

Obedience vs. Disobedience

A Message Series on the Book of Daniel

1st Sunday of Lent

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North East United Methodist Church

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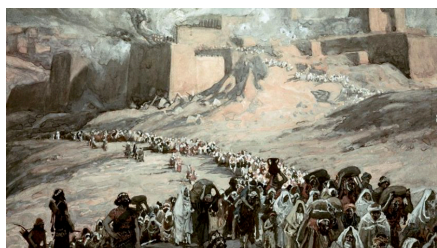
Every conscientious parent recognizes how difficult it is to exercise his God-given authority over his children. The delicate balance of being tough yet tender is not easy to maintain. Many parents intensify a rebellious spirit by being dictatorial and harsh. Others yield when their authority is tested. When a strong-willed child resists...the pressure to give in for the sake of peace and harmony can become overpowering. I am reminded of the mother who wanted to have the last word but couldn't handle the hassle that resulted whenever she said no to her young son. After an especially trying day, she finally flung up her hands and shouted, "*All right, Billy, do whatever you want! Now let me see you disobey THAT!*"

God's Word tells us, in Deuteronomy 5:32, *You must obey all the commands of the Lord your God, following his instructions in every detail. Stay on the path that the Lord your God has commanded you to follow.*

James 1:22, *And remember, [God's Word] is a message to obey, not just to listen to.*

We are called to obedience...and we find in Daniel a powerful example and a challenge to be obedient to God in the face of any obstacle.

Daniel is a story that takes place during the Babylonian exile.



Israel had turned away from God...their worship had become shallow, they had turned to idols, sin was rampant, and God was no longer obeyed. God had spoken through the prophet to Israel...

Jeremiah 2:19, *"Your own wickedness will punish you. You will see what an evil, bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord your God, having no fear of him. I, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, have spoken."*

God then watched as the final straw fell...Jehoiakim, King of Judah, took the scroll on which the words of God were transcribed by Jeremiah, words that spoke of the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army, and cut the scroll in two, throwing it in the fire.



This and many other acts of disobedience resulted in God allowing the Babylonian army, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to overtake Jerusalem around 605 BC.



King Nebuchadnezzar made Judah his vassal state and to demonstrate his dominance, took many of Jerusalem's wisest men to Babylon as captives.

Daniel 1:3-4 tells us, *"Then the king instructed...to bring some of the...young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had the ability to serve in the king's palace..."* Daniel was among this group.

For today's message, we are going to jump ahead sixty-six years to the rule of Nabonidus. Nabonidus spent many of his years away from Babylon attempting to reopen trade routes taken over by the Persians. While he was away, Belshazzar sat on the throne.

And this is where today's story begins.

Daniel 5: 1-4 (NIV) – *"King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone."*



God shows us through Belshazzar's Feast what disobedience looks like...Belshazzar would have known the history of Babylon, especially the most recent history. He would have known that Nebuchadnezzar was driven mad for a time by the God of Israel. He would have heard the stories of how the God of Israel was the only one able to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and visions. These are stories we will explore in the upcoming weeks.

Belshazzar would have known, though the Babylonians did not believe Israel's God was the only God, Belshazzar would have heard of Israel's God's power and wisdom. Yet, Belshazzar now takes the sacred vessels, taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and uses them for his party; this is a rebellious challenge to God's authority.

Not only is Belshazzar challenging God's authority, but the sacred vessels are a symbol of the appetite for power Belshazzar has...the hunger to be conqueror and to step on those less powerful. There is injustice here...injustice, the abuse of power, and oppression...using the sacred vessels in the midst of the sins of gluttony and drunkenness...mocks the defeated Israelites, puts them down...humiliates them.

Daniel 5: 5-9 (NIV) – “Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking. The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.”



God has had enough of Belshazzar's disobedience and suddenly a hand appears, words are written on the wall, and fear arises in Belshazzar. Three words are written in Aramaic: Mene, Tekel, and Parsin.

Belshazzar calls on all his astrologers, soothsayers, wise men to interpret this writing for him. They cannot and King Belshazzar is suddenly very afraid.

We then read that the queen, who was probably Nabonidus' wife...sends for Daniel.

Notice how Daniel addresses Belshazzar...Remembering that Daniel is a captive and could be put to death for disobeying the king or his representative...note Daniel's obedience to God in his boldness to speak the truth.

Daniel 5: 13-21 (NIV) - *So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.*

Daniel 5: 22-24 (NIV) - ***"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.***



Often kings would kill the bearer of bad news. But Daniel was not afraid to tell the truth to the king even though it was not what he wanted to hear. Daniel obeyed God and did what was right...such obedience had gotten his friends thrown in a fiery furnace and would later get him thrown into the Lion's Den.

Daniel goes ahead and then interprets the writing on the wall.

Daniel 5: 25-28 (NIV) - ***“This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. “Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Parsin: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”***

Daniel's words are found to be true that very night...historians date it October 12, 539 BC, King Darius the Mede and his soldiers entered Babylon and killed Belshazzar.



Belshazzar's disobedience of God led to his own demise. As someone once wrote, *“You can't really 'break' the law of God. The only thing you really 'break' when you disobey God's law is yourself. If a man or woman does not repent of his or her sins they will destroy their own life, but the word of God will still stand.”* Or as someone else once said, *“The cost of obedience is nil compared to the cost of disobedience.”*

Perhaps this is the battle...the Babylonian enemy that you and I face within...Disobedience vs. Obedience? Belshazzar or Daniel? Which one is winning?

Lent is a time of exploring very deeply who we are and how we are living out our faith.

- Are we the disciple of Christ that God is calling us to be?
- Are we living lives of obedience to God and His Word?

- Are we disobeying God, telling Him “no” when it comes to how God wants us to live, how God wants us to walk through this world in route to the next?

Lent is the time to be honest and when we find areas of our lives where we are in disobedience to God, to repent, seek forgiveness...



...to ask God for help and strength to overcome our tendency to ignore God and “go our own way.”

Are we like Belshazzar?

- Are we, in our quest for control and power, stepping over others, humiliating them, making them feel unwanted and unimportant? Does our personal ambition run contrary to God’s plan for your life?
- Are we giving in to our appetites to the point of over-indulgence? Does gluttony, drunkenness, lust, or greed have any power over us?
- Are we in direct disobedience to God...refusing to trust God, to give a portion of our income, gossiping about others, unwilling to forgive someone who has hurt us, or refusing to serve in an area we know God has asked us to get involved in?

Or Are we like Daniel?

- Are we willing to stand up and speak the truth boldly to those around us...letting them know about the God who loves them?
- Are we willing to stand against the culture...fighting for what is right and just...standing up for what we know God expects of us and supporting all people, loving them and helping them to understand they are important and valuable? Are we willing to forgive others and seek forgiveness when we have done wrong?
- Are we in obedience to God...following His guidelines, His rules...reading His Word and trying to live it out...seeking forgiveness when we “fall” and striving to be faithful disciples? Do we refuse to rationalize in order to justify behaviors that the world seems to accept, but God’s Word is clearly against?

As we begin our study on Daniel...we begin with the question of obedience...Where are you? **Belshazzar or Daniel?** Most likely, like myself, you are a bit of both. Lent is the season that we take the time to begin to look at those areas of our lives where we are being disobedient to God...it is a time to repent and seek forgiveness for those actions and motives contrary to Him...it is a time to begin and to take on new behaviors that honor Him and lead to blessing in our lives.

Jesus said, John 14:15 (Voice) – “*If you love Me, obey the commandments I have given you.*”

This first Sunday of Lent as you look deeply into your life, into your heart, who do you see? Do you see Belshazzar or Daniel? A little of both?

But even more importantly...as you move forward into the future...in your walk with God...

Whose footsteps are you going to follow...footsteps of disobedience or obedience...

Who will you strive to emulate...Belshazzar or Daniel?