

## **DARE TO BE A DANIEL**

We all know that the object of this meeting for the breaking of bread is edification, or building up in those convictions that constitute faith, and that lead to that course of action that is acceptable to God. There is no more powerful method of reaching this result than by reading the apostolic narratives with the constant recollection that they are true. We may read them sometimes without this recollection—we may read them in a mechanical, only half-conscious mood; as of a thing we have been long familiar with, and take little living interest in. This mode of reading will do us no good. I will not say it is better not to read at all than to read in this way; but it is better read in a better way. It is better to say to ourselves as we read: “Now, this that I read is true. It is no legend, or tradition, or cunningly-devised fable. Christ did really perform all these miracles of healing. Christ did really rise from the dead after he was crucified. The apostles did really speak with tongues, and deliver a testimony of personal witness to Christ’s resurrection, with all the attendant circumstances recorded; and therefore God now lives and reigns, and there will certainly in due time come all those good and glorious things He has promised by the prophets and apostles.”

There is not lacking a single reason for our thus building ourselves up in our most holy faith. Pure reason warrants, justifies, yea, compels it. Many reasons converge powerfully on this wholesome result, with these reasons you are all more or less familiar. There is no necessity for going into them on such an occasion as this. It is sufficient to realise that the narrative of the sayings and doings of Christ, and of the apostles who came after him and powerfully planted his name in the earth, has been in the hands of believers from that day to this: in which alone we have a guarantee that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote these accounts, for none other than the genuine productions of these men could have obtained currency among their friends, and in the generation contemporary with them. Being their accounts, it is the testimony of men who were eye-witnesses of the events which they narrate; and of men who are proved true by the nature of the enterprise (to turn men from their sins) and by the effects they themselves suffered in its prosecution (viz., the loss of all things, and in many cases of life itself). The nature of the writing, when we study it, comes in as a powerful supplement to the demonstration that it is true and noble, and finally, there is the evidence of that underlying inspiration which of itself gives us all the pledge we need in trusting our lives to that self-denying submission which the gospel demands.

The truth of the apostolic testimony brings with it the truth of Moses and the prophets, which Jesus and the apostles so emphatically endorsed. In a sense, Moses and the prophets do not require endorsement; for they are their own witnesses when we are able to estimate their character in comparison with the productions of mere human intelligence.

All we have to do, therefore, is simply to surrender to the belief of what we read. This will produce faith and all the other excellent fruits of the spirit—love, joy and peace in the mind, and righteousness in the life in preparation for the kingdom.

One thing which the apostles declare is that the things written were “*written for our learning*.” It was of the Old Testament this was said; and of course, if true of the Old, it is true of the New. This being the case, let us spend a little time in getting out of the portions that have been read the “*learning*” they were intended to afford.

It might not seem at first sight that we could get much out of the first reading concerning the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. It is a story of murder and wickedness: what good can it do us? He, Jehoram, came to the throne when Jehoshaphat died. Jehoshaphat had many sons, and had made a good settlement for them all. He left a handsome fortune to each, and had distributed them among various cities of the realm, so that each was a prince in his own district. To Jehoram he had given the headship over all as king. This wise arrangement ought to have worked well for all, but the very first thing that Jehoram did was to kill all his brothers, and to put also to death their friends and sympathisers—filling the land with mourning and woe. Not only so, but he established idolatry throughout the land, and led the nation away from the right ways of God.

What is the explanation of this extraordinary sequel to a reign so excellent as Jehoshaphat's? Why did the son of a good king turn out such a monster? Is it not true that if you "*train up a child in the way in which he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it?*" Yes it is true. Wherein was Jehoshaphat lacking then? Here is the point, and here is where we shall find our "*learning.*" Jehoshaphat did not take a firm attitude with those who were in a wrong position. He was friendly with the ten tribes who, though Israelites, had departed from the right way. He granted co-operation with Ahab, which he ought to have declined. He allowed his son, Jehoram, to marry a daughter of Ahab, which he ought to have forbidden. A prophet of God reproved him on the subject:

*"Shouldst thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?"* (2 Chron. 19:2).

Jehoshaphat was a good man, but lacking in the firmness towards evil-doers. He could not refuse their friendly advances. He consented to matrimonial alliance with the family of Ahab. His son "*had the daughter of Ahab to wife.*" The consequence was "*Jehoram walked in the way of the (wicked) kings of Israel, to whom his wife belonged, and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord.*" Here is a bit of "*learning*" through which we get from this as from many other parts of scripture: it is our duty to decline religious co-operation with those who are not in full submission to the way of the Lord. Above all, we ought not in marriage to be "*unequally yoked with the unbeliever.*" Any other line of conduct is not only displeasing to the Lord, but most hurtful to those who pursue it. From the days of the flood down to the corruptions of the captivity in the times of Ezra, the scriptural narrative affords many illustrations of the evil that comes from "*the sons of God*" marrying "*the daughters of men.*" It is our duty to marry "*only in the Lord,*" that in the fusion of two lives, equally dedicated to wisdom, there may be mutual help in the way of holiness, and family life based on the fear of the Lord and submission to His Word.

The second portion "*written for our learning*" not only shows the power of God to interfere on behalf of His faithful servants, in the shutting of the mouths of the lions to whom Daniel had been given over, but it brings home two other much-needed lessons—perhaps not so obvious. Daniel, who had been promoted to high political rank in Babylon, was found a useful servant of the state when Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian took possession of the city—so useful that he was put in the first rank over the heads of a multitude of native princes. The empire was divided, by the sagacity of Cyrus, into 127 provinces, over each of which was placed a governor, and over all these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first. It was according to the ordinary bent of human nature for these governors to be envious of a few so high in favour. The next natural thing was for them to plot his downfall. To bring this about, they must prove some fault against him. They looked into his affairs with this intent.

*"They sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom, but **they could find none occasion nor fault**, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."*

Here is a strong feature: Daniel was "*a man greatly beloved*" of God—not without a reason, and here is part of it, that he was an accurate, faithful man of business. His enemies could find no fault with him on this head. Ought they to be able to find fault with us? I do not speak of slander and misrepresentation, of which any man may be the subject, and of which all men who pursue a conspicuous course are sure to be the subject. I speak of true accusation. It ought not to be possible for the adversary to speak reproachfully with truth against the servants of God. They ought not to be able to truly say that they are untrustworthy—that they are slack in the performance of promises and in payment of dues—that they are insensible to honour in their transactions. They ought to be like Daniel: "*of good report among those who are without*"—known for integrity, kindness, promptitude, accuracy, honour. This is a piece of learning to which the apostolic epistles lend constant and especial emphasis. Popular "gospel" preaching—"only believe"—"down with your deadly doing"—has demoralised the public mind, so that the more "pious" people are, the more do business men shun them as a rule, because as a rule they find them capable of taking a mean advantage in the ratio of their piety. But the robust and glorious gospel of the first century produces very different results. It teaches men that they will "*reap as they sow*"; that they will be "*rewarded according to their*

works”—and that if they are given to unrighteous ways, *“they shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.”* The truth is able to turn men into Daniels if they will but give in to it.

Daniel’s enemies were able to get him into difficulty *“concerning the law of his God.”* They contrived a state law that would make him a rebel if he remained faithful to his usual modes and habits of worship. They knew he was a praying man. They extorted from the king a law that no prayer should be permissible for a month except to the king, and that any one breaking the law should be thrown to the wild beasts. How did Daniel meet the law? We know how he would have met it had he been like many modern trimmers and sophists. He would have said: “I do not see that I am called upon to run into danger. I am not called upon to tempt God by giving myself into the hands of these men. I can pray to God under the blankets as well as on my knees. God knows the heart and will accept the pure offering of the lips whatever the posture of the body may be. If I pray openly I will become food to the lions and will pray no more, whereas if I exercise prudence and veil off my devotions from these wicked men, I will live to pray to God many times. God will be glorified; I will be saved, and these plotting sinners will be foiled.” Not thus did Daniel deceive himself and try to deceive God.

*“When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime. Then those men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”*

The “*learning*” afforded by this incident is unmistakable—that we ought not to allow the fear of consequences to pare off the edges of our service to God. Let our service be hearty and thorough and bold, with humility. The truth exposes us to many disadvantages. We do not belong to the State church nor to other bodies in many parts equally respectable. We cannot conform to the public law on many points. In our day, the penalty is no longer exposure to wild beasts or deprivation of liberty; but the penalty is often quite distressing, nevertheless, in a community where individual prosperity depends upon popularity with neighbours. They may find no fault with our business ways, but they cannot pardon our exclusiveness—our separation—our faith. What are we to do? The temptation is to hide the light of God under a bushel—to go to church or chapel with the sophistical self-deception that we can worship God equally well in pew, in the midst of a large congregation, as in a small meeting at the breaking of bread in an upper room; that we need not believe what the priest or parson says, or take part in their exercises, though we are bodily present; that we can communicate with God direct for ourselves as much as if we were in the solitude of a desert; that we are not called upon to make ourselves a pest by finding fault with what the people around us say and think and do--&c., &c., &c. This would not be “daring to be a Daniel” or confessing Christ before men. It would be trimming for the sake of worldly advantage. The Daniel part is to openly profess and do what the service of God calls for at our hands—with all meekness and respectfulness certainly, but with all decisiveness of resolution, *“as to the Lord, and not unto men.”* We can well afford to take this course, even if it lead to a death as certain as that which seemed to be waiting for Daniel. Our present life is a transient affair. He that saveth it by pusillanimity toward God will certainly lose it, as Christ has said; but he that loseth it by faithfulness *“unto death”* will shortly (and to him so very shortly) be the subject of a divine interference more complete and lasting in its effects than that which took place in the case of Daniel. Not only from lion’s terrible jaws shall we be delivered for a moment, but from the everlasting dominion of the ignominious and obliterating grave. The cheering and powerful words will be addressed to us:

*“Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust.”*

Joyfully, in calm strength shall we respond:

*“O grave, where is thy victory?”*

How pale and hideous and mean will then appear the craven and uncertain course of those who fear man too much to serve God in the teeth of danger. How sensible and wise and noble and

radiant, on the contrary, will seem to all men the course of those (looked back upon) who can truly say with Paul:

*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."*

Brethren, now is our opportunity of being on Daniel's side in a bold and thorough service of God, amidst many foes and dangers. The opportunity courageously embraced will land us by his side, by the grace of God, in the day when *"Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets will be seen radiant in the Kingdom of God."*

Our third position gives us a little *"learning"* in another but not less important direction. Ananias and Sapphira, at a time when the peculiar situation of the truth led believers to dispose of their property and place the proceeds at the disposal of the apostles, *"sold a possession and kept back part of the price."* In this Peter accused them of having committed a great crime. The crime did not consist in withholding part, but in professing to give the whole. They were under no obligation to part with the property or to hand over the price. As Peter said,

*"While it remained was it not thine own; and **after it was sold**, was it (the price) not in thine own power?"*

But in the general enthusiasm of generosity that prevailed, Ananias and Sapphira did not wish to appear to be behind others, nor did they want to clean out every penny, so they took the middle and dangerous course of misrepresentation—**alias** lying. The heinousness of the offence was increased by the fact that it was an attempt to deceive God.

*"Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."*

Ananias and Sapphira were both struck dead on the spot, one after the other, which naturally made a deep impression on the believing community, at the time very numerous in Jerusalem.

*"Great fear came upon all the ecclesia, and upon as many as heard these things."*

If it be said there can be no *"learning"* for us in circumstances so out of the run of our experience, the answer has to be made that the lesson is not limited to the particular circumstances nor to any circumstances. It is a lesson affecting all characters and all time. It may be expressed in the simple words: "Never try to appear to be more than you are. Be simple and modest and true." Ananias and Sapphira would have come out all right if they had said, "We cannot afford to give more than half." The mistake was to attempt to gain the credit that did not belong to them. This mistake may be made, and is made, in many, many matters besides giving; and it is here where what is written is fruitful for *"our learning,"* in this sad case. Let us avoid with scorn all attempts to seem wiser than we are, to know more than we know, to be better than we are, to be more generous, or to be of more consequence than we are. *"He that giveth, let him give with simplicity"* and truth, guarding in the main against letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

Thus from all parts of the scriptures, with mind attent and eyes and ears open, we are able to gather *"learning,"* and to become wise unto salvation. The result is one that is despised in the world, and that in the weakness and weariness of mortal life may sometimes seem of small value to ourselves. But at last it will be *"found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ."*

Taken from: - "Seasons of Comfort" Vol. 2

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