

I. Introduction: 3 stories

During World War I there was no legal recognition for conscientious objection in our country. Joseph and Michael Hofer were two young married brothers from a Hutterite Christian community in South Dakota. They were drafted and sent to Camp Lewis in 1918. Because of their Christian peace beliefs, they refused to wear the military uniform and to obey other military orders, so they were court-martialed and sentenced to 20 years in the famous Alcatraz prison in California. In November of that year, after suffering terrible mistreatment for four months at Alcatraz, they were sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Forced to stand in the cold air for several hours in their underwear while waiting for their prison garb, the two men became very ill. They both died a few days later, martyrs for their Christian convictions, almost a hundred years ago, here in the United States of America.

Adapted from [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hofer Brothers](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hofer_Brothers) (accessed 1-27-2017)

About 40 years later, across many oceans in Ethiopia, 12-year-old Bekelatch attended a Christian girls' school about 3.5 miles from her home. Every day she walked to this school, where she learned to know Jesus.

Then came the Adibar festival, which marked the beginning of the Ethiopian new year. At that time many families would sacrifice a black sheep to Satan to ask his protection for the coming year. As her family was getting ready for the festival, Bekelatch's father asked her to prepare some coffee.

"Is it for Satan?" she asked.

"Of course it's for Satan," he answered.

Bekelatch looked at her father. "I can't do it, Father," she said. "I belong to Jesus now, and I can't worship Satan."

Her father was so angry that he made her leave home. He forbade her to return, and he said she would receive no more food from him.

Bekelatch continued going to school, but she didn't tell her teachers what had happened. Instead, she prayed to God, asking him to take care of her. And God did. Bekelatch had been friendly to an old woman on the way to school, and this woman gave Bekelatch food and a mat to sleep on at night.

Later, Bekelatch's father became seriously ill, so he allowed her to return home to help out. One day as she was sweeping the house and humming a hymn, her father called to her from his bed. "Daughter, God took care of you, when I wouldn't give you anything. You are right to follow Jesus. You can come back home to live with us."

Adapted from Marian Hostetler, They Loved Their Enemies, ©1988 Herald Press (Peace and Justice Series #3), p. 61-62.

Some 25 years after this, back in Hesston Kansas, a young man pondered what to do as he turned 18 and had to register with the Selective Service System. Growing up in a Mennonite church, he believed that followers of Jesus Christ should refuse to join the military and use violence against enemies, as Jesus taught.

Although conscientious objection in the US was by then a legal option, he also believed he should not cooperate with the whole military conscription system at all, because its purpose was to make it easier for the country to go to war and kill enemies.

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So conscientious objection was legally available, but only by a difficult process AFTER a military draft would be implemented, which wasn't the case. Refusing to register with Selective Service was a crime punishable by prison time, and some other Mennonite young men in the 1970's and 80's had already served time for this crime of conscience. But after prayer and consulting with a pastor and others from church, this young man decided to proceed with his decision not to register, even when he began receiving a series of increasingly threatening letters from Selective Service.

Within a year or two, the federal government decided that the strategy of imprisoning bright articulate young men was backfiring on them ... so they decided to hit non-registrants where it counted: in the wallet. The punishment for nonregistration changed to the withholding of federal loans and grants for college.

Fortunately for this guy, the Mennonite Church stood behind him, making college loans available to him to replace the loans he was denied as a non-registrant. Because the church put its money where its mouth was, he was able to attend Hesston College, and then Goshen College, and eventually even seminary over in Elkhart. You may have guessed that this guy ... is me!

A. I greatly hesitate to even put myself in the company of such faith heroes as the Hofer brothers, or 12-year-old Bekelatch.

1. In truth, I have suffered nothing in comparison to them.
2. But in all 3 true stories, in big or small ways, we were confronted with unwelcome changes ... whether it was from the power of a national government, or the power of parents.

B. We were all ordered to do something, and failure to comply could be costly. Yet our inner voice of faith was holding up this



road sign:

II. Today in our series on change, we look at the story of Daniel, King Darius & the lions' den

A. This story is different from our other biblical stories

1. In the other Sundays recently and in the future, the road signs are cautionary ... (Detour ... Curves Ahead ... Yield)
2. These signs tell you to be careful or they guide you in an alternate way, but they don't tell you to stop and turn around
3. In this series, we pastors recognized that many of us really don't like change ... in fact some of us resist change almost instinctively

B. So if you're a change-resister, if you frequently wonder "Why can't things just stay the same?" today's story of Daniel may be

right down your line ... as long as you recognize one truth:

1. Resisting change for God's sake usually comes with a cost
2. And the cost can sometimes be very high, but so is the reward ...

III. (background) This story of Daniel starts off with things going swimmingly for this intelligent gifted Jew, still with his people in exile

A. The Jews are captives far away from Jerusalem, but by now they have settled into this foreign land

1. There has been a big political shift over time and the Babylonian empire is no longer ruling. They've been replaced by the Persians
2. But the Jews are not being treated too badly, at least not the cream of the Jewish crop, like Daniel himself

B. In the story, it's a time of political transition:

1. the Chaldean king Belshazzar is killed and in his place rises Darius the Mede, coming from a very different culture and background
2. You could say it's a change of administration ... an overhaul of the government ... He is, so to speak, "draining the swamp" (*sorry, I couldn't resist that one*)
 - a) In a fashion that is peculiarly familiar right now, King Darius has his own ideas about how his empire should be run

He sets things up to run his way, in a very orderly fashion, by appointing his own high officers over the various provinces

And then, in order to assure that these high officers run their affairs according to the king's best interests, Darius centralizes his authority by appointing 3 top administrators to keep all those high officers in line
 - b) Well, somehow, Daniel's administrative skills, his integrity and his wisdom do not go unnoticed by the King's people on the ground
3. Amazingly, despite being a member of a low-regarded group of immigrants ... Despite NOT being a Mede or a Persian, Daniel gets fast-tracked up to the level of being one of these 3 administrators ...
4. In any case, his good fortune doesn't stop there:
 - a) Daniel's abilities and character are so outstanding that the King makes plans to add yet another administrative level –
 - b) Daniel will basically manage the whole kingdom on Darius' behalf, even above the 3 administrators!
 - c) It's easy to see how jealousy comes into play when this immigrant

outsider leapfrogs right past those who have been working their way up in the Persian power ranks for years

d) So the big change, the ethical conflict for Daniel arises when these jealous fellow politicians set him up to be eliminated

C. But behind the rise in Daniel's political fortunes lies a bigger reality: He maintains his spiritual integrity as a practicing Jew

1. I.e. Daniel practices his faith openly ... his allegiances are clear and his boundaries are firm

a) When a law is passed that would force him to stop his exclusive worship of Yahweh, he doesn't waver, even at the risk of his own life

b) His allegiances to his God are clear, and that's why his rivals choose religion as the place to attack him

2. Nothing less than allegiance and true worship is at stake

a) Last week Pastor Cindy challenged us to ask ourselves some core identity questions: Who am I? and Who are we, as community?

b) Daniel could not engage in an action that would betray his core identity as a covenant follower of Yahweh

IV. We live in a world of multiple beliefs, multiple values & multiple truths

A. It is easy to find a moral relativism these days that basically tells us almost anything goes

1. This even carries some influence for highly educated Christians who pride ourselves on NOT being fundamentalist or simplistic

2. Evangelicals on the right sometimes criticize progressive Christians for not having any boundaries, and simply sliding along with every moral change that comes in our world

B. This message today is a modest nod to my evangelical friends because one of my main points for today in this series on change is this: There IS right and wrong

**There IS
right and wrong**

*Some changes require
resistance,
not adaptation.*

1. If we're going to claim a Christian spirituality, not all values are relative ... Not all changes are morally neutral or negligible

2. We are a people of the book, who look to the Bible for guidance in the face of change, and we continue to claim that Jesus is the center of our faith

a) God does call for our allegiance to Christ and our following in the way of Christ, even when it comes at a high cost

b) In other words: God tells us that some changes require resistance, not adaptation

C. So here's one obvious question that Daniel 6 raises for us

Daniel 6 asks us ...
What kind of change or demand would cause you to refuse to comply, out of your Christian conscience?

OR

What kind of costly situation would bring you to heed God's



?

today:

1. *What kind of potential change or demand placed upon you would cause you to refuse to comply, out of your Christian conscience?*

a) Another way to ask it, *What kind of costly situation would bring you to heed God's WRONG WAY sign?*

b) Those are the ultimate application questions for today, and if I wanted to really play it safe I would just end sermon right there

2. But if you know me, you know I'm not a fundamentalist & I'm not a fan of simplistic black-and-white answers

3. So having said all this, let me add some observations that I also feel I need to add. Whether or not they are from the Holy Spirit, you



will have to judge ...]

V. How do you "dare to be a Daniel" in the confusing and conflictive world of today? Here are 3 things I'm NOT saying:

A. 1st I'm not saying that everyone MUST sacrifice much in order to prove their faith

1. Being a martyr just of itself, will not earn you brownie points in heaven, or even earn your way to heaven

2. When I ask you what kind of sacrifice you're willing to make for your Lord Jesus, I am not judging as shallow anyone's faith if their beliefs are not costly to them

B. 2nd, I am also not prescribing for everyone exactly which faith dilemmas rise to the level of the WRONG WAY sign

1. I know that the rubber meets the road right here for many Christians ... & these choices do vary among sincere Christians

2. Some Christians today are claiming their WRONG WAY signs in these situations:

- a) Being a member in an organization that restricts religious freedom of expression
- b) Following policies that do not exclude or prohibit abortion
- c) Obeying laws that ban refusing service to gay or lesbian couples

3. I also know that other Christians hear God saying WRONG WAY in situations like these:

- a) Abiding by laws that suppress voting rights of racial minorities
- b) Paying the portion of federal taxes that supports war and military spending
- c) Following regulations that will bring more harm to God's creation
- d) Obeying prohibitions on hospitality to refugees or immigrants

4. It is precisely one of today's biggest challenges for Christians to dialogue and respect each other on how we interpret God's voice to us in these matters.

C. 3rdly, I am encouraging you as a Christian NOT to make every ethical choice into a litmus test for faithfulness to Jesus

1. Not every dilemma before us is so black-and-white that it implies embracing or rejecting Jesus

2. Our American landscape has become way too polarized

- a) Too often we settle into permanent entrenched camps on issues (& this is for both liberals and conservatives)
- b) In these camps, compromise becomes a dirty word & everyone is convinced of 3 things:

Only we correctly understand God

God is on our side

Only the other side needs to change

3. My friends, the loudest weeping I hear in these situations is not from whichever side happened to lose the latest court decision or the latest election ... the loudest weeping is from Jesus himself!

VI. Conclusion

A. This morning I'm asking all of us how high a price we'd be

willing to pay to maintain our allegiance to Jesus?

How high a price would you pay to maintain your allegiance to Jesus?

1. Could we sacrifice our job? The house where we live? A close relationship? Our very lives?

2. For over 200 years such questions have seemed so remotely hypothetical ... so far from reality that we Christians in USA have not often had to take them seriously

a) The occasional times that living out Xian faith for most American Anabaptists has required major sacrifice have been during national wars and dealing with military conscription ... but a military draft has not confronted the Peace Churches for over 40 years

b) Most of us here have not in our lifetimes been forced to make Yes/No decisions on costly changes that would compromise our allegiance to Jesus and the path of following Jesus

B. But I think such times may come sooner than we think

1. Part of the message of the book of Daniel, and indeed the message of Jesus and the early apostles, is that God's laws are higher than human laws.

2. When our schools & our employers and our governments enact policies that support the values we see Jesus supporting, then by all means we need to applaud them

3. In the coming 4 years, I fervently pray that our new national government will show more respect and concern for refugees, immigrants, the poor, the disabled and the environment than what we have seen so far

a) Prayer for our governing officials at all levels is always something we Christians are called to do

b) But the church of Jesus Christ may soon be called to stand up for the most vulnerable people and elements in our world, in ways that we have not had to stand up in the past

c) For example you may soon learn of practical ways that Waterford people can join with other local churches to give tangible support and encouragement to immigrant families living in great fear

4. Of course, if we do take stronger stands with "the least of these", we must always do so humbly, prayerfully, and forthrightly, in our Lord's spirit of both love and justice

C. Let me close with a gentle word of encouragement, lest you think that our service today is all about just saying NO:

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1. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, who has called us out from darkness to light, is always much more a statement of YES, than a statement of NO!

Benediction

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, who has called us out from darkness to light, is always much more a statement of YES, than a statement of NO.
May the life-giving YES of Jesus Christ lighten the burden of every NO he calls you to speak!