

Daniel 1:8-21 - DiCicco

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2026

Preacher: John DiCicco

[0:00] I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country. You might remember that from fifth grade history class or something like that, like I do.

! An American patriot, a spy named Nathaniel Hale, who was sent to spy on the British camp at Long Island, who upon being found was executed for his crimes. Those were his last words. I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country. Or maybe you know the story of Eric Liddell, that Scottish Sabbatarian sprinter who won gold in the 400-meter dash, but who later became a missionary, got caught in the middle of a war in China and died in a prison camp. His final words were, it's all surrender. Speaking of the Christian life. His words, it's all surrender, seemed like a fitting title for this sermon.

And I'll tell you why. Because his final words really capture what we see in the story of Daniel, where Daniel is this amazing example of resolve to honor God with everything he has.

[1:26] For us, in a world that's sort of inebriated with self-seeking and self-promotion, self-satisfaction, God's people are marked by honoring him with all we have.

Daniel Hale and Eric Liddell, even Daniel, are examples a little bit far removed from us. I mean, not many of us literally have our lives on the line for our faith.

But in some ways, their example is very similar to our day and age. After all, don't we face a task that's maybe equally as difficult? After all, it's unlikely that any of us would honor God in our death if we fail to honor him with our lives.

I mean, daily living can be just as costly as those final moments. Daniel's example presents us with the need to honor God with all we've got.

It presses this in on the people of God. While at the same time, offering to help God's people who struggle like Daniel did with living in the tension between hope in God and being home with God.

[2:43] The existence, the reality of our everyday lives, and the hope of what God has promised to do for us. In this story, Daniel's resolve, his request, and his reward show us when and how.

And I think most importantly, why God's people ought to honor him with all we've got. Before we turn to this story, would you pray with me just one more time?

Almighty God, would you give me the tongue of one who is trained by you, that I might know with a word how to sustain those who are weary.

Also, Lord, give us ears of those who are trained by you, that we might hear and do and live according to your word.

Amen. I'm not sure about you, but Daniel's resolve is compelling to me. One of my earliest journal entries, one of the many times I tried to start journaling was just on the first three words of the passage we read, but Daniel resolved.

[4:01] And his resolve is compelling, but I think it becomes even clearer when we get the full picture of the context of where Daniel is. Because you may have noticed we dropped down into the middle of a story.

For centuries, God's people had been living in the promised land. We just went through Deuteronomy this fall and we saw Israel on the verge, on the cusp of stepping into this promised land.

Well, here in Daniel, we're on the opposite end of that. God's people, the kingdom of Judah, the faithful, chosen southern kingdom, just on the edge of being pushed out of the land, according to God's promises, just as they were brought into the land according to God's promises.

You remember as we walked through Deuteronomy, the promises of blessing for obedience and of curses for disobedience, of life and abundance and prosperity in the land for those who love and follow God, and of exile and hardship for those who forsake him or for the nation when they forsake

him.

And for centuries, God's people had turned their backs on him. They worshipped idols, they broke their covenant with God, and they failed to hear and heed the warnings of the prophets that God sent again and again and again and again.

[5:17] And so Daniel actually starts with this little historical marker. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, brought his army and he sacked Israel and he raised the temple and he took some of the vessels of the temple back with him to Babylon, as well as some of the best and the brightest of Israel.

In verses 3 and 4, the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both the royal family, the nobility. So they just sort of skimmed the cream of the crop off of Israel, took them back to Babylon.

These vessels of worship, the gold things that Solomon had commissioned for the beautiful temple that he built, the temple where God's glory dwelled, and it was so powerfully present that people could not go in it.

These golden vessels that he had made were taken from the temple, marched back to Babylon, and placed in pagan shrines of worship in their capital, defiled by their placement.

Daniel and his friends also are captured, carried away to the capital. God's holy people pulled out of where they were meant to worship him, and now in a land where they have no idea what to do.

[6:47] And the purpose of the king pulling these people out so that he could have this little trophy case in his throne room, he gives them three years to learn the Babylonian language, to learn literature, and to be trained in wisdom, basically to be not his jesters, but conquered peoples who were brought to his land, taught the ways of his people, and to be sort of trophies of how the Babylonian wisdom had conquered all others, their strength, their might.

Daniel is in this group being trained for three years, and the king graciously gives all of these people being trained food from his table, the best of his food, his wine.

Again, it props him up as an amazing king. You can imagine Daniel is in no way in control of his situation.

This might be a darkly humorous twist on the title of the sermon, It's All Surrender for Daniel. He has no choice, no control. It's all surrender.

So he's faced with intense pressure, and you can imagine not just here in Babylon, but also back in Judah. This is the Judah that God exiled. But here we see Daniel who is resolved to honor God in the way that he eats, the way that he conducts himself among the Babylonians.

[8:09] We can ask ourselves why. The text doesn't really give us an answer, but if we read the Bible, we know why one of God's people seeks to honor them with their life. It's because of who God is and what he's done.

That's what we saw all throughout Deuteronomy. I, the Lord, have delivered you from Egypt. So love me. Obey and live. Daniel is one of the people of God who was resolved to live a godly life. And you can imagine he was like this in Judah as well as Babylon. It's possible he had some sort of long march, a lot of time to think between Jerusalem and the capital of Babylon, but I don't think we changed that much.

So Daniel is one who is marked by this resolve. Both when it's maybe a little bit easier, Jerusalem, but also here in Babylon. So Daniel resolves not to defile himself with this food from the king. He resolves not to defile himself. So you can imagine this food is unclean food. Probably there's pork in it.

[9:15] No one followed these laws that the Jews did. They were there to mark them as God's people. A lot of these food laws, the Sabbath law, different things marked them as God's people.

We saw this in Leviticus. So Daniel will not do it. He will not defile himself because of who he knows God to be and what he has seen God do.

So as all these pressures are mounting in front of Daniel, the question sits before him. What's most important? To stand before the king or to stand before God?

This is one of those areas where I think Daniel is not all that far from us, is he? And have you ever faced pressure to capitulate, to do some things that our culture celebrates, but that actually God's people are not to do?

That actually by stepping back from these things, we mark ourselves out as followers of Jesus. Have you ever been in a situation like that? You can just think of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus'

teaching against anger, lust, and greed.

[10 : 33] Christians are weird people in a world. Like Daniel, who might have lived in Babylon, but chose, resolved to live as if he was in Jerusalem, God's people are in the world, but not at home in the world.

And Daniel resolves to live as if he were in Jerusalem. And he's rightly named Daniel because Daniel means God is my judge, or my judge is God.

This becomes the ground for his resolve, and this is the ground for our resolve, because while we may live and move and vote in Wheaton, as those who follow God, our citizenship is in heaven. And so Daniel resolves. His example presses on us. I think it's a very compelling reason for us, too, to resolve, to live in a way that honors God, to live in a way that marks us out as God's people, to live in a way that puts him and his ways first, because to resolve helps us simply avoid the error of pragmatism.

You know, when decisions come down the line, if we're not prepared for the decision, sometimes we just make whatever decision is best, whatever decision makes the most sense in the moment. Pragmatism is often reactionary, self-preserving.

[11 : 59] This is a very good side of pragmatism, but when we as Christians are faced with decisions between right and wrong, if we are not resolved to be God's people, to live in a way that marks us out as his people, it's very easy to be pragmatic.

I mean, could you imagine being in Daniel's situation? You get this word from the king, we're gonna feed you from his table and his wine. And what is Daniel supposed to do?

And on the one sense, if he hadn't been resolved, his reaction could have been something like, well, the Lord is the one who exiled his people. God's sovereign hand is over my displacement. And here I am in the king's court, and this is the food that's being provided to me. So although it may defile me, strip away one of my markers, adds God's people. What else am I supposed to do? Go hungry? Starve?

I think we face situations like this. Have you ever been in a situation where not towing the line brings consequences? Or we're not going with the status quo actually has down the line consequences, effects for your life that are less than desirable.

[13 : 18] Daniel's example of resolving compels us to do a similar thing. Because Daniel knows who God is and what God has done. And we're very much like Daniel in this respect.

But we're also very much not like Daniel. Because how much more do we know that we have seen Christ, who is the ultimate revelation of who God is, and in whom we have the ultimate expressions of what God does for his people?

The life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus on our behalf brings to bear God's plan of redemption for those who have faith in him. So how much greater cause do we have to resolve, to live a life that honors God, than Daniel?

We're like Daniel, but we're not like him. Because we've seen this redemption. And so God's people are marked not simply by surviving in the midst of a hostile world, despite our allegiance to the creator of the universe.

Actually, we should be a people marked by a resolve to live a compelling life as Christians. That our lives might be a witness to this dying world of the life that gives us hope.

[14 : 33] All throughout Daniel, we sort of see this, this happened. We won't skip ahead in this chapter, but we see his friends, named in VeggieTales as Rackshack and Benny and the Fiery Furnace.

When they're saved, it is a witness to who this God is and how great he is. Or when Daniel gets tossed into the lion's den and they don't eat him because God closes the mouths of the lion, it is a proclamation of how great this God is.

And every time throughout Daniel this happens, the king, at the highest places, of social society, the king worships.

So from Daniel, who's in the least place, to the king, God is magnified and is put on display. And this is the same sort of thing we see in the New Testament. The apostle Peter writes a letter urging Christians to think on the hope that they have.

To remember who God is and what he's done. He opens his letter with, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[15 : 43] And the rest of this letter unpacks what Christians who are facing trials are to do because of this resurrection. This is how he summarizes it in chapter three. He says, Now then, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear, nor be troubled, but honor Christ the Lord as holy.

Always being prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. Always being prepared to make a defense, sorry, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. This last line could be a summary, maybe, of the kind of thing that Daniel resolves, or what grounds his resolve. It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. And so Daniel's resolve is compelling for us as Christians, but it's not enough simply to resolve.

[16 : 57] Because while resolving might help us to avoid pragmatism, so that when we get faced with decisions that we don't expect, we have a ground for our decisions.

It might help us avoid pragmatism, but we might avoid pragmatism just to fall into idealism. And so sort of a naive optimism about the way life is.

God has said, this is the way it should be, therefore, this is the way I expect it to be. That would be a little bit disconnected from reality. If Daniel simply resolved, and then waited for the food to be set before him, what option does he have but not to eat?

And Daniel doesn't let his attitude sit there. His attitude is put into action. He makes a request.

Daniel doesn't simply resolve, he requests Daniel goes to this chief eunuch.

Here's the problem. Daniel recognizes the zero-sum game. Either Daniel resolves not to eat, or he's forced to eat.

[18 : 15] Either Daniel gets to not defile himself, or the king wins. And when Daniel's will comes up against the king's will, whose will do you think is going to win? Either Daniel gets his way, or the king.

And so, this is the issue. And Daniel makes his request. He goes to the chief of the eunuchs, this man who was in charge of all of those who were brought from Israel. I was tasked by an elder who will not be named.

It was taking at least five minutes to define exactly what a chief eunuch is. And I looked up quite a bit. I was in the Illustrated Bible Dictionary this morning.

Said the same thing. A eunuch is simply one of those who was in the highest levels of the court.

There was some sense in which a eunuch, someone who had been castrated was very trustworthy because there's no way for them to steal the throne and continue a line because they were unable to have children made this way so that they might not steal the throne.

Only of relevance to our story because this man is high in the courtroom of the king. He's a trusted official. And Daniel goes to this man and asks not to be defiled with the king's food.

[19 : 32] And this man comes back to Daniel and he says, I like you. I mean, it says God gave Daniel favor. So, the fact that this conversation is happening sort of is that favor. Daniel isn't killed outright for making such a bold ask.

But this chief of eunuchs, this high administrative official says, I actually fear my lord, the king. Because if you guys stop eating the food he's given you and start wasting away, he's going to kill me.

Daniel recognizes the problem. And yet, he resolves to honor God. To honor God with what he's got.

He doesn't have much. It's all surrender for Daniel. But what he can do is ask. We mentioned Eric Liddell as we opened. This was a man who was a sprinter, who was a devout Christian, who was also a Sabbatarian, who took Sunday very seriously and would not do any sort of activity.

He wanted to rest on Sunday. And he was a professional runner, was going to the Olympics, and his chosen race was the 100-meter dash. But you might know the story from Chariots of Fire, the 100-meter dash, the qualifying runs were held on a Sunday and he just simply would not run.

[20 : 52] He trained his life for this and decided, you know what? No. Like Daniel, sort of all surrender for Eric Liddell. He can't change the Olympic Committee's scheduling program.

He is one man in the face of a large organization. Daniel is just one man in the face of the King of Babylon. There's not really anything they can do. But they can take action.

Eric Liddell chooses not to run the 100-meter dash. Daniel's solution is a little more elegant, and we'll come back to Eric Liddell. But Daniel doesn't just recognize the zero-sum game. He relies on God for a remedy. He comes up with a very creative solution, something that ought to go on his resume if he needs another job. Because Daniel sees these things. He holds these things in tension. His convictions and the consequences that these will have not only for him but for those around him. And so Daniel gives as much ground as he can when he makes this request.

[21:52] Do you notice that? He asks to test your servants for 10 days. If you skim up to the first part of this chapter, the timeline that was given to these exiles, this cream of the crop was three years.

Three years to eat from the king's table. Daniel asks for 10 days. So the chief of the eunuch says, I like you but sorry, we're not going to do that. And Daniel says, okay, well, three years is a long time. Why not give us 10 days? What could go wrong? This is sort of a win-win situation for you. So he asks the steward that was giving them the food and apparently got permission to do this. So the steward gave them vegetables and water for 10 days. Again, Daniel's request, I think it challenges us.

It challenges us who are faced by situations like this because we, a lot of us, have a resolve to live in a way that God would want us to live. But when we come up against situations like this that are out of our control, we can sometimes baptize our belligerents and just be grumpy people because we say this is how God wants us to live.

[23:13] A baptized belligerence is not a fruit of the Spirit. Begrudging apologies that are not very real is not the way God wants us to live. Daniel's example challenges us to live in a compassionate yet compelling way.

He gives as much ground to this man as he can. Daniel moves on. He makes this request, vegetables and water, not simply because veggies are a solution to the problem.

Daniel, I think, in presenting this test, is a lot like Abraham we heard a couple weeks ago. God came to Abraham and asked him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

So, like Abraham, Daniel's sort of in an impossible situation. But Daniel acts out in faith. I want you to remember how Tad illustrated Abraham's faith.

He talked about the firewood needed to conduct this sacrifice. It was a helpful illustration. Tad mentioned that, you know, perhaps Abraham himself went out that day and cut the wood.

[24:24] This was important wood for him to cut. This was the wood that God had asked for, for him to sacrifice his son. Daniel could not have known the outcome of his test, just as Abraham didn't know exactly how God would fulfill his purposes, fulfill his promises, while still asking this impossible thing of Abraham.

And yet, both of these are examples of how God's people honor him with all they've got, even if all they have is the smallest amount of faith. Whether it's Abraham giving everything he has, this son that God had promised, or Daniel giving whatever he's got, which is a conversation with this chief of eunuchs, Daniel makes this request so that he might not defile himself.

And this is a miraculous outcome. I don't know if he caught it as Dan read, but every time I hear it read, I don't know if it's just the way it was taught to me growing up or something, but to hear that at the end of 10 days it was seen that these four men, Daniel and his three friends, that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

That's a bit miraculous. Because at what point does restraint win over excess in this area? You know, Daniel, you know, maybe practicing something like a pre-Lent fast, vegetables and water for 10 days, versus all these men who are being trained by the king, eating at his table, gorging themselves on delicacies.

In what way does this make sense? That Daniel, who's eating next to nothing and those who are eating far more than him, that he would look fatter in flesh than those who are eating far more than him.

[26:19] It's not the best plug for the Daniel fast books. It seems to achieve the opposite end, but this is what happens.

Daniel asks not to be defiled and God comes through. I think the context of Daniel also makes it clear that these things are miraculous. I mean, every time God's people are tested in this book, every time they trust in him, God does something miraculous to save them.

I think the same is true here. It's just a picture of what God is going to do throughout the book of Daniel. God's people are called to honor him with everything they've got.

With Daniel's case, all he can do is make a request. Daniel's resolve compels us because when God's people are faced with hard situations, when it looks like it will take everything, Daniel resolves to honor God with everything he's got.

Daniel's request challenges us to honor God with everything we've got because we see Daniel standing on his word within the pressures of this world. So we might be compelled, we might be challenged to live a life like Daniel, but I think the question still remains, why?

[27 : 34] Because while we might know these things somewhere, while we might have heard the story and been convinced that God ought to be honored by his people, what happens when the rubber meets the road for you and for me?

What happens when we're actually faced with these situations? Like, why is it that I ought to honor God when the consequences are going to be severe for me? Why couldn't Daniel just eat and presume on the grace of God to cover him, cry out to God for help?

Why can't Christians bend the knee to Caesar and pray to Jesus for forgiveness? I think this is a question that needs answering because it will make all the difference in our lives.

It will make all the difference when we face these situations. And Daniel's reward at the end of this chapter, I think, gives us a helpful reason, a ground for honoring God with everything we've got.

See, Daniel is rewarded for this. Again, it's miraculous. As for these youths, in verse 17, God gives them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom. He gives Daniel understanding and visions and dreams.

[28 : 48] God pours out blessing on his people who honor him. And they're raised to the position of high importance. There was no one like these four. It says the king found them ten times better than all of his own wise people.

And all of this on the foundation of not following what the king had ordered, but Daniel's resolve to honor God. Daniel's reward teaches us to honor God with all we've got because God will honor us. If Daniel's resolve helps us to avoid pragmatism, if his request helps us to avoid idealism, Daniel's reward at the end of this chapter I think helps us to avoid a sort of Christian stoicism.

This idea that virtue is its own reward. The ancient Stoics said that a man being tortured but who had his virtue had everything he needed in life. That sounds like a pretty miserable life.

As we walk through Proverbs we saw that God gives good gifts to his people to enjoy them and to put them to use for ourselves and for others. There is a good life that God has created this world for.

[30 : 09] And I think we see something similar here. Daniel is rewarded for his honor of God but just like it helped to understand Daniel's context at the beginning why his resolve mattered so much that it wasn't just a little thing I think it helps us to remember who this book was written to.

It was written to God's people at the very least who are in exile who are like Daniel out of control. It's all surrender for them.

They are under foreign kings. Actually if we keep going through Daniel we'll see that there are going to be nations that come and go powers rising and falling and we know from history for the next 400 years Israel was in the midst of a turbulent place.

Ruler after ruler kingdom after kingdom. What do God's people do? Why honor God when there's no hope of them getting their kingdom back in the way they thought they would?

With each new ruler constantly being oppressed and occupied what are God's people supposed to do? Because in the past what they did is they turned to their own desires. They built up their own idols.

[31 : 21] They followed their own way. And Daniel's reward here I think is given to God's people as just a picture of what we saw in Deuteronomy. That there is blessing for obedience.

There is abundant life for those who follow God. That God wants to honor his people when they honor him. We could say Daniel's reward helps us to avoid stoicism.

We can just flip that on its head. It offers hope. We sang it in our hymn this morning. That even through the valley of the shadow of death your rod and your staff are my comfort still.

Your cross goes before to guide me. And you spread a table in my sight. A banquet here bestowing your oil of welcome my delight my cup is overflowing.

God has always promised blessing for his people. So we shouldn't shy away from enjoying them. And I don't think as Christians we should shy away from allowing God's blessings to be a motivation for us.

[32 : 29] God has to consider if you did this in some of your relationships. You're out to lunch with a friend. You're having a good time.

You feel the need to say just hold on. I want you to know that I'm not just here because I have fun. It's not just because I have a good time with you.

I want you to know that really I'm here not to get anything out of you but because it's important to me. This relationship on some level just it needs to happen. There's nothing I'm getting out of it. I don't want you to feel like I'm your friend just because we have a good time. Or if my wife was giving me a gift for Christmas I said thank you for the gift. I left it in the closet because really this is about our relationship.

It's not about the things I get. God gives gifts to his people. He blesses his people and it's inherent in the relationship.

[33 : 29] Inherent in the relationship between friends is enjoyment of one another. You can't sign a contract and be friends with somebody. Decide to go to lunch once a month because this is what we've decided to do and this is the right thing.

This is how I'm a friend. I go to lunch with you. You're friends when you! In the same way God has marked his people by his blessing. We sing it every week as we close our service.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. If we can praise him for those blessings could they not also motivate us to live our lives as living sacrifices?

This is not a God helps those who help themselves kind of thing. That came up in an earlier sermon. It's actually not part of the Bible though a lot of people think it is.

It's not God helps those who help themselves but God does honor those who honor him. And of course it is possible to abuse relationships to seek a relationship simply because of the benefit they will give to you.

[34 : 34] If you hear that one of the people in our church is a pilot and you buddy up to them because you think you are going to get the jump seat on the next flight just to find out that we just fly cargo planes so you can hop on but it's not going to be what you think that would be an abuse of the relationship that's not true friendship that's actually how Israel ended up in exile they presumed on God's blessings!

without any of the things that he asked them to do the abundant provision that the blessing of God was to motivate obedience it was not to be licensed for how they wanted to work and so this is the way God often works we see it with Abraham as soon as he's called God calls him out and promises to bless him Israel we saw through Deuteronomy over blessing for obedience we saw this in Proverbs!

the good things God has given are given to be used for good and we see this ultimately in the gospel when Jesus in Mark chapter 10 is talking to his disciples about what it means to follow him what it means to leave behind your father and mother and this is what he says truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions!

And in the age to come eternal life! There are blessings for following God there are blessings for honoring God God honors his people when his people honor him and this is the way he works and so when you or I come up against a situation like this the blessing that awaits us the eternal life that is promised to us ought to motivate us it's what Peter used to motivate his people this resurrection from the dead this living hope allows them to stand during the fiery trial and it's the sort of motivation that I think helped Eric Liddell end his days faithfully sick in a prison camp resolved to honor God with everything he had at this point an Olympic gold medalist he went to China and gave his life and on his death said it's all surrender

God is worth everything I have Daniel's resolve his request his reward presses in on us the need to honor God with all we have so as we go from this place may we say with Eric and with other Christians throughout the centuries it's all surrender let's pray God we thank you for your word and for your church we thank you for what you've given us help us Lord to stand in the day of testing and of trial be with us Lord as we go from this place and give us strength we ask in Christ's name amen well as Christians Jesus calls us to be at peace so would you stand and greet one another with the peace of Christ