

UNSHAKABLE FAITH: COURAGE TO STAND

Sermon preached by Martha Jean Fitch

February 27, 2022

TEXT: Daniel 1 & 6

MANUSCRIPT:

In 1989, Pastor Greg and I took our 1-year-old daughter and went on a vacation to Wyoming and see Yellowstone. How many of you have been to Yellowstone? It is an awesome, magnificent place! And it was truly amazing to go to Yellowstone in 1989 – the summer after the great fires of 1988. Some one million acres of the Greater Yellowstone Area received some type of burning. We were shocked to see all the burned down trees and the blackened earth...and yet, in the midst of that, growth was starting to occur with little shoots of green leaves scattered everywhere.

The North Fork Fire was a human caused fire that came into Yellowstone from the Targhee National Forest. That immense fire caused much damage and threatened much of the land where the geysers in the area were. One of those geysers is the most famous of all geysers named Old Faithful. But the good news is that Old Faithful remained steady and strong in the midst of the fires.

Throughout the years, Old Faithful has continued to live up to its name. Visitors to Yellowstone can see Old Faithful shoot forth some 6,000 gallons of boiling water up into the air (some 180') almost every 60-75 minutes. Sometimes those intervals vary – due to vandalism and earthquakes. But even with those negative impacts, Old Faithful remains steady, strong, and spectacular!

Wouldn't it be great ... if all of us had the same reputation as that geyser? Wouldn't it be wonderful ... if people would look at us and say, "Wow – there goes Old Faithful! You can always count on her!" "No matter what happens – good or bad – he's Old Faithful -- steady and strong and spectacular!"

OK, maybe we wouldn't like the description "old" – but I think that we would like the description "faithful" wouldn't we? To have strong, unshakeable faith.

Throughout our sermon series, we have been hearing about many "Old Faithful" saints of the Bible who had that unshakeable faith – people like Joseph who kept his eyes on God and remained faithful even when it seemed all odds were against him. People like Job who kept believing in an unshakeable God even as everything was falling down around him. He claimed the promises of God as His Redeemer – and trusted that God would carry him through his trials.

And then today we turn to Daniel – a man whose life was overflowing with integrity. Truly his life was full of the spirit of God and people could see that he was "Old Faithful". Open your Bibles and let's look at the story of Daniel.

When we open the book of Daniel, we find Daniel is just a young teenager who is among many of the Israelites that were captured and taken to Babylon under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. It was a desperate situation, living in a foreign land – surrounded by idolators and under the rule of a powerful & brutal king. Daniel could have easily given in or given up under the circumstances. But instead of complaining and becoming bitter because of the situation he was in – Daniel made the decision to make the most of the situation and continue to hold fast to his faith. And that decision made him stand out as a man with high character traits. Look at verse four of chapter one. Nebuchadnezzar was looking for: “*young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight and competent to serve in the king’s palace.*” Daniel and his three friends were chosen and served there in the palace and were educated in the ways of the Babylonians.

As part of their time there, they were offered a daily ration of the royal food and wine. How easy it would have been to just adapt into the culture and do everything like the Babylonians – and compromise many of the commitments he had made to follow God’s commands. But Daniel didn’t do that. There in verse eight, we read that Daniel resolved he would not defile himself by eating the unacceptable food and wine – but he asked to have a simpler menu of vegetables and water. And in the end, it proved to be a healthy choice.

Already, as a young man, Daniel was showing that he had unshakable faith. And it was really all about the choices he made. He chose to make the best in difficult circumstances and stay faithful to God.... rather than pouting and becoming bitter about what he *didn’t* have. And he made a choice to be true to God’s commands. In fact, he made a choice to *be different* than the culture rather than blend in and compromise his faith.

We ourselves can face difficult circumstances and temptations. In fact – it could be that you are facing times like that right now. How can we respond with that unshakable faith? By making a decision – resolving now that you will stand firm – no matter what – and by trusting that God will give us the strength to endure and remain steadfast.

Daniel made the choice to stand up for his faith – and he definitely caught the attention of Nebuchadnezzar. In fact – Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and his friends ten times more capable and wiser than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom. So – Daniel worked faithfully as an adviser to the several different kings in Babylon...and continued to stay true to his faith throughout it all.

When we arrive at Daniel 6, we find Daniel working as a commissioner in the government of King Darius. Daniel, at the ripe old age of eighty had truly distinguished himself in the kingdom. It says that Darius even planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom! Why? Look at verse 3: It was because he had an excellent spirit in him. His character showed through! So, King Darius planned a promotion for good Ol’ Faithful Daniel.

But the other officials in the kingdom saw the favor Daniel was getting from Darius and became quite jealous. They didn’t have that excellent spirit that Daniel had, and they decided they would make Daniel look bad. They looked for ways to destroy Daniel by pinning something on him that would destroy his virtue or his credibility. You know they were kind of like present day

news reporters looking for all the dirt they can find on a political candidate! But those rivals couldn't find a thing to accuse Daniel of! Look at verse 4: *"The presidents and the satraps tried to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom. But they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn, because he was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy."*

Since they could not find any corrupt deed in Daniel in his public life, they decided to look at his private life. And there they found he was a faithful Jew---a man of prayer---who prayed three times a day. With that kind of evidence, maybe they could blackmail him and convict him by going against the King.

So, they went to King Darius and said that they had all agreed that he should make an ordinance that, whoever makes a petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to King Darius, would be cast into the den of lions. Darius agreed and signed the document that could not be changed.

Now when Daniel heard about this edict, he could have responded in a variety of ways. He could have panicked and said, "Well, I'm just going to pray in secret or silently – it's only for 30 days anyway. I'll hide it and no one will know." But he didn't do that – he didn't panic or even change his ways. Look at verse ten, it says, *"when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to God!"*

And that is when his conspirators found him and had him arrested. But King Darius didn't want to put Daniel in the lion's den. Look at verse 14: *"When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel, and until the sun went down, he made every effort to rescue him."* But finally, having no other choice, Darius put Daniel in the lion's den and said to him: *"May your God whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!"*

The next morning, the king hurried out to the den of lions and called out to Daniel saying: *"O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?"* And sure enough, there was Old Faithful – alive and well! The angels had come and shut the mouths of the lions and there was no kind of harm on him at all. And why? Look at verse 23: *Because he had trusted in his God!*

Daniel had kept God's commandments and had refused to stray from them. Daniel had trusted in God with all his heart and didn't give up in the midst of trial.... and the end result was that King Darius declared that all people should worship the God for Daniel.

What an amazing story of a man of God! And how badly we need more people today to live like Daniel. You know there is an old song that kids used to sing called, "Dare to be a Daniel". Does anyone remember it? *Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone; dare to have a purpose firm, dare to make it known! Standing by a purpose true, heeding God's command, honor them the faithful few! All hail to Daniel's band!*

I believe that what we need in this world are more people who would dare to be a Daniel – people who would have the courage to live as Old Faithful in the midst of our unsteady and faithless world. We need the Holy Spirit to work within us and develop a character like Daniel so that people can say of us: Wow! Look! Those people have an excellent spirit---the spirit of God is within them.

I think there are two main take-aways from the story of Daniel that we need to remember as we live our lives of faith.

The first – We must make up our minds in advance to be faithful and not compromise. For Daniel, he had been thrown into an environment where there was an effort to brainwash him – to change his name, his education, his language. But he made a decision *in advance* not to defile himself by eating food that had been offered to idols. He drew a line in the sand *in advance* and said, “This far and no further”.

The world is going to continue to be out on a battle to reprogram us to think and act like they do – and follow worldly values. We have to fight the battle in our minds with the power of the Holy Spirit and stand strong with our convictions. We have to decide now to “*stand firm and let nothing move you. Always giving yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*” (I Cor. 15:58)

And then remember, as Rick Warren puts it, that the key to standing strong is kneeling often. I believe that Daniel was able to be faithful and stand strong in the midst of very difficult times was because he made a commitment to pray. He had a conversation with God three times a day and did not let anything – not even an edict from the king not to pray – stop him. Prayer was not an option in his life - it was his life-connection to God. I believe this time of prayer gave him perspective and wisdom, and the strength and courage to face the times when his faith was challenged. He could face even the threat of the lions because he trusted in God and knew that God was with him.

We too have to make a commitment to keep praying and have that running conversation going with God. It is through that continued prayer we have the courage to stand strong and face our fears – and the confidence to be faithful even when faced with great temptation to compromise. And through that continued prayer – you will come to know that the Lord is always with you, and you won’t be shaken in times of trial. And you will have that unshakeable faith that others will see in you!

You know, I learned something about Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone. Did you know that Old Faithful is not the biggest geyser in America? It is not even the most powerful geyser in America. That distinction actually belongs to Steamboat Geyser at Yellowstone! So, what makes Old Faithful so famous and well-known? Well, it is so famous because it goes off like clockwork. It’s dependable. Steamboat Geyser lie dormant for many years – and now only erupts every few days or even every few years. You can’t count on it. But you can count on Old Faithful – steady, sure and faithful, unshakeable even in the midst of fires.

What about you? Do you have a reputation for being reliable? Would someone who knows you well describe you as “Old Faithful”?

Mark Hatfield tells of touring Calcutta with Mother Teresa and visiting the so-called “House of Dying”, where sick children are cared for in their last days and the dispensary, where the poor line up by the hundreds to receive medical attention. Watching Mother Teresa minister to these people, feeding and nursing those left by others to die, Hatfield was overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the suffering she and her co-workers face daily. “How can you bear the load without being crushed by it?” he asked. Mother Teresa replied, “My dear Senator, I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful.”

Dare to Be a Daniel, my friends. Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone and to stand firm in your morals. Dare to be a Daniel and let your faith be known. Dare to be Old Faithful!

And then, when God greets you when your life is done, you will rejoice in hearing Him say, “Well, done, my good and faithful servant, enter in the joy of your Father.”

PRAYER:

God sometimes it is so hard to be a Christian---the pressures to conform to this world bombard us every day. And then there are days when are eyes are out of focus, away from you and we are consumed by our anger and impatience, our bitterness and criticism of others. Forgive our foolish ways and guide us how to live with integrity in this world. Shine your light through us that we might truly be faithful to you in all we do and say. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN

INVITATION

We have a God that has an unending supply of mercy! And each and every day we have the blessing of starting anew with God's steadfast love. And even when we are unfaithful – God is always faithful – that is His nature!

Jesus is standing here again this morning – offering you His grace and mercy! He wants to come and live in your heart -- won't you open yourself up to him? Won't you make a promise today to live for Christ?

Come and give your heart to him. Come, make First Christian Church, your church home! Come as we stand and sing, and we will rejoice with you in your decision.