

## **On a Roll with Daniel**

**Daniel 1:5-11**

**VBS Sunday**

**June 26, 2022**

**Pastor Andy Kinsey**

*“Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself...”*

**Daniel 1:8**

### **Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, we thank you for all you give us, and we pray your blessings upon us as we celebrate food, faith, and children. Amen.

### **Message**

When I was growing up, my family always told me to eat my vegetables. I did. In fact, I loved to eat just about everything on my plate, except for spinach, for which I later acquired a taste. It was part of our routine of eating.

But I enjoy good food. I love a good meal. Indeed, I think there is truth to the statement that “we are what we eat” and good eating, as opposed to unhealthy eating, is important to what kind of people we are. Our diets say a great deal about us.

Maybe it is because I had two parents who grew up on farms, but I feel I can safely say how the adage “eat everything on your plate” was common. Having a mother and a father who could cook and having two grandmothers and a mother-in-law who could cook – meant that this adage was real. I could eat well because I could enjoy it all. I wasn’t picky.

Thankfully, that kind of pleasure continues, with Peggy, and as I learn to share in food preparation too: Simple meals. Meat and potato kinds of meals. Nothing too fanciful. Just keeping it simple.

Indeed, I don’t know if it is the German-side or English-side of my own food-heritage that provides such sensibilities. The German-side is wonderful, with

schnitzel and wurst, potatoes; the English-side doesn't always pack a punch, but after spending ten extra days in England recently, I can honestly say that I came to appreciate a good English breakfast, not to mention the fish-and-chips and shepherd's pie. Of course, this doesn't mean I will ever pass up an American hotdog!

All cultures have their own unique foods. Perhaps you have had the chance to taste such cuisine from Italy, or Asia, or the Middle East.

### **On a Roll with Daniel**

Our VBS theme, obviously, was about food. It was about the connection between food and faith, with the most important connection to food and faith being Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:1-15).

Though I don't think there were food trucks in Jesus' day, there were food concerns that went to the heart of faith and practice. That should not surprise us. Food and faith have always gone together, with feasts, and banquets, weddings, Last Supers – and Potlucks!

Indeed, there has always been these connections between food, and economies, and politics throughout history. The invasion of Russian into Ukraine has reminded the world that the flow of grain is all interconnected in a global economy, as food is basic to the well-being of all households.

When Jesus sits down to bless people, excluded from the food tables of his day, he is saying that these connections matter, that “food and faith matter,” to the body and to the soul, to our well-being; for Jesus, no one is to be excluded from what gives life to a person – food. Food and faith go together.

### **Daniel's Allegiance**

Now when we open the book of Daniel in chapter one, which was one of our lessons this week, we immediately confront the importance of food and faith. Right off the bat!

In this passage, we read about an incident that might sound very odd to our modern ears, but which points to something very important about our relationship with God and to what is important: to whom do we give ultimate allegiance?

You mean, Pastor Andy, food can tell us about our ultimate allegiance. Hold that thought! Remember that when we read Daniel, we need to remember that Daniel is in Exile. He is not on his home turf, and he dealing with a foreign king. As we have shared before, the Exile is the watershed event in Israel's history. Nothing is ever the same after the Exile when Israel goes into captivity.

Second, the Exile is a tragedy *par excellence*, prompting the prophets of Israel like Jeremiah and Ezekiel to ask a series of difficult questions: such as, has God abandoned us? How is it possible to be faithful to God when we have lost it all? Will there ever be a day when life will return to normal?

The book of Daniel addresses these questions and looks to help people who are disoriented, dislocated, and disillusioned. It seeks to ask the question that Pastor Jenothy asked two weeks ago, when she asked, what is God up to? What does it mean to trust God in a day when no one else is living out that trust, when allegiance to the God of Israel has fallen on hard times, even among God's people?

In Exile, Israel is down to a faithful few – to a remnant. Are we?

That's Daniel's situation: he is away from home, in a land he doesn't like, with a ruler who wants to pressure him to go against his faith and conscience.

To be sure, as I shared, to our ears this all might sound odd, of how faith and food come together. *But if we understand how allegiance to God is symbolized by food, we can realize something very important when Nebuchadnezzar offers Daniel the royal rations: Will he eat what Nebuchadnezzar gives him or not? Where does Daniel's true allegiance lie? Daniel has a choice to make. He and his friends can eat the defiled food of the king and become unhealthy, or they can eat their own vegetables and remain healthy.*

Now I don't know if you ever sang the ole gospel song "Dare to be a Daniel," but it lifts up Daniel as the poster child of someone who doesn't compromise his faith.

Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone!  
Dare to have a purpose firm!  
Dare to make it known.

That's Daniel. In the lion's den, he doesn't balk or bow down to the gods of the Babylon. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel remains steadfast to Yahweh, to God.

The only problem, of course, is that when we read the book of Daniel, we learn that Daniel *did* compromise. True, Daniel refuses to eat the king's food; but to make it in Exile, Daniel had to learn how to be faithful *and* how to compromise so that he could find a way to help his people return home. He had to find ways of dealing with new realities that were part of his life.<sup>1</sup>

For example, when asked to take on a new name (one that was likely the name of a local god), Daniel did so. When he was offered a free ride to the University of Babylon and was indoctrinated with the language and literature of the Babylonians, he did not refuse. When he was pruned for service in the court of the King, he did not reject the opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

In an ideal world, Daniel would have likely refused these things. But Daniel did not live in an ideal world (and neither do we). Daniel was in Babylon, and he was under no illusion that he could make Babylon into Israel, or that he could change the king.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Daniel had to learn to pursue what one scholar calls "faithful compromise."<sup>4</sup> He had to deal with the circumstances as they were, not as he liked them to be. He had to remain faithful, but he also had to know which battles to fight, or which bones to pick, all the while keeping his eyes on God, so he could help his people.

Unlike our day when we see compromise as heresy, Daniel viewed it as a part of faith itself, knowing that our situations are hardly ever clear-cut. There is always more to the story.

### **The Challenge**

I think this is a challenge we all face if we are honest. In fact, I wonder how you respond to such challenges, regardless of where you find yourself. I wonder, for example, if there are folks here or online who might relate to this. Do you ever compromise or negotiate, or do always get your way? Spouses? Parents, what about you? Do you and your children get everything on every issue? In some cases, yes. In other cases, no. How do you decide? Who decides?

Let's be honest: sometimes compromise happens and sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes as parents, we make the final decision, and then later we have to back off. Or maybe we do compromise and later we regret it. The examples are

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<sup>1</sup> Jamie K. A. Smith, *Comment Magazine* (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

many, and we don't always foresee the consequences of our decisions. Sometimes it is clear cut, and sometimes it isn't.

I think of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, where he famously takes a stand and says, "*Here I stand, I can do no other!*" He was very clear. And yet, Luther soon learned the hard way that people would stand against him and that they would not compromise either. But I also think of person like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Here was a pacifist who took part in a plot to kill Adolf Hitler. By his own standards, he compromised. But was he faithful too? Then again, I think of Eric Liddle, known as the Flying Scotsman, who would not run on a Sunday morning in the Olympic Games. He was not going to compromise, but he also found a way to negotiate running anyway. Would Eric Liddle make it today?

I don't believe there is anything like an ideal situation. Instead, there are factors that come into play every moment of every day, whether you are a parent, or a teacher, or a spouse, or a nurse, or whether you serve in the armed forces, or in administration, or in public service – there are all kinds of things that impinge upon us.

Daniel learns to be faithful to God in all kinds of difficult situations, compromising when needs to compromise, to see a greater good, and not compromising when he can, to witness to his faith.

What about you? What does faithfulness look like to you? Is there any tension in your faith when you have to decide, or is it always a clear road with no obstacles?

Whatever the matters are, just know that there is always more to the story, and that refusing what some people offer you can be a symbol of your ultimate faith in God. It might sound odd, but it is.

Put differently, and keeping with VBS, who knew that eating your vegetables would be so eternally important? Who knew? That's what I learned in VBS. Amen.