

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Daniel 3:16-18

INTRODUCTION: Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge," was a statesman in the court of heathen monarchs. Taken captive as a youth to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605, he spent the rest of his long life there as a governmental official and as a prophet of the true God. He claimed to have written this book (12:4), and Jesus identified him as the prophet in Matt.24:15 and Mark 13:14. Since he did not occupy the prophetic office, the book is found in the third division of the Hebrew Bible, the "Writings," rather than in the second, the Prophets. Throughout his life he was uncompromising and faithful to his God.

Because of the events recorded in chapter 2 (Daniel interprets the King's dream), Daniel was given a place of prominence and responsibility in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. After the king's death, Daniel apparently fell from favor, but was recalled to interpret the writing that appeared at Belshazzar's feast (5:13). He was made one of three presidents under Darius (6:1) and lived until the third year of Cyrus (536).

His ministry was to testify, in his personal life and in his prophecies, to the power of God. Though in exile, the people of Israel were not deserted by God, and Daniel revealed many details about His plan for their future, including the prophecy of the seventy weeks of years (9:24-27) and the activities of Antichrist (11:36-45). He also traced the course of Gentile world powers from his own day to the second coming of Christ (Ryrie).

Most of us already know the story in chapter 3. This is one of the favorite stories in the book along with that of Daniel in the lion's den. We know about the three Hebrew children. We have heard and read about their demonstration of faith in the fiery furnace. Even though they were very young, they were believers who had some character. If these young teenagers had this kind of character, facing what they were facing, it seems like some of us older believers should have even more character. We have been at it a lot longer. No doubt we need more Christians with character like that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

What was it that gave them this kind of character? I think it was their faith in God. Christian character comes by trusting God. The three Hebrew children trusted God. This becomes obvious as we observe how they responded to the king's insistence that they bow down to false gods. What would you have said to the king? Notice the ingredients of their Godly character. If we trust in God, we will have Christian character with the same ingredients.

I. FAITH GAVE THEM CONVICTIONS (v.18)

They said, "We will not...." A person with Christian character will have convictions based on the Word of God. There are certain things he will not do and he has already made up his mind about those things.

To have Biblical convictions is to find out what God's opinion is (from the Bible) and to make His opinion our opinion. A conviction is not based on personal preference, but is solidly

based on what God has said in His Word and our determination to follow it.

Charles Spurgeon tells how a boy, reading aloud the account about Daniel in chapter 6, mistakenly rendered verse 3 as follows: "Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent SPINE (should have been spirit) was in him." Spurgeon commented that it undoubtedly was bad reading but good theology. Christian character comes by trusting God. This faith in God will give you Biblical convictions.

II. FAITH GAVE THEM CONSECRATION (v.17)

They said, "God whom we serve...." We need some Christians who are totally devoted to the Lord. These Hebrew boys knew that God would deliver them out of the king's hand, whether God delivered them out of the fire or not. Dead or alive they would be delivered.

They knew who they served. They knew who their master was and their devotion was 100% toward the Lord. We need some Christians with this kind of consecration. We need some Christians who have given themselves totally to the Lord and His wish has become their command. Christian character comes by trusting God. This faith in God will give you Biblical consecration and devotion to God first of all.

III.FAITH GAVE THEM COURAGE (vv.17-18)

They said, "If it be so, our God...is able to deliver...but if

not...we will not serve thy gods."

These young people had some courage. They said that they believed God could deliver them if He wanted to, but if He decided not to deliver them, they were not going to serve the king's false gods anyway. And they knew what they were facing too, for they had already been warned about the fiery furnace prepared for those who would not bow.

These young men had character. I have heard people say, "Lord if you will get me out of this problem, I'll get back in church, but if you don't get me out of this problem, don't expect to see me in church." That's real character, isn't it? Many Christians today say for example, "Lord, I'll tithe if you will bless me." But will they go on to say, "If you do not bless me, I'll tithe anyway"? The last statement takes courage and character.

Abraham Lincoln showed the quality of his courage and character, when, against the advice of Congress, he made the call for an additional 500,000 recruits. He was told it would prevent his re-election. With flashing eye, he replied: "It is not necessary for me to be re-elected, but it is necessary for the soldiers at the front to be re-enforced by 500,000 men, and I shall call for them; and if I go down under the act, I will go down, like the Cumberland, with my colors flying." Christian character comes by trusting God. This faith in God will give you Biblical courage.

IV. FAITH GAVE THEM CONSISTENCY (v.16)

They said, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter."

What they were saying was, "this is always the way we answer this kind of temptation." Do you remember in chapter 1 when they refused to defile themselves by eating the king's meat? Their answer is still the same. They didn't even have to think about their answer. They already knew what they were going to say because their trust was in God and they consistently put Him first.

If you will make the right decision long enough you won't have to think about what to answer. I don't have to think twice about saying "no" to going to a bar. Some people do. I don't have to think about whether or not I am going to church. Some people do. The reason some people waver is because they haven't made the right choices long enough. If you will trust God and His Word, you won't have to be inconsistent in answering temptation.

Have you ever wondered why the king chose them to work for him in the first place? It was because he saw their character. He saw that they were hard and honest workers who were loyal and upright. Now, the king gives them chance after chance to do wrong and it makes him mad when they choose right. It will make the devil mad too, but it will make the Lord happy. Just keep on choosing right. That's Christian character. Christian character comes by trusting God. This faith in God will give you Biblical consistency. (1Cor.15:58).

V. FAITH GAVE THEM COMPANIONSHIP (vv.16-18)

All through the first chapters of this book we see "they", "them", "we", and "our" in relation to the Hebrew children. You will travel with the kind of people that you want to be. Charactered people attract other charactered people. The

opposite is true as well.

Do you want to have friends that are honest and hard working and loyal? Then be that kind of person.

Be a person of character and you will attract people of character. You will also choose your friends from those who are characterized people. You may not have many friends, but the friends you have will be good friends and good people. Thank the Lord for the friendship of quality people. Christian character comes by trusting God. This faith in God will give us Biblical companionship.

CONCLUSION: Famous men of the past have bequeathed us statements that have become mottoes. History declares that Henry Clay was about to introduce a certain bill in Congress when a friend said, "If you do, Clay, it will kill your chance for the presidency." "But is the measure right?" Clay asked, and on being assured it was right said, "I would rather be right than be president." Emerson said, "A change in geography never changes character." Someone else has said "character is what you do when no one else is watching."