

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

How then should we live?

Presented by David Kerr

INTRODUCTION

When I wake up of a morning now, I wonder what catastrophic events may have happened overnight, in the space of 7 or 8 small hours. How do you feel when you wake in the morning? Some folk I speak to say their sleeping patterns have changed and they've had restless nights. They're concerned for friends or family travelling overseas. Others are anxious about their financial security with the markets in turmoil. I've heard of a number of people who've cancelled overseas travel and will miss weddings, reunions and other important events they were looking forward to, due to the uncertainty and tension in the world.

What can help us? Who can help us in a time like this? How should we live in the uncertainty of these times?

Part 1

How should we live in the uncertainty of these times? Today I want to encourage you from the Old Testament story of Daniel, a young man who was taken captive from his homeland by King Nebuchadnezzar.

I've never had the experience of being captured and transported to a foreign country. I can only imagine what it's like. I've felt the intrusion and outrage when my home has been broken into and some of my belongings stolen. That's bad enough. But to be held captive and forced to live in a foreign land, I could only imagine the trauma.

You may have faced that experience before you came to Australia. I have friends who have suffered the pain of losing their possessions and their homeland to an evil enemy who sought to dominate and destroy their lives and culture. I wonder what thoughts went through Daniel's mind as he left his beloved home and faced a future as a slave in Babylon? How could they do this to us? How could God do this to us? How will I survive? How will our people survive? Amidst the outrage, I believe that Daniel quietly, in his heart held on to the belief that somehow *God was still in control*. God is all knowing and in charge of events.

Today it feels like we're standing on the edge, in a world that seems to have gone mad. Attitudes and values that people have held high are trampled underfoot. The abusive and forceful seem to win and the humble are left in their shadow. While we haven't been taken captive to a foreign land, like Daniel, it seems that our world has been hijacked by evil, and we live in a new and strange environment that is tense and unsafe.

However, as in the days of Daniel, so it is today. God is still in charge of world events. God has a great track record of overruling and removing rebellious leaders. God will overcome evil. No one is exempt. God will stand with those who are faithful and follow him.

The words of the Psalmist (46) have been an anchor for God's people down through the centuries....

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in time of trouble,
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way
And the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
Though its waters roar and foam
And the mountains quake with their surging.*

*There is a river whose stream makes glad the city of God,
The holy place where the Most High dwells,
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
He lifts his voice, the earth melts.*

*The Lord Almighty is with us:
The God of Jacob is our fortress.*

*Come and see the works of the Lord,
The desolation he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear,
He burns the shields with fire
Be still and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.*

*The Lord Almighty is with us;
The God of Jacob is our fortress.*

God was the Psalmist's strength and Daniel's strength in his pain, helplessness and insecurity, and is our strength today, in whatever the future holds for us.

Part 2

How should we live in the uncertainty of these times? The first thing I've suggested is to hold on to the fact that God is still in control. God is all knowing and is still in charge of world events. The Old Testament figure Daniel held onto that truth as he faced his time as a captive in Babylon.

How do we live in a world that has suddenly changed? Some folk have suggested that since September 11 when the terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre, it's been like living in a different world. For those who have experienced a world war, some have said that it's like the build-up before WW2.

They say, "We've been there....we know what that's like."

However, for most of us to live in the current world tension, it's a new experience. It can change the way we look at the world. The way we see others in the community, the plans we make for the future. It can change the way we experience life.

For some there can be deep grief, trauma, confusion, tension rage and anger. It may also affect our spirituality. The way we make sense of the world. The way we see God's place on the revolving stage of world events.

How then, should we live? How did Daniel live? Daniel and his three companions didn't do anything unusual; in fact, they maintained the same disciplines of daily living, including diet and prayer that was their practice in their homeland. However that made them very different. It was this difference that caused the King Nebuchadnezzar to listen to Daniel's interpretation of his dreams that won him favour.

Maintaining our momentum by not changing our rhythm is important. Continuing all the daily disciplines that we find useful, is an important factor in coping. Basic activities of work, exercise, good meals, are essential. Maintaining our commitment to regular prayer and worship is crucial. Enough is changing around us. Hold to what is familiar and important to you.

At another level, how tempting it is to lose your poise when the going gets tough! In the midst of stress and upheaval, we can become vulnerable, supersensitive, act impulsively; become distorted in our thinking, which may have serious consequences for our relationships. We may easily and unjustly project our anger, fear and vulnerability onto innocent people.

There have been attacks by mainstream Australians on Middle Eastern migrants who do not sympathise with, or support the actions of terrorists. This only compounds the tensions, and the real issues can be lost.

Daniel didn't give in to whatever the pressures he experienced when his world turned upside down. In the midst of an alien and evil culture, he maintained the disciplines that marked his life in Israel. If he experienced rage and revenge, it wasn't evident. He didn't give in to the pressures that surrounded him. I'm sure it must have been tempting..... but he remained faithful to God.

Daniel's clear purpose in life to remain faithful to God, maintaining his everyday disciplines, enabled him to cope and stay focused. It provided stability and strength to manage the challenges of living in a culture that was vastly different from his own.

Part 3

How should we live in the uncertainty of these times? **Firstly** I've suggested to hold on to the fact that God is still in control. God is all knowing and is still in charge of world events. Daniel held on to that truth, as he faced his time as a captive in Babylon.

Secondly, Daniel's clear purpose in life was to remain faithful to God. He maintained the regular healthy daily disciplines that marked his life in Israel, which enabled him to stay focused, and face the challenge of surviving an alien culture.

Thirdly, Daniel was willing to be different and never compromised his faith. He was truthful, always acted with integrity, and disinterested in power for personal glory. He didn't allow himself to be squeezed into the thinking of those around him. He didn't lie down and become a victim. He didn't submit to the threat of death, refusing to bow down to King Darius as God. He didn't take up arms in anger and fight the enemy. He dared to be different. He dared to be himself. He dared to be God's person. He was one person who stood firm against the current tide of his time and made a difference in the national events of his day.

"August 19, 2001 was the tenth anniversary of the final downfall of international communism in the Soviet Union. A group of Russian generals were determined to turn back the tide of democracy in that declining

empire. They placed Mikhail Gorbachev under house arrest at his dacha outside of Moscow. Meanwhile a tank rumbled into Red Square with the sole purpose of capturing second-in-command, Boris Yeltsin. But Yeltsin did something quite extraordinary. Instead of acquiescing to his captors, he leaped atop the tank and welcomed the tank commander over to the side of democracy.

"Later the tank commander reported that, up to this point, he had no intention of joining the forces of democracy, but Yeltsin was so persuasive that he could not resist. And with that single event, communism lost its final prospect of a return to power.

"A reporter interviewed Boris Yeltsin not long after that famous incident. The reporter asked Yeltsin what gave him the courage to take that stand. Yeltsin credited reading the story of Lech Walesa, the Gdansk electrician who led the forces of Solidarity and helped bring democracy to Poland several years before.

"Someone once asked Walesa what caused him to make the stand that brought down communism in his land. Walesa said he was inspired to his acts of sacrifice and courage by reading accounts of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights marchers in the United States.

"When Dr. King was asked what pivotal event spurred him into action as a leader of his people, he cited the influence of Rosa Parks, the African-American lady in Montgomery, Alabama, who refused to sit in the back of the bus when instructed to do so because of her the colour of her skin.

Now here is the question for the day: Is it possible that the fall of Communism began with one African-American woman who refused to sit in the back of a bus?

In these uncertain times, what is God saying to you? Is there a 'God given ache' that needs to be faced, that may mean you risk standing alone like Daniel did? It may not seem to be life- changing to you, but who knows where it may end.

It may be that you phone someone who needs your support. Speak to a Moslem and reassure him/her that you don't label them as a terrorist... write to your local member about your position.... pray..... go to church. It may be something you've never done before, like Rosa Parkes, who one day, chose, not to sit, at the back of a bus.

Conclusion

Daniel provides us with a model of how to live in the uncertainty of our times. Daniel held on to the fact that God was still in control. God is all knowing and is still in charge of world events

Daniel's clear purpose in life was to remain faithful to God. He maintained the regular healthy daily disciplines that marked his life in Israel, which enabled him to stay focused and face the challenge of surviving an alien culture.

Daniel was willing to be different and never compromised his faith. He was truthful, always acted with integrity, and disinterested in power for personal glory. He didn't allow himself to be squeezed into the thinking of those around him.

Jesus, the Son of God, who laid down his life on the cross for you and me, invites you to put your faith in him and to follow him in these uncertain times. He calls us as His followers.... to be His hands and feet, and march to the beat of a different drum.