"And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and the window of his chamber being open toward Jerusalem, he kneeled down and prayed and gave thanks to God three times a day, as he did aforetime." And this he did, remember, not because he was in ignorance of what had happened. He did this not because he did not know that a company of little fellows driven on by envy had catered to the vanity of Darius and had secured the passage of a foolish law. He knew as well as any man in Babylon that it was forbidden to pray to any being for the next thirty days save the king. He knew that that law could not be changed. He knew that in doing as he was now doing he was looking death eye to eye and defying it. Yet he goes quietly on the path of duty. He is not to be cowed. He is not to be frightened out of his convictions. And as we read the story we can not but say with admiration, "This is a man."

How are we going to account for Daniel? He did not become what he did by mere process of drifting. Plenty of folks drift. That is an easy thing to do, for there are currents in society, currents in life, just as there are currents in the air and currents in the sea. But the unfortunate fact is that the young fellow who drifts never drifts upstream. He never drifts into greatness. He never drifts into cleanliness. He never drifts into manliness nor into genuine heroism. This man Daniel did not begin by being a drifter.

Neither did he reach the heights that he reached by mere good fortune. We see him in this story upon the summit of the mountain. He did not, however, fly up there and light down like a bird. He was not lifted there upon the hands of happy chance. "While his companions slept" or dodged or took it easy, "he toiled upward in the night." He arrived, but his arrival was in no sense an accident. He made good, but his making good did not grow out of a mere fortunate set of circumstances.

I know that it is true that circumstances help some men and help them greatly. But that very same combination of circumstances wrecks other men. Two boys may attend the same school. They may sit in the same class at the feet of the same teacher. One may come away warped for life. The other may come away strengthened and better equipped for the stern business of living.

Do you remember the story we read in the twelfth chapter of Acts? Peter, you remember, was being kept in prison, but one night, in answer to the prayers of the saints, the story says that the angel of God smote Peter. And then what happened as a result of that smiting? This: His chains fell off from his hands. He was emancipated. He was made free. He was enabled to stand upon his feet and walk. A little further on in the chapter we read how Herod made an egotistical speech and that the angel of God smote him and the worms ate him up. Now, so far as we can tell, the same angel smote these two men in the same way, but one man it set free and the other man it made worm-eaten.

So Daniel did not become the mighty man that he was simply because of certain fortunate circumstances. His circumstances were by no means fortunate so far as they looked to us at the beginning. But he conquered in spite of his circumstances. He conquered because when
a lad between twelve and sixteen years of age he made this high decision. He formed this daring purpose: "He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." He purposed in his heart that he would stand by his convictions, that he would be true to the right as he saw it and to the truth as he believed it.

This is the secret of all that Daniel became in the after days. This accounts for him and you can account for him in no other way. Here is the little Lake Itasca from whence sprang this mighty Mississippi that through the centuries has helped to water the nations. Daniel became the hero that he was because of a right decision, made in early youth and persisted in through many toilsome years.

Look at the story. In the heart of the Judean hills there stood an ancient city. It was not the largest city of antiquity, but it was by all odds the most important. It was the religious and governmental capital of a people that have done more to bless and enlighten the world than any other nation that has ever lived. Here in this inconspicuous walled city there stood the temple of Jehovah. Here towered that wonderful structure whose glittering dome caught the first kill of the sunrise and held its last lingering caress at eventide. In this temple was the true God worshipped and His ordinances observed.

Away to the east, some 500 miles, there was another city, the most marvelous in some respects that the ingenuity of man has ever builded. The name of this city was Babylon. It was builded, we are told, four square. It was 60 miles in circumference. It was surrounded by a wall that was 300 feet in height and wide enough on top for 6 war chariots to drive abreast. The city was entered by a hundred great bronze gates, 25 on a side.

Down through the midst of this city flowed the historic river Euphrates, supplying it with water and adding to its picturesqueness and its beauty. Upon the banks of this stream were builded wonderful temples and palaces. Here was the famous tower of Baal lifting its tall head to a height of more than 600 feet. And just across on the other side of the river, with a wonderful bridge between, was the royal palace. This palace was a bit of a city within itself. It measured some 7 miles in circumference. Here were the famous Hanging Gardens, one of the well known seven wonders of the world.

Nebuchadnezzar, as you know, had married a queen from the hill country. Amidst the low lying plains of Babylon she was homesick. She longed for the breath and the outlook of the great hills. She was wearied with the monotony of the unbroken plains and so her king builded her the swinging gardens, a great artificial mountain. This structure rose terrace on terrace. Upon its sides grew great trees and bloomed wonderful flowers. And down from its summit flowed songful and colorful little streams from water lifted from the Euphrates by hydraulic pressure. A wonderful city was this Babylon, almost an empire within itself.

Now, out from the gates of this city of pomp and splendor and power there marched an army and it journeyed to the west and laid siege to the smaller city among the Judean hills. And the story says that "God gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah into his hands." And the walls of the city were torn down and its sacred temple was sacked and the immense treasures of the temple were stolen and carried away to be placed in the temple of the gods of Babylon.
But the finest treasures that were stolen from the Jewish people were not the gold and silver vessels of the temple. They might have lost these and still have remained rich, but the priceless things that were carried away by this shrewd conqueror was the flower of the youth of Jerusalem. He gathered the choice of the lads and the lassies of the city of Jehovah and these he took away into lifelong exile.

It would be hard for us to imagine the utter bitterness and black despair of this going into exile, both on the part of those that were left and of those that were taken away. There could be little hope of return. In fact, I doubt if there was any hope at all. You can see the captive band as they pass out the broken gates. You can see them as they take their way over the hills to turn their tear wet faces upon the highest summit for a last look at that city that meant to them all that home means to us. And not only all that home means, but it also meant to them the place where the honor of Jehovah dwelt. And as they look you can hear them say, "If I forget thee, Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

At last the long march is ended. They come within sight of the towering walls of Babylon. Their immensity makes the walls of their native city look like the playthings of children. They enter by one of the great gates, and heartsick and homesick they pitch their tents upon the banks of the river Euphrates.

Curious people gather about them. They are eager to have a look at these strange folk that come from beyond the plain. And remembering their fame for music, they ask them for a native song. They say, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But in response, they hang their harps in songless silence upon the willows and weep as they think of their far off home, saying only, "How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?"

Now, among that desolate, sobbing crowd was a young fellow somewhere between the ages of 12 and 16 by the name of Daniel. Whether he was as utterly cast down as those about him we do not know, but we do know that there soon came for him the big chance of his life. A royal officer picked him out along with some few others to become a candidate for positions of high honor and power in the king's service.

Daniel is taken into the palace. I am sure he did not know that morning that he would that day have to face what was possibly the supreme temptation of his life. He did not know that that day it should be for him to determine upon which side of the great water shed of right and wrong the stream of his life should flow. But that was the day of testing. It was the day when he started toward the high summit of that manliness that is presented to us in the text.

Arrived within the palace, they are made to recline at table. Upon this table Daniel sees the dainties of a king. There is meat which it is not lawful for him to eat. There is wine which his conscience forbids him to drink. Here about him are the officers of the king. He is an exile and a slave. Shall he eat or not eat? Shall he be true to his conscience and stand by his convictions or plead the hard situation in which he is placed and play the coward?

Now, to his eternal credit we read this sentence: "Daniel pur-
posed in his heart that he would not defile himself." "Daniel purposed" - then you are going to have to reckon with this man Daniel. You are going to have to realize his presence. You can not push him out of the way as if he were not there. You can not boo at him and dismiss him as you would blow a piece of chaff off your coat sleeve. "Daniel purposed."

And notice that his purpose was a worthy one. "He purposed that he would not defile himself." He knew well enough that if he did not defile himself then he would stay clean. Because it is true forever more that nobody can besmirch your soul but yourself. All Babylon is powerless to put a mark on the soul of young Daniel. They may put chains on his body, but they can not put chains on his heart. Nobody can soil you. Nobody can besmirch you. Nobody can besmirch me but myself. A man may pass by and splash mud upon my clothes, but mine is the only hand that can splash mud upon my soul.

Daniel purposed that at any cost he would keep clean, that he would be unspotted. I can see him as the banquet begins. Everybody is eating, but he has touched not a morsel. And the king's officer puts his hand upon his shoulder and says, "See here, young fellow, you are not eating." And Daniel faces the issue. He does not say, "I am not hungry today." He doesn't try to dodge by saying, "I don't like these things" or that "I have a dreadful headache." He meets the issue squarely and says, "I can not eat this. It is contrary to my religion. It is against my conscience." I feel quite sure that that officer never had another such shock as that in all his life.

And while reading this, it may sound very easy for Daniel. Yet I want to remind you that it was not easy. It seems to me that if ever a young fellow might have been excused for spitting in the face of his conscience, Daniel might have been excused at this time. Remember his circumstances. He is a captive, a slave. His life is absolutely at the disposal of his masters, and here is a door opened to him. If he is obedient, if he will only compromise, he has an opportunity to get on.

There was an appeal, then, to his ambition. Daniel was a young fellow of ability. He was a young fellow of intelligence. He was a young fellow who had an ambition no doubt to be and do some worthy thing. And this temptation came saying, "Eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine and you will get on in life. You will come to a place of power. You will win a position. You will be able to help not only yourself, but your enslaved people as well."

Then, there was money in this position that is opened to Daniel: The truth of the matter is, there was unlimited money. As a high officer of the king, he would share in the unlimited wealth of the rulers of that great empire. And so there was that in this temptation that could appeal strongly to any man who had in him a lust for power or a lust for gold.

Then, everybody else was eating. What a test it is when you have a troublesome conscience that will not allow you to do what your friends do, that will not allow you to share the pleasures that they enjoy, that will not allow you to engage in the pastimes in which they engage. We do not like to stand alone. We have a deadly fear of being peculiar. We want so far as possible to dis-individualize ourselves and come to think and feel and act just like those about us. "Daniel, everybody is eating", and if Daniel had been like most of us he would have had a mouthful and a
swallow of wine within the next two seconds.

It was customary to eat. Daniel knew that and yet he had to defy custom. He would not put custom above conscience. He would not put custom above his sense of right. He would not let custom override his convictions. You know we do. A modest girl would never allow herself to be seen in a ball-room costume and in a compromising position in which the modern dance places her if it were not customary. It is the usual thing, and therefore, though it is shocking, though it sooner or later tends to take the fine edge off of any girl's modesty, we go ahead simply because it is customary.

"Then, Daniel, you ought to eat because you are away from home. You are here among strangers. The chances are you will never get home again. True, your father and mother might grieve a bit if they knew you were eating, but they will never know."

How many people there are who feel that they can do things away from home that they would never think of doing at home! How many there are in Washington today who are living in habitual neglect of the church, who are habitually breaking the vows of church membership that would never think of so doing in their own home town! How many there are that are guilty of practices away from home, who take liberties with their conscience away from home that they would not think of doing at home! Now, Daniel knew, as you know, that a man is just as good as he is in a strange city only and he is no better. If you are religious because of public sentiment, then you are not religious at all.

And last of all, it was hard for Daniel to stand because everything represented by his religion seemed to fail. The city of his fathers was defeated. The temple of his God was destroyed. God Himself seemed conquered and overthrown. Sin alone seemed mighty and successful. Right seemed weak and powerless and broken. Yet this young fellow had courage to believe in the might of righteousness in the face of his conquered nation. And when he tells the story in the after days he doesn't tell of the conquest of his people on the part of Babylon as a thing that was due to the prowess of the conquerors. He says, "God gave Jehoiakim into his hands." He can believe in God and right even in the midst of seemingly utter defeat and powerlessness.

And it was this high purpose made and persisted in that accounts, I say, for the mighty man that Daniel is as we see a vision of his face in the text, no longer a lad but one in the strength of his manhood. We read of the maker of this high resolution that he prospered. That is, that he won the very prizes that it had seemed as if he were going to miss by pursuing the course that he did pursue. Daniel prospered. He got on in life. If you had asked any candid and honest and knowing man in Babylon for the name of the most powerful man in the empire, they would have told you at once that it was Daniel. But the big prosperity that came to this man as a result of his high choice was not simply an outward prosperity. He prospered in his inner life. He gathered unto himself the only real wealth that a man can possess in this life or in the world to come. He gathered character. His big prosperity was not in what he got, but in what he became. This man, first of all, became a man who was the most trusted man of his day. His friends believed in him. They were confident that he was straight, true, loyal, religious. His enemies believed in him. They did it not because they wanted to, but because they could not help it. And when they wanted to set a trap for
him they said, "There is but one way to get Daniel into trouble. He is loyal to the king of Babylon. He does his work and does it well. There has been no sharp dealing. There has been no bribe taking on his part. He is absolutely dependable."

And so much did they believe in him, they dared to believe that he would go on with this praying, that he would stand firm in his devotion to God and conscience, though it cost him his position and cost him his life. That was what his enemies thought about him. That was the reason they got the egotistical old king to pass the decree that he did pass. It was because they had such profound faith in the man Daniel.

How we need men like that today! ("God give us men.")

Daniel became a trusted man. He became a much loved man. His king was devoted to him. I feel confident that most people were devoted to him except those who were envious of him. But like practically all great men, he was not only deeply loved but deeply hated as well. In this he was like his Master. Christ's presence won from some a love that nothing could kill. In others He stirred tempests and waked serpents and kindled anger that was so fierce that it would not allow His remaining on the earth.

Daniel became a man who could look death eye to eye and not flinch and not be afraid. He knew perfectly that if he prayed he would be cast into the den of lions. And yet he enters his house, ascends to the upper room where the window is open toward Jerusalem, and prays as he had done aforetime. His plans are not changed in the least. There is no parade, there is nothing of the braggart. He simply keeps the noiseless tenor of his way.

Notice he was doing as he had done aforetime. A thousand fidelities and small tests in seemingly insignificant matters enabled him to be true in this, the colossal test of his life. You can not fail and falter before the small temptations of life and expect to stand true when you come to its great temptation. The big failure that you will make then will only be the sum total of the little failures you have made before, just as the great triumph of Daniel here is but the sum total of the smaller triumphs of the years that have passed.

Daniel is praying. The little fellows gather under his window to listen. I know what they thought in spite of their envy, in spite of their hatred. They said, "There is a man praying up there. The lions can not destroy a man like that. Nothing can destroy him."

Babylon is dead today. Its pomp and splendor have vanished like the morning dew. Its mammoth walls, its towering palaces, are only heaps of dust. And where the music and laughter of pleasure once rang we hear tonight only the howling of the jackal, the call of the night bird and the wailing of the wind. There is only one thing left in Babylon, one structure that the centuries could not destroy. That is the window out of which Daniel looked and from which his voice floated in prayer. And you and I pause together for a little while this morning to listen to this kingly and courageous heart as he talks to God. And we too will say, as they said then, "This is a man." And we will, I trust, go away with the high purpose in our hearts that we will not defile ourselves, that we will know something of the courage of Daniel which is a courage born of faith in and fidelity to God.