

Daniel:
Conviction in an Age of Compromise

Rare and Remarkable Virtues

Daniel 6:1-16a

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Rare and Remarkable Virtues

Scripture

Today I would like to continue in my sermon series in the book of Daniel. Please listen as I read Daniel 6:1-16a:

¹ It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

⁶ So the administrators and the satraps went as a group 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put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”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.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² 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The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

¹³ Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." ¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. (Daniel 6:1-16a)

Introduction

In every sphere of our culture—business, government, sports, education and religion—we face an integrity crisis. Long-accepted ethical codes of conduct are giving way to the short-term pragmatics of ambition, profit, and pleasure.

What scares me the most about all of this is that a lack of integrity no longer shocks people anymore. Ethical compromise is no longer reprehensible, but is actually gaining acceptability.

Listening to some business people today, it's easy to get the impression that the recent legal convictions of some corporate giants resulted more from a lack of savvy than a lack of ethics.

The loss of an ethical consensus is evident now at every level of society, not just among the corporate giants.

Some time ago the *Dallas Times Herald* reported that while on his way to school one day, a young boy found two large canvas sacks lying in the street. When he looked inside he was amazed to find that the sacks were full of money—\$415,000 in fact! When he

returned the money to the Princeton Armored Service, he received a reward of \$1,000 and got his story in the paper. But the young boy was very unhappy about it all. In his interview he said he had expected a larger reward.

“I don’t understand it,” he complained. “If I had to do it over again, I’d probably keep the money.”

I read a story recently about a pastor who preached a sermon on honesty one Sunday morning. The next day he took the bus to get to his office. After he paid the fare, he realized that the bus driver had given him back way too much change.

During the rest of the journey, the pastor rationalized how God had provided him with some extra money he needed for the week. But he just could not live with himself, and before he got off the bus he said to the driver, “You have made a mistake. You’ve given me too much change.” And he proceeded to give back the extra money.

The driver smiled and said, “That was no mistake. I was at your church yesterday and heard you preach on honesty. So I decided to put you to a test this morning!”

This morning I want to give you a test—an integrity test. I want to give you a test by exposing you to the life and character of a man named Daniel.

As believers in Christ, we all desperately need models of integrity worthy of our imitation. But let’s face it. Models of integrity are hard to find these days. God knew that, and so he has given us a model of integrity worthy of our imitation in the life of Daniel.

When we come to Daniel 6, Daniel was by now well in his eighties who had outlived five Babylonian rulers. Darius the Mede was now the newest king over Daniel. He had just conquered the Babylonian empire and was setting up his own government. Darius was an intelligent, capable, and powerful ruler. We will also see that he was the man who had Daniel thrown into the lions’ den.

This well-known story began in the office of Darius as verse 1 tells us he appointed 120 satraps—or overseers—to rule throughout the kingdom. In verse 2 we read that he chose three

administrators—a second echelon, one of whom was Daniel—to rule over the 120 satraps.

Verse 3 then tells us that **“Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.”** Pay special attention to the phrase **“his exceptional qualities.”** The word translated **“exceptional”** means “pre-eminent, superior, or superb.” It was because of Daniel’s **exceptional qualities** that the king was planning to promote him.

Lesson

What exactly were these exceptional qualities—these rare and remarkable virtues? This morning I want to share three rare and remarkable virtues with you. They are:

1. Personal integrity,
2. Steadfast faithfulness, and
3. Authentic Spirituality.

I. **Personal Integrity (6:4a)**

The first rare and remarkable virtue is personal integrity.

In verse 4 we learn that the king’s planned promotion of Daniel had caused the envy of his peers. So they plotted against him: **“At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him. . . .”**

You might think at first that Daniel’s exceptional qualities at work and his upcoming promotion would have brought praise from his peers. But this was not the case. Instead they made every attempt to get rid of him—and they almost succeeded!

The first avenue **the administrator and the satraps** pursued in their efforts to oust Daniel from office was to try to find grounds for accusing him **“in his conduct of government affairs.”** They

did everything they could to find fault with Daniel's job performance. But **“they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him.”** They were unable to find one single ground of accusation. There was not one shred of evidence of corruption.

How would you like to come under that kind of scrutiny? How would you like to have your public life and personal world come under that microscope? If for some reason, serious questions arose about your character and you began to be ruthlessly investigated, how would you hold up? Would that make you nervous? Is there anything you need to burn, hide or destroy? Are there any papers that need to be shredded? How would you do if you were to undergo an IRS audit?

A test of your personal integrity is how you handle yourself at work. The interesting thing in our text is that Daniel is like most of you in that his calling in life was not to be a preacher or a pastor. He did not spend his days in what is commonly called “the ministry.” Instead, he was a spiritual man who did his work for God and in the presence of God.

Daniel had what we call a “Christian World and Life View.” He did not fall into the trap of dividing his life into the secular and the sacred. Instead he had learned to see and live out all of his life in the presence of God. Theologians call this “Coram Deo,” which is a Latin phrase that means “before the face of God.”

So when he did his work, he did it as an offering to God. His work was always done for the King above the king. That was why his opponents found no corruption in him.

Let me warn you here: When you learn to see your life and your work as “Coram Deo,” and you start taking a strong stand for personal integrity at work, you may be faced with trouble from your fellow workers, if they are dishonest and lazy. They will be very troubled if you are not like them. And because you will not be like they are, you will find that they will become envious and jealous and maybe even plot against you.

When I served in my first pastorate, just north of Pittsburgh, there were a lot of steelworkers in the congregation. They told me

that because they belonged to a union they constantly faced pressure to produce a certain amount of work. To my surprise, it was not a *lot* of work that was required but rather a *little* work that was required. If someone worked more than the rest, he would show up well in the eyes of management, and the rest of the workers would not look so good. So, the pressure was on everyone to produce a little.

Friends, that is not right. Appraise your integrity quotient. Are you a man or woman of true personal integrity? I'm asking a lot more here than if you are willing to give the extra change back to someone. I'm asking a lot more than if you are willing to do your best at work. I'm asking if you are willing to live and work and do everything in your life "before the face of God."

II. Steadfast Faithfulness (6:4b)

The second rare and remarkable virtue is steadfast faithfulness.

In verse 4b we find that Daniel's opponents "**could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.**" Whatever work Daniel was given to do he did it faithfully.

The word "**trustworthy**" means "faithful, loyal, and dependable." Some Bible versions, such as the *King James Version*, *New American Standard Bible*, and *English Standard Version*, use the word "faithful" in place of "**trustworthy.**" We usually use this word "faithful" to refer only to the spiritual life. But that is not the way the word is used here in Daniel 6:4. The word "faithful" is not referring to Daniel's faithfulness in prayer and worship, but rather to his loyalty and dependability in all areas of life, including his governmental responsibilities. This is talking about his faithfulness as a worker.

Proverbs 20:6 (*NASB*) asks, "Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?" The expected answer here is: "Rarely." Here we have another rare and remarkable

virtue. Rarely do we find a man or woman who is truly trustworthy. Rarely do we find someone who does what he says he will do. Rarely do we find a person who follows through on what she says. Rarely do we find a person who hangs in there and keeps his word when the going gets tough.

Are you a **trustworthy** person? Can people count on you to do what you say? Can people count on you to get the job done? At the end of the day, you who work outside of the home—how will your 8-10 hours have been spent as you work shoulder to shoulder with people in your office? Are you really faithful? Can you be counted on to do your best to see that the job you have been given gets done, and gets done properly? Or do you just squeeze by, barely covering yourself by last-ditch and half-way measures? The same qualities are important when you take on a job in the church.

Faithfulness in your work—whatever it is—is not a small thing with God. It’s part of what it means to be a faithful Christian.

Daniel was the kind of man who remained faithful even when he was opposed. He was trustworthy even when continuing to be faithful was very difficult.

In verses 5-9 we find that when his peers could not find any flaw in his character or job performance, they devised a devious plan to trap him. They got the king to agree to sign an edict that for the next thirty days everyone had to pray to the king. For whatever reason, Darius agreed to the edict.

So what happened? Here we are told that they found Daniel praying, not to the king, but to his God—just as they expected, I’m sure. They went to the king and got him to agree that he could not have his law repealed. Then they told him about Daniel. Unable to save Daniel, however, the king finally ordered that he be thrown into the lions’ den.

Daniel remained faithful to the very end—in the face of the most unfavorable circumstances. The godliest man in the kingdom of Persia was now thrown into the lions’ den.

There is a very important lesson here: As you seek to be a faithful man or woman, you will seldom get what you deserve from people. That applies both to criticism and to honor.

When you are genuinely deserving of honor, you will seldom get it. And when you are truly deserving of criticism, you will seldom get it either. You will often get promoted when you don't deserve it, and you will get demoted when it isn't fair. You will seldom get from people what you deserve. So don't expect it.

When the recognition you deserve doesn't come, when the criticism you don't deserve cuts deeply into your soul, when the opposition, slander and gossip against you mounts, that is often the greatest test of your commitment to steadfast faithfulness.

How did Daniel maintain steadfast faithfulness? He maintained steadfast faithfulness because he had another rare and remarkable virtue, which is probably the most important of all. And that is what we'll call authentic spirituality.

III. Authentic Spirituality (6:10)

The third rare and remarkable virtue is authentic spirituality.

Let's go back to verse 10 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.

Don't miss this last phrase at the end of verse 10: **“just as he had done before.”** Daniel was not the kind of person that turned to prayer only in a time of panic. Instead he prayed consistently, three times a day, to God.

He wasn't flaunting his prayer life by having the windows open. Instead he probably had them open as an aid to prayer.

John Calvin believed that this open window was simply serving Daniel as an important aid to more effective prayer. Calvin applied this by saying, “Let us learn, therefore, when we feel ourselves to be too sluggish and cold in prayer, to collect all the aids

which can arouse our feelings and (help us to be more effective in our praying).”

How is your time in prayer? What does it take to get you on your knees? A tragedy? A real crisis? Daniel had been praying as a habit of life.

Please don't tell me that you are too busy! Daniel was one of the top government officials of his entire nation. Somehow the priority of prayer was so important that he always made it a point to carve out the necessary time from his daily schedule to come before God in prayer—pouring out all his fears and worries and praise to God.

If the truth were known prayer is really not the priority it should be in most of our lives. And that includes mine. We're all just so busy.

I once read about a quotation that hangs on a man's office wall in Southern California. It reads, “When you are faced with a busy day, save precious time by skipping your devotions. Signed, Satan.”

I remember a man in the first church I served as a pastor. He badly wanted to be an elder in the church. Yet, he did not seem to have much discipline in his devotional life. He did not seem to have time for prayer or Bible reading. One evening I visited him in his home, and I discovered that every single day as soon as he got home from work he turned on the TV. He spent about 5 or 6 hours watching TV every single evening from the time he got home until he went to bed. It is no wonder he had no time for any spiritual priorities in his life.

The great 16th century Reformer Martin Luther started each day with two to three hours in prayer. And he used to say that when his life got busier he needed to spend *more* time and not *less* time in prayer with God!

How are you doing in your devotional life? Are your spiritual priorities where they ought to be?

Conclusion

God calls all of us to a life of integrity. Ted W. Engstrom, in his book *Integrity*, has this anonymous quotation in his book:

When wealth is lost, nothing is lost;
When health is lost, something is lost;
When character is lost, all is lost.

Daniel was committed to a life of integrity. He lost all that he had in terms of personal wealth and freedom, but he never lost his character or his integrity. His walk matched his talk.

John Bunyan, the great Puritan preacher, said this: “You have one tongue in your head and two tongues in your shoes, and no matter what the tongue in your head is saying, the tongues in your shoes tell what you are doing and where you are going, and the awful truth is that the tongues in your shoes have the last word.”

Never forget that the temptation for you to compromise is just a small part of a much larger strategy of Satan against you. This was also true of Jesus. Satan continually assaulted Jesus during his earthly ministry. But the Bible tells us that Jesus ultimately defeated Satan through his death on the cross.

The good news is that you and I can now share in that victory over the evil one if we will only draw near to that same cross in times of solitude and prayer. For it's only at the foot of that cross that God has promised you not only his forgiveness but also his power for being the person God has called you to be. Let's do just that now in prayer. . . .

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
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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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

Some of you here today feel like you are being crushed under the weight of all your responsibilities and pressures. And instead of allowing those pressures to draw you closer to God, you have allowed them to draw you away from him.

You can't even remember the last time you had a meaningful encounter with God on your knees apart from some crisis. No wonder we see such little personal integrity, steadfast faithfulness, and authentic spirituality in our lives.

Some of you have still never received Christ as your personal Savior. If you were to die today, you don't know whether or not you would go to heaven. Let me encourage you to turn from your sin right now and trust in Christ to save you. Say in your heart, "Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I need your forgiveness and power in my life. As best I know, I now turn from my sin and trust in your shed blood on the cross to forgive me and cleanse me. Give me a new start with you today."

Our Father, we all thank and praise you for the challenge that you have given to all of us today. We ask for your grace and strength that we all might resolve to meet with you alone more regularly. We realize that the battle before us is long and hard. Help us with our priorities so that we all might find in you, not only forgiveness for our sin but the power to be like Daniel as we stand strong for Jesus Christ.

All of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

God calls us all to a life of integrity. Make a commitment today to a life of integrity, and as you do so, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.