

Sunday 19th April, 2026

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church Welcome & Prayer

Bible Reading – Daniel 1:1-16 (NIV)

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. 3 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— 4 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. 5 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. 6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. 8 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. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel, 10 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." 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 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." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Announcements

Focus for the month: People. It is really tempting for Churches to focus on buildings (especially when they are involved in a redevelopment) or finances (especially when they have a big loan to pay off) or programmes (especially when they grow in numbers and extra coordination is needed) but the real work of the Church is about people. People coming to the Lord, people growing in their faith and people serving the Lord in all they do. Let's work hard to keep our emphasis on people.

School Holidays. With NSW school holidays ending this weekend, the normal activities of the Church will start back again this coming week. Why not find a way where you can service this term on our rosters (see Sam) or join a Bible study (see Stephen or Audric) or even pray more the work of the gospel in this place.

Random Reno Review. In our revamped church space, there are now four sets of doors on the eastern side. Each of these doors will be available to leave via an emergency but in order to get the extra seating that we need into our Church space, they will not be the regular way of coming in and out of the Church space. Please use either the very front or the very back doors to come in or out.

Easter services. It was wonderful to see so many of our regulars and visitors attending one or more of our 7 services. In particular the Easter Thursday night service and the Good Friday services at Charlestown and the Resurrection Sunday service at Swansea were the highest attended in decades. Keep praying for the visitors who came that God would take the Easter message and draw them closer to a personal relationship with Jesus.

Days Off. Please note that Audric normally takes Mondays off and Stephen Saturdays. They are both available in emergency on these days but if you can hold off contacting them on their day off that would be greatly appreciated.

Training Day. Stephen is hoping to have a training day on Sunday 3rd May from 11:30 to 1pm to talk about service leading, Bible reading, pastoral prayers, welcoming and much much more. This will be a refresher for those who are currently on the morning rosters in these capacities but would be great for those who would like to think about helping out in one or more of these roles into the future to come along and see what volunteering in these areas would look like. All welcome to join.

Song – Jerusalem <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g252SXZvdn4>

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. See Him in Jerusalem
Walking where the crowds are
Once these streets had sung to Him
Now they cry for murder
Such a frail and lonely man
Holding up the heavy cross
See Him walking in Jerusalem
On the road to save us</p> | <p>4. See the empty tomb today
Death could not contain him
Once the servant of the world
Now in victory reigning
Lift your voices to the one
Who is seated on the throne
See him in the new Jerusalem
Praise the one who saved us</p> |
| <p>2. See him there upon the hill
Hear the scorn and laughter
Silent as a lamb he waits
Praying to the father
See the king who made the sun
And the moon and shining stars
Let the soldiers hold and nail him down
So that he could save them</p> | <p>Lift your voices to the one
Who is seated on the throne
See him in the new Jerusalem
Praise the one who saved us
Praise the one who saved us</p> |

Pastoral Prayer Points

Pray for Saudi Arabia (Population 38 million, Christians 2 million). Christian converts from Islam remain incredibly vulnerable. They are seen as deeply dishonouring their families and country, which can trigger violent responses from family members. Pray that God makes a way for secret believers to find fellowship with one another. Pray that expatriate believers who meet in secret can continue worshipping without hindrance. Pray for God to reach people in Saudi Arabia through radio, internet, missionaries, dreams and visions.

Pray for our small groups that all those who attend would be growing in understanding, delighting in God's truth, and being shaped by it in. Pray for honest, loving groups where people are known, supported, and encouraged in their relationship with Christ. Pray that groups would look outward—welcoming newcomers, sharing the gospel boldly, and multiplying as more people are reached and discipled.

Pray for those caught up in domestic violence. Pray for the protection of those experiencing domestic violence. Pray for those who perpetrate abuse—that God would convict hearts, bring true repentance, and transform attitudes and behaviours. Pray for survivors—that they would find safety, support, and deep healing from trauma; and for churches and communities to be places of refuge, where people have the courage to speak up and receive wise, compassionate care.

Pray for the Parsons.

Bible Reading – Daniel 1:17-21 (NIV)

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. 18 At the end of the time set by the

king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Sermon: Where to draw the line? (Stephen T)

Sermon link: <https://www.charlestownpresbyterian.org.au/morningsermons/daniel-1/>

If you walk along a beach early in the morning, you'll notice something interesting. There's always a line in the sand. The waves come in all night & then they stop. The water reaches a certain point and goes no further. You can usually see it clearly — a darker strip of sand, seaweed, shells, debris. It's the place where the beach has said: "This far and no further."

Every Christian needs a line like that. A line in the sand. Because the culture we live in is constantly pushing in like the tide. At work. At university. Online. In our friendships. And we need to work out where do I draw that line in the sand? What do I say no to? How much do I adapt to the culture around me? And how much should I blend in?

Slide 2

I could give you numerous examples from my own life but let me tell you about what happened to me a number of years ago when I joined a soccer team. I decided that I would not play in the Christian competition as I wanted to meet non-Christian men my own age and so I signed up for the Kingscliff Wolves. The 'Wolves', was I happy to take on the name of an animal that hunts down its prey without mercy? Yes, I was. At least that was an easier decision than my friend Richard, whose local cricket club was called the Red Devils.

I joined up and ever second word was a swear word. They would go after the game to the pub and get wasted. Sometimes when we played an away game, we would hire a bus and they were obnoxious even before we got home. And would urinate in one big line on the side of the highway. If I went out with them socially, they might start at the pub, often with lots of gambling and end up at a strip show. So why would I want to even associate with some of these guys? And if I was to continue, where would I draw the line?

Slide 3

It's a hard decision, isn't it? And it is a decision that we all have to face very regularly in our lives. We faced it at school; with the group of friends we hang around with. We face it with our peers, do I watch the same shows that they watch, watch the same movies as them even when they present a lifestyle of greed, of bitchiness, of a distorted use of sex? We face it at uni, work, our social or bowls clubs. We face it when we are trying to decide what we can do with our friends, where we go, how different we will act. Where do I draw the line?

Many draw the line in a place which means they will have no involvement at all with those whom they consider undesirable. Others fail to draw the line at all & so become swallowed up by their culture. But where do you currently draw the line? What issue would be too much for you? Will you only hang around with Christians, or those who have similar beliefs to you? Will you conform if they drink, smoke, swear, go out on Sunday at the same time as Church, or when they have different morals to you? Where do you currently draw the line?

In the first chapter of Daniel, we see Daniel and his three friends are asking themselves this exact same question. Where do I draw the line? How do I fit in without being swallowed up? Especially when it is God Himself who has delivered them right into the wolf's lair.

Slide 4

1. God Delivers (verses 1-7)

*“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.”*

The book opens, with a breaking news story. “We interrupt this program to bring you this report from Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has just declared war on Jerusalem.” So, this isn’t some fairy tale, a ‘once upon a time’ type fable. Its history. We are talking about what happened in 605 BC. Where the super power of this world, Babylon decides to use brute force to get its way over the people of God living in Judea.

Slide 5

It’s an absolute crisis. Especially as the temple is raided. The place of God’s presence and its items of worship are taken to Babylon and if you note the NIV’s footnote they are taken to Shinar which was where the tower of Babylon was first erected in Genesis 11. Our author is setting up the ultimate good vs bad contest. God & evil are at it hammer and tongs. And it seems that evil is winning but read again verse 2.

*“And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.”* No, the Lord is not defeated. The Lord is not absent. He is still present and is still in control. The Lord is responsible for the situation that God’s people, Israel finds itself in. The Lord would rather have a remnant of his faithful people living in captivity in a pagan world than to continue to let his people live like pagans in the land that God had given them & have them drag his name through the mud.

Slide 6

The Bible calls this God’s providence, how the Lord is in complete control of all things that happen. Listen to what the Westminster Confession of Faith says about this in chapter 5, *“God, the great Creator of all things, does uphold, direct, dispose & govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible fore-knowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, **to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.**”*

God’s plan for his people’s lives include humiliation as well as glory, exile and shame as well as security and prosperity. God is using a powerful king like Nebuchadnezzar to bring about his good purposes, for not just his people but his whole world. Let’s see what happens next.

Slide 7

3 “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— 4 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.”

The Babylonians then choose the best and the brightest, the cream of the crop of young Israelites, to be enrolled in the best Babylonian university for the next three years. These guys are not priests or prophets but laymen. Youths actually, probably no more than 14 or 15 years of age, and they will be given a Babylonian make over. The best food. The best education. A chance of power and status. Here we see how advanced this Babylonian empire really is – it can use not just brute force but soft power to achieve its goals.

Slide 8

And it does so, using three steps. Firstly, it teaches these young men the language and literature of Babylon. Well at least that seems pretty harmless enough. Except what they were learning was the Babylonian world view, they were learning about their gods, their way of life, even about the black magic, the sorcery, the astrology that the Babylonians were known for. Would you accept that or would you have

nothing to do with it? Would you be willing to learn about the black arts, about other gods, about a non-Christian culture?

Daniel and his friends bended on that one. For how were they going to communicate the true and living God to the Babylonians if they didn't know what the Babylonians believed? How were they going to understand the mindset of those they daily rubbed shoulders with, if they didn't know what was important to them and what values they had? For knowledge itself is not the problem. Christians do not need to fear learning. Daniel understood something important: You can study a worldview without believing it. You can understand a culture without adopting its values. Christians should not retreat from education, ideas, or culture. We should attempt to understand the world deeply.

Friends we face the same issue when we think about schooling for our kids & our grandkids. Today they are being taught a completely different world view in the government school system. So, to some the answer is the Catholic system or the Christian school system. Or maybe we should home school? But whatever you decide to do you need to take responsibility to teach them and prepare them for a non-Christian culture. For work, for university, for new friends. Whatever you decide, Christian families are responsible for the education of their children and they can't afford to delegate that wholly to someone else.

Slide 9

The second step was to give them the best food and wine that Babylon can offer. *5 "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."* This looked like a privilege but it was also a trial. I've always struggled at an all you can eat buffet. What are you like at a function where there is an open bar? We'll come back to this in a moment.

Slide 10

And the third and final step was to change these young men's names. *6 "Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego."* So, for example, Daniel's birth name means "the Lord is my judge" And it is now changed to "Bel (a Babylonian god) protects my life"

Many migrants are confronted with this sort of challenge. For these young men their new names rolled off the Babylonian tongue. They are names that hide entirely their Hebrew past. Names that made them fit right in. Daniel and his friends let that one slide too, they realised it was only a label, and a label cannot change your true identity. Labels in the end are not that important, they decided, they knew they still belonged to the Lord Himself

Slide 11

The issue though is where will you draw the line? If everything becomes a line issue then you will totally withdraw from all of your society. If nothing crosses that line, then you will become just like everyone else. So where do you draw the line? And do you realise that different Christians will draw the line at different places. We saw that with COVID didn't we? The Christian Church approached the government regulations in different ways and with very different outcomes. Each group pointing back to the Scriptures for their justification.

Joseph serves in Egypt. Moses was trained in Egyptian learning. Paul knew Greek philosophy but all had the faith to prayerfully draw the line in such a way, acknowledging that God was still in control. God delivers, even when his people are surrounded by a pagan culture. And

Slide 12

2. God Causes his will to be done as Daniel resolves to follow God's will. (verses 8-17)

8 *“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 **resolves**, to not cross this line in the sand. They were willing to be deported, re-educated, have their name changed but they resolved not to eat the royal food and wine.

Slide 13

Now why draw the line here? It is not immediately obvious to us thousands of years later why this was a no-go area but there are three reasons why this was the hill Daniel and his friends were willing to die on & it might have been due to **the kind of food** they would eat.

The meat and drink may have violated Old Testament dietary laws. Things like pig and camel were unclean. And so maybe Daniel would not break God’s commands just to enjoy the king’s menu. Or it might have been due to **the use of the food**. In the ancient world, food served in the royal court was often part of pagan worship. It was dedicated to gods before being eaten. That would make eating it a form of participation in idolatry. And Daniel would not want to eat a meal that been dedicated to another god.

But personally, I think it was more likely due to **whose food it was**. In the ancient world, eating from a king’s table symbolised allegiance and dependence on that king. By living on the king’s provisions, Daniel might appear to owe his identity & success to Nebuchadnezzar rather than to God. The vegetable test emphasises something important: Daniel’s health and wisdom would now be dependent upon God, not Babylon. Daniel would not let Babylon take credit for what only God provides.

Now whichever reason is correct, the deeper point is clear. Daniel recognised that something small could shape something big. Eating the king’s food might seem trivial... but it symbolised loyalty, worship, and identity. So, **Daniel drew the line there**. For Daniel the issue wasn’t vegetables versus steak. The issue was loyalty: who do I ultimately belong to?

This is an issue that many of us Christians forget about. Compromise rarely begins with big decisions. It begins with small ones. A meal. A conversation. A quiet moment where no one else notices. Here Daniel decided: “If I can’t honour God at the king’s table, I won’t last long in the king’s palace.” But please notice that this costly resolve led to characteristic humility.

Slide 14

9 *“Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food & 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.”

Slide 15

11 *Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food & treat your servants in accordance with what you see.”*

Sometimes when we know we have to take a stand and face down opposition we can become sharp and ugly and pugnacious, can’t we? In our conversations with others, as we communicate on social media, as we talk about politicians and people in power we come across strong and inflexible. But Daniel doesn’t come across that way, does he?

Slide 16

Let’s not forget that Daniel is about 15 years old at this point in the story, and yet he demonstrates remarkable humility and mature judgment, doesn’t he? He doesn’t throw his refusal to eat and drink from the royal table in the face of the chief of the eunuchs. He doesn’t have a martyr complex. He isn’t trying to

be a hero. He's just **trying to be faithful**. And so, when he approaches the chief of the eunuchs in verse 8, he comes with a request and not a demand. And the Lord rewards that sort of confident faith.

Slide 17

15 "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead." The young men's small act of loyalty is richly rewarded. Daniel has drawn the line in the sand at his dependence, his complete dependence upon the Lord. He will go this far but no further because he is His.

Slide 18

Now he and his three friends have no idea of the bigger tests that will soon come to them. The three friends will be soon challenged to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue of gold and will end up in the fiery furnace. Daniel will end up serving in the court of the godless Belshazzar during the last days of a crumbling empire. He will be charged with treason and be thrown in the lion's den. But here the Lord is preparing his people with smaller, private tests, to get them ready for their future when the tests will become bigger and more public.

I think this should prompt us to ask ourselves, where are we currently drawing the line? Are we willing to depend upon the Lord even if it means going against the flow of the people around us? On identity? On marriage? On sex? On entertainment? On sport? On Church attendance? Are we failing in the little things? If so, what hope is there for us with the big things? Are we ready for our society to become more and more unchristian? If so that means the challenges are going to come thick and fast for both us and our children.

For what type of people are we raising here in this Church? And in your families? Are we prioritising their pleasure? Their promotions or their purity? Daniel resolves to be the Lord's first and the Lord causes the door of service to remain open to him. Which leads lastly to

Slide 19

3. The Lord gives (verses 17-21)

*17 "To these four young men **God gave knowledge & understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.** 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so, they entered the king's service."*

How heroic is Daniel and his three friends? But the real hero of the story is the Lord. Who gave these four men the knowledge and understanding that they will need. Who made them look good in the king's eyes. Who quietly intervened so that his people, his godly servants, are now at the very heart of this super power of the ancient world. For just like a little yeast causes the bread to rise, so these four young men will be like yeast in this pagan kingdom, helping shape the destinies of all the people in that corner of the world.

Slide 20

20 "In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus."

You see the pursuit of godly wisdom is not just a good end in itself. It's also useful for the people of this world. Because here we see that Babylon's wisdom is no match for God's wisdom. That Babylon's power has been overtaken by God's quiet resistance. That Babylonians' assimilation was in the end a part of God's plan of putting key people in the centre of this influential government. For due to God's power and wisdom these four youths started off as captives and end up right in the very middle of the seat of royal power.

And they were to stay there for the next 70 years. Daniel ends up as an advisor of the next 6 kings, including one from Babylonians eventual conqueror, King Cyrus of Persia. You see Daniel lived to see Babylon's fall. He gets to see God's ultimate victory of bringing his faithful remnant home. You see in Daniel 1 it looked like Babylon had defeated Jerusalem, but instead the Lord was turning apparent defeat into victory. His victory over all his enemies.

Slide 21

And that is the pattern we see replicated in the gospels. Where God's son Jesus knew exactly where to draw the line. He had fellowship with prostitutes, was willing to eat with sinners, he spent plenty of time in Gentile territory and he refused to confirm to the expectations of the religious leaders around him. Instead, his food was to do the will of the father. His desire was to take the road less travelled. His aim was purity of life because he knew it was the power of this indestructible life that would ultimately bring about God's worldwide kingdom.

For there on the cross, in apparent weakness and suffering, in darkness and death, Jesus defeats Satan, he pays for our sin and secures God's sovereign grace for all who will put their trust in him. At the cross Daniel's God achieves the most important victory of all. Where he delivers us from our sin, he causes us to become right with him and he gives us his wonderful grace, which he makes available to us for all eternity.

Friends, let's remember that we live in a world like Daniel's. We don't live in a Christian world; we live in a world where we will have to continually draw a line between what we can & can't do. And in the words of the old kids chorus we need to Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand up and serve the Lord no matter. Dare to be different. Dare to draw the line in such a place where we can live in the world but not be of the world. Where we can serve the God who made the world, while seeking to please him as we live out our lives in this world.

Slide 22

And we will only be able to do that if we don't fix our attention on Daniel but on Daniel's sovereign God and Daniel's glorious redeemer, Jesus. Our loyalty is to the Lord God. We belong to Him. We may too live in Babylon but we don't want Baylon to rule us. For we are the Lords. And because of that we can live like Daniel and live like Jesus – trusting that God is in control, resolving to honour him in all we do and believing that God will bring about his good purposes for our lives and for our world. But in his time and in his way.

Slide 23

That's the line in the sand that God has drawn for us. That he will work all things for the good of those who love him. Now how good is that?

Song – This I believe <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNiYUPsHgls>

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Our Father everlasting | Bridge |
| The all-creating One | I believe in You |
| God Almighty | I believe You rose again |
| Through your Holy Spirit | I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord |
| Conceiving Christ the Son | (Repeat) |
| Jesus our Saviour | |
| | Chorus |
| I believe in God our Father | |
| I believe in Christ the Son | |
| I believe in the Holy Spirit | 3. I believe in life eternal |
| Our God is three in One | I believe in the virgin birth |
| I believe in the resurrection | I believe in the saints' communion |
| That we will rise again | And in Your Holy Church |
| For I believe in the Name of Jesus | I believe in the resurrection |
| (In the name o' Lord) | When Jesus comes again |

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2. Our Judge and our Defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in You
Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious light
Forever seated high
- For I believe in the Name of Jesus
- Chorus
- Chorus

Benediction *“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴ Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering” (Isaiah 53)*