

At The Movies Msg 3 – Men In Black International
 Sermon preached by Dr. Rick & Judy Mandl
 Eagle Rock Baptist Church
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Welcome to Eagle Rock Baptist Church, it's great to have you join us for our Father's Day "Real Man" edition of At the Movies.

Today we're looking at MEN IN BLACK: INTERNATIONAL

If you're not familiar with The Men In Black franchise, the Men in Black are members of a secret agency and they are really the coolest of the cool.

Nobody really knows about them because only the best of the best are invited to be a part... only the ELITE.

Their mission is to take on the biggest, baddest villains the universe has to offer.

In this newest film,

We see a woman become part of the MIB team for the very first time, as she works with the team from London...hence the International.

But you saw the idea there even in the preview: that it's the cream of the crop, the best of the best, that get to be a part.

As I was thinking about that, it made me think of the book of Daniel.

Just as the Men In Black are the best of the best, Daniel and his friends were considered the Elite, the cream of the crop.

In keeping with Father's Day weekend – we're going to look at the story of Daniel to see what it can tell us about being a real man of God, like Daniel was.

Let me add, women don't tune out.

I think the lessons we can learn, apply to you just as much as they do to us men.

If you will now turn with me to book of Daniel.

The Story: Daniel 1:1-21

We're going to begin in chapter one, verse one, where the author, presumably Daniel, begins by setting the stage for his book.

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." Daniel 1:1

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These (that is the articles) he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." Daniel 1:2

The setting for Daniel, is what we call the exile.

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army to victory against the Egyptians and Assyrians at the battle of Carchemish.

It was a sort of passing of batons from one ruling empire to the next.

After their victory, almost as an afterthought the Babylonian army laid siege to, and destroyed Jerusalem.

Eventually, they would carry off much of the population of Judah into Babylon, where they would live for seventy years in Exile.

For the Babylonians, this was a footnote, it was just another conquered town.

But to the Jews, this was unthinkable.

We're talking about God's city.

The temple was the seat of God's earthly throne.

And it was ransacked and destroyed.

How is it that God could allow this to happen?

They took Jehoiakim the king of Judah into captivity, and twice it refers to . . .

The "articles from the temple of God,"

And tells us that they were put into the temple in Babylon.

It's kind of a weird to focus on knickknacks from the Temple, when Jerusalem has been destroyed and the king has been taken captive, but there's a reason this was important.

In ancient times when you conquered a land you would enter into their temple or holy place, and you would take the image of the god that they worshipped and you would take it back to your land and place it in the temple of your god.

This was a way of saying “*neener neener neener*” our god beat up your god.

We saw this happen in 1 Samuel 4 and 5, when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, they took it back to Ashdod and placed it in the temple of Dagon.

When the Babylonians entered into the temple in Jerusalem, they must have been confused because there was no idol to be found.

So they took the articles that the Jews used to serve God.

It was kind of the ultimate checkmate,

It's saying not only have you been defeated as a Nation, but your God – what you put your hope and trust in, he has been defeated.

That may have been what the Babylonians thought, but that was not the reality.

It may have been the way it appeared, from the outside looking in.

Babylon had defeated Israel, and all hope was lost.

However, verse 2 gives us “*the behind the scenes view*” of what was really going on.

Look at the first words of that verse . . .

We're told that . . .

the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand

It was God who delivered the city of Jerusalem, and their King, into the hand of their enemy, the Babylonians.

He even handed over the items from his own throne room to be placed into their treasury.

Nebuchadnezzar's victory was orchestrated by God.

God was still in control.

Daniel clearly understood this.

Let's jump a little bit ahead in the story.

Turn over to Daniel chapter 2, verses 20-22.

There we're told that . . .

Daniel praised the God of heaven and said: 'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.' Daniel 2:20-22

The book of Daniel is amazing, and it tells of some incredible stories of the faith of Daniel and his friends, and gives us encouragement, even today, for how we can live in a culture that is contrary and sometimes even hostile, to our Christian convictions.

However, when we read and study Daniel, we should start with this premise. . .

The book of Daniel is not about Daniel,

Oh, Daniel is featured in it, and a lot of the narrative revolves around him and a few of his friends.

But God is the main character.

We're going to spend a good amount of time talking about what it looks like to be a MAN OF GOD or WOMAN OF GOD, but to do so we must first say a little something about the God we are talking about.

We are talking about the God revealed to us in both the Old and New Testament, but particularly here we're talking about God as he's revealed to us in the book of Daniel:

And the message throughout Daniel is simple

God is sovereign – He is in control.

He is an all-powerful God, behind the rise and fall of nations.

In fact, King Nebuchadnezzar himself would ultimately declare this,

Take a look at Daniel 4:34 – 35

This is King Nebuchadnezzar speaking, and He says this about our God. . .

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” Daniel 4:34-35

God is sovereign and He is in control.

He's also personal and responsive.

He knows our thoughts, our desires, and he responds.

He doesn't always give us everything we want – surely his people did not want exile.

They didn't want to see their city fall or to be taken into captivity.

But he gives us what we need – his people needed to be disciplined – to return to the faithful people he created them to be.

The God of the Bible, the God we worship doesn't always act the way that we expect. . .

He certainly doesn't always make sense to us, but the book of Daniel, in fact the whole Bible demonstrates that he is worthy of our trust and obedience.

Let's keep reading

“Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility. . .” Daniel 1:3

“Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.” Daniel 1:4

“The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.” Daniel 1:5

Like the Men In Black, King Nebuchadnezzar wanted only the best of the best.

They had to be of royal or noble pedigree, good looking, in great shape, intelligent and fast learners.

He valued what our world values.

You don't have to look too far to see it – we value power, physical prowess and beauty, education and influence.

Things haven't changed much have they?

But since we were just talking about who our God is, let me also add this, with the God of the Bible, you don't need to be elite to be chosen.

Read through scripture, outside of Daniel and a few others, almost everyone had at least one strike against them – too old, or too young, wrong tribe, quitters, cheaters, murderers, I could keep going.

In fact, the Bible tells us that God's plan is to call and use those the world considers unworthy

1 Corinthians 1 says . . .

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-27

“God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:28-31

We might not be elite, we don't have to be.

God, in His wisdom and grace calls us to himself.

To live successfully as a man or woman of God is not about ability it's about availability – surrendering to God's Lordship in your life, relying on His power, and trusting in His purposes.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best and the brightest – but for what purpose?

Well, at that time, Babylon was a huge empire.

To rule it required a pretty substantial bureaucracy.

When you don't want to rule by military occupation, the best way to do it is by using indigenous leaders who are in alignment with your purposes.

So part of bringing these young men to Babylon was to enculturate them into Babylonian ways and customs.

This is not just an ancient strategy.

Hitler wrote, *“He who has the youth, has the future.”*

Lenin said, *“Give me just one generation of youth, and I'll transform the whole world.”*

This was Nebuchadnezzar's plan – take the best youth, train them, educate them, Babylonian-ize them, and then use them to influence and rule over their countrymen.

As an added enticement, these young men were to eat and drink from the king's table.

They were to experience the best Babylon had to offer.

They might be captives, but they were going to live like kings and once you've lived like a king, it's hard not to do the king's bidding.

That's the plan – let's see how it worked out in the lives of Daniel and his friends.

“Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel 1:6-7

I want you to notice there is a switch in initiative.

King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, he carried off the temple articles, then he ordered the chief officer to bring in the young men, they were assigned food and drink, they even had their names changed.

They were being acted upon.

There's a passivity to it.

But there's a switch in verse eight, it tells us

“Daniel resolved,”

Daniel made up his mind.

The Hebrew tells us *Daniel set it upon his heart*.

He is now an actor, he is no longer being acted upon.

What did Daniel resolve?

He resolved to be different.

As a man of God or woman of God, this is the first principle that the text teaches us.

We're not just the victims of our circumstance.

We are created in God's image, with a will and power to act.

We can make a choice today to

be different and live differently.

What Daniel chose what was not to defile himself with royal food and wine.

What does that mean?

Why is it that the food and wine would defile him?

At first glance, you might think, well is it because the food wasn't kosher?

Perhaps the meat was prepared in a way where the blood wasn't fully drained out, so according to Mosaic law couldn't eat it.

And that kind of makes sense, except it doesn't account for the wine.

There's no reason he couldn't drink it.

Another argument is that before the food and the wine were offered to these young men, it was first offered to the Babylonian Gods, as was often done.

This is a possibility, but in that case the vegetables also would have likely been offered to the gods and not just the meat.

Ultimately the text doesn't tell us why.

I think the best explanation is that to eat from the king's table was to become the king's man, and Daniel was not going to become the king's man, he was God's man.

He would not be assimilated, he would not compromise.

The book of Daniel talks of four men who took this stand.

Which means there were probably a number of other Jews that were taken into captivity in Babylon, trained in the Kings service, who had no problem eating at the Kings table.

They probably said, *“Daniel, take it easy. It's not that big of a deal. It's just meat and wine.”*

I wonder if you have people in your life like that?

Who see your Christianity, and say *“Come on lighten up, will you? Don't take it so seriously. It's not that big of a deal.”*

Or maybe it's not people in your life.

Maybe it's you.

You've read God's word, and you know His commands.

But you've decided, to live in Babylon today, it's easier, maybe it's more fun, to eat at the kings table – than to stand out from the crowd.

It's worth asking is there any area in your life where you've chosen vegetables and water, in order to be different or stand out?

I'm not trying to be legalistic here, that brings God no pleasure either, but is there any area in your life that sets you apart from your neighbors or co-workers?

Maybe it's not in what you do or don't do in terms of *"I don't drink and I don't chew and I don't go with girls who do,"* but what about your attitudes?

Jesus commands us to be different.

Look at Luke 6.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you . . . If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that."

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:27-36

It's easy to go along with everyone else – but God's Word tells us to choose to be different.

Daniel had resolved in his heart ahead of time,

"I will not allow myself to be defiled. I may serve the King, but my loyalty will be God."

I can't help but think that Daniel's decision here, his insistence to not defile himself, when it was something relatively small, gave him the strength later in life, to stand strong when it mattered most.

So Daniel came up with a plan.

Let's see how it worked out...

"Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'" Daniel 1:9-10

"Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.'" Daniel 1:11-13

"So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food." Daniel 1:14-15

As we've already seen, the primary message of Daniel is not how we are supposed to live but rather that God is sovereign, that He is in control.

We see that again in verse 9.

"God caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel."

Daniel was committed to living differently, but he needed God's grace to do so.

We can understand that the chief of the court would not usually be inclined to grant the request of a captive, especially if it might put him in jeopardy, but here Daniel is careful to let us know that because of God's intervention, because of God's grace – the man granted his request.

To live differently in our culture today,

We must be dependent on God's grace.

This is countercultural.

John Wayne used to be the American image of the ideal man

The Duke was ruggedly independent.

But that's not the case with a man...or woman of God.

We are woefully and wonderfully dependent on God.

Perhaps you've heard the old saying, *"The will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you."*

In Daniel's case, God's will had taken him into captivity and God's grace would sustain him there.

In our lives, we can trust that wherever God leads us, and whatever circumstances He allows to surround us, His grace will also sustain us.

Real men and women of God choose to be different and depend on God's grace.

They also live by God's wisdom.

Once Daniel had decided not to eat the food that was being offered, look at what he did.

Vs. 8...he asked for permission.

He didn't go on a hunger strike, he didn't defy the guard.

He asked for permission.

And then, when the guard expressed fear about what would happen to him if Daniel and his friends didn't fare well without the king's food, Daniel came up with a plan.

Vs. 12 "Please test your servants"

Daniel approached the guard with God's wisdom.

Although the book of Colossians wouldn't be written for a long time after Daniel lived, I think he was acting on the principle expressed there.

"Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." Colossians 4:6

Proverbs 9:10 states,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Daniel exhibited a healthy reverence for God in his desire not to be defiled by the king's food.

This reverence led to wisdom.

Look at Daniel 1:17

"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds." Daniel 1:17

God gave wisdom to Daniel and his friends.

God gave them understanding.

And Daniel lived by God's wisdom.

In chapter 2, Daniel interprets a dream for the king which results in the lives of all of the king's counselors being spared.

Daniel was able to do that because he asked God for wisdom and recognized that his wisdom came from God,

"To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom." Daniel 2:23

How do we get wisdom today?

Proverbs 2:6 tells us,

"For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Proverbs 2:6

We get wisdom by listening to the voice of God.

We hear God's voice through His word.

On Mother's Day we issued the Romans 12 challenge, and many of you spent a couple of weeks reading Romans 12 every day.

If you did that, you received wisdom.

Today I'm going to challenge you to take the

"Proverbs challenge"

By committing to read one chapter of Proverbs every day for the rest of the summer.

There are 31 chapters in Proverbs so it works out pretty well to read one chapter a day.

You can start on June 16 with chapter 16 and go from there.

If you miss a day, don't worry about it, just read the appropriate chapter on the next day.

By filling your mind with God's Word, and obeying what you read, you will learn to live by God's wisdom.

Real men and women of God live by His wisdom.

They also . . .

Discipline themselves for holiness.

Discipline is not a fun subject.

We all know we need it, but few of us actually make the choices to develop it.

Discipline is what can change our desires into reality.

I might desire good grades in school.

Discipline is what causes me to do my homework rather than watch television.

I might desire to get into better shape.

Discipline is what causes me to go for a walk or go to the gym.

I might desire to lose weight.

Discipline is what helps me say no to the ice cream in the freezer.

I might desire to know God's wisdom.

Discipline is what will help me actually open my Bible and read through Proverbs this summer.

I recently read an article on **Developing Mental Toughness** by Tim Elmore.

Tim is a leadership consultant

And an expert in Generation Z –

If you're not familiar with the term, "Generation Z" are those children currently in kindergarten through college.

He gives

8 suggestions for developing mental toughness.

Number 3 on his list is:

Persist on a project when it's hard.

Tim writes:

This is something I talked to my kids about as they were growing up. We embraced this definition for discipline: "Doing what you need to do even when you don't feel like it." This is huge. All four of us in our family would choose a project (often weekly) that we didn't like and do it.

We'd discuss it later just for accountability's sake. Whether it was cleaning the garage, taking out the trash every other day, raking leaves, you name it, we all chose something that wasn't glitzy or sexy, but was hard. On purpose.

There's something about pushing my lazy body to do the opposite of what it wants that helps me lead myself, deepens my discipline—and makes me mentally tough. Few activities make us tougher than intentionally "doing hard things."

Tim is writing about mental toughness, but I think we can apply this same principle to disciplining ourselves for holiness with one important difference.

Tim is writing for a secular audience and so the emphasis is on what we can do.

When it comes to holiness, the Bible tells us that God has already done the work.

In Christ we have been made holy; but the Bible calls us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to exercise that holiness in our lives – to live in accordance with that holiness. That takes discipline.

In my experience, one of the best ways to discipline myself for holiness is to exercise the spiritual disciplines in my life. There are a number of spiritual disciplines: Bible reading, prayer, corporate worship, accountability, silence, scripture memorization, service, and many more.

Richard Foster wrote the book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*.

In it he explains the function of spiritual discipline.

"A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain... This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines - they are a way of sowing to the Spirit... By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done."

Daniel, in exercising the discipline of not eating the king's food, was getting himself to the place where something could be done.

As he faithfully aligned himself with God's purposes, God was developing holiness in him.

In fact, later on in the book, we read an account of a time when Daniel was promoted over the other advisors of the king. Their jealousy over this promotion led them to try to find a way to bring Daniel down. However, in spite of their best efforts, they could not.

Chapter 6 verse 4 describes their conclusion about Daniel,

"Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him."

Daniel 6:4

Daniel's character was so pure, his actions so righteous, that they couldn't come up with a charge to make against him. As they examined his life they came to the conclusion that he could be counted on to make the right choice, so much so that they declared,

"We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God."

And so they talked the king into making it illegal to pray to anyone else but him, knowing that Daniel could be counted on to continue to pray to his God despite the threat of death.

You can read what happens in Daniel 6.

One of our Next Steps this week is to begin a new spiritual discipline to help us grow in holiness.

I would encourage you to take that step. I believe that you will experience growth as you “prepare the soil” for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Daniel . . .

. . . **Chose to be Different**

. . . He **Depended on God’s Grace**

. . . He **Lived by God’s Wisdom**

. . . And he **Disciplined himself for holiness**

That’s what a real man or woman of God looks like.

Let’s pray that we would be “Real Men & Women of God”

Let’s pray . . .