

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute"

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Living for God in a Pagan World

Daniel 1:1-9 Exodus 23:2

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 33rd email sermon in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message develops a text in Daniel 1 and teaches us how to be aware of Satan's strategy as we seek to live Godly lives in the midst of a pagan culture. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it!

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

Living for God in a Pagan World

Daniel 1:1-9 Exodus 23:2

Dan 1:1-8

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility--

4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine (NIV)

"DO NOT FOLLOW THE CROWD INTO DOING EVIL." Exodus 23:2

BY AGE 20, 81% OF TODAY'S UNMARRIED MALES HAVE ENGAGED IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE ... HAVE COMMITTED FORNICATION, A SIN AGAINST GOD AND AGAINST ONE'S ONE BODY.

BY AGE 20, 67% OF TODAY'S SINGLE WOMEN HAVE ENGAGED IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE .. HAVE COMMITTED FORNICATION. IT IS NOT AN EASY THING TO REMAIN PURE AND UNDEFILED IN THE MIDST OF A SOCIETY THAT IS BEING OVERWHELMED BY IMPURITY.

IN A RECENT YEAR, 1.1. MILLION TEENAGE GIRLS BECAME PREGNANT OUT OF WEDLOCK. 400,000 OF THESE INFANTS WERE KILLED BEFORE THEY WERE BORN. IT IS NOT AN EASY THING TO AVOID IMMORALITY WHEN THE SOCIETY SURROUNDING US IS DELUGED WITH SUCH LACK OF BIBLE-BASED VALUES.

31% OF AMERICA'S FIFTH GRADERS HAVE TRIED WINE COOLERS. 40% OF THESE SAME CHILDREN HAVE FELT THE PRESSURE TO DO SO. IT IS NOT A NATURAL THING TO ABSTAIN FROM DRUGS AND ALCOHOL WHEN THE WHOLE NATION IS MORE CONCERNED WITH SAYING "WHEN" THAN SAYING "NO."

74% OF ALL AMERICANS LEARNED OF SEX SOMEWHERE BESIDES THE INSTRUCTION OF A PARENT. WHEN YOU LEARN VALUES IN THIS AREA FROM THE MEDIA, PORNOGRAPHY, AND HOLLYWOOD, IT IS INDEED TOUGH TO FOLLOW BIBLICAL STANDARDS AND MORALS.

IN OUR LAND, 74% OF THE PEOPLE THINK THAT TAKING THE LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS IS SOMETIMES JUSTIFIED. IT IS NOT AN EASY THING TO BE PROPERLY SUBMITTED TO GODLY ORDAINED AUTHORITIES WHEN THE SOCIETY AROUND YOU IS STEEPED IN INDIVIDUALISM AND INDEPENDENCE.

"DO NOT FOLLOW THE CROWD INTO DOING EVIL." Exodus 23:2

"DANIEL RESOLVED TO NOT DEFILE HIMSELF WITH THE ROYAL DIET." Daniel 1:8

It is a challenge to live righteously in the midst of a pagan society. Daniel knew this very well... and Daniel did very well. A key to his victory lies in his understanding of the enemy's strategy. Let's look at Dan 1.

Background: UNITED KINGDOM DIVIDED REMNANT DANIEL TAKEN TO BABYLON AS A PART OF THE "CREAM OF THE CROP."

I. SATAN IS AFTER GOD'S BEST! 3-4a 6-7

Note the attributes of these young men: "...young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace."

This was a strategy of the Babylonians II Kgs 24:13-16

II Kings 24:13-16

13 As the LORD had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the LORD and from the royal palace, and took away all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the LORD.

14 He carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans-- a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

15 Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land.

16 The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans. (NIV)

While we tend to be over confident concerning the best of our young people, SATAN IS MAKING SPECIAL EFFORT TO TEACH THEM THE WAYS OF HIS KINGDOM TO SNATCH THEM FROM US!!

ITEM: It was reported factually just a few years ago that every young man originally aligned with a particular evangelistic ministry had suffered the disintegration of his family. Each had been deserted by his wife and each marriage had ended in divorce.

ITEM: The youthful minister of a large church (running over a 1000 per Sunday) resigned in the midst of a marital crisis brought on by his own infidelity and sexual sin. Thankfully the church is now doing well.

Satan is after God's best! Not that he won't gobble up the young Christian struggling with his faith.. not that he is disinterested in the young person who has never been introduced to Christ and His church... BUT SATAN IS TARGETING OUR MOST PRECIOUS EARTHLY RESOURCE ... OUR YOUNG PEOPLE!

Satan seeks our best young people in two ways: 1) Lead them into evil; 2) Lead them into "good" not "the best." The second is more subtle. A would-be missionary goes into scientific research; a would-be preacher decides to pursue a career in politics. Evil?? But is it the BEST?

Phil 1:9-11

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God. (NIV)

Look around...see some great young Christians .. like those who are so good to be here for youth

group, VBS, and various assemblies. THEY ARE STRATEGIC MILITARY TARGETS OF OUR ENEMY IN THIS WAR IN WHICH WE'RE ENGAGED. Eph 6:10ff

MORE SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE? Job 1:6-11

Job 1:6-11

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.

7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied.

10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (NIV)

II. SATAN IS OUT TO CHANGE GOD'S BEST 4B-5

He is looking for particular avenues of modification that will transfer these individuals from the army of the Lord to the ruts and the ways of paganism.

NOTE THE AREAS IN THE TEXT - Three T's: A. Talk --language B. Thinking -- literature C. Tastes -- diet

The Babylonians knew if they could change the talking, the thinking, and the tastes of these Jewish boys, they would have "converted" them to their culture completely.

This is the reason for the warning in Rom 12:1-2

Rom 12:1-2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

God is at work thru the Word -- TRANSFORMING

Satan is at work thru the world -- CONFORMING

A. TALK v 4

Language points us to priorities and shifts our attention to things earthly.

Do we speak the World's language? Colloquialisms are one thing... but disrespectful speech, profanity, and language that exalts temporal, earthly values above spiritual values IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE CHRISTIAN!

Note these scriptures:

Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (NIV)

Eph 5:3-4 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (NIV)

1 Pet 3:10

10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. (NIV)

IF YOU START SOUNDING TOO MUCH LIKE THE WORLD, HAVING TROUBLE COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS.. BEWARE!!

B. THINKING v 4

Daniel and friends were led to read the literature of the pagan culture.

Satan says: READ THE WORLD'S BOOKS, THINK THE WORLD'S THOUGHTS!!

GOD SAYS: READ MY WORD, THINK MY THOUGHTS!!

How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to THY word. Psa. 119:9

DANIEL WEBSTER Quote:

"There is no solid basis for civilization but in the Word of God. If we abide by the principles taught in our Bible, our country will go on prospering; but if we and our posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity. If religious books are not circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of corrupt and licentious literature will. If the power of the Gospel is not felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness will reign without mitigation or end!"

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. (NIV)

Caution concerning reading too much of the world's publications, magazines, books, etc. WITH WHAT WE FILL OUR MINDS, WITH THE SAME WILL OUR THINKING BE MOST INFLUENCED.

C. TASTING v 5

The Babylonians wanted to change the tastes of the Hebrews Satan wants to create cravings for things that draw us into his culture! His tastes are sensual, magnetic, alluring, and usually VERY ADDICTING.

These tastes are like the Babylonian cuisine in that they were both CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL (v. 8) and THE CONSUMER (15). In fact, that is why the will of God is for us to avoid such!

ALCOHOL REPRESENTS AN APPETITE THAT SATAN CULTIVATES STRATEGICALLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ERODING SELF DISCIPLINE, PURITY, AND GODLINESS. Drinking regularly of the LIVING WATER is essential:

"The man would never have gone back to his bottle if he had had plenty of nourishing food," said a physician, concerning a recovering alcoholic who had lately returned to drinking. "As long as he was eating and drinking of that which nourished his body, the old appetite did not assert itself." This thought reminds us of the words of Jesus regarding the living water, "He that drinketh shall never thirst" (John 4:14). It is he that has ceased to drink at this fountain who is in danger. The Christian who is continually drinking in supplies of grace from the Word and from the place of prayer will not thirst after the world. Beware of neglecting the living water. It is the devil's opportunity for suggesting that the wine of the world is pleasant to the taste.

Remember the 5th graders who had tried wine coolers? How about the rush to non-alcoholic or "low-alcohol" beers...do they not train young and innocent children to like the taste of the stuff? Ninety percent of America's inmates were users of alcohol or drugs!

Here is the big picture... SATAN IS AFTER GOD'S BEST..OF ALL AGES .. AND WE MUST RESIST THE STRATEGY HE IS USING.

Don't learn the talk... the thinking ... the tastes of the WORLD!

I John 2:15-17

I Jn 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.

17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (NIV)

Daniel exhibits that attitude in Daniel 1:8 -- "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine

If a cube of lead is placed on a cube of gold, the two metals slowly but inevitably begin to penetrate each other. In the same manner we tend to imbibe the spirit, to share the opinions, to partake of the qualities of our intimate associates. Though we may believe that our gold will enrich their lead, the opposite is far more likely to prove true--their lead will debase our gold. That is why the Psalmist said, "Depart from me, ye evil doers, that I may keep the commandments of my God" (Ps. 119:115).

Daniel purposed in his heart to keep his distance from Satan's snares. Are you resolved to STOP SAMPLING THE THOUGHTS AND TALK AND TASTES OF THE WORLD AND CULTURE AROUND YOU?

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"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B**