

Faiths counter strategy

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[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 1 and we're looking this morning at the second half of that chapter from verse 8 and right down to the end of verse 21.

Last week we began a study of the book of Daniel and remember that we looked at the first seven verses last week where we saw under the title of enemy strategy how these particular youths of Jerusalem how they were actually under the strategy of Babylon so that there were three things that we took note of three things by which an attempt was made to convert them to be ambassadors of Babylon we took a look at how they were under indoctrination how they were given certain incentives and how also they were involved in what we called an identity crisis how their very names were changed to include names of the pagan gods the question that we're now addressing is under the title of faith counter strategy how did these young people how did Daniel especially as their leader how did he actually counter that strategy of Babylon how is it that we ourselves therefore must set against all the inroads of indoctrination all the incentives that the world may set before us all the crisis of identity that it may produce in the way that our souls are subject to turmoil and our thinking subject to change how should we counter the strategy of the enemy in what way that Daniel set about this particular aspect of getting around this huge problem that he was faced through and what we'll see is that he actually countered it with a resolute pain in God that he actually made the whole situation a matter of testing his own faith a matter of actually putting his own principles to the test a matter of actually setting out in trust in God and thereby setting side by side pagan principles against the principle of faith and the outcome as we'll see is that faith comes out on top so that that whole situation really becomes for Daniel a means by which his own trust in God is put to the test and overcome and gains the victory in that test and as we're looking at it under the title of faith, cultivate strategy, we have to bear in mind that that's that element of faith is very much to the fore throughout the whole of this strategy let's look a little more closely then at what we find in faith's counter strategy now here are these Hebrew Jews they've been brought from their homeland they've been taken away from their own family environment they've actually been taken under the strategy of the king of Babylon and it seems really to an outward observer that they have no hope of retaining their identity that they have no hope of actually pursuing the kind of life that will actually please their own God it seems that the only way out is to go along with the plan of the king of Babylon is it? and how did they counter it?

well the first thing that they meet with we find actually in verse 9 God had brought Daniel into into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuch with the chief steward or the chief official in the royal house this is a man who had a significant position under Nebuchadnezzar and we find that God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love of that man and here are words which the Old Testament doesn't use lightly because these words favour and tender love are very frequently used in respect to God himself so that we very often find them translated by the words loving kindness and tender mercy and here is a man who is a pagan a man who is paid by Nebuchadnezzar a man who is a man who is a man who is a man who is a man who is a man who is really setting about Nebuchadnezzar's strategy and yet these young men find that he has been brought to actually favour them in a particular and in a unique way what does that actually teach them?

what is the first point that meets us in the counter strategy of faith? it is this that God has gone ahead of them that God is always one step ahead of them that God himself has gone there to prepare the way for them yes there is God even in Babylon and there is God actually ruling over the strategies of Babylon and there is God actually using Babylon's strategy to bring about his own particular purposes to actually bring about conditions where the faith of Daniel and his companions will not just survive but will actually be seen to thrive God has gone ahead of them God is there in Babylon God is there in actually giving them this tender favour with this oppression you see how

that really overturns the purpose of Babylon

Babylon power goes about trying to change your mind to change your attitude to change your allegiance to actually put you on the spot in such a way as can say to you look the only way out of this is to come over to my side what does God say to you?

[7 : 21] God says to you it's not a matter of you actually changing sides it's a matter of seeing me in control in such a way as can actually change the mind of Babylon as can actually set about the strategies that are against God's people in a way that will have God's people to be favoured by their very enemies isn't that what he said concerning the people of Israel on the eve of their departure of Egypt what did he say to them?

he said that they would actually be brought into favour of the Egyptians and he says you will not leave this land empty handed because you will spoil the Egyptians you will actually take away the best of their gold and their treasures they will actually give these things to you willingly because the Lord is actually over the event and he opens the very hearts of the pagans to do good to the people of God to those who are faithful in their standing for him yes God has gone before them even into Babel and just when it seems as if every door has been shut against them a door opens in the most surprising way when a chief official of Nebuchadnezzar lavishes his kindness upon them now shouldn't that comfort our hearts today?

isn't that a matter of comfort there for us first of all because you and I might be in the very situation in which we feel that Babylon really has us in its grip that the forces that are against us have really got the better of us?

when we can really say that we are confined and pressed out of measure when it may even seem that the best way out for us and the only way out for us is even in a little way at least to compromise to go over just a little to the side of Nebuchadnezzar to become even in a little way part of his policy no, God is saying to you I've gone ahead of the faithful God is saying whatever you think the situation may actually be now and may be in the future God is ahead of those love God in the heart but it's not just a matter of comfort there is that comfort in it undoubtedly but there is a challenge in it as well because the question for us today is is this faith the faith that we are exercising is this strategy, this strategy of faith a strategy by which you and I are setting about countering all that is designed to frustrate us to put us out of the way, to make us compromise isn't it the case that too often we are actually involving ourselves in what we can call the strategy of climb down instead of the strategy that goes ahead and sees that God is ahead of us isn't it too often the case even in the minor point that we actually engage in a climb down that says no Babylon's strategy is too powerful it's too great, it's an awesome monster how can I possibly hope to take on such a thing you and I have got to have this kind of faith the faith that we can call God ahead of us faith the faith that we will actually call God ahead of us faith because we are convinced in it that whatever may seem to be the case he is the one for his own faithful people who stands always ahead in the path so that even when it comes to the very point of death itself and let's remember Daniel was under threat of death not only just here but in other cases as we'll see also God will even when death itself stares us in the faith when our whole way of life and principle is really on the line you and I can say with the psalmist you are wrong in the valley of the shadow of death

I will feel no evil why? because thy rods and thy staff they comfort me because God is ahead of me even there and as you view that particular monster and enemy of death itself what is your view of it this morning is it the view of it that says I consider it still to be my enemy or is it the view that sees Christ even there that sees the Lord going before you and having been there before you so that you can actually say of that and of all things then he is at my own time I will not be wronged God has gone ahead of them and the second thing that we see not only that God has gone ahead of them but that God's people are people of principle God's people are people of principle look at verse 8 [13 : 22] Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with a portion of the king's meat there was the incentive we saw last week there was Nebuchadnezzar setting out the best food and the best wine and saying in effect look can you actually get such things in Jerusalem can you actually get such things if you don't come over to my side look at all the things that you will have all you've got to do is really change your allegiance and you'll have all of that Daniel purposes in his heart that he will not eat it because he considers eating it a pollution of himself a defilement of it now why does he actually see it as a defilement there's nothing specifically commanded against eating the best kinds of food it's not either neither is it a matter of abstinence or moderation because you and I can be as Daniel could have been immoderate or gluttonous even in eating

vegetables and water it doesn't matter what kind of food we're eating if we're eating too much if we're over moderate we're overindulged then we're still guilty of the same sin of gluttony and it's nothing like that specifically that this passage teaches us why does Daniel actually say that to eat this kind of food this offered fair of Nebuchadnezzar would actually be his defilement well because Daniel saw through the intentions behind it

Daniel saw that here was something which you and I as well as himself could call a temptation because the design of it as we've said is to get him to abandon all that he is as a child of Jerusalem and to go over to the side of Nebuchadnezzar and everyone has it and Daniel will rather than trust to his own strength will rather than actually go along with that he will rather see that as a sin if he heeds too and he will actually not eat that faith he will not have that food because he knows that the intention behind it is one that seeks to bring him over to the side of Babylon and to bring him over to the side of Babylon is to go against all that Daniel knows of his own identity no, Daniel belongs to Jerusalem he belongs to a particular people he belongs to a unique and defined religion he belongs to certain principles which he knows he cannot abandon and he has one principle that governs every other principle that he cannot at any cost abandon and it is the principle of faithfulness to his God and if he abandons that principle of faithfulness to his God in whatever matter he is involved if it is an abandonment of that principle then he has left all that he stands for behind and he's gone over to the side of Babylon and he cannot do that and he will not defile himself with it he's a man of principle a man of distinguished principle a man who will not give way to Nebuchadnezzar's temptation and his self and of course it follows from that that the people of God in every generation are people of principle they are people of principle who know that they belong to a characteristic way of life and who know that they cannot abandon that way of life without being involved not just in lots of faith but in lots of principles

I know that the world will say about that that you are being very narrow that you are being rather stubborn and pig headed about it all that you are not prepared to actually change your views that you are seeing things in black and white and that is not allowable that you should be prepared to move with the time that you should be prepared to at least listen to a little advice in terms of changing your whole outlook but Daniel knows differently and he and I both know differently also because people of principle are quite prepared to accept those accusations they are quite prepared to accept them and they are quite prepared to actually put them to the test and they are quite prepared to take their stand upon the principle of faithfulness to God however much the principles of Babylon will be thrown at them because Daniel here sets out in that principle to stand as a man who cannot go over to the side of heaven because he values far too highly what he has as a child of Jerusalem he knows that all things are bound around this principle that he must be faithful to God at all times and that means that we can go on from that to say that principle and witness are always bound up together the principle of faithfulness to God is always hand in hand with a witness to God the fact that these young people are living in Babylon is no excuse whatsoever to them would be no excuse whatsoever for them not to witness on the side of God the fact that they are actually living now in Babylon is no excuse whatever for them not to witness that they belong to another place yes they are living in Babylon but that is not their home their home is Jerusalem everything that they stand for belongs to Jerusalem and belongs to the religion of Zion it belongs to the whole matter of faithfulness to God and it's the same for you and I

Babylon is all around us the world is all around you the world's own strategy is ever being set before you it's ever being used in such a way as Babylon power will try and make you change your religion will try at all costs as to break down this principle in your mind of faithfulness to God you're living inward you're actually in Babylon you're surrounded by the people of Babylon you must never ever live in a way that gives the impression that Babylon is your home you don't belong to Babylon do you?

you belong to the Jerusalem that is above you have not come to any other city but to the city of Zion the city of the first born and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant your faithfulness to him is what is on the line and whatever it may be suggested at you in the strategies of Babylon whatever it may say even concerning the Lord's day that you can go out and enjoy a round of golf that you can go out and enjoy the creation and that is equal to the worship of God that is the incentive of Babylon because it wants you to use those kind of things to give the impression that you don't belong to any other than to Babylon that this world is your home that you can easily go over to the side of Babylon without there being any damage in your life that is the strategy of Babylon and you have to counter

it in faith and you have to counter it in the strategy that sees that God is the head of the faithful but remember there is no guarantee that he is ahead of other than the faith the fact that we can say the strategy of faith is that God ahead of a strategy doesn't at all imply that where that strategy is absent where you are setting about your life or your principles in a way other than faithfulness to God you have no guarantee that God is ahead of you you have no guarantee that God will stand before you in the next few steps of your life you have no guarantee that this power is on your side that Babylon strategy will not swallow you up it is for the faithful and let's be faithful let's be people of principles the principle of faithfulness to God these men are people of principles you and I in our surroundings by the world and by Babylon power above all else let's be principles let's be faithful to God in every single item that he says before nothing can justify our becoming defiled by eating of the fear of the king of Babylon nothing can justify a change of allegiance nothing can justify our abandoning of these principles and going after the way of the world nothing and then Daniel sets out his plan as we know he asks that in fact they will be given pulse and water or vegetables and water and will be given such for three for ten days he's putting it to the test in such a way as asks that this kind of food will actually be given to them for ten days and then they will be looked at to see whether they're actually thriving or indeed whether they're thriving more than those who are eating of Nebuchadnezzar's provisions this is the test that Daniel actually sets out he's quick you see to grasp to grasp the advantage of the way that God has prepared for him in the favour that he has given him with his chief official and you notice the chief official is in two kings yes he favours Daniel and his friends that he says in verse 10

[24 : 56] I fear my lord the king who has appointed your meat and drink why should he see your faces worse like him than the children that are of you he doesn't have the faith of Daniel at all does he what he is saying is if you go on to this kind of food of vegetables and water then there's no doubt about it you're not going to thrive the same way as if you had the best of food and wine like the other children have why should I put my own head on the block as it were why should I actually be in danger of losing my own life and that was a very of course that was a very real possibility for that man if Nebuchadnezzar had discovered that he had gone along with Daniel's plan he very likely would have lost his head you see there's a lesson in that as well here is a man who shows great kindness to Daniel a man who facilitates Daniel in many things who makes life for Daniel much easier than it otherwise would have been who shows great kindness to this child of God but his own heart still belongs to Babylon let's actually stop at that and think of the serious point that it's making too it is quite possible to show the greatest kindness to the people of God and that itself is a commendable thing but it is not equal to your own salvation it is quite possible to deal kindly to give the greatest gifts and kindnesses to the people of God but don't let that be the base upon which you or I will face eternity because you can have all that in your life and your heart can still be in the hands of the King of Baalabab and then you see Daniel pursue the matter with one of those who were under this chief official

Daniel says to this particular Melzar whom the prince of the eunuchs had sent over Daniel he actually pursues the matter with this fellow Melzar not quite as important as the other one but still one that Daniel can actually approach and you see the point is there that faith is in exercise when it has once met with a setback that it has actually been frustrated if you like on the one hand it pursues things in another direction like the Syrophenician woman who cried after the Lord and who was re-bucked even by the Lord himself who was even given the title of one of the dogs that ate from under the table but what did she do?

was she put off? is true faith really put off? by it being re-bucked? by an apparent failure? by an apparent closing of one door?

of course it isn't faith re-bucked is the ground for faith re-assertion and when the chief official says to Daniel no I can't go that far I'm going to be in danger of losing my own life fine says Daniel he pursues the matter with Melzar and he gets his strategy into operation by actually pursuing the faith by actually continuing with it by actually saying well I'm not going to accept that the principle of faithfulness of faith is going to be defeated by any principle of Nebuchadnezzar he pursues it in that other direction one of our old Scottish divines one of indeed the greatest Scottish divines Samuel Rudder first he says in his book the trial and triumph of faith which isn't very easy to get nowadays but it's worth its way to go he says that God's dispensing of things to us as they used to speak in most days the way that God deals with us the way that we find things being distributed to us by God he says that the wheels of such a chariot sometimes move very slowly that distribution or

dispensing is a very slow sometimes a very ponderous thing and he goes on to say this about it what he says hope bids us to await the Lord's event we see God's work it comes to our senses but the event that God brings out of his work lies underground we see God's work he says towards us that there's something else something ultimate something of a hidden purpose the work that God brings out he says the event that God brings out of his work lies underground we don't see it for the moment and he goes on to say this dispensing he says is like a woman travailing in birth and crying out for pain but she shall be delivered of two children and the two children ask mercy to the people of God and just to battle us that's how he puts it he's not talking on the book of Daniel he's talking on the trial and triumph of faith and even when you've got to wait a long long time for what you know is an event of God that lies under his work the work that you now see him doing in your life when you've got to wait for such a long long time when it seems as for Daniel that everything has been closed off this is what he says the woman he says will bring forth two children mercy to the people of God and justice to Babylon wait on he says until the woman bring forth though now you see not the church not only is that the case in the events of our lives but it's also the case for those who are seeking Christ that whole search may take much longer or much shorter than you and I imagine it to be if you're seeking Christ here today and if your heart still hasn't

gained that sense of his presence that you desire and even if you are Christ and he has withdrawn himself from you for some reason even if you are Christ and you're still seeking more and more of that presence the same thing holds true as what we've just said and indeed in the same book Samuel Rutherford puts things this way Christ's love he says is liberal clenchedness yet it must be suing you must seek you must see for it and Christ he says though he sells not his love for the penny worth of our sweating and pain yet we must be low for such a gold mine as Christ and then he says Christ's love is wise he keeps us knocking until our desire belongs it for him and he knows that delays raise and heighten the market and rate for the value of Christ we he says underwraith anything that is at a level should Christ throw himself in our bosom and black while we are in our morning sleep he would not have the marrow and flow of our esteem his love must not only leave the heart but it must also draw the heart violence in love is most taking and delay in enjoying so lovely a thing of Christ breeds violence in our affections and the suspension of presence oils the fields of love desire and joy want of Christ is a wing to the soul words which perhaps contain the flavour of the day which they were written words which contain a mine of wisdom the sense of Christ's absence is a thing that you and I must use in a positive way is he absent from your life? is he absent from your heart?

[35 : 17] do you lament his presence? are you making that absence a means of more earnestly seeking him? of more earnestly pursuing him? of more earnestly suing his love?

is it a wing to your soul? is it a means of impelling you towards him? or is it something that you don't think too much about? that you don't care too much about?

will you take up the challenge of this strategy of faith? will you actually take up this cross of discipleship? when our day is seeking so many others that will live principled lives that will live lives that will not give way to the king of Babylon will you take up this challenge? will you take it up today?

will you become one of those principled people if you're not already one of those? will you stand against the power of Babylon?

will you actually do so in such a way as say yes I know that doesn't guarantee me peace of mind in the sense that I will have difficulties, trials, pains, difficult decisions none of that you will be immune to I cannot guarantee you a life free of any of those things the Bible bents me to guarantee you the Bible itself guarantees you that means God guarantees you that the principle of faith will win day that the principle of faithfulness to God will not be dissatisfied because as John the Apostle put it that which is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that overcomes the world even our faith anything else and to be satisfied with anything left is to face defeat is to face being overcome by God the promise is to Him who overcomes and to overcome you and I must be faithful faithfulness to God is the victory in faith there is God going before them there is the principle that is involved in their lives they are people of principle and the outcome of course is that Daniel does win the day these people see that Daniel has something which others do not have that he has something extra that these others who are eating the best food obviously don't have and that something extra the book will show us and as we know ourselves is that Daniel has this God this true God and the power of this God in his life you notice how it says as for these four children in

verse 17

[38 : 45] God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all dreams and visions Daniel was more endowed than the rest of them he would be one of God's prophets and yet he says the others also had knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom there is an emphasis there on the intellectual side of things as well as anything else that doesn't mean that to be a faithful Christian and to be a good Christian means that you must have a very high intellect that you must have a really good memory that you must be able therefore to take with you all that you hear from the pulpit or that you read in the Bible or in other books that's not what it means at all there are many Christians in the world that are far more effective though they don't have high intellect than many Christians that have and I don't want anyone here to think that to be an effective and a faithful witness to God requires a high IQ that is not the place that is not the case but neither is it the case that spirituality has to be equated with a lack of intellect because this is one of the fields upon which we must face the strategy of Babylon here he wants to use your intellect in his own particular strategy even if it's a part of the capacity of your mind that he wants to use so be it you must not give him the pleasure of actually having any part of your intellect that is given over to the furtherance of his purposes because whatever level of capacity

God has given to us the importance is not in the level of the capacity itself but in using it to its full potential and to use it in its full potential in the service of God a lazy Christian is a contradiction in terms even if it's a laziness of mind of thinking that we're talking about very often we're reading materials that are good, wholesome, necessary materials that are actually easy that give us a sense of comfort materials that leave our minds relaxed that's all very well we're not against that but there must be more than that because a good read there's also a read that taxes your mind that stretches its potential that uses its whole capacity we've got to love the faith yes we've got to live the faith yes but we've also got to learn the faith and let's not imagine that to be a spiritual person means that we don't use our intellect to the full because that is contradicted even by Daniel's own position love the faith live the faith learn the faith the counter strategy the counter strategy of faith includes all three the enemy's strategy faith's counter strategy the outcome is those who are faithful to God are not the losers in the end however much it may appeal that that is the case at some point in our lives your faithfulness to God may not be disappointed

Lord we bless thee for thy sovereign will and purpose for the strength that thou dost lend to those who are humble for we know that thy word teaches and our own experience likewise that thou dost give grace to the humble but that those who are proud thou dost send empty away we pray that thou would make us thankful today for every privilege that is afforded unto us especially for the privilege of showing ourselves to be faithful witnesses for thee in this world that we may take the light of the gospel the whole message of Christ to a perishing world about us be with us and be around us be ahead of us and be behind us that in all things we may know thee to God who ever keeps thy people who neither slumber nor sleep we ask it for thy glory sake
Amen Amen