

CHARACTER OF DANIEL.

~Other Speakers M-R: Edward Payson:

"O Daniel, a man greatly beloved."
(Daniel 10:11).

of the great excellences of Scripture is, that it points out to us the path of duty, not only by precept, but by example. Not to mention the perfect pattern of a holy life, which it sets before us in the character and conduct of Christ, it presents to our view men of like passions with ourselves, in almost every possible variety of situation; and while it urges us, by the most powerful motives, to become followers of those who, by faith and patience, now inherit the promises, it clearly describes the way which led them to glory; and teaches us, by their example, in what manner to discharge the duties, support the trials, and overcome the temptations, of our probationary state.

Of those whose characters are thus recorded for our imitation, few, if any, will be found superior to Daniel. His life as described in Scripture, appears to be without blemish. He is almost the only eminent saint there mentioned, of whom no fault is recorded. Nor was his character for goodness merely of the negative kind. Even during his life, he was placed by Jehovah himself, in the same rank with Job and Noah; men eminent in their day for faith and piety. In addition to this infallible testimony in his favor, we find him, once and again, addressed by an angel, as a man peculiarly dear to God. O man greatly beloved, says he, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong: for I am come to give thee skill and understanding, for thou art greatly beloved. The same title is given him in our text, by one who appears to have been the Son of God. I looked, says the prophet, and behold a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold. His body also was like the beryl; and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright; for to thee am I sent.

My friends, nothing is more indispensably necessary to the welfare of all creatures, than the favor of their Creator. To be greatly beloved of God is the highest honor and happiness, to which we can possibly attain, either in this world or the next. Hence it becomes a matter of infinite importance for us to know how this privilege is to be obtained. This knowledge we may easily acquire, from an attentive consideration of the life and conduct of Daniel. We know from infallible testimony that he was greatly beloved; and have therefore every reason to conclude that all who resemble him will enjoy the love and favor of God. Let us then carefully examine his character, and ascertain, if possible, why he was so greatly beloved by his Creator.

The first thing in his character which deserves our attention, is his early piety. Like Josiah, though he was very young when carried captive to Babylon, yet even then he appears from his conduct to have been eminently pious. He must therefore, like Josiah, have begun at a very tender age, to seek after the Lord God of his fathers. At a period of life, when most young persons are wholly engrossed by follies and trifles, and know nothing of spiritual and divine things, he was well acquainted with the law of God; and, though a child in years, was a man in knowledge and understanding. This remembrance of his Creator in the days of his youth, when mankind generally forget him, was doubtless one among other things, which gave him so distinguished a place in the divine favor; for God's language to his creatures is, I love them that love me.

Another trait in the character of Daniel, deserving our attention, is the caution, zeal and resolution which he displayed, in keeping himself unspotted from the world. This, the apostle James informs us, is an essential part of pure and undefiled religion; and for this, Daniel was highly distinguished. When carried to Babylon, he, with a few companions, children in whom was no blemish, but who were well-favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and possessing ability to stand in the king's presence, was selected from the other captives, and taken into the royal palace; that they might acquire the learning and language of the Chaldeans. In this situation, the king appointed them a daily provision of his own meat, and of the wine which he drank; so nourishing them for three years, that, at the end thereof, they might stand before the king. But Daniel purposed in his heart, that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. Various reasons might induce him to adopt this resolution. He might do it from love of country, and his fellow captives, with a view to show his sorrow for their calamities. He could say with Nehemiah, why should not my countenance be sad; why should I indulge my appetite in feasting when the city and place of my father's sepulchres lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. For a Jew to be joyful when his nation was thus smarting under the judgments of heaven, was not only unsuitable and improper, but highly displeasing to God: for we find in the prophet Amos, a wo denounced against those who eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the stall, and drink wine in bowls, in a time of public calamity, but are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph. A regard to his country, and to this threatening, might possibly have some influence in producing Daniel's resolution not to defile himself with the king's meat. But it was, more probably, from a principle of obedience to the divine law. You

need not be told, that, by the law, the Jews were strictly forbidden to eat certain animals, which were used for food among the heathen; and that all kinds of food which had been previously offered in sacrifice to idols, were considered by them as unclean. Had Daniel shared in the king's provision, he would have been under the necessity of eating, not only meats which had been offered to idols, but meats which were absolutely forbidden by the law of Moses. He, therefore, resolved not to defile himself by partaking of it; but to live only on herbs and water. If we consider the circumstances of his situation, my friends, we shall find reason to admire the firmness, zeal, and tenderness of conscience, displayed in this resolution. In age, he was but a child. The royal delicacies which he was invited, and even commanded to partake of, would doubtless have been highly gratifying to his appetite; and he might easily have invented many plausible excuses for enjoying them. He might have pleaded that he was a captive, and under obligation to obey those into whose power Providence had thrown him. He might have pleaded that by refusing to partake of the king's meat, he should bring upon himself much ridicule and reproach, and perhaps expose himself to severe punishments. He might have pleaded that the Jewish ceremonial law was not intended to be binding in a foreign country; and that since he was among the Chaldeans, he was under the necessity of complying with their manners and customs. With much less plausible excuses than these, do young persons, in general, satisfy themselves for complying with the sinful customs and manners of the world. But Daniel, notwithstanding his tender age, had sufficient firmness of mind to reject them. Be the consequence what it might, he was determined to maintain his integrity, and to preserve himself unspotted in the midst of a luxurious court, and ensnaring examples. Thus he early began to deny ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly and temperately, presenting his body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This conduct doubtless had a tendency to secure the divine favor, and to render him a man greatly beloved by his Creator. It proved that he was not ashamed of his religion, his country, or his God; and that like Moses, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

A third remarkable trait in the character of Daniel, is the holy indifference and contempt with which he looked down on worldly honor, wealth and applause. We have already seen how little he valued, even in his youth, those worldly, sensual pleasures, by which the young are so often fascinated and ensnared. As little did he value wealth and honor. Though he was of royal descent, and though he had, from his infancy, been educated in courts where religion was neglected, God dishonored, and the world idolized as the one thing needful; and though he possessed, in the court of Babylon, every possible opportunity and advantage, for acquiring riches and honors, yet he seems to have overcome all these temptations, and to have considered all these ensnaring objects, for which millions barter their souls, as trifles unworthy of his pursuit. It is true, he obtained both riches and honors; but it is no less true that he never sought them. They came to him unasked and undesired. He evidently appears to have preferred a calm, retired, humble station, to all that kings and courts could give. Witness the manner in which he treated the monarchs under whose government he lived. Instead of flattering them, as did others, and as he would have done, had he desired to secure their favor, he never failed to reprove them for their sins, when a favorable opportunity was offered him. Hear with what holy boldness he reproved the proud Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful monarch on earth. Break off thy sins, says he, by righteousness; and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. This was strange language to the ears of a prince, who was accustomed to hear nothing but the most extravagant praises and flatteries and who was never addressed by his subjects without their prostrating themselves before him. With the same holy zeal and fortitude did he reprove the impious Belshazzar. When he offered to clothe Daniel in scarlet robes; adorn his neck with a chain of gold, and make him the third ruler in the kingdom, he replied with a holy contempt for these glittering trifles, let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all that befell thy father, for his pride; but thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, and the God in whose hands thy breath is, thou hast not glorified. This, my friends, is not the language of a man of the world, who wished for the riches and honors which kings bestow on their favorites? No; it is the independent language of a man crucified to the world, and regardless of what that world could bestow. This trait in his character was indispensably necessary to render him beloved by his Maker; for we are expressly assured that the love and friendship of the world are enmity with God.

Another part of Daniel's character which we are called to notice, is his exemplary piety and devotion. He was emphatically a man of prayer. Though he lived in the midst of the tumult, noise, and confusion of a court, and during a great part of his life, had almost the sole direction of the counsels and offices of a powerful nation, which must necessarily involve him in an ocean of business, cares, and perplexities; yet he daily found much more time for secret prayer, than many Christians can find at the present day, who have nothing but their own private concerns to engage their attention. He never pleaded, as an excuse for neglecting this duty, that his body was too much wearied, and his mind too much perplexed by constant care and fatigue, to perform it. No; whatever obstacles might oppose it, or however loudly necessary business might demand his attention, he prayed to God regularly three times in a day; and he would much sooner have thought of neglecting his daily food, and sleep, than of omitting these accustomed devotional exercises. He lived, in this respect, like a man who knew that his soul needed daily refreshment, as well as his body; and who felt that, without God, he could do nothing. Praying was not with him, an idle form, a heartless ceremony, or a duty performed merely to quiet

his conscience. No; it was his joy and delight; it was the very life of his soul; and with almost as much ease, might the sun he turned from his course, as he from his daily approaches to the throne of grace. Even the commands of the king, and the certainty of being cast into the den of lions, could not, for one moment, deter him from the performance of this duty. My friends, do you love prayer thus fervently and sincerely? How often, think you, should you approach the throne of grace, if your way to it lay through a den of lions?

But to return. In addition to the prayers which Daniel offered up; three times in a day, he frequently set apart seasons for more especial attention to this duty. He set his face, as he expresses it, to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and in the performance of these duties, he sometimes spent the greater part of every day for weeks together. Since God loves those who love him, we cannot wonder that a man whose fervent love for his Maker led him so frequently and constantly to the mercy seat, should be greatly beloved in return.

Another trait in the character of this eminent saint, was his strong faith; and confidence in God. That he possessed such a faith is evident from the frequency and fervency of his prayers; since none truly pray, but those whose faith is strong and lively. That his faith was of this character is further evident, from his conduct, and from the testimony of Scripture. It was this which enabled him, without shrinking, to enter the lion's den, and which preserved him there unhurt. He was taken up out of the den, we are told, and no manner of hurt was found upon him; why?—because, says the inspired penman, he believed in his God. This, this alone preserved him. Like Moses, he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith, he could realize God's presence, and his ability to shut the lions' mouths. It was in consequence of possessing such a faith as this, that Abraham was called the friend of God. My friends, is your faith of this kind? Does it produce effects similar to these? Does it support and comfort you in dangers, trials, and temptations? It will do so, if it be genuine. But if it is not, if it is mere natural, speculative belief, it will have little effect. It will not overcome the world, it will not lead you to encounter perils and difficulties, for the sake of Christ; it will not enable you to see him who is invisible. It is without fruits; it is dead.

Again; profound humility, and a consequent disposition to give the glory to God, is another remarkable trait in the character of Daniel. This appears in his confessions and praises. Notwithstanding his eminent piety, we find him saying, O Lord, we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled by departing from thy precepts, and thy judgments. He seems to be at a loss for expressions sufficiently strong to describe the greatness of his sins, and heaps words together, in order, if possible, to show the deep sense which he entertained of his guilt and unworthiness. In the exercise of the same humble temper, we find him renouncing all pretensions to any worthiness or righteousness of his own; and depending entirely on the sovereign mercy of God. He might have trusted to his own prayers and merits, with as much propriety as any man that ever existed; but instead of this, we find him saying, O Lord, unto thee belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion of face: we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. The same humble temper is strikingly expressed in his language to Nebuchadnezzar, when he revealed to him his dream with its interpretation. Instead of taking to himself the glory of this interpretation, he says, There is a God in heaven, who revealeth secrets; but as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for the sake of any wisdom that I have more than others. Here, my friends, you see the genuine language of humility. He was afraid that the king would suppose, either that he had discovered this secret by his own wisdom, or that it was revealed to him for the sake of his own superior goodness; and that thus, God would lose the glory of his own work. With a view to prevent this, and to lead the king to give the glory to God, he modestly disclaims all praise, and refers it to him to whom it was due. He who thus humbles himself shall be exalted.

The last trait in the character of Daniel, which I shall mention, is, that his religion was habitual, uniform, consistent, and lasting. He was always the same. In childhood, in youth, in manhood, and in age; he inflexibly followed the path of duty, and steadfastly adhered to the God of his fathers. Nothing could seduce, nothing could drive him from his course, or induce him to deviate from it, for one moment, in the smallest possible degree. Of this, his conduct, when his enemies conspired to ruin him, affords a striking and satisfactory proof. When he knew that the decree, condemning any one who should pray to God for thirty days, to be cast into the den of lions, was irrevocably passed, he went into his house and prayed to God, as usual, three times a day; his windows being open towards Jerusalem. Yet how many plausible excuses might he have made, for conducting differently; and how many would he have made, had he resembled some professing Christians of the present day. He might have pleaded that his life was of great consequence to his countrymen; that it was in his power to do much good, in his then elevated station; that he was bound to obey the king his master; that it was his duty to preserve his own life; and that it would do no harm to anyone, on such an occasion, to abstain from prayer for thirty days. At least, he might have urged that it would be justifiable, in such circumstances, to shut his windows, and pray in private; and thus disappoint the wicked designs of his enemies. These excuses,—any one but a real Christian would have made, and considered himself justified in omitting prayer entirely, or at least performing it in secret. But Daniel was really religious, and therefore could not be deceived by these plausible excuses. He knew that he was watched. He knew that if he neglected to pray with his windows open, as usual, his enemies would assert that he had omitted that duty. He knew that, in this case, it would be said, See, Daniel, notwithstanding his pretended firmness and piety, can, like others, make his

religion bend to his interest. He prefers his life to his duty. He cannot trust in his God to save him. His God, therefore, can be no better than the gods of the nations; and his religion is no better than ours. Thus God would be dishonored, the Chaldeans would be prejudiced against the true religion, and a glorious opportunity of suffering for Jehovah, would be lost forever. These reasons did not allow Daniel to hesitate a moment respecting what he ought to do; and for him to know what he ought to do, and to do it, were the same. He never troubled himself about consequences. He only asked, what is duty? When he once saw the path of duty, he would follow it though hell should open her mouth in his way. This, the whole tenor of his conduct proves; and a similar course must be pursued by all who wish to be, like him, beloved by their Maker.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. From this subject we may learn, my friends, how religion dignifies, and ennobles our nature, when it is entertained in its power and purity. How noble, how dignified, how sublime, does the character of Daniel appear! That you may see this in its true light, bring him forward; and compare him with the nobles, princes, and great ones of Babylon. See them indulging in sensual pleasures, proud of their wealth and birth, panting for riches, honor, and applause, seeking these transitory trifles by every possible means, neglecting immortal honors and glories; and meanly envying and hating that excellence, which they could not reach. See Daniel, on the contrary, calm, firm, and self-collected; with an eye fixed on God and heaven, despising the trifles which they pursued, aiming at the glory of his Maker, and the happiness of his fellow creatures, and following with unconquerable, undeviating resolution, the path of duty. While they groveled on the earth, his head, and his heart were in heaven;—while their minds were darkened by the clouds of ignorance and prejudice, and their breasts convulsed by the storms of ambition, avarice, envy, and revenge; his exalted soul dwelt in regions of eternal day, far above the clouds of mental ignorance, and the storms of contending passions. That you may, still more clearly, discern the superiority of his character, compare him with the kings whom he served. See Belshazzar, making a great feast, to a thousand of his lords; and surrounded by every thing, which could dazzle or delight the senses. See Nebuchadnezzar, walking in the midst of his palace, reflecting with self-complacency, on the nations he had subdued; and proudly exclaiming, Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? Then turn your eyes to the prophet. See him, with that heroic boldness, which nothing but true piety can give, reproving the pride of one of these kings, and the impious extravagance of the other; see him, in defiance of threats, and impending danger, bending his knees to the only being whom he feared; see him, with unshaken calmness and serenity, sitting in the midst of ravenous lions, who, like lambs, crouch at his feet;—and then say which was the more dignified character, he, or the proud kings of Babylon. Nay more, say which possessed the more enviable titles and honors; he or they? They were styled princes, on earth. But he, as a prince, had power with God and prevailed. They were honored, admired, and applauded by their fellow worms; but he was greatly beloved by his God. Who would not be Daniel in the lion's den, rather than Belshazzar, at his feast, or Nebuchadnezzar on his golden throne? O how evidently does it, in this instance, appear, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor. Such being the superior excellence of Daniel's character, permit us farther to improve the subject, by inquiring,

2. Do you, my friends, possess a similar character? This, all must allow to be an important question; since if we do not resemble Daniel, we are not, like him, beloved of God. Say then, does your temper, your conduct resemble his? Did piety like his distinguish your early years? Have you kept yourselves unspotted from the world, when temptations to sensual indulgence were peculiarly plausible and urgent? Have riches as little attraction for you as they had for him? Is your piety habitual, the same in all circumstances; and are you equally fervent and persevering in prayer? Have you the same strong faith, and equally triumphant in the darkest times; and do you manifest the same deep humility, and unmoved firmness and resolution?

Lastly, permit me to improve this subject, by urging all present to imitate the conduct of Daniel. To induce you to this, consider what an unspeakable honor and privilege it is, to be greatly beloved of God. It is the highest honor and happiness to which a creature can arrive. It includes everything, which creatures can possibly desire; for, if God love us, then all things are ours, all things must work together for our good, and nothing can do us any real injury; for, says the Apostle, if God be for us, who can be against us? O then, if you love life, if you love happiness, if you love yourselves, be persuaded to copy the example of Daniel. Let those of you who are young, begin early, like him, to seek after the Lord God of your fathers, and remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Begin from this day to cry unto him, My father, thou art the guide of my youth. Let those who have lost this precious season, remember that it is not yet too late, and strive to redeem the time which they have wasted, by double watchfulness, zeal and diligence. Above all, let those who profess to be the people of God, consider their peculiar obligations, to imitate this ancient worthy. Would to God, my professing friends, you could be prevailed upon to feel the force of these obligations. Would to God, that every member of this church were a Daniel, in weanedness from the world, in humility, in resolution, in faith, and in prayer. How would religion then revive and flourish among us. How would gainsayers be confounded. How would our hearts be encouraged, and God be glorified. How would your own souls rejoice. My Christian friends, why will not each of you be a Daniel? Are there no motives, no considerations, which will rouse you to exertion? Is there

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nothing in your natures, on which we can operate; no spark of holy ambition, of sacred zeal, which can be blown up into a flame! O that we could breathe a divine, celestial ardor, into your souls, and fire you with inextinguishable, insatiable desires after growth in grace. O that we could persuade you to pursue religion, with that patient, zealous, habitual, unwearied diligence, and resolution, with which you pursue the things of this world. Then should we see our wishes realized; then would this church be as a crown of glory, in the hand of the Lord, and as a royal diadem, in the hands of our God: then would there not only be some, but many, among us, to whom angels might say, Fear not, but be strong, O ye, who are greatly beloved of your God.