

GOD'S SUPER HEROES - DANIEL

Fighting God's battles- part 5-Daniel

The word, "system" can be defined as " A group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole." A system is composed of different parts which function in certain ways with the goal of producing a certain result. That being true, we enter different systems every day. Your home is a system. Your job is a system. If you've ever been in the military, you know there's a system there that tells you what to do and how to do it.

Many years ago, we went to Disney world, and I can tell you that it is quite an experience. When you're in Disney world, you're in a different system that is run by different laws than what we experience in our normal everyday lives. In Disney world, you may get in a boat that is attacked by pirates, or you may see prehistoric animals. Or you may be in a spaceship traveling to some other planet. The problem is that none of those things really happen, and before you know it you are leaving the Disney world system and heading back to real life.

The bible tells us that an evil, fallen angel named Satan has devised a system of living that permeates the entire world. It is often referred to as the "world system." When the bible uses the word "world" in this context, it is not speaking of the earth that we live on. It refers to an invisible, organized way of thinking and acting which is contrary to God's way of thinking and acting. The purpose of this system is to take people away from God and his way of doing things and ultimately to remove them from his presence throughout eternity.

John 15:18-19, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

2 Timothy 4:10, "for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia."

Just as Demas left Paul and the work of God because of the world system, even so Satan is constantly using his system to tempt us to do things contrary to God's will. Today, we will look at a super hero named Daniel. Daniel's story is an example of how the world seeks to corrupt us and how we should deal with it.

Daniel's early life was probably fairly normal. He grew up with a mother and father who loved him and who taught him God's ways, but then it all changed. The great king Nebuchadnezzar was conquering everything in sight, and he had a plan to unite his vast empire. He would choose the brightest most promising young men from various nations,

bring them into Babylon and train them to work in his court. When Daniel was only a teenager, he, along with a number of other young men, were taken into Babylon, and he lived the rest of his life there. As we see Daniel responding to the pagan world he was a part of, we learn lessons on how we can respond to our culture and a godly matter and bring glory to God.

The assault of the world system

1. The world seeks to remove us from our source of strength

If you remember the old cartoon “Popeye,” you know that Popeye the sailor man gained his strength as he ate his spinach. That being true, His adversary, Brutus, wanted to keep Popeye as far away from the spinach as he possibly could. We are spiritual Popeyes. Left to ourselves, we are weak and defenseless. That is why we are urged in Ephesians chapter six to put on the whole of armor of God. On the other hand, Satan is a spiritual Brutus who tries to keep us away from our spiritual spinach.

Daniel 1:3- Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility- 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. 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.

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

Nebuchadnezzar did not leave these young men in their own land because they would have been nourished by the scripture there. They would've had family members and other devout Jewish people to encourage them in the ways of the lord. Nebuchadnezzar sent them into Babylon so they would be removed from their source of strength. That is a very simple tactic, and Satan regularly uses it today and the lives of Christians.

Don't be surprised when circumstances make it hard for you to get to church on Sunday or to read your bible as you should through the rest of the week. Don't be surprised if your prayer time is interrupted by some unforeseen circumstance. And don't be surprised if you become irritated at your brothers and sisters in Christ because Satan would love to keep you from being with them because they're a source of strength for your Christian life.

2. The world seeks to impress us

When Nebuchadnezzar deported the group of young men of which Daniel was a part, those young men must've been overwhelmed by the magnificence of what they saw. The city of Babylon was about the size of San Francisco. It had great, huge walls around it that were so wide 4 chariots could ride on the top side by side. They had hanging gardens which were said to be one of the seven wonders of the world. As they passed through the double walls of the city they would have found them to be composed of colored enamel bricks. The small group of Israelite young men who had come from a rural setting we're now in the midst of a huge population of thousands and thousands of people. It must have been very impressive, and it is no different today. Our secular society has produced things they would never have even been thought of in the ancient world. The bright lights, the wealth, the pleasure, the fame—all of it works together to pull us in the direction of the world. The danger is that you can become so involved in seeking after all this world has to offer, that you have very little time to seek after God. God is left on the back burner while you seek other things.

The apostle John says, in 1 John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."

3. The world seeks to assimilate us into its system

I am reminded of a mental patient who walked up to the new doctor in the state hospital, and said, "We sure like you a lot better than we did the last guy." The new doctor smiled and said, "Why is that?" He said, "Because you seem just like one of us." That is what the devil wants to do with you; he wants you to be no different from our pagan society.

Daniel 1:5 says, "They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service."

For three years these young men would be immersed in Babylonian knowledge, culture, history, language, and religion. At the end of that time they would enter the king's service and be assured of high-level government positions.

There was a three-step plan to indoctrinate these young men. Step one was a full scholarship to Babylon State University, the Ivy League of the ancient world. That's like being singled out by the boss's right-hand man for special mentoring. It was the kind of break most guys would jump at. And to be fair, we have to say that Nebuchadnezzar didn't think of it as an evil thing. He probably thought he was doing these young men an incredible favor.

Step two was to offer them free food from the King's Buffet. Because it was prepared for the king, you can be sure that it was tasty stuff.

Step three was to change their names.

Daniel 1:6-7, "Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego."

All these names had special meanings. The Hebrew names all contained references to the God of Israel. The new Babylonian names mention the gods of Babylon:

Daniel ("God is my Judge") became Belteshazzar ("Bel, protect the King").

Hananiah ("The Lord is gracious") became Shadrach ("Command of Aku", the Sumerian sun-god).

Mishael ("Who is like the Lord?") became Meshach ("Who is what Aku is?").

Azariah ("The Lord is my helper") became Abednego ("Servant of Nebo," another Babylonian god).

The original Hebrew names tell us that these four teenagers must have been raised in godly homes by parents who raised their children to serve the true God. By giving them new names Ashpenaz meant to obliterate their past. Nebuchadnezzar didn't want good Jews working for him, he wanted good Babylonians who happened to have a Jewish background. They were being weaned away from their past little by little so that they would think and act and speak like the pagans around them.

The bible is very plain in telling us that we're not like all those in this world who do not know Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are a unique group of people, a people who have God living within them. That's why Peter says in

1 Peter 1: 17, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

We are strangers here. We're resident aliens, passing through this dangerous environment as pilgrims making our way to our heavenly home. Satan wants us to forget that we are different so that we blend in with the rest of the unsaved world.

The Christian's response

1. Don't be persuaded by the majority

I heard a story about a man driving his car down the street who took a turn onto another street only to find that he was meeting the traffic head on. Somehow, he pulled off the road and turned around so that he was in the same flow of traffic with the rest of the cars. But then something unexpected happened. Up ahead he saw a police officer giving the cars in front of him tickets. The truth was he was right when he made his turn, and all the other cars coming at him were going the wrong direction. It is so easy to be swayed by the majority.

In the world that we live in, the majority of people do not follow the principles of scripture in living their lives. When you go to work, in all likelihood you'll be working with people who do not understand the things of God or want to understand them, and in that kind of environment, it's easy to be swayed. Always remember that you live to please an audience of one-God himself.

2. Understand when to speak and when to be silent

Daniel was sent to the Babylonian university and trained in all of the ways of Babylon, and he went along with it. He did his studies and learned what they wanted him to learn, and when they gave him a new name, he went along with that also. Both of those things were part of the brain washing process that was used to turn the young men away from their former faith and make them Babylonians. But Daniel did not resist those two things.

Daniel 1:8, "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."

That seems strange to me. I would think it would have been more important to not subject yourself to all of the pagan teaching at the university. And I would've thought it would've been more important to not take a pagan name. Why did Daniel take a stand on the food issue when he did not on the other two items?

Daniel could sit through the lectures at the university and reject what he knew to be false, and he knew that a name alone couldn't define who he was. Eating from that king's table, however, was different. First of all, the King's food would contradict the dietary laws that had been given to the people of Israel by God. It is also true that the food the king ate was in honor of various Babylonian gods, and Daniel knew that he could not cross over that line. To do so would have been idolatry, and Daniel would have died before doing that.

That tells me that everything is not worth fighting over. When you go to the office or when you talk with people anywhere, you will hear things which are contrary to God's teaching. It is not your job to rebuke them for what they say. It is your job to live out the truth in your life and to love those people so that you make the gospel attractive to them. We're not a spiritual attack dogs who are always sniffing out something that we can bite someone for. Daniel did not do it that way and neither should we.

You also have to respect the way he handled the situation. Verse 8 says of

Daniel, "He asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

He could said, "Ashpenaz, keep your food because I'm not going to eat it." Or he could have said, "There is no way that I'm going to give honor to an idol by eating that food. I worship the true God." He didn't do any of those things. He asked permission because he knew how to deal with people in a tactful, loving way.

3. Trust God to bear witness of your life

There is an old saying that goes like this, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” You can claim all you want about how good your pudding is, but the proof is in how it tastes to other people. People may not want to live by the godly standards you live by, but no one can deny the results God produces in your life.

Daniel 1:9-18 tells us that Daniel proposed a test for 10 days. After the 10 days of being on his diet, he was to be compared to those who ate the king’s food.

Daniel 1:15, “At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.”

The bottom line here is that following God's principles work. God does not always bless his people in the same manner or with the same timing, but he blesses, and other people see that blessing, they are drawn to the God who gave it.

4. Make godly decisions beforehand

The timing for making those kinds of decisions is very important. You don't decide what you are going to do in the middle of the temptation. Decisions like this must be made in advance before the temptation arises. There must be some things in your heart that you have predetermined that you will never do. That way when the temptation arises, you don't have to think about what to do because you have already decided what you're going to do.

Life is a series of choices. We make our decisions, and our decisions turn around and make us. You are who you are today because of decisions and choices you made years ago. Most of the time we don't realize how important small choices can be.

This week I read about a 400-year-old redwood that suddenly and without warning toppled to the forest floor. What caused the death of such a huge tree? Was it fire? Lightning? A strong wind? An examination of the dead tree root revealed a surprising cause. Tiny beetles had crawled under the bark and literally eaten the fibers away from the inside. Although it looked healthy on the outside, on the inside it was virtually hollow and one day finally collapsed.

The same thing happens when we refuse to stand our ground for Christ. Every time we compromise something bad happens in our soul. Eventually the little decisions add up and we become hollow on the inside even though we may look great on the outside.

Questions

How strong are your convictions?

Can you rely upon them to hold you up under pressure?

What decisions do you need to make before you get into a compromising situation?

What areas of your life might be straining under the pressure of this world right now?

Our culture is becoming more and more godless with every passing year. I challenge you to be a Daniel in this culture because we're the only hope that it has.