

## DARE TO HAVE A SURRENDERED MIND

DANIEL 2:1-28

The movie *A River Runs Through It* tells the story of the Maclean family (no relation to our MacLean family!) who lived in Montana in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The father was a Presbyterian minister – stern but loving. He had two sons, firstborn Norman, who was the responsible one, and a younger son, named Paul, who turned out to be the rebel. Throughout the story, a beautiful mountain river that the Macleans live close to became a focal point of their family's life. It was walking along the banks of that river on Sunday afternoons that the father established a relationship with his young sons – teaching them about the world, about life and about the God who made it all. It was on the river where they learned to fly fish for trout. As teenagers, the boys took a death defying ride down the rapids of that river in a stolen boat. It was on the river that Paul made a name for himself as the finest fly fisherman in the area. When Norman came back from college searching for himself, it was to the river that he went to fish and to ponder his next steps in life. The Maclean family knew failure, success, laughter, fighting, disappointment, but always the river was there. The river became this defining force that ran its course through their family. I'd like to suggest that there is another kind of force that runs through the lives of God's people. That force is, in fact, a Person: God Himself.

Today we conclude a study of Daniel – one of the great characters in the Bible. Now, Daniel was a sinner like each of us, but he's one of the few Bible characters who didn't have some kind of colossal spiritual failure on his record. It would have been very easy for Daniel to fail. He was ripped away from his family, his friends, his culture and his spiritual environment at the tender age of 14 or 15 and plunked down in the godless, pagan city of Babylon to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. He lived out the rest of his long life among people who cared less about Daniel's God and whose approach to life was the exact opposite of Daniel's. How easy it would have been for Daniel to conclude that God had just abandoned him and that it didn't matter if he was faithful to God or not.

Instead, we discover a man who was extraordinarily devoted to God. That's why I've been daring you to be like Daniel and teaching you that little Sunday School song about him. "Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known." To live the way Daniel did never just happens. It doesn't happen accidentally or easily. You don't live before God like Daniel did without understanding the issues at stake and making some very clear, conscious and firm decisions about how you are going to think, act and live out your life. Why was Daniel so exceptional? Daniel had a purposed will, a courageous heart, a prayerful spirit and, I suggest to you today, a surrendered mind, too. Why is that important? Why is it important to surrender your mind to God? What difference will it make in your life if your mind is surrendered to God or not? Let's read a story about Daniel and then try to answer those questions. Here is the first question today.

## WHY HAVE A SURRENDERED MIND?

The first answer to that question is this: the fact of God's sovereignty. What does that mean? The sovereignty of God means that God has ultimate control of all things. It means God has a definite plan and purpose for this universe that will be fulfilled exactly as God intended. That's not to say that everything that has happened in the past, present or future is pleasing to God or is part of His perfect plan. Nevertheless, no evil person, no evil event, no evil action will be able to defeat God or His will ultimately. He is sovereign. The message of Daniel – indeed you could say it's the message of the whole Bible is very simple. God is gonna win! God always wins in the end.

Here, then, is one important reason to have a surrendered mind. If God is in control and His purpose and plans will ultimately prevail, then it's in your own self-interest to get on God's side. Daniel realized this truth at a remarkably young age and allowed that truth to soak into every nook and cranny of his being. It determined how he lived out his life. It shaped his decisions. It was the single greatest factor in the person he became. Because Daniel knew that God is sovereign, he surrendered his mind to God. In the story we read, King Nebuchadnezzar was threatening to kill off all of his advisors – including Daniel – if they didn't tell him both what he had dreamed and what it meant. God revealed to Daniel both the dream itself and its interpretation.

Daniel recognized God's omniscience. In other words, God knows know all things and how all things work together. Daniel knew God is omnipotent. In other words, He is all powerful and His ultimate will can never be frustrated. You see that clearly in Daniel's prayer in the passage we read. "Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he has all wisdom and power. He controls the course of world events..." (Dan 2:20-21 NLT) In other words, God is in control of human history. Furthermore, "... 'he removes kings and sets up other kings....'" (Dan 2:21 NLT) God has final control of over human governments and human leaders. "... 'He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the scholars.'" (Dan 2:21 NLT) In other words, God is the source of all truth. "He reveals deep and mysterious things and knows what lies hidden in darkness, though he is surrounded by light." (Dan 2:22 NLT) God reveals enough of His will and purpose to us, but there is much that remains a secret to Him alone.

"I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors, for you have given me wisdom and strength. You have told me what we asked of you and revealed to us what the king demanded." (Dan 2:23 NLT) Daniel recognized God's sovereignty over his personal life – the specific events, decisions and opportunities that came Daniel's way. My friend, the sooner you recognize who runs the universe in which you live and the sooner you come to grips with the fact He wants you to act, think and believe in a certain way as a response to that truth, the better off you will be. Pastor and author, Steve Brown, once said, "Let me give you some

bad news: you're going to die. Some very bad news: you're not going to leave a hole. Some good news: that's OK, because this is God's show anyway."

Why have a surrendered mind? Not just the fact of God's sovereignty, but the sheer extent of that sovereignty. Daniel's story reminds you that nations and empires rise and fall, but God's Kingdom endures forever. Babylon rose and fell. The Medes and Persians rose and fell. So did the Greeks and the Romans. The Nazi regime rose and fell as did the Soviet Union. I'm grateful and blessed to be a citizen of the United States, but one day there will be no America. One day all there will be is the Kingdom of God. The Bible says, "...The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Rev 11:15 NLT) Of course, you should be proud and blessed to be a citizen of this country. Of course, you should love this country and pray for it and its leaders. But if you're a follower of Jesus, your primary allegiance is to the Kingdom of God. It's an eternal citizenship that can never be taken away from you. The Bible says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." (Heb 12:28 NLT)

The mind-boggling extent of God's sovereignty runs throughout Daniel's story. Daniel came to see that the reason Babylon had defeated Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and taken him into exile was a direct fulfillment of what God had said would happen because of Israel's sin and rebellion. The prophet Isaiah had lived some 100-150 years before Daniel. He told one of Israel's kings, "The time is coming when everything in your palace—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left," says the LORD. 'Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king.'" (Is 39:6-7 NLT) Daniel realized his being in Babylon was no accident. Daniel was a part of God's plan and purpose. God had put him in Babylon for a reason and it was Daniel's joy to surrender his mind and heart to that divine will and fulfill God's purposes – even in that seemingly God-forsaken place. Another man of God, Paul, the great Christian leader, came to much the same conclusion some 600 years later while he was sitting in a jail for the "crime" of preaching the message about Jesus. "And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News." (Phil 1:12 NLT)

Let me ask you this question. Do you believe that about your life and the events in your life – especially the really difficult, exceedingly painful events in your life? Do you believe God is still in control and sovereign? Or do you subscribe instead to the idea that the hard times in your life are just random train wrecks that God allowed to get out of control? God has a different perspective. Every test, every hard place, every bruise that life makes upon your soul, every crushing disappointment – from God's viewpoint – is like a chapter in a book that God is writing about how His grace has worked in your life. When you have a mind that's surrendered to God, you understand that, you yield to that, you live every

day in light of that. Jesus is our greatest example of a surrendered mind. Jesus withstood the tremendous pressure of constant temptation and testing, so that He might become the kind of compassionate and caring Savior you and I need. How is God ever going to make you and me strong and useful tools fit for His use in this world and the next? He tests you – just like He tested Daniel and just like He tested Jesus. God sovereignly tests every man and every woman who receives His grace. It requires a surrendered mind to believe that.

Dr. Appianda Arthur of Ghana in West Africa had committed no crime. He'd served as a member of Parliament and a close advisor to the president of Ghana until a military coup overthrew that government. Dr. Arthur landed in prison. One day soldiers marched him out into a field, handed him a shovel and ordered him to dig his own grave. When he had dug deep enough, he was blindfolded with his arms tied behind his back. He stood in a line with other political prisoners. A volley of shots rang out. Dr. Arthur thought he was dead. But then the soldiers removed all the blindfolds. They'd fired blanks - playing a cruel trick on the prisoners. In that prison Dr. Arthur just happened to find and read a Bible. He just happened to also find and read a copy of the book Born Again. He was moved by Charles Colson's story of falling from power and serving time in jail. He knelt on the floor of the prison and promised God he would spend the rest of his life serving Him. Eventually, Dr. Arthur made his way to America where he went to seminary and studied the Bible. He could easily have gotten political asylum and stayed here. Instead – the last I heard about him – he returned to Ghana - and to its prisons of all places – where he directed the Ghanaian expression of an international prison ministry. Why have a surrendered mind? The fact and the extent of God's sovereignty. It's as big as the universe and as small as your individual life and mine. But let me ask a related question that Daniel's life and story also helps us answer.

## **WHAT IS A SURRENDERED MIND?**

What does it look like? First of all, a surrendered mind is worshipful. Isn't that obvious in what we read earlier today? When Daniel realized that God was in control of human history, human governments, and even personal human destinies, all he could do was worship and praise the Lord. When you come face to face with this awesome, eternal and unchanging God who controls all and yet who loves you with an intensity and depth beyond anything you might imagine, your first and most appropriate response is worship. Show me a follower of Jesus who has a surrendered mind and I'll show you someone who worships God every day and worships each moment of each day. Are you worshipful?

A surrendered mind is trustful. That amazing story about Daniel and the lions' den might be the best example of that truth. Do you recall what was said about Daniel after God delivered him? "The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God." (Dan 6:23 NLT) When you trust God, you recognize His power. It's

one thing to sort of generally believe that God is powerful. It's quite another to believe He will save you from a group of underfed lions! Another example of trustfulness is Daniel's three friends – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. When the king threatened to throw them into an enormous furnace for defying his order to worship an idol, they said, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty.” (Dan 3:17 NLT) That's being trustful! And yet those three men weren't blind to the realities of their situation or to the fact that God works out His purposes and will in the way He chooses. They had surrendered their minds to God; therefore, they had also surrendered their wills to whatever God willed for them. In the very next verse, they said to the king, “But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.” (Dan 3:18 NLT)

I find instead that I'm a lot like another man I read about. He was walking along a railroad track going across a bridge in the middle of the night. He'd been feeling his way along in the darkness only to hear the train whistle. He panicked. He crawled over the side of the bridge and lowered himself down very carefully holding on to the bridge itself. He hung there in mid-air as the train passed over him. Then he tried to raise himself back up, but his arms were too tired. To conserve his strength, he just hung there, dangling in space. As dawn began to break, he discovered that instead of hanging hundreds of feet above the ground as he imagined, he'd actually been hanging only six inches from the ground the entire time. As scary as it sounds, maybe you need to relax, let go and fall into the hands of your sovereign God a bit more readily. Show me a follower of Jesus with a surrendered mind and I'll show you someone who is trustful. You may not know all the reasons for all the events in your life. You may not understand why this or that happened. But a surrendered mind simply trusts God and follows Him whatever His purposes may be. Are you trustful?

A surrendered mind is truthful. Daniel was truthful in his life and with his lips. Time and time again when he stood before these powerful, pagan kings of Babylon, he spoke the truth boldly. On one occasion, he said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.” (Dan 4:27 NLT) He stood before another king, Belshazzar, and said, “...‘yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven.... But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny!’” (Dan 5:22-23 NLT) Show me a follower of Jesus with a surrendered mind and I'll show you someone who is truthful. You prefer reality over illusion. You desire to know the truth about God, about others and about yourself so that you can bring your thinking and behavior into conformity with reality. Are you truthful?

A surrendered mind is “humble-ful.” I know there's no such word, but I had to make it match all the other words in this list! A surrendered mind is full of

humility. Never once do you hear Daniel boasting, being arrogant, or showing pride in any of his comments. In his dealings with other people, he is always truthful and respectful. He never insults or attacks anyone. He never says anything like, “Just you wait, Nebuchadnezzar! You mess with me, you’re messin’ with God!” Daniel was an extraordinarily gifted and capable man, so he might have had reason to be proud. Instead, Daniel seemed to understand that it was God who had given him all those gifts and talents. Over and over again, Daniel is eager to give God the credit. Before telling Nebuchadnezzar his dream and the interpretation, he says, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.... And it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart.” (Dan 2:28, 30 NLT) Show me a follower of Jesus with a surrendered mind and I’ll show you someone who is “humble-ful.” Are you “humble-ful?”

And then, finally, a surrendered mind is prayerful. Why pray at all if God is sovereign over all things and in control of everything? What possible difference can your prayers make? Most of the time we pray in order to get God to do something for us that we think He would not do otherwise. But in the Bible, most people prayed in order to get the strength to do whatever God wanted them to do. Last week we reflected on the fact that Daniel had a prayerful spirit. His insistence on praying was what got him thrown into the lions’ den! Prayer continually reminded Daniel of who was really in control of his life. Prayer was God’s way of reminding Daniel that he belonged and served God first and foremost. Show me a follower of Jesus with a surrendered mind, and I’ll show you someone who is prayerful. Are you prayerful?

William Carey is referred to as the father of modern missions. He once faced a ministry disappointment of overwhelming proportions. Carey began his missionary service in India in 1793 working in that country for 40 continuous years never once returning to his native England. Carey translated portions of the Bible into over a dozen Indian languages. One afternoon after some 20 years of plodding labor in that country, a fire broke out in his printing plant and warehouse. All of his printing equipment was destroyed. But more tragically, many of his precious manuscripts – copies of the Bible - were completely consumed by the raging fire. Of course, William Carey had no computer back up files or copy machine copies. Twenty years of work went up in smoke in a few hours. How could he get his mind and heart around this devastating event? He wrote to his pastor and friend, Andrew Murray, back in England, “The ground must be labored over again, but we are not discouraged.... We have all been supported under the affliction and preserved from discouragement. To me the consideration of the divine sovereignty and wisdom has been very supporting.... I endeavored to improve this our affliction last Lord’s day, from Psalm 46:10, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ I principally dwelt upon two ideas: 1. God has a sovereign right to dispose of us as he pleases. 2. We ought to acquiesce in all that God does with us and to us.” Now that’s a surrendered mind. Daniel had one as well. Do you? Do you have a surrendered mind?