



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, May 30, 2010

Wake-Up Call

Getting Ready (Week 2 of 3)

Daniel 2:44-45 — *The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)*

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands — a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

Daniel

We know very little of the early life of Daniel, except what is recorded in the book bearing his name. Here it is said that he was one of the youths of royal or noble seed who were carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of Jehoiakim king of Judah. These youths were the best of the best and as such thought competent to serve in the king's palace. The king commanded they be taught the letters and language of the Chaldeans, and assigned for them a daily portion of the king's food and wine. After being educated and nourished for three years, they were to stand before the king.

Having determined not to pollute himself with the food and drink of the king, Daniel requested of Ashpenaz permission to eat vegetables and drink water. Through the favor of God, this request was granted, despite the fears of Ashpenaz that the attenuated physical appearance of the young Hebrews after living on such a diet would cost him his life. However, after a trial period of 10 days, the result was so promising that Daniel and his companions were permitted to dispense with the rich food of the royal court in favor of a diet of vegetables and water. Then God bestowed on the young men knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, and to Daniel understanding in all visions and dreams; so that at the end of the three years when the king communed with them, he found them much superior to all the magicians and enchanters in every matter of wisdom and understanding.

The Teenaged Daniel

Daniel's public activities were in harmony with his education. His first appearance was as an interpreter of the dream recorded in Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar has seen in his dream a vision of a great image, excellent in brightness and terrible in appearance, its head of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Next he saw a stone cut out without hands smiting the image and breaking it in pieces, until the image became like chaff and was carried away by the wind, while the stone that smote it became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. When the king awoke from his troubled sleep, he had apparently forgotten the dream, and summoned the wise men, who having said that they could not tell the dream, nor interpret it as long as it was untold, were threatened with death. Daniel (who seems not to have been present when the other wise men were before the king), when he was informed that preparations were being made to slay all of the wise men of Babylon, himself and his three companions

included, boldly went in to the king and requested that the latter appoint a time for him to appear in order to show the interpretation. Then he went to his house, and he and his companions prayed; and the dream and its interpretation were made known to Daniel.

The Interpretation

The heart of the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream lies in verse 44. Daniel proclaims, ***“the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”*** Kings rise and fall. The things of the world are only temporary.

Daniel goes on to say, ***“...a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.”*** Some interpreters believe that Daniel is referring to either current or future kingdoms of the earth. Still others believe that Daniel's interpretation from God is that “the rock of Jesus Christ” is stronger than any of the things that we consider valuable in this life. Only God is forever. For Daniel this is the belief and conviction that carries him to challenge King Nebuchadnezzar, to interpret other dreams, to survive the threat of the Lion's den, to protect his friends from the flames of the furnace, and to read the “writing on the wall” written by God as a warning to Nebuchadnezzar's son.

Opening Our Eyes – Seeing Clearly

Are any of us really prepared to face the world as we know it today? We are blitzed with media hype, over stimulated with conflicting messages, everyone wants to create their version of moral truth, not mention the world crisis that is now knocking at our door.

Faith takes courage and discipline. Yet the constant message is to take the easy road. The message of the book of Daniel is clear: those who trust in the Lord shall prevail against all challenges. Do we have the faith and training to face up to a world of challenges?

At the heart of Daniel's courage, discipline, faith and action:

- Daniel knew that he was God's child.
- Daniel constantly searched after God's direction.
- Consequently, Daniel clearly saw the dangers before him and was prepared to meet those challenges with the strength of his faith in God.

Questions to Discuss with your family

- When have you landed in a life situation you would not have chosen? In what way did you sense God's call to faithful and holy living despite the circumstances?
- Although Daniel served kings, he refused to confirm to their world lifestyles. What influences make it difficult for you to live ***“in the world and not of it”***? (John 17:16; Rom. 12:2) Your job? Friendships? Family? Volunteer work? Your neighborhood? The pull of the media? What worldly ways are most tempting to you?
- How much is discipline a committed part of your life? Consider an area of your life in which God might be asking you to practice greater discipline. How could this discipline influence your relationship with God?

The New Day of Teen Challenges

Like no other time in history, our teens are facing unprecedented pressures and challenges. Here are the top four, as cited by Ronald Hudcraft, and how we as a church, teens and parents can respond.

Media bombardment – Billions of dollars are spent a year transmitting values thru movies, songs and magazines. Not just teens, but adults too, are bombarded with what it means to live a happy and meaningful life. Our notions of reality are shaped not just by our everyday experience but through constant media communication.

The Church's answer – While billion of dollars may be spent on the media blitz we experience today, the

church offers relationships, support and hope. Studies site that positive role models from church, school and extra-curricular activities who show high Christian values gain the highest respect from teens. Especially younger kids are like sponges watching to see if Christians are genuine in what they say and do. Further, parents can find the help, support, advice and mentoring of other parents who have been there before in the church.

Pressure to make moral choices come at an earlier age – Two decades ago we worried about what was happening in our high schools. Now these moral and potentially dangerous decisions are being made in middle school.

The Church's answer – Our moral compass has not changed. Jesus was clear about the greatest commandment, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength - love Neighbor as self.”** The earlier a child is exposed to the activities and teaching of the church the better the chance the positive life giving values of Jesus Christ become part of their decision making. Abundant research from various top-level universities, government agencies, and religious research institutions like the Barna Group document that active church participation is the key to raising well-adjusted, happy children who have a life-long moral compass and avoid the typical pitfalls of the teenage years. When researchers try to isolate “what works” in terms of raising children, invariably they find this key — “active participation” in a “faith community.”

The real possibility of no future – The access to media and the dangers of society have lead our teenagers are paranoid. Questions like: Will there be a place for me when I grow up are being asked in one way or another on a constant basis. What if someone pushes the wrong button and we get nuked? Will there be a job for me when I graduate? Is my school really that safe? How long will it take for the terrorist to strike again?

The Church's answer – From Genesis to Revelation, the message of the Bible is clear – God's Kingdom is eternal. No matter what we may read about the problems in the world, the church is a place of hope for the future. Jesus the Christ will always prevail.

The Lack of a moral consensus – Everyone from athletes, talk show host, the rich and famous, politicians, and movie stars want to share their ideas about morality and behavior. Teens as well as adults watch hours of television and have easy access to the wide variety of ideas presented on the internet, while our faith development might get 2-3 hours of attention a week.

The Church's answer – We look to one source for our moral direction – the scriptures. The scriptures are not always popular, never driven by personality or popularity, does not change with the trends of society and have stood the test of time.

Next week we conclude this series by looking at the promise of the future by examining the life of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark. Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did. God is doing great things through the ministry of Trietsch.

TRIETSCH'S WAKE-UP CALL COVENANT

- I will pray with/for my kids/youth and the kids/youth of this church this week.
 - I will bring the community of Christ into my community this week by showing kindness and love to others I encounter in my day to day life.
 - I will dedicate an hour this week to spend with my family without the presence of any electronic communications or other distractions.
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Daily Readings

These passages will allow us to go deeper into the life of Daniel. Some of these passages will be very familiar while others will be new. Interpretation of the book of Daniel differs from church to church. Some scholars use Daniel to predict the end times and the second coming of Christ, while others point to the events of Daniel's day as the basis for the message. But one thing is certain and agreed by all — Daniel proclaims the righteousness of God's people and the eternal nature of God's Kingdom. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, May 31 – Read Daniel 2:1-49 — This passage includes the entire story for Sunday's sermon. The interpretation in verses 44-45 will be familiar from the sermon. By reading the whole story, you can see the danger Daniel faced as he confronts the king. His incredible courage and faith is seen in the way he joins with his friends to pray for God's revelation. Then he boldly approaches the king with a difficult word from God. Are there times in your life when you feel threatened? How did you react? In faith? In prayer? With courage?

Tuesday, June 1 – Read Daniel 3:1-30 — The vain King Nebuchadnezzar builds a golden statue to himself and requires all to bow down to the image. Daniel's three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refuse because of their faith and allegiance to God. The penalty was to be thrown into a fiery furnace. God protects the three young men and then God is shown walking with them among the flames as they escape unharmed. Can you identify the golden images of our day? In what ways are we asked to bow down to these images? How would you respond to such a challenge?

Wednesday, June 2 – Read Daniel 4:1-37 — Nebuchadnezzar is given a second dream. Again Daniel interprets the dream as a word from God. The king is to give all credit to God for the kingdom of Babylon or it will be taken from him. Nebuchadnezzar heeds Daniel's warning for 12 months and then in a moment of pride, proclaims, ***"Is this not a magnificent Babylon that I have built...for my glorious majesty?"*** Immediately, the kingdom is taken from him until he repented to God and gave God the glory for his success. This is a story of warning, judgment and redemption. How have you heeded or ignored the warnings of God's Word? Have you taken credit for the success of your life or dedicated everything to the Lord? Are you ready to receive the good news of redemption that comes out of repentance and change of heart?

Thursday, June 3 – Read Daniel 5:5-31 — Belshazzar has now taken the thrown of Babylon. In a party thrown in his honor, he ignores the commands of God by praising the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone. A mysterious hand writes on the wall, ***"mene, mene, tekel, and parsin."*** Daniel is the only one that can read the writing on the wall — ***"God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*** From this passage we get the phrase, "reading the writing on the wall." Only in the full devotion to God do we find direction from God. What is God writing on your wall? Can you read it?

Friday, June 4 – Read Daniel 6:1-28 — This is the most well known passage in Daniel. After the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians, Daniel is selected to remain in King Darius' counsel. This arouses jealousy from his Persian counterparts, so they plot against Daniel to discredit him before Darius because of his unwillingness to compromise his faith and devotion to God. The penalty was to be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel is left over night sealed in a den with hungry lions. In the morning, when Darius comes to check to see if Daniel's God had delivered him, he hears these words from Daniel, ***"My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong."*** Darius then punishes those who have plotted against Daniel and proclaims that greatness of God. When have you stood up for God in your life? What are you willing to sacrifice for your faith?