

CONTAGIOUS—SHARING JESUS/GOING VIRAL

Contagious Faith Despite Circumstances

Daniel 1:1-21

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/contagious-faith-despite-circumstances/>

Let's face it. We all have problems with phrases like "personal evangelism, witnessing, sharing our faith, proselytizing." In our minds, we aren't qualified, plus we have pictures of abusive tactics, using guilt and manipulation, and even badgering and bullying others to say yes to Jesus. We don't want to be the buzz kill at a party. **HERE'S OUR PICTURE OF FAITH-SHARING** (two young men wrestling). So, we do nothing! And that's not the answer either.

At its best, sharing with others our faith in Christ isn't a program or a sales job. It is natural. It is being contagious, going viral and hoping people "catch" Jesus. Now we all know about bad viruses and germs. The Zika virus, the Ebola outbreak. And how many movies have been made about a contagious disease, threatening to wipe out the human race? Here are a few: "Contagion, Outbreak, 12 Monkeys." I could go on. But we need to remember. Contagious can be good if you are spreading life. How do we share Christ? Daniel and his friends give us some clues.

Historical context: The setting is the time of Judah's captivity in Babylon, modern-day Iraq. Daniel's dilemma was how to live and witness faithfully in adverse circumstances. He was to eat at the royal table. But in that culture, to do so would signify he was sympathetic with Babylon's ways. Now, notice that Daniel refuses to eat the king's dainties, but does so politely, with courtesy and respect. He found a way to be in, not of, the world. Later, Daniel and his three friends added verbal witness to their actions. Daniel declared to the king, "There is a God in heaven..." (2:28) and his three friends testified about their faithfulness to the one God (3:16). And the king was impacted by it (3:28). So Daniel's witness was effective!

Now I want you to think about something. We have all been led away into Babylonian exile, without ever leaving the country. Under our noses, culture has changed. Seminary professor Jason Byassee, who lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, was getting his hair cut. The stylist asked him what he did for a living, to which Byassee replied, "I teach theology." The stylist replied, "Really? You believe in God?" The professor answered, "I do. And the strangest thing I believe about God is that he became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth." The stylist replied, "Who's that?" [*Christian Century*, Jan. 6, 2016, p. 22]. Now here in the Midwest of good old USA, it may not be quite that bad. But there is a new paganism.

And nonbelievers are watching us, and listening to us, to see if we mean it, if we live it. And they are hungry for us to share, whether they let on or not. One of our own members, Darlene Clark, recently shared a devotional in our daily series. This picture, as she describes, of figures poised, facing forward, and open. They are asking, yearning, eager to learn. Their questions: "What and whom do we believe and believe in? They are dying to know. They have stopped their play. They are ready. Shall we tell them?"

So Daniel and his friends shared their faith even in difficult circumstances. But what do we do? We sit around and wait for conditions to be right, perfect, before we share our faith. We whine that we want our Christian privileges restored, but wake up. We are in a foreign land! Stop using your energy to complain and start living and sharing Jesus!

Here is a verse that Paul wrote that was true in Daniel's day and still today: "Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night." [Philippians 2:15, *The Message*].

One of the things I admire about Daniel is his strength. Now we all know that being strong helps us witness. But the converse is also true: Witnessing helps us be strong. I have discovered that the more I share Christ with others, the more spiritual energy is released in me, power that otherwise lies dormant in my tired and selfish soul.

One of my all-time favorite books is *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom's story of hiding Jews in their Dutch home and then surviving the Nazi death camp. She writes graphically about the first shower she was allowed to take after being placed in solitary confinement. Streams of clean, warm water flowing over her crusted, festering skin and matted hair. As she went back to her cell, she resolved: "Next shower, I will take three copies of the Gospels with me. Solitary was teaching me that it is possible to be rich alone" [pp. 140-141]. What about you? How can you take the Gospel into your limited world? Daniel did it. Corrie did it. We can do it.