

SUNDAY 14th JANUARY 2023

The Rival and Real Kingdoms.

Scripture: Daniel 1:3-5 & 8-10



Today's sermon is titled – The Rival and Real Kingdoms.

What do you think the difference is between a fanatic and a fan? Do you know anyone you would class as being a fanatic or do you think you are a fanatic? I am sure we have all known someone who is a sports fanatic – maybe even yourself.

Let's see – a fan follows and barracks for the team and enjoys watching the games. But a fanatic's life centres on everything to do with the team, allowing the outcome of the games to influence and determine their emotions and well-being.

Let's explore and see who you think is the fanatic in our scripture from Daniel.

The book of Daniel covers 75 years of his life, but 490 years of history. Daniel also predicated future events – 735 in total with 593 already fulfilled. The book of Daniel was written for a people who lived in troubled times. We live in similar times; thus, God's word is here for us as well. The moral fibre of the nation was rotten and religious institutions had collapsed. Some people hid their heads in the sand in denial; others lamented while many stood their ground, refusing to get mixed up in a world that was riddled with bad motives and evil actions.

We have heard the Daniel, and his friends were captured by King Nebuchadnezzar, a proud, cruel tyrant who took pleasure in

torturing his victims. He wanted to defeat Egypt, but Judah was in the way. So, he attacked and captured many, including the young and strong Daniel and his friends.

On being taken to Babylon Daniel and his friends would have seen a place filled with images and statues of pagan gods and punishment if you did not bow down to them.

I think Nebuchadnezzar was a fanatic to this rival, pagan kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar demanded a period of indoctrination for his captives, to learn the Babylonian language and the lore of magic and fortune-telling. He began a process of enculturation, which means to change, modify, or adapt behaviour and ideas, to force Daniel and his friends to absorb into a pagan way of life, while effectively neutralizing their identity as the Lord's Holy people.

Nebuchadnezzar changed their names to help them become assimilated into the culture. This is how the king attempted to change the religious loyalty of Daniel and his friends from Judah's God to Babylonian's god.

Were Daniel and his friends just fans of God or were they fanatics?

If Daniel and his friends were to be used by God in the Babylonian court, they had to retain their distinctiveness as the People of God. When the king decreed that all the men, he had captured should eat all the delicacies he provided, to ensure they remained strong and healthy, Daniel and his friends stood their ground and refused to defile themselves in a relatively small matter of diet. They could have indulged themselves in the lap of luxury.

Instead, they chose to discipline their appetites and maintain continuity with their own people. Because they did, God used them to infiltrate the pagan court as His witnesses. They did not hesitate to stick to their convictions.

That meant they were fanatical about God and obeying His commands.

What about you – are you just a fan of God or are you fanatical about Him?

We are often assaulted by pressures to compromise our standards and live more like the world around us. You only need to turn on the news to be shocked at the evil that seems to be running rampant throughout the earth.

How do you respond as a Christian? Do you put your head in the sand in denial, maybe changing the channel to something else; do you give in to lamenting and fearing the worst; do you respond with moralistic reprimands, sitting in judgement on the world around you or do you respond in faith, knowing that God Himself, will intervene triumphantly in favour of His people?

Evil does not have the last word – God has the last word, and it is a triumphant one!

The ways that God equips us, both physically and morally, are far superior to the world's ways. Self-sacrifice is far better than self-indulgence. The faithful, who rely on God through prayer, is always better than the arrogance of fortune-tellers, who rely on their skill in summoning spirits. Committed witness sometimes is recognized by this world. If we are to infiltrate the world around us for God, we must be fanatical and committed to obeying Him.

It is time for all of us to do a heart check by asking ourselves this simple question: “Is Jesus my real King?”

The rival kingdom belongs to Satan and his paganism. The real kingdom is the Kingdom of Jesus.

For which kingdom are you truly living – the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of heaven?

Another way of putting all of this is, “Are you a fan or a fanatic?”

A mere fan of Jesus likes to go to church, read an uplifting passage of Scripture and even help a good friend.

But a fanatic of Jesus centres their life on His Kingdom.

Prayer: Thank You that I am one of Your people, God. A holy people, called out of the world, yet at the same time called to be in the world. Keep me from getting discouraged when the world news is grim. Help my faith not to be in the might of any worldly powers, but in You, the almighty God. No matter how disheartening the worlds of the news readers, help me to understand that they don't have the last word. And neither do nations or natural disasters. You, O God, have the last word. Help me to realize that not only is it a final word, but it is also a faithful word, one that I can count on, one that we all can count on, all of us who are the People of God, who, in the end, will be left standing. Amen.