

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 2nd December 2018 – 11am

Daniel 6:1-14

“A long obedience in the same direction”

Introduction

Some of you might have heard of **John Allen Chau**, a young American student, just out of college, who decided to go to Erromango, on one of the Vanuatu islands, to reach a tribe of just a few dozen people, who have no known contact with the outside world, and who therefore have never heard the Gospel – ever!

This happened only a couple of weeks ago. He convinced some fishermen to get him to the island, about half way between Australia and Fiji. (Protected by India). He never got the opportunity to learn the language, to translate the Scriptures, or even to preach the Gospel using words, because he was shot through with arrows, by the natives, as soon as he arrived, and they buried him the next day.

This is what he wrote to his parents shortly before he died:

‘You guys might think I’m crazy in all this, but I think it’s worth it to declare Jesus to these people...I can’t wait to see them around the throne of God worshipping in their own language as Revelation 7:9-10 states.’ – (Signed: John Chau).

The last time something like this hit the headlines, it caused outrage around the world. It was 1956. Jim Elliot and four other missionary friends had been speared to death by the Auca Indian Tribe, they had gone to reach with the Gospel, in the Ecuador jungle. Jim was only 29. They had only begun to make contact with the tribe. Later, some of the missionary wives, inc Elisabeth Elliot, went back and lived in the tribe, and today about half of the tribe are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ!

What some people don’t know is that Jim Elliot had a brother called Bert Elliot. He and his wife Colleen were missionaries in the Peruvian Jungle for 62 years! He only died a few years ago in 2012, in Trujillo Peru, of an infection that refused to respond to antibiotics. He was 87. Jim Elliot, dying as a martyr at 29, is a hero in evangelical circles around the world. But most of us have never heard of Bert, his brother, who served faithfully for 62 long years on the mission-field!

Randy Alcorn (Christian author) met Bert & Colleen Elliot in 2006. He remembers Bert describing his brother as **“a great meteor, streaking through the sky.”** *“Bert didn’t go on to describe himself...”* Alcorn says, *“...but I will. Unlike his brother, Jim, the shooting star, Bert was a faint star that rose night after night, faithfully crossing the same path in the sky, to God’s glory.”*

Luis Palau, the famous South American evangelist, says that Bert & Colleen Elliot established 150 congregations in Peru - something of a record for one missionary couple. *“Bert didn’t want to talk about it,”* Palau recalls. *“But I said to him...”*

‘Nobody knows you, and your brother is a famous hero!’

Bert just said, *“I’d rather not be a hero.”*

Elisabeth Elliot when she wrote ‘Through Gates of Splendour’ after Jim’s death, records a conversation between Bert and Jim in their early years of missionary service in which Jim talked about being prepared for **‘a long obedience in the same direction.’** As it turned out, it was Bert - not Jim, who had to learn from experience what that meant. We are all called as disciples of Jesus Christ to *‘a long obedience in the same direction.’* That’s what we see in Daniel’s life in ch.6.

Daniel ch.5 recorded the downfall of the Babylonian Empire, and the take-over of the Medo-Persian Empire. It was a very important turning-point in history.

(Daniel 5:31) *‘That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.’*

So as we come into the best known chapter of the Book of Daniel - the story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den - we have to understand that a new ruler has just come to power, a new World Empire is now in charge, and Daniel has been around for a long time! He has outlived 4 or 5 kings as power passed from one to the next. He’s been in exile for nearly 70 years, so he’s probably in his mid 80s if he came to Babylon as a teenager, and yet there he is, still being faithful to the True and Living God, even though he’s been living for such a long time in a hostile world!

What were the secrets of Daniel’s **‘long obedience in the same direction’?**

Well I just want to draw three answers to that question straight from the text today:

1. ‘Because an excellent spirit was in him’ (v.3)

The last time we read of Daniel having *‘an excellent spirit’* it was in ch.5:12.

It’s what the Queen said about Daniel probably to her son Belshazzar.

Now we read it again in ch.6:3. A new king is in charge – Darius. A new Empire is in control – the Medes and Persians. The great Babylonian Empire has come and gone. But Daniel stays the same. He’s known for having *‘an excellent spirit’* in him.

But what could that mean in practice? (vs.1-3)

Well, let’s think of the structures of power that were being put in place by this new king Darius, now that he has come to power. He’s the supreme ruler of the whole Empire. Just think of all the nations, tribes, peoples and languages under his control from the Mediterranean right through to the Persian Gulf and all the places in between. He’s in control of the whole of what we would now know as the Middle East. This is too big a place and too vast an area for one man to rule over himself.

So, he decides to create three offices under him:

- He's going to have 3 Presidents. A bit like the European Union: Did you know the EU has 3 presidents? Donald Tusk (Council), Jean-Paul Juncker (Commission) & Antonio Tajani (President of the European Parliament).

Well, one of the 3 presidents of the Medo-Persian Empire was going to be Daniel.

- Under those 3 presidents there were going to be 120 Satraps. So 40 of these would report to each of the Presidents above them.
- And then Darius (the supreme ruler of the empire) decides that Daniel should be elevated again to create another position. He wants Daniel to be in charge of the other Presidents, who would be in charge of the 120 Satraps. So Daniel would answer directly to Darius, the Emperor.

So Daniel would be like the Prime Minister of all of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Why? Why would this new Emperor Darius want to exalt Daniel so quickly?

Ans. Because Daniel had 'an excellent spirit' within him.

He was a cut above the rest! There was just something about him!

I'm sure these pagan world emperors couldn't quite put their finger on it, but they knew there was something special about this man, in terms of his intelligence, in terms of his experience, in terms of not just his knowledge, but his wisdom too!

There was an excellent spirit about him. Anything he did, he did with a heart and a half. He put his whole heart into it. He didn't do anything in half measures.

He gave it his all. But notice:

(ch.1:17-21) – This excellent spirit has been growing in Daniel since his youth. It was God-given in many ways. But it was also nurtured too.

(ch.2:30, 47) – Again Daniel is quick to point out that his wisdom was God-given.

(ch.4:8-9, 18) – Nebuchadnezzar was even beginning to see it was God-given.

(ch.5:11-12) – This excellent spirit was remembered by the Queen years later.

(ch.6:3) – Now as the Medo-Persian Empire is taking over, it's recognised again!

*'Daniel's rise above his peers had more to do with
God's activity in his life
than any personal charisma that marked him...
He had the kind of wisdom that only comes from above.'*
(David Helm, p.104)

There is a place for hard work and determination, and for some kind of ambition to press ahead in life, and to succeed in your work, but we can't make it on our own!

Sometimes selfish ambition can take over, and give us a drive and a dog-eat-dog mentality that is anything but attractive in a follower of Jesus.

If we want to have this 'excellent spirit' that Daniel had, we need to realise it's God-given, not man-made!

So that's the first thing this morning, Daniel's first secret, which enabled him to have 'a long obedience in the same direction,' was **an excellent spirit**, which was given to him by God.

His second secret for being able to persevere and endure over the long haul, was simply...

2. 'Because he was faithful' – he was a civil servant with integrity (v.4)

I want you to notice in these verses that as soon as Darius, the new Emperor, recognised these God-given qualities in Daniel, his peers didn't like it.

In fact, it soon turned all those around him, against him. Look at v.4...

*'Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, **because he was faithful**, and no error or fault was found in him.'*

As I said earlier, Daniel has now served at least 4 kings under the Babylonian Empire from Nebuchadnezzar to Nabonidus, and then his son, Belshazzar, and now he's serving another man under a new Empire – Darius the Mede.

So he's been answerable to 5, maybe 6 kings in the period of 70 years. That's an average of about 14 years serving each one. Now, bearing in mind, that he began his civil service career by being carried off into exile against his will from Jerusalem to Babylon, where did this **spirit of faithfulness** come from?

It had to come from God too! He must have been conscious that God had him there for a reason. He must have realised that he was part of a bigger plan; that His God was in control, not the false gods of the Babylonians, and so he consciously set himself to serve his earthly boss, as if he was serving the Lord!

And isn't that what we are told to do in the N.T. epistles, when it comes to our everyday working world? (Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-4:2, 1 Peter 2:18-23). We are called to be faithful, as if we are serving the Lord, not men. That's the only way we can stay committed for 'a long obedience in the same direction' as we keep our eyes on the Lord and seek to serve him, not just those around us, or above us, in positions of responsibility.

But before we move on to look at the most important secret behind Daniel's ability to keep going over the long haul, I want you to notice vs.4 & 5 together.

*'The presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and **no error or fault was found in him.**' (v.4)*

*Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel **unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.**" (v.5)*

Isn't that some admission on the part of these peers, colleagues, rivals of Daniel?

They try to catch him out as far as his work for the early kingdom goes, as far as his work for Babylon (and now for the Medes and Persians) is concerned. But they can't find a thing wrong with his work; they can't find any ground for complaint against him. **'No error or fault was found in him.'**

Now, there are not too many of us who can say we've never made a mistake, especially when it comes to our every day work in the secular world.

I'm sure you've got an odd figure wrong somewhere along the line. I'm sure there are times when it comes up for 'Annual Review' or whatever, that the boss has to say a few things to you, by way of gentle encouragement to pick up your pace of work, to pay more attention to detail, to be more punctual in your time keeping, to watch your attitude towards those around you, to increase the sales figures, or whatever it is! There aren't too many of us who have a perfect record at work.

But these guys would have been digging deep, these guys would have been out to bring Daniel down, they would have been leaving no stone un-turned, trying to find something to point the finger of blame at Daniel. But they couldn't find anything!

Just think back to the collapse of Stormont nearly 3 years ago now!

Think of Jonathan Bell giving that interview to Stephen Nolan on TV one night. Do you remember how he got (was it his father, or father in law) to kneel in prayer with him in the TV studio before the interview started? Before he testified to what had been going on within the DUP and within the Department that was responsible for the RHI Boiler scheme? Now, I don't know who was right and who was wrong; I don't know who did what, and who didn't do what they were supposed to do, but even Arlene Foster had to give a public apology at her party conference a week ago, probably because she judged the time was right to do so, to turn some attention away from herself, and put more attention onto Theresa May and what was going on as far as Brexit was concerned on the wider UK stage. (All we know is that politics is a grubby world for a Christian to try to stay pure in!)

Nobody came out of the RHI scandal with their reputation intact. There were a lot of civil servants & politicians hauled over the coals for their part in that scandal.

So, the point I'm making is this, in the world of politics, if someone wants to bring you down, they will stop at nothing to get some evidence against you, or wrongdoing, or of not checking the figures, or whatever. But they'll not give up without trying to discredit you in some way, shape or form.

Maybe even in your work-place you've had to put up with a bit of that, from those who might be against you for some reason or another...

But the amazing thing about Daniel was, they couldn't find a thing against him! Not one thing! In fact they had to come to the conclusion that the only way they could get between him and Darius, was to concoct something to do with his God.

*"We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel **unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.**" (v.5)*

That's integrity! Isn't it? They'll not be able to find any ground for complaint against this Daniel, unless they could find something in connection with the law of his God!

Is that the only way that people can find some complaint against you? - Only if it has something to do with your walk with God? Your ethics, or your morality, that is based squarely on your understanding of the Word of God?

Daniel could prove faithful over the long haul, Daniel could commit to 'a *long obedience in the same direction*' because he had **an excellent spirit** within him, and because he had **a spirit of faithfulness** within him too. But most of all...

3. Because Daniel had always been a man of prayer (v.10)

This is where his rivals found the only way to drive a wedge between him and his boss, the king. They got him on the one thing that he and his boss would differ on: **His prayer life!**

Look at how they went about concocting this scheme in vs.6-9. They tricked the king into signing a decree, a document, a new law, that nobody was allowed to pray to, or worship, any God, except the king, for the next month!

They tricked the king into signing it, because they claimed twice that all of them had agreed to this - that this was coming as a unanimous decision from them all! But it wasn't, because Daniel hadn't been consulted! Daniel had been excluded! Now if the king had stopped to think about it for 5 minutes he would have wondered about only being made like a god for 30 days! Either he was a god, or he wasn't! Why was he only going to be treated like a god for 30 days?

But just like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar before him, here's the Achilles heel of kingship – **pride** goes before a fall. If his loyal subjects wanted to make him god for a month, then why would he stand in their way? So he quickly agreed to sign it!

Now the problem was, the laws of the Medes and the Persians couldn't be changed - they couldn't be revoked. Once the king had signed it, it was law. He couldn't go back on it.

So the question is, what would Daniel do, when he found out about it?

Well, we discover in v.10, what Daniel would do about it. Absolutely nothing! He just continued to go about his business, and his normal daily routine.

And what did that normal daily routine involve for Daniel? (v.10)

It involved going home at lunch-time, going upstairs to his room, where the windows opened to the West, towards his beloved birthplace of Jerusalem, and there he got down on his knees and he prayed to his God, the Living and True God, 3 times every day – morning, noon and night – praying and giving thanks before his God – just as he had always done: (v.10)

*'He got down on his knees 3 times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, **as he had done previously.**'*

Why would Daniel do that? Why would he keep on doing something in private that was now outlawed? Sure nobody would ever know whether he was doing it or not! Or would they? Well, he would know, and God would know, but more than that, his enemies would know, because they were quickly on his heels, to keep watch on him, to see whether he would abide by this new law, or whether he wouldn't.

And what do you know, these men came as a group, once again, they were all in it together, and they *'found Daniel making petition and plea before his God'* (v.11).

So from these verses we discover that Daniel's prayer-life consisted of 4 things:

Praying - Giving Thanks - Making Petition - Pleading to God.

And this he did *'3 times a day'* (v.10 & v.13). - **It had always been his custom!**

Now, if such a law was passed in our country today, how would it affect you? How would it affect me? - **No more praying to God for the next 30 days!** How would your life change tomorrow morning - Monday morning - as a result? Do you pray 3 times a day, every day? – Do I? Is that my normal practice, is that my custom, is that what I have always done?

Or would such a law being passed, not make one bit of difference to my everyday life, because apart from the prayers that I pray in church on Sunday, or at the Lord's Table, or in the prayer meeting on a Wednesday night, or when I'm visiting folk, is that the sum total of my prayer life?

Someone has said, **'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'** – Well, if your prayer-life was investigated, in order to find evidence for or against the case, would you be found guilty as charged, or would you be acquitted? - That's a searching thought isn't it?

Is your prayer-life, is my prayer-life up to date? Is it what it ought to be? Has it lapsed? Is it not what it should be? When's the last time you prayed in private, at home - once, never mind 3 times a day?

I have to be honest, I find it much easier to sit down and read the Bible, to study, to prepare sermons, than I do to spend quality time with God in prayer. And yet it is part of my role as your pastor, as an elder, to give my time *'to the Word of God and prayer'* for the flock of God that is under my care.

I wonder is that why modern pastorates tend to be so short? We're not in it for the long haul, we're not prepared for **'a long obedience in the same direction'** - because we're not giving ourselves to prayer, in the way that we should be?!

Conclusion

What is it that God has called you to do?

What is it that you're doing every day Monday to Friday?

Do you see yourself there for the long haul?

Could you stick at it for a life-time? For **'a long obedience in the same direction?'**

Would you be prepared to face the consequences, if the laws of our land changed, and we found ourselves on the wrong side of the law, as Christians?

What are the qualities we would need, that would make the difference?

Do we have an excellent spirit within us? Do we have the Holy Spirit within us?

Are we known to be faithful? - Not just to our earthly bosses, but to the Lord?

Are we known to be men and women who have a consistent prayer-life?

*Q. If you were arrested for being a Christian today,
Is there enough evidence to convict you?*

Daniel points us to Jesus: He had an **excellent** spirit within him. He was **faithful** to his heavenly Father. He often took time with his Father **to pray**. - Why not us?