

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES? Daniel 1: 3-17

Have you ever felt like you don't quite belong or looked at the world and wondered – where did it all go wrong? We can all say that right now with what COVID 19 has caused people to do.

Fear and terror have been running rampant for decades but it seems that it has escalated recently. More family breakups, domestic violence, abuse, discrimination, environmental disasters – the list seems to go on and on and we can feel like it will never end. What is wrong with this world? If you think this way, then you are not alone. It is like the world has turned upside down, making no sense and is so messed up.

We all have a choice as to how we will manage these ever-changing situations and crises. We can either choose to hide our heads in the sand or live in a cave and hope the world will just go away? Or since we can't beat them, we join them and just succumb to the ways of the upside-down world?

Our Scripture this morning describes how Daniel, a young man of around 13-15 years old managed when his world was suddenly turned upside down.

I have been watching a show on Netflix called *Stranger Things*. It is a story of a boy named Will who goes missing. He is taken by a dark creature – a monster to a dimension called – the Upside Down. It is a parallel world, existing alongside and mirrors our own reality. There are buildings and trees but everything is covered in vines with spores

floating in the toxic air and darkness everywhere. Everything looks like it is decaying and there are terrifying monsters.

As Christians, we hear about God's kingdom: a place of light, goodness, love and hope, but we know that this world is far from that. There is beauty in this world, as you can see in a sunrise, sunset or in the natural world. But there is also an ugly side – we live in a world where hatred and revenge are more common than love and grace. It seems like the world is falling apart – like we are living in a world that is Upside down.

The story of Daniel happened 2600 years ago and we can see that it was not much different to today. It is crazy, mixed up and the only world we have to live in.

Do we have what it takes to live a life for God's purpose in the world today? Let's see what we can learn from Daniel's attitude and actions when his biblical convictions were challenged and use them in our lives today.

Daniel is living a peaceful life, although is surrounded by a pagan culture – those who are hostile to God. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and took hostages, including Daniel and his 3 friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

How did you feel when you first moved away from home to set out on your own or perhaps with a friend or partner?

Daniel and his friends were only young when they were captured and placed in a 3 year training program to prepare them to oversee Jewish affairs in the Babylon Empire.

And the King used specific tactics to try to force the four young men to assimilate to the Babylonian culture. Not much different than today when we consider the force used to make our Aboriginal brothers and sisters to assimilate and even overseas cultures who come to live here.

It was a common custom in this time period that the king would rename foreigners who were brought as captives. In this situation, it was used to remove any reference to God. The name Daniel means “God is my judge”; Hananiah means “Yahweh has acted graciously”; Mishael means “Who is what God is”; and Azariah means “Yahweh has helped”.

The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.” And we see that many international people choose a new name when living in Australia to make it easier for people to pronounce – but that takes away their identify.

It is like the Babylonians were trying to erase God from their lives and indeed were refusing to permit Daniel and the others to continue eating the diet that they were used to and as set down for them as Jewish persons.

Have you ever refused to eat certain foods or participate in certain activities because of a belief you hold?

We see that Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. And you may ask well – surely the king’s food would have been the best around at that time – it’s not like he was serving noodles in a cuppa soup.

But this was not the reason that Daniel refused the food – it was that the food would defile Daniel. You see, some of the food have been sacrificed to Babylonian gods and probably contained food that the Jewish people considered unclean. God had told them not to eat certain things, their consciences were pricked so they stood their ground.

Would you have done that? Would you continue to obey God’s commands in a situation like that?

You see by refusing the food, Daniel was putting himself and others in a dangerous position. For one thing – they could have been killed; or starved to death and if the chief official agreed to Daniel’s request, he could also have been killed. All because their actions were insulting the king.

But they chose to stand their ground in their upside-down world. The world was telling them that this food was the best food, but their hearts were telling them that the food would kill their souls. It looked good and probably tasted good, but it was laced with a spiritual poison that would lead them away from God.

So what did Daniel do in this situation? Did he bury his head in the sand; disobey God’s commands by going along with the crowd just to stay safe in this world. No, he created an alternative plan. He said – feed

us just vegetables and water for 10 days and feed the other people the king's food. See who is the healthiest after the 10 days. He planned a trial period – a tactic often used today, a probationary period. It was a good plan to calm the fears of the guard and official. So, they agreed and tested them at the end of ten days.

At the end of the ten days, the results were astounding. Daniel and his 3 friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. Now you may suggest we should all then become vegetarian but it was God who made them healthy.

Why? Because they were standing in obedience to God. God saw the stand they were making in His name. He saw the respectful way that Daniel dealt with it and He blessed them to be successful.

Daniel was wise, tactful and respectful. He held to his convictions, but he didn't force those convictions down the throat of anyone who heard them. He chose the higher road and God blessed him for it.

God gave them success in all that they did. As they learned from the Babylonians, they became very skilled. And God gave Daniel the ability to understand visions and dreams of all kinds. God chose to bless them and make them the best at what they would do.

Now, standing your ground for God is not a guarantee to success. The outcome should not be the reason we stand firm. We shouldn't be seeking the reward. We should have conviction despite the danger because we love God.

We have to live in this world and cannot put up barriers to others or our own community. If you look at the past locking yourself away in isolation was something people did thinking they would become more holy without the distraction of the world.

And yes, I can tell you that during this pandemic I have been able to spend more quality time with God and He has certainly spoken to me as He continues to help me grow.

But we are not called to isolate ourselves – God wants us to reveal to the world the hope and love we have in Him with all glory given to God. But we also must be on our guard to ensure we do not give into worldly temptations that take us away from God.

Daniel didn't care about the name change, but he did care about the food. It was idolatry and he didn't want to defile himself. We all have convictions that God gives us and we have to make sure that we do not do something that goes against our conscience, and that can be different for each person. It is important to live within your conscience and stand on your convictions because you love God.

We live in a crazy, mixed-up world and it is easy to get caught up in everything, but it is important that everything that we do gives glory to God. Jesus died for us, so that we can have life and that life isn't something to be wasted. We live to tell people about God and what He has done. We have to have a level of credibility or people won't believe us and we have to have a measure of holiness so that people will want to know what we have in our hearts. It is easy to get caught up in the mess of the world, but we cannot just go with the flow because there is

so much wrong in this world. We cannot waiver in our belief, we must remain firm.

Most of us don't take large steps away from God, but just a number of small steps. Each small step leads us further away from God, so we need to stand firm for God in the things that convict us like Daniel and his friends did. It might seem small, but they held firm to their belief with wisdom and tact.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I love You and thank You for all that You have done for me. Thank You for dying for me and taking the punishment that I deserve. Father please help me, for when I am on my own I want to tell the whole world about You, but when I am in company with other people, I just freeze up and get so tongue-tied and am so lost for words. I feel I am letting You down by not saying anything about You, and remaining silent, when I should be lifting up the Lord Jesus and telling everyone I meet, the message of salvation by grace through faith.

Give me courage I pray, to open my mouth and speak the truth to whoever I come into contact with. Release my tongue and allow me to speak forth what is in my heart, to Your praise and glory. Lord, I know that without You I can do nothing, but I also believe that I can do all things through Christ Who gives me the strength and courage.

So use my life I pray, and give me the courage to be a good and faithful witness to Jesus, in word and in deed, to His praise and glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.