

Daniel:
Conviction in an Age of Compromise

When the Bottom Falls Out!

Daniel 2:1-18

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When the Bottom Falls Out!

Scripture

All of us watched with horror and sadness the incredible destruction this past August of the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina. Much of the region was flooded by storm surge and broken levees. Homes and businesses washed away and collapsed into a heap of ruins. About a thousand people were killed, and for the survivors the bottom just seemed to have fallen out of their lives.

Have you ever had one of those days? A day when the bottom falls out? If the bottom falls out from under your house, the remedy is plain enough. You simply move to Pennsylvania where the soil is strong!

But what do you do when the bottom falls out of your marriage? Or your career? Or your kids? Or your health? What do you do when you get back that lab report that doesn't look good? When relationships break down? Or never form? When you find out that your daughter is pregnant? Or your son is on drugs? Or that your spouse has been seeing someone else? When your plans and dreams never materialize? What do you do then?

Daniel was a man who knew first-hand what it was like to have the bottom fall out of his world. Life wasn't always rosy for Daniel. Although Daniel had been born of royal Israelite lineage, king Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Daniel's homeland and taken him captive as a prisoner of war when he was a young boy.

But lately, the events of Daniel's life had been on the upswing. Daniel received an appointment to train for the king's service. At the end of the training he had become superior to all of his peers. With God's help he had risen above his adverse circumstances. His future, which at one time was very dim, was now very bright again!

That is where we left Daniel last time. But as we come now to Daniel 2 we find a dramatic shift. Suddenly, the bottom fell out

again. Let's read about that in Daniel 2:1-18 in a sermon I have titled, "When the Bottom Falls Out!":

¹ In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

⁷ Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁸ Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."

¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke

to him with wisdom and tact.¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷ Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. (Daniel 2:1-18)

Introduction

While on vacation this past week we watched a movie titled *Into Thin Air*. The movie is based on Jon Krakauer's book by the same title, and it relates the hazards that plagued the climbers in their expedition to Mount Everest during the spring of 1996. That year, the attempt to reach the summit resulted in the loss of five lives.

One of those who died was Andy Harris, one of the expedition leaders. Harris had stayed at the peak past the deadline, and on his descent, he became in dire need of oxygen. Harris radioed his predicament to the base camp, telling them of his need and that he had come upon a cache of oxygen canisters left by other climbers, all empty. Those who had passed by the canisters on their own return from the summit knew they were not empty, but full. Even as they pleaded with him on the radio to make use of them, it was to no avail. Already starved for oxygen, Harris continued to argue that the canisters were empty.

The problem was that the lack of what he needed so disoriented his mind that though he was surrounded by a restoring supply he continued to complain of its absence. The very thing he held in his hand was absent in his brain and ravaged his capacity to recognize what he was clutching in his grasp.¹

¹ Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 2000), 86-87.

I want to suggest to you this morning that there are times in our lives when we encounter a crisis, when the bottom falls out of our lives, and the very thing that can address the issue is within our grasp!

Lesson

I want to show you from Daniel 2:1-18 how Daniel responded when the bottom dropped out of his life, when he faced a crisis. Let me begin by setting the scene for you.

I. Daniel's Crisis (2:1-16)

First, notice Daniel's crisis.

It all began when king Nebuchadnezzar had a series of dreams which bothered him so much that he could not sleep. So the king called his advisors to tell him what he had dreamed.

The advisors asked the king to tell them the dream. But the king had already decided he was not going to tell them his dream this time. Anybody could give an interpretation. Instead the king decided to put these men to the test. He wanted them to draw on all their own magical and spiritual resources and actually tell him his dream first, and then interpret it. And if they could not do it, he would have them cut into pieces.

The wise men swallowed hard and then tried again to get the king to tell them the dream so that they could interpret it for him. But Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't budge. He insisted that they tell him the dream as well as the interpretation, or they would die.

With their inability to discover the king's dream now exposed, they began trying to defend themselves saying that no-one could do what the king asked. The king became so furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon.

Now you must understand that Daniel was one of the wise men of Babylon at this time. So that meant that he too was to be put to death. The bottom had just fallen out for Daniel.

When Daniel was seized by Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, he asked what was going on and why the king issued such a harsh decree. Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.

Once Daniel understood all the facts, he then went to Nebuchadnezzar and asked him for time, so that he might interpret the dream for the king.

Each one of us has had times in our lives when we've been hit hard and unexpectedly with really bad news. To have someone you deeply love tell you she doesn't want to see you anymore. To have your boss tell you he is going to have to let you go. To get a phone call from someone who tells you that a dear friend or a family member has been killed in a car accident. To have a doctor tell you that you have cancer.

Those are the times in life when you feel like the bottom has just fallen out. Those are times of great testing for everyone, even for those of us who know Jesus Christ.

So what did Daniel do? How did he respond? And what can we learn from this?

II. Daniel's Response (2:17-18)

Second, notice Daniel's response.

Daniel's response is in verses 17-18: **“Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”**

Simply put, when the bottom fell out, Daniel fell to his knees. Daniel prayed. Although he secured extra time from the king, that reprieve was not to cook up an escape plan. It was so that he might immediately gather those who love the Lord and fervently pray. Daniel understood that a humanly impossible situation can only be resolved with divine intervention.

Let's pause here for just a moment and think about this. Someone once said, "We're all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations!"

When the bottom fell out of Daniel's world he saw an opportunity. When Daniel heard the king wanted not only an interpretation of his dream but also the recounting of the dream itself, Daniel thought, "Wait a minute, this is a great opportunity for God to work." It was impossible and urgent: All the makings for God to do a great work for his own glory!

The truth is that we don't think like that. Instead, we begin to look for a way we can take care of our problems ourselves.

So we lie awake at night and toss and turn, saying to ourselves, "How am I going to work this one out?" rather than saying, "Lord, this is your specialty! Take over and do a work here that will glorify your name!"

But there is something else about Daniel's response you must not miss here. In verse 17 we find that after Daniel talked to the commander of the king's guard, he then went to his three friends. The word translated "**friends**" in verse 17 is from the Hebrew word that means "to tie a knot, to join together." Daniel's heart was tied in a knot with his three friends.

Picture this: Daniel came walking through the door. His three friends were sitting there watching *CNN Headline News* about the king's threat and the predicament of the wise men, and Daniel said, "Well, guys, we're facing a pretty serious situation. It is so serious that if God doesn't come through, we don't continue to live."

After Daniel's friends heard all the details of the situation, they slipped out of their chairs and on to their knees before God. They probably forgot all about dinner. They may have not even slept that night. They may have prayed all night.

When a situation is really urgent, it's amazing how insignificant all the other things in life are.

There are very few fellowships that ever get closer than those fellowships that are tied together with the strings of prayer. When you have a need in your life, don't go it alone. Don't play tough.

Instead, learn to share that need with someone else. Tie a knot with a friend. Bind together. Covenant to pray together.

Daniel and his friends set aside the things of this world so that they might, according to verse 18, plead for mercy from the God of heaven so that they might not be executed.

It probably doesn't strike you as significant that Daniel's first response to his crisis was prayer. We all tend to think of Daniel as one of the great Fathers of the faith who is supposed to pray like that. But I want you to realize today that if anybody had a reason to skip prayer as a first option, it was Daniel.

He had many other options. For one thing, he was brilliant, ten times wiser than the wisest man in Babylon. So he could have used this extra time to figure out some solution to his predicament.

Daniel also had power. He was now in the king's service. He had learned to manage the politics of the royal court. Maybe he could pull some political strings, call in some favors, twist an arm, or use the "good old boy" network.

Yet, in his crisis Daniel chose prayer first!

Too often I'm afraid we fail to follow Daniel's example in our crises, no matter how spiritually mature we may think we are.

Some years ago I was working for the South African Transportation Services in Cape Town. One day my boss informed me that I was going to be transferred to Johannesburg. I was shocked to hear the news for, you see, Johannesburg was the last place I wanted to be.

My initial response was to take charge. First, I needed to find out the appeal process. Next, I needed to find out who I needed to lobby to get my transfer revoked. Then I needed to talk to those who could advise me on how to avoid a transfer.

What was missing in all my frantic activity? Prayer! It's not that I did not plan to pray. Oh, I was going to get around praying, but prayer just didn't make it to the top of my Day-Timer "To Do" list. I had to handle this crisis on my own. I grabbed the reins. I was going to fix this problem single-handedly.

Not until I had stumbled along like this for quite a while did it hit me that I had not really prayed. Oh, I had stopped to pray a few silent, “Help me’s” while I was calling someone. But I had not fallen to my knees in concentrated, humble, dependent prayer **“plead(ing) for mercy from the God of heaven”** (v. 18). I had not gathered those who love the Lord and love me to pray as Daniel did with his friends in verse 18.

Thankfully, despite all my failings, the Lord did finally break through all my franticness and show me my need to join with others and pray. I went home and asked my three roommates to pray with and for me. They did. And then I spent most of the rest of the night in Bible reading and prayer. Amazingly, in the wee hours of the morning a peace crept into my soul and I knew that, no matter what the outcome, I could trust God.

As it turned out, I never did get the transfer, for reasons still unknown to me. How thankful I am that I finally did turn to the Lord in prayer. I still count that evening as one of the most precious seasons of prayer with the Lord in my life as I turned to him to find grace in my time of need.

Conclusion

God’s abilities are beyond our imagining. His ways are beyond our knowing. His solutions are beyond our doing. That is why when the bottom falls out, we must always seek him first in prayer.

So why don’t we follow this example of Daniel and seek God in prayer more often? The answer is painfully simple: *Because we usually forget how truly helpless we are apart from God.*

We continue to believe that our own efforts are what really make things happen. In the business world, in our families, even in the church, we believe our activities and programs and planning are the cause of successes or of failure. So, when the bottom falls out, we all instinctively turn to ourselves. We’re so accustomed to

depending on our own resources that we neglect seeking God's supply when we need it the most.

In Tom Peter's book *In Search of Excellence* he mentions a psychological study where adult men were asked to rank themselves on their "ability to get along with others." 100% of the men ranked themselves above average. 60% ranked themselves in the top 10% of the population, and 25% of the men humbly thought they were in the top 1% of the population.

What did Peters conclude from all this? He wrote: "We all think we're tops. We're exuberantly, wildly irrational about ourselves."

The reason we don't pray is that it costs. It costs honesty. You have to be honest with God and say, "I am inadequate. I need your help in this situation." As long as you feel self-sufficient, prayer will have no meaning for you because you think you've got it all together.

Prayer is a declaration of dependence before God. It doesn't mean that you become irresponsible about your duties and plans. It's simply acknowledging your dependency.

It's saying, "God, apart from you, all my actions and plans mean nothing. On my own I can't fix this. I can't put it together again, heal this wound, correct this fault, or clean up this mess. Lord, you must take control if any good is to result. Use me if you will, but you must do what I confess I cannot do alone, despite my position, my intelligence and my connections. Lord God, I trust in you alone."

Jack Miller was an author, pastor and seminary professor. God taught Jack the vital importance of this truth I am sharing with you today. In a letter to a friend, Jack wrote these words, "Please pray for my habitual tendency to trust in myself and what I can do."

Great men and women of God have always recognized the temptation to depend on themselves. We should all recognize that weakness in ourselves.

When the Bottom Falls Out!

When the bottom falls out, be very careful not to become so busy taking care of the problem that you forget God's way out—prayer! Amen.

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develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Prayer:

Some of you come here today at a very broken and bruised place in your life.

Some of you are wrestling with some very confusing dreams. And it's not clear to you what God is saying to you. Some of you are here today without Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and you need to turn from your sin and trust in him to save you from sin's penalty and power over your life.

Let's end our service today by taking the next few moments to think through those heartaches, those broken dreams, those broken relationships and then come to the Father with them all.

Ask him for forgiveness through Christ. Surrender to him all your plans and schemes. And ask him to work through your difficulties in a way that brings glory and honor to the name of Jesus.

Our Father in heaven, thank you that we can come to you in prayer. Thank you that when the bottom falls out of our lives, when we encounter a crisis in our lives, you teach us in Daniel to come to you. I pray that you will help every single one of us here today to come to you when the bottom falls out of our lives. And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Charge:

During his time of crisis, Daniel learned the importance of drawing near to God in prayer all the time. Next week we are going to see what happened after Daniel prayed and learn some very practical truths through his response. Until then, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.