

IN THE WORLD, BUT OF THE KINGDOM

(Excerpt from Inner Connection to the Unseen God)

"You have abandoned your first love." Why does that happen so often? Why is it that love seems to cool down? What do we have to do to get back to that first love and hang on to it and live it all the way to the end?

"You have a name for being alive, but you're dead." Why is it that the fire dies down ... the zeal sags? And soon we have only the appearance of being alive. People looking at us think we're alive, but we know we're dead, and so does God. What do we have to do to wake up and get light and walk in the light and stay alive and never again become an empty shell?

We have to move from "lukewarm" back to "hot".

"Lukewarm" ... there was a time when we were hot. Imperceptibly bit-by-bit the temperature dropped slowly down to the place where now we're just lukewarm. What do we have to do to get hot and stay hot and never diminish in that heat until we get to the end of the road?

A number of years ago a Christian community formed.. People in this community kept going ... at high temperature ... for a number of years. The only drawback was the price of an almost physical separation from the rest of the world. Even those who still had jobs outside the community, were so absorbed in the life of the community they had very little contact with the outside world. One has to admit that these believers seemed to stay hot. The danger in that kind of separation from the world is that such a community begins in time to take on the atmosphere of a cult. Cut off from the real world, and from the rest of the Body of Christ, the community itself becomes an idol. Strange things begin to happen in these tender hearts.

Using the early believers as an example, we are convinced that we are to stay in the world, hold our jobs, be with our families, maintain those relationships with relatives and friends and neighbors, circulate in a world where there are all kinds of distractions and problems and temptations and still remain hot ... and never become lukewarm.

Is this possible?

It was for Daniel. He remained engaged with the world, but his flame never diminished.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three presidents of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom; but they could find no ground for

complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "o King Darius, live forever! All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, o king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, o king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Daniel 6:1-10

Daniel did not become lukewarm. He never lost his first love. He kept right on going. Let's suppose that Daniel had some Jewish friends who were also radically committed to the kingdom of God. Let's suppose that they met with Daniel and said,

"Look, Brother, we're going to have to get out of this city, or we'll never keep our vision." Daniel refused.

And so one night these friends escaped over the wall of Babylon and headed for the desert. They formed a community of believers out in the wilderness. There they maintained their vision of God. Perhaps their prayers helped other people---but they were never seen again in Babylon.

Let's suppose that Daniel also had Jewish friends who, being in Babylon, began to settle down. As time went on these friends became less and less Hebrew ... more and more Babylonian... until finally their vision of God was gone---they were lost in Babylon with mind and body and spirit.

But notice how Daniel functioned in Babylon, in the very upper echelons of power, and never lost his vision. Daniel paid whatever price he had to pay to keep that vision. How did he do it? He didn't do it by wearing a polka dot shirt to show how different he was from everybody else. Nor did he do it by finding the most broken down chariot in the city to prove that he was more pious than anybody else. Nor did he do it by finding a chariot with all the gadgets on it to prove that he was more successful, therefore more "blessed" of God, than anyone else. Nor did he do it by binding the Torah to his head to prove that he was holier than everybody else. Nor did he do it by joining a commune. Daniel was too busy to be part of a commune, even if it was a "Christian" commune. He had work to do..

It was his heart. Daniel's heart was radically committed, truly on fire for God. So much so that he could not be sucked into the rat-race of Babylon. He was in Babylon, working in Babylon so effectively, he got promoted again and again ... but his heart was not there. His heart was in God.

Daniel knows that he doesn't belong to Babylon even though he's functioning as a high government official. Daniel knows that he belongs to the kingdom of God, and Daniel expresses his commitment to the kingdom in five specific ways ... five ways in which you and I are called to express our commitment to the kingdom of God. If we will express our commitment in these ways, we will remain hot---right in the middle of Babylon!

First of all, Daniel Prayed.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.

For Daniel, prayer is the source of his life with God. "I can't survive without this. So if the lions get me, they get me ... I'm going to keep praying."

This is equally true for us. No more can we survive as servants of God in the realm of Babylon in which we live without prayer, than we can survive in the physical realm without breathing. The atmosphere and the system of Babylon will do everything it can to discourage our praying.

"You poor soul, all you're doing is psyching yourself up! You're wasting your time! Nothing ever happens when you pray!"

Or to lie to us, or to distract us, or to put us to sleep. Or to have us so busy with other things there's no time left for prayer. We're only going to make it if there's a discipline of prayer. And you say,

"I don't know how to pray."

Nobody knows how to pray.

"We don't know how to pray as we ought," Paul says, "The Spirit helps us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

But you can at least do what Daniel did. Go into your house, shut the door, and open that window that faces the heavenly Jerusalem and let the light of the kingdom of God come down

into your soul and renew you as you speak to the living God ... as you cry to him, intercede for people. This is the basic foundation of your life. You can have all the correct theology, you can believe all the proper doctrines... if there's no prayer, there's no life.

Secondly, Daniel kept his life simple.

The king assigned them a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate, and of the wine which he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

Daniel 1:5

The idea of only eating vegetables was symbolic of something deeper. Daniel kept it simple. He wouldn't allow himself to get distracted. Daniel and his companions fed on the bread of God. A word from God was what they needed and what they sought and what they got, which gave them the wisdom to know what things are to be pushed aside.

The same is true for us. The king's rich food for us may be the compulsion to always get the latest news ... four o'clock let's hear it ... five o'clock did anything new happen? ... at six o'clock maybe something new happened? Or it may be the compulsion to get in all the latest entertainment.

"Oh, it's marvelous! ... you can't miss it!"

....."Five new ways to make money".

Or it may be that we're consumed by an obsession with clothes or an obsession with the latest gadget or the hottest Christian fads, or my favorite political crusade to the point that I forget what I'm here for.

Our Lord kept it simple. Evil is not simple...evil is complicated, you can't figure it out. But the kingdom of God and our relationship with God has to be simple. This is why Jesus said,

"Unless you repent and become as little children, you'll never enter the kingdom."

...keep it simple. Get down to that basic diet of beans and water, the living bread ... a word from God. Not just mechanically reading your Bible and thinking it's going to come into you like an injection, but a living word from the mouth of God that's hot and alive. Settle for nothing less than this.....

"Lord, if thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit. Be not silent unto me! Speak to me!"

And he will. And by the power of a clear, simple word from God day-by-day we will have the wisdom to know what things to cut out of our lives, so that they're clean.

Third, Daniel stayed in touch with the Body... with his brothers and sisters.

Reading again from Daniel 2...this time the king had a dream ... he's troubled with the dream. The king wouldn't tell any of the wise men what the dream was, but he wanted an interpretation. Everybody says,

"What are you asking for? This is impossible!"

So the king's going to have everybody killed. Daniel hears about it and he goes to the king....

And Daniel went in and besought the king to appoint him a time, that he might show to the king the interpretation.

Daniel doesn't have the interpretation, but he's convinced that God will give it to him. After he gets the appointment to tell the king what his dream is all about, he runs back home....

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael and Azarish, his companions (his brothers) and told them to seek the mercy of the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision in the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel was not a one-man show. Nor did Daniel find three companions that he could manipulate and call it "fellowship". He was in submission to those men as they were to him. It was a mutual submission; there was unity.

Our Lord did the same thing. From the minute he began his ministry until he hung on that cross he was in submission to his Father first, but he was also in union with men and women, who prayed with him, shared the burden, walked with him. They were with him all the time.....

"Peter, James and John, stick with me. Stay awake while I go and pray."

He needed them. And who do we think we are that we can make it by ourselves? There's no way we'll ever survive in Babylon as little lone rangers. Whether we like it or not, somewhere we belong in the Body. And wherever God leads us, there are going to be brothers and sisters

who will sometimes rub us the wrong way and misunderstand us. That's all part of the process. In union with them,

- we pray,
- we share,
- we break bread,
- we struggle,
- we work,
- we suffer together.

Without this we cannot survive spiritually. If some of us have become lukewarm, perhaps it's because we so value our independence that we're afraid to be in submission to brothers and sisters.

Fourthly, Daniel refused to compromise.

Back to that passage about the den of lions. The presidents and the satraps came by agreement to the king and asked him to sign this document so that nobody could pray to any god or man except Darius the king for thirty days.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

As far as Daniel is concerned there's only one King, the king of the universe, Yahweh, the living God. And king Darius is under him and he can't come between Daniel and the real King. Whatever price he has to pay, he will pay, but he will not compromise out of fear. At another point in the book of Daniel, Belshazzar sees the handwriting on the wall and he offers Daniel rewards and gifts if he'll just tell him what it means. Daniel says,

"Keep your gifts! Give your reward to somebody else!
I'll read it for you free of charge!"

He won't be compromised by money, by fear. And most of us allow ourselves to be compromised by both.

Jesus says,

"The light of the body is the eye. If your eye is single, your whole body is full of light. If your eye is double, evil, mixed, then the light in you is darkness."

If our eye is on the kingdom, but it's also on an object of our lust, or our covetousness...

- the bottle,
- the needle,
- the pills,
- the thing that gratifies our ego ...

... then the light in us is darkness.

"If the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness."

The call is upon us to see if our eye is single. Get rid of the compromise.....keep it single.



Finally, Daniel proclaimed the kingdom of God in the midst of Babylon.

Notice he didn't just get some of his Jewish brothers together and proclaim the kingdom of God to them. He spoke the word of the kingdom to Babylonians even to the king of Babylon. Reading from chapter 4 of Daniel ... Daniel now is speaking to king Nebuchadnezzar:

"It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times (meaning seven years) shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High God rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be sure for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. Therefore, o king, let

my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquility."

Here's Daniel telling king Nebuchadnezzar that he'd better repent!... that's enough to get him thrown into the den of lions!

Why do you think the Lord has placed us in this Babylonian world? Why didn't he drop us into a quiet valley apart, where we could have our pious retreat center and live in peace until the King comes?

He has sent us into the world because we are to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom. To shine in the world like Daniel did. If we're afraid to open our mouths and speak we will soon be absorbed in the atmosphere of Babylon.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:14

We can't be the light of the world unless we're in the world. But in the world we have to be a light that doesn't grow lukewarm and doesn't lose it's first love. We will be such a light, a light like Daniel was, if we will learn from him these five lessons:

- He prayed.
- He kept his life simple.
- He stayed in union with the Body.
- He refused to compromise.
- He opened his mouth and spoke the word of the kingdom in the heart of Babylon.

If we will do that, we will keep our first love.

Our light won't grow dim.

And we won't become lukewarm.