You know what? Other people start coming out of the shadows.

Philippians 1:13-14 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Your boldness will encourage other people to be bold. That's a benefit. Not only is it an encouragement to other believers when you stand up for God.

5. Distinguished Future

Daniel 6:28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Standing strong for God will be rewarded in eternity. Jesus promised it, and those rewards are going to last forever, and ever. Fear is temporary. It last for a few seconds and then it is gone. When you do the right thing then fear subsides, but the rewards go on and on.

Let me end by asking this, are you a courageous person? Daniel started his life strong. He stayed strong throughout his life. Now he is in his 80s and he is ending strong. Because of that, God was able to use him in an amazing way.

How about you? Are you ending strong? There are people who start off strong in the faith, but then just seem to fizzle out. They are only in their 60s or 70s, but they start checking out. "Let somebody else do that ministry, we have dine our part. We have served long enough. It is time for someone else to do it." The word retirement is not in the Bible. What it does say is;

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

You want to finish the race. You want to end strong. You want to finish well. Whether you are 59 Or 95, you want to end strong.

Are you familiar with the brush-suede shoe called Hush Puppies? They were popular when I was a kid back in the 60s and 70s. The brand was all but dead until late 1994. Sales were down to a few thousand pairs a year, mostly sold in obscure outlets and small-town family stores. Wolverine, the company that makes Hush Puppies, was planning on phasing them out, but then something strange happened.

Two Hush Puppies executives were at a fashion show and ran into a stylist from New York who told them Hush Puppies were all the rage in the hip clubs and bars of downtown Manhattan. They were selling out in resale shops and people were going to the Ma and Pa stores and buying them up.

In the fall of 1995 one fashion designer used the shoe in his spring collection. Then another.

A third designer in LA put up a twenty-five-foot inflatable basset hound on the roof of his Hollywood store, gutted a gallery next door, and turned it into a Hush Puppies boutique. That year the company sold over 400,000 pairs of Hush Puppies. In 1996 they sold more than four times that amount and then sales exploded. How do you explain that kind of explosive growth?

It has been called “the tipping point.” It is when an idea or social behavior crosses a threshold, and becomes the norm. It is when a small, but targeted, effort can cause an explosion, or decline, in an idea or behavior. Hush Puppies were born in 1958. The brushed pig skin leather was something that had been developed during WW2. How could an outdated 60 year old shoe change the modern footwear landscape? It was the tipping point. What goes around comes around.

Maybe you are here today and you feel like that old shoe. You are in your 60s, or 70s or 80s, and you are wondering what contribution you can make. Daniel was in his 80s, and God used him because he had faith. If a few designers can take an old shoe and use it to change the cultural landscape of footwear, God can use you to change the spiritual landscape of a nation. However, for God to use you means you have to be a person of faith.