

KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE BIBLICAL INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY 6TH GRADUATION SERVICE, YANGON, MYANMAR -17 FEB 2019.

Daniel 1:8-21 Precepts for God Honouring Christian Service

Introduction

Greetings and congratulations in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ from SHBPM on this blessed occasion of BIT 6th graduation service. On this red-letter day of your graduation. I would like to challenge you to greater devotion and commitment to Christ as you prepare to go into the field to serve him in the days ahead. Being in a fallen world has many challenges and compromise can lead to falling away. The Spiritual work of the gospel is a God directed work and process. We need to be ready and equipped to work hard for Christ in the mission field and to wait patiently upon Him for guidance. We need to have a strong resolve and a passionate desire to propagate and to defend the truth. (Jude 3, 4). Let us consider this important subject together today with 5Cs.

1. Conviction

All Christians need to have strong biblical conviction in their hearts. It is a strong belief that grips us that we will not compromise our faith and beliefs. Religious compromise is often a great temptation as we try to please man, but Daniel withstood this.

Life is often filled with manifold temptations to compromise our beliefs and doctrinal and ethical convictions. We have a choice to make as to how we will live our lives and what path we are going to follow through life. When we come to trying times, it is imperative that we make godly choices in our faithful service of the Lord in his sovereign will and not give in to the compromising advances of the world or the evil one. Some of the choices we make at the crossroads of life requires courage and faith against the tyranny of men and it will determine our obedience and usefulness to God and our effectiveness in His kingdom work. The four Jewish youths, including Daniel, had to decide in their lives. They could either compromise and eat food offered to idols in a polytheistic culture and go with the religious flow of Babylon and get worldly rewards and acceptance, or they could stand their ground and live for the Lord. The

circumstances they faced and the decisions they made would set the course for the rest of their lives. The names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have the good testimony of being names of genuine heroes of the faith. And Daniel was a man of deep spiritual conviction. He did not compromise at this important initial stage of life and even later in his ministry.

Consider how we can fight temptation and conquer compromise. We need to always make our stand for the Lord anywhere as he leads in his service. Consider these verses. These Hebrew boys faced several challenges. Each of these had the potential to derail them and lead them off in disobedience and rebellion against God. However, the concerns they faced, were not that different from those we face today as well in our world and we need to stand up and defend the faith and not compromise our faith.

2. Companions

V. 1-2 – Changed environment. These Jewish boys had one another to encourage and had been brought up in and around Jerusalem. There they were constantly reminded of their God and of His importance to life. The Temple with its sacrifices was there. The prophets were preaching the message of Jehovah. Now, they are slaves and have been hauled off to Babylon. Here, they are surrounded by heathen worship, images, idolatry and ungodly people. It would be easy to conform just to fit in. The spiritual dangers around us in the last days are as real today. It is easy to be spiritual in church. When we are around godly people. However, when we separate from the godly influences around us, we are placing ourselves in a vulnerable position. We are often tempted by the world and Satan to compromise. It is important that we seek out godly friends and be consistent in our devotion to God. Encourage one another in the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) (see Hebrews 10:25). It is essential that we develop edifying relationships with godly people, 1 Corinthians 15:33 who will stand with us and God in times of crisis. It is so easy to give in and compromise and conform with the world but the influence of godliness in edifying friendship and fellowship will help us to co labour together in the gospel and to stand firm and steadfast for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

V. 3-4 - Changed culture. These young men were intelligent and they were taught a new language and new social norms. They had been exposed to Jewish wisdom, but now they are being taught the culture of Babylon. They are being exposed to things, to polytheism and idolatry besides others. It is a dangerous time for them. There was much pressure exerted on them to conform to the new secular world around them. We are constantly being exposed to worldly practices and false doctrines like evolution and psychology, or that the Bible is outdated, and not fully inspired. There is much pressure placed on the Christian community to conform to the world's way of thinking and we need to fight against it. As you leave the bible college and go in the mission field, you must stand firm on the authority and sufficiency of the word of God. Christians are under pressure to accept homosexuality or be covetous (i.e. take bribes), or lie or steal or accept gross immorality, but we will not compromise as we obey the will and the word of God.

V. 5 - Changed Diet. These four young men had lived by the dietary laws handed down in the OT. Now they are faced with new food. This food was unclean by Jewish standards, and most of the meat had probably been sacrificed to idols. Therefore, it would have defiled these men and made them unclean before the Lord. (As Christians, we too are faced with choices that run contrary to the best that God has purposed for us. There are decisions we have to make (and our children) about our choice of entertainment, the music we listen to, choices in our personal relationships. We are confronted daily by choices that can cause us to be sanctified or defiled. In life choices can either build us up as a servant of God or otherwise we can become ineffective for God if we give in to worldly pressure 1 Corinthians 9:24- 27. Therefore, guard yourselves in this matter of what we do or say that it glorifies God first and also edifies others.

V. 6-7 Changed Identity - When these young men arrived in Babylon, they came carrying wonderful names. Each name carried with it a testimony to the person of God.

Daniel - God is my judge. Hananiah - God is gracious. Mishael - God is without equal. Azariah - The Lord is my helper. When they arrived in Babylon they were given new names. Daniel became Beltshazzar - Which means, "Bel will protect." Hananiah became Shadrach - Which

means, "Inspiration of the Sun." Mishael became Meshach - Which means, "Belonging to Aku," and Azariah became Abednego - Which means, "Servant of Nego." Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to change their identity and hopefully their way of thinking and convictions. But even though their names were changed their beliefs and character remained intact. The world and the devil will try to squeeze us into their mould. But they will not be able to change our hearts and minds towards damnation for we are saved and safe in Christ, 1 John 3:1-2!

As you graduate and go forth to preach the gospel, there are going to be attacks by the foe to get you discouraged or to undermine your ministry by all diabolical means. Be alert and be armed with the full armour of God (Ephesians 6:11- 18) and do not conform to the fallen world's standards and stay close to God your refuge and strength. Don't be afraid of men and the advances of the evil one and by faith In God and by his sovereign hand, you will persevere on with the ministry he leads you. There will be times of testing and trials but God Himself has promised to preserve and help us when we honour him and pass the test of life - 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15. Looking at the stand these four young men took there in Babylon will help us when we are faced with a crossroads in life. We see not only the challenges they faced, but also we witness the strong Purpose Of their Hearts.

3. Communication (PURPOSE OF THEIR HEARTS)

A. V. 8 Dedication - The Babylonians could change their homes, their diet, their names, and their education, but they could not change their hearts! These men had decided that they were going to serve the Lord, whatever the cost! They were willing to commit themselves to God's will despite the consequences. Daniel communicated his concern to the head of the eunuchs with humility and respect and with prudence too. We need to learn how to share the message of the word of God effectively with others with this same level of determined commitment! We need to counsel wisely and to preach and to teach the word of God in season and out of season. We need to learn to speak with gentleness and godliness and dedicate ourselves to God and His plan for our lives, even if it costs us our lives! Our duty is to faithfully serve the Lord with all we have and trust Him to see us through the trials and testings to come, Romans 12:1-2; Romans 8:18.

B. V. 9-14 Desire – They sought to maintain their religious purity before the Lord. They requested that they not eat the king's meat that was offered to idols. They knew they would be given defiled foods offered to idols, and after much prayer they took a strong stand and asked to have pulse and water for a ten-day period. Daniel and his friends insisted on a strict diet and they trusted God to honour their faith in Him as they honoured him. They were willing to trust and rely on God and bear with the trying circumstances. Dare to take your stand with God with divine prudence and endurance. If we will be willing to stand our ground for the Lord, He will certainly honor our stand and bless us as we look up to Him (Matt. 6:33)!

C. These young men had made up their minds that they were going to live for the Lord and they allowed nothing to turn them from their purpose! For the rest of their lives, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to live and die for God rather than compromise. In Daniel 6, when he was an 80-year old man, he trusted God and risked his life in the lion's den rather than compromise his faith. Do we have that same level of resolve and commitment to the Lord and His work? Would you be willing to put God first and not compromise with the enemy?

D. Many do not honour the Lord but will then compromise in their conduct, or speech or thought life. We need to decide in our hearts that we will not compromise with the world, the flesh or the devil. We need to strive for holy biblical standards in our own lives. (Do not let down your guard but be alert and vigilant. We are to live with godliness and truth. It is the perilous end times that all of God's children to resolve in their hearts that come what may, they will not undermine the faith and they will not compromise in any area of their lives and so must you today and always as you prepare to go to the mission fields of Myanmar to serve God!

E. The dedication of these men can be summed up in 2 words, Faith and Obedience. They were willing to trust God to do what He had promised, and they were willing to follow and serve Him, regardless of the personal cost. Are you prepared to do the same and take up your cross, deny self and follow Christ?

In Vs. 17-21 and 15-16 note that Daniel and his friends honoured their Word and they were

healthier than the others, as God was with them. Have good friends who will honour God and let them have a godly influence on you. If we will do as God's word teaches us, He will never fail us. He will be faithful to honour His Word and His servants who trust that Word (Lamentations 3:23; Hebrews 6:13-19). We have experienced the bountiful goodness and blessings of God in our growing reformed church in Singapore, SHBPM when we trusted in his sovereign will and honoured Him first and He sovereignly provided, guided and blessed and prospered our hands in his work. Dare to trust and count on the Lord in all circumstances of life and he will be faithful to carry and see you through in due season!

4. Competence

V. 17-20 Their Excellence - For more than 3 years they maintained their godly stand and resolve! They were hardworking and excelled in their studies and were able to stand before the king. When he interviewed them, He found that they were 10 times better than his wisest counselors. God honours those who honour Him. This does not teach that serving God faithfully will make you rich or famous. It teaches us that serving God has with it the benefit of being blessed for our faith and competence. God placed these men where He could use them in that day, and He did use them in mysterious ways for His glory. We should serve Him faithfully and with a spirit of excellence in whatever we do for him. The key is to work hard by the wisdom of God and know your bible well and teach it with the fear of God to do our best to save souls and build up the church for our Lord Jesus with all our heart and might to his glory and to the edifying of the saints and he will surely bless our labour of love!

V. 21 Endurance - Daniel endure in a place of power and prominence, for over 70 years. He was close to 90 years old when he faced the lions. This just encourages our hearts because it reminds me that we are to always seek to honour the Lord. He will consistently bless us and use us for His glory. God is always looking for holy and faithful vessels which He can fill up and pour out for His glory. However, to be usable, we have to be faithful, with endurance and perseverance. We must learn to never be guilty of compromise - 2 Timothy 2:20-21. God's house is filled with all kinds of vessels. Some are honorable and are being used for His glory. Others are defiled through compromise in one or more areas of life and cannot be used. Be that sanctified and

effective vessel fit for the master's use and preach Christ. Propagate, disseminate and defend the most holy faith in the last days.

5. Commendation

Our eternal reward is from the Lord and not men (Colossians 3:22-24). The devil tries to bring Christians down through seemingly insignificant temptations and with other seduction. While we are fighting for Christ, Satan will try to erode our foundations, but we can and need to stand firm on his inspired word and hold fast to the inerrant word of God and not to give in to compromise and disobedience to God.

God will honour his faithful servants with eternal rewards one day. This doesn't only apply to Daniel and his friends but you as well if you dare to honour God first in your life (Matthew 6:33, 34). They were promoted by the king to be the top counsellors in his kingdom and they were able to serve God where they were. Be faithful and accountable stewards (2 Corinthians 5:10) and one day you will give an answer to God and you may receive that well done good and faithful servant as you enter into the joy of the Lord. What a joyful and precious moment it will be. Strive for the heavenly prize and pay the price for it while you are on earth (Philippians 3:13-15).

Conclusion

We thank God for his covenant faithfulness for leading everyone who has studied and passed your exams and are ready to graduate today. As you graduate and leave the college today, there are areas in your life that you need to work on. Are you allowing God to rule in your lives? Beware of worldly compromise but live with godly convictions and with competence and sound companions and good communications in sound preaching and teaching of His word. He has promised us that he will honour and use clean vessels for his glory. Will you resolve to be set apart for the Master's use for the glory of the Lord in your new ministry or field and to the edifying of the saints? May the sovereign Lord guide and lead you as you look forward to grow and glow in the sovereign grace of the Lord in your faithful and joyful service of Him.

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