

## DANIEL'S RESOLUTIONS

In 1816, a renowned woodsman named Dan arrived at Fort Osage. Now Fort Osage was located where Kansas City, Missouri is today. In 1816, there was no city there, of course. Fort Osage was considered to be an outpost on the fringe of what was considered the American Frontier in those days.

For 2 weeks, Dan thrilled the soldiers with wonderful stories about his wilderness wanderings. And then Dan told the soldiers of his newest resolution - a goal that shocked even these rugged soldiers. Dan had been told about the far west. The crystal clear lakes, the grand mountains, the pristine forests. Dan wanted to explore them, alone. He wanted to taste the fresh water, smell the pure air, gaze upon the peaks of the Rockies outlined by the blue sky.

The soldiers at Fort Osage admired Dan's enthusiasm- but did he realize all that he was getting into here? A half dozen years before, in 1810, a rugged mountain man named John Colter had struggled back from the wilderness that was so beckoning Dan barely hanging onto his life. The Blackfoot Indians had captured him and almost killed him. Colter had escaped, but the hardship of the weather and wilderness had almost finished him off. He had barely made it back to the fort alive. Did Dan want to risk these dangers just to travel where no white man had gone before?

Yes, Dan said. He had made up his mind. It had been a lifelong dream for him to go west and this was his resolution for the New Year. So, despite the protests of the soldiers, Dan began his journey west. He left Fort Osage, headed north up the Missouri River, then west along the Platte River across what is today the state of Nebraska. And Dan followed the Platte River all the way to the Rocky Mountains. When he ran out of river, he travelled overland on foot. And Dan crossed what is today the State of Wyoming, going into what we call the Yellowstone Park. Dan journeyed over a thousand miles in a wilderness where he was threatened by Indians and besieged by bitter weather. And after he was satisfied with his explorations, Dan returned to Fort Osage to tell his newest stories.

Now, on the one hand, we probably should not be surprised at this remarkable trek out west. For if

anyone should have been able to find his way out there and back, it probably should have been Colonel Daniel Boone. He already had a reputation as a trail blazer and pioneer explorer. While just a teenage, young Daniel had helped blaze a trail with his family down the Yadkin River in North Carolina which was just wilderness at the time. And then as a mature man in his 30's, Daniel had pressed on west into the wildernesses of Kentucky. Certainly, we would think, if anyone could find his way out west and back, it should be Daniel Boone. But, on the other hand, Daniel Boone's great western trip that had been the dream of his life is one of the most remarkable ever traveled. For the reason for the soldier's trying to dissuade Daniel Boone from making that western journey was the fact that before he began his trip, he was already 82 years old.

A person is never too old or too young to make a resolution in life. To set a goal, to make a plan, and then to execute that plan gives the satisfaction of direction and accomplishment in life. Without resolutions, we become complacent in life. Without goals, we become stagnant in life. Without a purpose, we lose direction in life. It is a good thing for us periodically to assess and evaluate our lives and make some resolutions or commitments for the future. But with thoughtful resolutions and commitment to achieve them, we can like Daniel Boone explore new frontiers in life.

This is a time of year when people naturally consider resolutions. Most people make some kind of resolutions for the New Year. But the vast majority of resolutions that will be made will be rather superficial. Resolutions that can change our lives are substantial and necessary resolutions for us to make. Our Parish nurses are encouraging us to make some of these kinds of resolutions as we prepare to enter this New Year.

And I want to talk with you this morning about some resolutions that will do far more to change your life than superficial resolutions can ever do. The resolutions that we are going to talk about are commitments that different people made during different stages of their life that not only affected them personally but literally changed the course of history. The first resolution was one that was made by a teenager. The second resolution was one that was made by some men in their mid 30's. And the final resolution was one that was made by a man in his 80's. These resolutions are found in the bible - in fact,

they are found in one book of the Bible. And these resolutions demonstrate to us the fact that a person is never too young or too old to make a commitment to do what is right - and that we all need to continue to make such commitments throughout our lives.

1. In the first chapter of Daniel, we find 4 young men in one of the most unfortunate circumstances of life that one could possibly imagine. They have been torn away from their homes, from their homeland, and taken into a far away foreign country where they have no friends or family. Listen to the account of their misfortune as I read verses 1-7.

READ DANIEL 1:1-7

<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. <sup>2</sup>And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup>Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility -- <sup>4</sup>young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>5</sup>The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

<sup>6</sup>Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup>The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

We are happy for extra-Biblical historical sources which help to complete the picture of what Daniel and his 3 friends were experiencing here. Plato, the Greek philosopher, wrote of a Persian training period for young exiles that began at the age of 14. Xenophon, the Greek historian, spoke of the completion of their training at the age of 17. It is very likely that the Persians got this idea of a 3 year training period for young

conquered exiles from the success which the Babylonians had with it. So most probably, Daniel and his friends were about 14 years of age when they were taken from their families and exiled into the land of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was most obvious. Having conquered many of these foreign countries, he was now faced with the task of administrating them. He needed capable, gifted, loyal administrators to expand his kingdom across the world. His own country just didn't have enough capable leaders to do the job. And even if it did, Babylonians would be resented in positions of leadership in foreign lands. So Nebuchadnezzar's idea was to take the best, most intelligent, most gifted young people from across the world, bring them to a training school in Babylon where they would be thoroughly indoctrinated into the Babylonian culture, weed out the ones who couldn't make the grade or refused to be loyal to the new order, and send the best of the best back into their homelands to rule as Babylonian puppets. It was a brilliant idea - one which allowed the Babylonian Empire to achieve heights not yet attained becoming the first truly world empire. All of the other kingdoms to follow - the Persians, and Greeks and the Romans - would learn from and follow Nebuchadnezzar's innovative plan.

Daniel and his 3 friends were chosen albeit against their wills to be participants. In a sense, it was a great honor - for they were given a chance for world leadership - but it certainly would have been traumatic for them. The brainwashing began with a change of name which had great religious significance. Daniel (whose name meant *God is My Judge* in Hebrew) had his name changed to Belteshazzar ( *which means Bel or Marduk, protect his life*). Through complete saturation into the Babylonian culture - learning the language and literature - and VIP treatment giving to them the best of food and accommodations available, the goal was to make Babylonian thinking and acting people in Jewish bodies for the good of the new ruling order - the Babylonian Empire.

Now all human reason and logic would have lead Daniel and his friends to go along with Nebuchadnezzar's plan with all of their hearts. After all, they were hundreds of miles from home - nobody would ever know what they did in Babylon. They frankly had never had it so good. They had left an

economic disaster in Israel plagued by famine and despair and now had entered the most prosperous place in the world with all of the food and luxuries of life that they had only dreamed of before. And if they hoped for any advancement in career at best or just to save their own lives at worst, they had to play along with Nebuchadnezzar's game. There just didn't seem to be any alternative for them.

But Daniel demonstrated amazing maturity and wisdom by realizing that while the path of the emperor might appear to be the best for his physical wellbeing, the path of remaining true to God's laws and ways is always the best for the spiritual wellbeing. So Daniel makes a resolution - a resolution that on the surface would appear to at least squelch any chance of advancement and probably even mean his life. Notice that resolution with me in verse 8.

READ DANIEL 1:8 -

<sup>8</sup>But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

The world continues to offer its path towards advancement and success. But all of God's people, and young people in particular, are wise if they recognize the wisdom in following the laws and commandments found in God's word. Many a young person who has great potential has been shipwrecked upon the rocks of the world's broken promises, and suffered the scars of God's broken commandments for the rest of his or her life. A good resolution for the New Year would be to resolve to follow God's moral commandments and not defile ourselves by going along with the crowds.

2. But let's turn over a couple of chapters now to Daniel 3 and see another resolution that was equally as dramatic or maybe even more so.

About 20 years have passed now. Daniel and his 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are now in their mid 30's. Nebuchadnezzar had finally accomplished what had only been the dream of so many other world leaders before him. The city of Jerusalem had been captured; the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down; the temple of Jerusalem had been looted. This was a monumental achievement - and Nebuchadnezzar knew it.

To celebrate this great event, the Babylonian king ordered a giant statue to be made of himself. It was to be 90 feet tall and made out of pure gold. Then, in order to honor himself as the greatest conqueror the world had ever seen, Nebuchadnezzar choreographed an impressive ceremony that would end with everyone bowing down in homage and worship to the image of himself that had been made. The most gifted of the world's musicians were to be there; thousands of his top administrative officials were to be there; no expenses were spared; this would be a ceremony to top all past ceremonies.

In the midst of this ceremony, there were 3 men who refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image. To add insult to injury, they were Jewish men. Here Nebuchadnezzar was celebrating his victory over the fall of Jerusalem and 3 Jewish men were trying to rain on his parade. Is it any wonder that Nebuchadnezzar lost his composure? His rage burned so intensely that he lost all sense of reason. He not only ordered the men to be burned alive immediately, but he also ordered the furnace to be heated to the place where he lost his own loyal soldiers who were throwing them in. The Bible says that the King ordered the furnace to be heated 7 times hotter than normal and that the very soldiers who threw the bound men into the furnace were killed because they couldn't stand the intensity of the heat.

Why would these 3 Jewish men who had attained such positions of leadership in the Babylonian empire throw all that they had accomplished and even their very lives away? It was all because of a resolution that they had made - a resolution that is one of the most important that can ever be made in life. Notice this resolution with me as we break into this story just after the king found out that these men had refused to bow to his statue:

READ DANIEL 3:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a

blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had resolved never to worship any other god than the one true and living God of the Bible. The first commandment that God had given to them was not to have any other god before Him. And the second was not to make any graven image or bow down to any idol. These 3 men had long ago resolved themselves to keep God's commandments and never worship any other god except for their creator and sustainer. It was this resolution that appeared to be taking their lives - but that was alright with them. For they had made this firm resolution.

It is important for every person, but especially for those in their middle aged years to resolve never to have any other god besides the true and living God of the Bible who has created them and who continuously sustains them. It is not as if there are no counterfeit gods who offer themselves. Materialism continues to present itself as a god worthy of our worship and adoration. Career advancement raises its hand and demands our absolute allegiance. Our desire for health and wellbeing tempts us to deify these earthly bodies and worship them. And if we don't have resolve, these and many other false deities will divide our allegiance. But just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will be able to face loss of all material possessions, loss of career and even loss of life because they had resolved to worship no other god besides the Lord God Jehovah, so we will be able to maintain our course through this fallen world without diversion only as we resolve that the Lord God alone will be our God.

3. Well, we have looked at a resolution made in teenage years and a resolution made in the middle aged years. Let's conclude by looking at a resolution which was made near the end of life.

As we come to the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Daniel, about 50 or 60 years have now passed. The Babylonian Empire has fallen to the Persians. But it is interesting that while the Babylonian Empire has come and gone,

Daniel is still going strong. He is now in his 80's, and a key administrator in the Persian Empire. And he still has enemies who are trying to discredit and frame him. They are so jealous of his success that they will do anything in their attempts to tear him down. They have his books audited, they question his colleagues and subordinates, they look into his background. They finally come to the conclusion that this is such a man of integrity that there isn't one thing that they can find that would discredit him.

Finally, they decide that if they are to get to Daniel, they must do it through his religious commitments. Daniel has resolved to walk with God. This is their only path to ruining his career.

So these unscrupulous and envious cowards manipulate the king so that he passes a law against praying. There is to be no prayer in schools - or in governmental offices, or even in churches and homes. No prayer whatsoever - for 30 days. Any violator will be thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Now natural reason would advise Daniel to just lay low for a month. Let the law pass - and then get back into your spiritual disciplines. Or at least become a closet believer. Hide in the closet and pray. Or just pray in your heart while you are driving your chariot to work so that nobody will know. But Daniel couldn't do that for he had resolved to walk in a daily manner with his God and to do it publically without compromise. 3 times a day, he had resolved to open his window and pray towards Jerusalem, towards the temple of God. And these villains were actually counting on Daniel's discipline to entrap him. Listen to the record of Daniel's resolve that is recorded in Daniel 6:10-11.

READ DANIEL 6:10-11

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

Daniel, Daniel - what are you doing? Are these routine prayers towards God's temple worth your life? Don't you realize that you are going to end your earthly existence with the gruesome experience of being eaten alive by lions? Can you think of a worse way to die? Is it worth it, Daniel?

Yes, comes back the answer. It is worth it - because I made a resolution to pray to God and to seek his face 3 times every day.

You might be retired now. And you might even be having questions about how much you are able to contribute to society and to our church. Let me just remind you that prayer is the fuel that empowers God's work here on earth. And you might be in a better position to pray than anyone else here in this church. You have walked with the Lord for decades now - you know how to pray and seek God's face. And you are in a position where you can make time to spend alone with the Lord every day.

That is the reason for the enemy tempting you to neglect your spiritual disciplines. That is the reason for the enemy trying to fill your life with so much commotion that you don't think you have time for intimate fellowship with God. Yes, it is easier to do many other activities than to get on your knees and pray - but which activity is going to bring eternal rewards into your life?

We all need to pray. Devotional Bible study and prayer should be a daily part of every Christian's life. And it is a good resolution to set aside daily time for Bible study and prayer. But it is an especially good resolution for those who have known the Lord and walked with Him for many years - to pray for the blessings of God's revival to fall upon his church.

3 resolutions - good for all of God's people. A teenage resolution to follow God with a whole heart and not be defiled by the sins of this world. A middle aged resolution to worship God alone and not allow the things of this world to take His place in our affections. A retirement resolution to be a prayer warrior for God. Will you make your resolution to serve the Lord this year?