

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear fellow believers,

On Tuesday, our nation will elect its next president. Have you watched any of the debates? Have you watched any of the candidates' speeches? One thing I've noticed about both candidates is that both have been caught compromising or even flip-flopping their position or even apparently their convictions, in order to try to please more people or for personal advantage. Both sides have done it. In fact, this seems to be true of many politicians. If a policy or a conviction threatens your campaign and might make you unelectable, change it... and claim you never had the policy or conviction in the first place. It's incredibly rare today to find a politician who will stand his ground no matter what other think or say.

Unfortunately, in modern times it's becoming equally rare to find Christians who will do the same. God in his love and wisdom has revealed to us absolute, unchanging, objectively true spiritual facts. These facts and God's truth have not changed one iota this year, or this century, or this millennia, or ever. God has remained God, and God's truth has remained truth.

If you install a new washing machine, and you see it's not level, you can tilt your head the same way and make it appear to be more level, but we both know that conforming one's perspective does not change the objective truth. That washing machine is still not level. Likewise, many churches and individuals today peddle an installation of "God's" Word that is off level. When they're called on it, they don't make it level and true again. Instead they tell you to tilt your head sideways and you'll see things are on the level.

Friends, we walk in danger in these modern times where truth is considered to be flexible or even non-existent. We live in dangerous times where truth is considered all a matter of perspective. We live in dangerous times where people are expected to shift and change and move what they believe to be true all the time. Truth is considered subjective. In other words, whatever *you* consider to be true *is* true... for you. But don't you dare suggest it might also be true for others.

Against this post-modern backdrop, our God comes to us today with a startling message which is completely counter-cultural. He says to us, "Let nothing move you from my truth!"

In today's sermon text we take a look at a believer who refused to budge from God's truth, even when threatened with his life. Listen to Daniel 6:10-12,16-23:

*"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." "So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live*

*forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.” The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.”*

We’ll need some background in order to understand what’s happening here. The story takes place roughly 550 years before Christ was born. The place: ancient Babylon. Doesn’t most Bible history take place in Israel? Yes, it does. Here’s why the change of scenery: God chosen people, the Israelites, refused to remain faithful to God. Time and again, they refused to honor and obey God. They disregarded his Word and promises. Again and again they turned to false gods. Finally, they were severely disciplined. God allowed the Israelites to be conquered by ancient Babylonians. The majority of the Israelites were taken out of the Promised Land to live in Babylon. Daniel was among those were deported.

The brightest and best of Israel were brought first to Babylon where they were taught the language and literature. Those especially talented were given government positions. Daniel was one of the bright young men working in the Babylonian government.

Daniel and other Israelites who remained faithful to the true God, knew that Babylon was not their permanent home. God had promised that a remnant would return to Israel. You see, God promises and his covenant were tied to that land. The temple, where God promised to be present among his people, was in Israel in the city of Jerusalem. Though destroyed, Daniel and many other Jews had the hope of returning, rebuilding, and again worshiping the true God in the temple God himself had ordered built. They knew and believed the promised Messiah, the Savior, would be born there. This explains why Daniel had the habit of opening up his window and praying toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the symbol of God’s presence among his people, and his promises of forgiveness, redemption and blessing.

All went well for Daniel at first. He quickly rose through the ranks in the Babylonian government. He was a gifted, intelligent man who tirelessly used his God-given gifts in the work he was given to do. But his success was noted with jealousy by native Babylonians. They couldn’t stand to see this foreigner in a higher position than themselves. So they conspired against Daniel. But they could find no fault with him. So they came up with a plan. They knew he was faithful to his God, and they figured they could make that his undoing. They went to the king and said, *“O King Darius, live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.”* Kings in those times liked to think of themselves as a sort of deity. They had enormous egos. Those plotting against Daniel played on this. They convinced the king to issue an edict that everyone in the kingdom pray only to him for a period of 30 days. If someone refused to comply, he would be thrown into the lion’s den. The king thought this was an excellent law. He immediately put it into writing and made it an irrevocable law. It was published throughout the land.

Now here’s where it gets interesting. Daniel heard about this law. Now he had a decision to make. (1) He could pretend he was praying to king but in his heart pray to God. Who would know, right? Or, (2) he could simply close his doors and windows and secretly pray to God. No one would have to know what was going on behind closed doors. (3) He could simply stop praying for a month. Or, (4) he could continue to publicly and openly pray as he always had to the true God and courageously face whatever consequences there would be. Think of the many rationalizations he could have come up with for those first 3 solutions! “If I am dead or not in power, then God’s people will suffer. I must do this minor sin for a greater service to God! Besides, God surely understands. He wouldn’t want any harm to come to me. He

knows I don't really mean in it if I follow those options." I'm sure we could have helped Daniel come up with all sorts of excuses.

Fast forward a couple thousand years to the time of Luther. Luther, an Augustinian monk, saw all sorts of false teachings in the Catholic Church. He knew they were not teaching what Scripture said. He spoke against those errors. He was brought before rulers and authorities and he was commanded to recant... that is, to take back all he had said and taught and written against the church. If he did not, he would be excommunicated, put under the ban of the empire, and he knew perfectly well that this typically meant being tried and executed as a heretic. What to do? Option 1: Publicly take back all he ever taught against the false teachings of the church. In his heart he'd still know he was right. He could simply go back to teaching the truth, but much more quietly and subtly. Option 2: Stand his ground and not be moved. There are all sorts of rationalizing we could do to support the first solution, right? What good is a dead reformer?

Fast forward another almost 500 years to present day. We today face difficult circumstances regularly where we are tempted to compromise God's truth and to fudge on our faith. We have options. We can trust and obey God, knowing we very well may suffer for it. Or we can rationalize wrong behavior. How often don't we do that latter? "If I'll just get drunk with my buddies, they'll remain my buddies which means I'll have more opportunities to witness to them in the future!" "I'm going to give very little in the offering plate when it comes around, because I have to pay off personal debt. If I pay it back sooner, I'll be able to give more generously later." OR "If I save lots when I'm young that money will grow lots over the coming decades. I'll have much more to give to God when I'm older if I give little now." "If I don't speed I'll be late for church. God wouldn't want me to be late for church!" "If I point out to my friend that divorcing her husband would be a sin, she'll stop confiding in me because I know that's not what she wants to hear. Then I won't be able to help her anymore." "I know if I do *this* it's wrong, but there's no way I'll get caught and I'm not hurting anyone. So I might as well do it." "I'm going to hide this problem my car has and sell it. Everyone else does it, and if I, one of God's people, get a little extra money, isn't that only a good thing?"

Our challenge may not be as big as the one Daniel faced... or Luther. But it is certainly of the same nature. Do I trust in God and obey him, even if it means personal loss, suffering or even death? Or do I rationalize wrong-doing to make life easier?

What if Daniel had gone the easy route instead of the right route? What if Luther had? What if we do? The consequences in each of these instances are the same. The consequences are extremely serious.

- 1) It is a *denial of God*. It's hiding your faith in God.
- 2) It tells God's enemies that we his followers think he is *too small to help*. In other words, we're running God's name through the mud.
- 3) It *condones compromising the truth*. If you compromise, others will think they can do so too.
- 4) It gives an *unclear witness*. Does God forbid certain behaviors, or not? Is God's morality a smorgasbord where we pick and choose what we want and leave the rest? That's the message we send when we abandon God and his ways when under pressure, persecution or when in the public eye.
- 5) It *weakens our own faith*. Our relationship with God is severely damaged when we willfully disobey for our own convenience.

Bottom line: Our souls and others' are endangered very time we disobey, condone compromise, and every time we fudge on our faith.

Consider the results of Peter when he denied Christ. Or David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. The result was all 5 of these, wasn't it? (REPEAT) Compromising God's truth always has dire, negative consequences.

Back to our story. Daniel didn't compromise or fudge. Did he? He opened up his windows and prayed facing toward Jerusalem just as he always had. He continued to publicly proclaim his dedication to the one true God. Luther didn't compromise either, did he? He took his stand on God's truth, and under the threat of death, he publicly held to the true teachings of Scripture, refusing to budge from the true faith unless someone could show him from Scripture where he was wrong. Where did they get their courage and faith? Where can we get such courage and faith?

- 1) In chapter 2 of his book, Daniel praises God with these words: "*Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*" Daniel knew and believed that he was not wiser than God. He knew and believed that God was the source of all wisdom. Therefore, Daniel, Luther and all wise men of God seek God's truth, study, listen and obey. It's where faith comes from. It's the tool the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen us. If God said it, it must be true and right.
- 2) And what did that Word say that gave them courage? From Scripture, they knew there was only one true God. They knew that God was holy. They knew they were mere sinners who had not met the holy God's demands. They knew and believed that if they were to be saved and not eternally condemned, it could only be by God's merciful and gracious intervention. Daniel believed God's when God promised that salvation and restoration would come through the promised Messiah. Luther believed God's salvation had come through the promised Messiah, Christ Jesus. God's love and God's faithfulness to every last one of his promises was what empowered these people to stand firm on God's truth.
- 3) They knew that those who know God's truth have an obligation to carry it faithfully and intact to others. They knew that their life was a witness. If they were not faithful, others would be misled and suffer if they compromised and fudged.
- 4) Finally, they were courageous because they knew God was bigger than their enemies. They knew their times were in the hands of their loving God and that his will would be done. God was their refuge and strength.

Their faith was not in vain. God didn't abandon Daniel, did he? He was caught praying to God and disobeying the king. He was thrown into the den of lions. God shut up their mouths, and Daniel walked out untouched. God's name was glorified. God also protected Luther's life. Does he always deliver believers from the hands of wicked people? Yes. One way or another. In the case of Stephen, God delivered him from evil men by allowing them to stone him to death. He brought him safely to his eternal rest. God's name was praised by believers who saw Stephen's courage and peace in the face of those who hated him.

Dear friends, you are going to face challenges in your life where you are tempted to compromise the faith. You will be tempted or pressured or persecuted to back down from God's truth. You will be tempted to rationalize your disobedience or lack of faith. Friends, let nothing move you from God's truth. He is the source of all wisdom. His truth is the only way for lasting happiness and eternal salvation. Know his Word. Study it. Believe it. Know his love for you in Christ Jesus. Rejoice in your forgiveness, salvation and restoration. Recognize that your behavior does affect the faith others. Knowing God's love and faithfulness take your stand and be willing to suffer and even die for Jesus' name so that his name may be honored and glorified. Take your stand... with Daniel... with Luther... and with the many multitudes of believers... take your stand on the church's one foundation... Jesus Christ, the Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understand will guard and keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.