

#1 - Standing Up in a Smackdown World

8/24/2008 - Jim Johnson / Daniel 1:1-8

We seem to be living in a Smackdown world that wants to bring down moral and principled people. Much like “professional” wrestling, our culture is becoming increasingly fake, lewd, profane, lawless, violent and tilted against the good guys. Is it possible for a Christian person to still be standing when the bell rings and the winner is declared? The life of Daniel says yes. Daniel was a Jewish boy who lived in Jerusalem. He was a member of the Royal family of Judah and his story began about 600 years before the time of Christ. He lived in a changing world.

A. Daniel's _____ had been changed - 1-2

The Babylonian forces, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, besieged Jerusalem. The King surrendered. The Babylonians stripped the nation of its costly treasures. God chose not defend his people. In fact He used the Babylonians to discipline Judah for their years of disobedience and idolatry

Daniel became one of the treasures that was carried away. Babylon would conscript smart, young people who could be reeducated and then put to work for the good of the empire.

Picture Daniel leaving Jerusalem in chains, his family probably dead, his hometown in flames. He was walking away from his friends, family, and religious institutions and entered a huge cosmopolitan metropolis with strange language and customs. It was a traumatic change for a 16 year old boy.

B. Daniel's _____ and language had been changed. 3-6

The King of Babylon would need loyal servants who could manage the affairs of his subjugated people. People who knew the local culture and language but also knew and understood Babylonian culture and language.

The candidates needed to be without any physical defects, broadly intelligent, exceptional in their abilities and they needed to know how to get along with people and relate to others diplomatically. Daniel and his 3 friends qualified. They were to enter a training course of 3 years. If they were to serve the empire, then they had to become empire thinkers. They would need to learn to read and write the cuneiform language of Babylon and have their minds marinated in the same kind of literature that gave birth the Babylonian mind and values - the legends of the gods, and history of her kings.

Because they were servants of the state the King made sure that they would be fed with only the best of food – right from the King's table in fact. More change! Learn a new language and a new culture, and eat from a new diet.

C. Daniel's _____ had been changed. – 7

When children were named in Daniel's day, the devout in the faith, would include the name of their God in their child's name. For instance Daniel means – God is judge. Children were named this way in hopes that their very name would remind them of the good God they served.

But the boys had been enrolled in a thorough reeducation program. And part of it involved getting a brand new Babylonian name that included the name of a Babylonian god. Daniel was changed to Belshazzar which means “May Bel protect his life.” Each of them were renamed.

The Babylonians wanted to possess these young men, body and soul. They wanted to break them down piece by piece so that they might own them. They wanted them to forget Judaism and her God, and embrace Babylon and her gods instead. Their identity was changed.

Daniel and friends were transported to a world that was very different and very hostile to the one they knew before. This new world was determined to force their way of life and thinking upon them. Should a person ever resist? Should they ever say no to the culture? And if so – at what point?

D. Daniel refused to allow his _____ to be changed - 8

According to verse 5, the King made sure that young trainees were fed from same foods that graced his own royal table. However the Jews had strict dietary laws whereas Babylon did not. Beyond that – it was standard practice in Babylon to take their meat and wine and offer them as a sacrifice to their gods. Only after, could the meat and drink be consumed. Both of these issues put Daniel and friends in a tough spot. If they were to eat the various meats and drink the wine of the King, they would violate their dietary laws, or even worse, do homage to pagan idols.

Which is why “Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank...” Daniel wrestled with the issues but then decided that he would not do anything that would cause him to disobey or dishonor the Lord. He could flex with all the other changes – but he would not compromise on what was clearly right and wrong. Daniel knew the secret.

You’ll never stand in this smackdown world unless you first _____ to stand.

APPLICATION

Some changes are pretty good , some are not. In 2003 the Barna group did a survey and found that 4 out of 5 adults are concerned about the moral condition of this nation. In that same survey they found that there was a pronounced decline in the level of morality generation to generation. For instance co-habitation is almost twice as acceptable to 18 year olds as it is to older folks, The same is true of sexual fantasies, abortion, casual sex and porn. Profanity is 3 times the rate. Homosexuality almost 3 times the rate. What we see here is a world that is quickly degenerating in its values.

Look closely however and you will find Daniels among us - Individuals who have made up their minds to not eat the polluted food that this world is serving up - People who love the Lord and are committed to obey His Word.

It starts with a decision. Surely you will need more than will power to do this. You will need the strength and grace and power of God to succeed. BUT it begins with a decision. You’ll never stand in this smackdown world unless you first choose to stand. What do you choose?

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Use this section in your personal or family devotions to better apply the truth.

1. Can you identify with Daniel's circumstances? When did you feel like a fish out of water? How did you cope?
2. What part of our culture seems to wear hardest on you?
3. As the world tries to tear down our identity in Christ – what can you do to preserve it?