

On the 4th of June 1940, Winston Churchill delivered what was probably the most famous speech he ever made. It wasn't a speech that was ever broadcast on the radio, it was only given in the House of Commons and the recording of it we've heard was made years later in 1949. 4 years after the war ended. I'm talking about his fight on the beach's speech.

Britain had just been defeated in Europe and endured the humiliation of Dunkirk. France was about to surrender; America wasn't in the war and Churchill was going to be left fighting on his own against Hitler. His speech was full of references to defeat, **and even if, which I do not believe for a moment, this island or part of it were subjugated and starving...** there was a real possibility and fear that Germany would invade and so Churchill promised he would scatter the Royal Navy into hiding, waiting for the Americans to come to our aid... **then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.**

While we look back on this speech with great admiration and almost as an incredible act of defiance that galvanised a country, empire and allies. The reality at the time was that it was given as a message to the British People and the American government that things were about as bad as they could possibly be. It was a message received not altogether favourably by the ruling conservative party.

Churchill's wife is reported to have said, **a great section of the Tory Party were not behind Winston and had received his great speech... even in sullen silence.**

Why did Churchill give such an unpopular and almost defeatist speech. Yes, we might well fight on the beaches, but only because the enemy has landed on our shore! It was a message people at home and in America needed to hear. Preparations needed to be made to secure the fleet, to prepare defences, to call for help.

There are times when unpopular and uncomfortable things need to be said. Daniel experienced this when he was called on to interpret another of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.

None of the Babylonian wise men had been able to interpret it and so Nebuchadnezzar called for Daniel. Daniel was then faced with the uncomfortable situation of having to tell the king that it wasn't kingdoms that would fall this time, as in his previous dreams, but him. **My lord, if only this dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!** (Daniel 4:19)

The dream was a warning to Nebuchadnezzar that unless he set aside his own pride and sense of greatness, even though he was incredibly powerful, God would humble him. He would lose his sanity, live in the wild and would remain this way until he acknowledged that **Heaven rules.** (Daniel 4:26) Daniel urged Nebuchadnezzar to change his ways: **renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.** (Daniel 4:27)

If the conservative party received Churchill's warnings with sullen silence, one can only wonder at how Nebuchadnezzar received this news or how it affected Daniel's reputation and relationship with the king.

It takes a special courage to deliver such a message. I don't remember Churchill's speech and I'm guessing few of us do. I do remember the demise of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister when she dramatically pulled out of the conservative leadership election in 1990. At that time, so we're told, cabinet minister after cabinet minister reportedly went in to see her to say they didn't believe she could win. In later documentaries they claimed it was an incredibly difficult but necessary task. The Prime Minister needed to hear it.

Folks, there is a message we all need to hear and pass on and it is this: ***Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near.*** (Matthew 4:17) An age-old message that Daniel had the courage to give to Nebuchadnezzar.

What is repentance? Daniel was clear when explaining it to the King: ***renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.*** (Daniel 4:27) Repentance is not a one-off moment, it is not a set of words or a desire to be better or even to try harder. Repentance is putting away those things we know to be sinful and replacing them with those things that God has called us to: justice, concern for the poor, freedom for the oppressed, love for God in place of love for sin, trusting in him for our salvation and not ourselves. Repentance is obedience to God rather than disobedience.

There is a real need for the courage to hear, respond to and deliver this message. Some 12 months after Daniel spoke to the king he was walking along his balcony. He looked out at the grandeur of his kingdom and in quiet satisfaction adored his own greatness and power. At that very moment he was reminded of what Daniel had said and so he descended into madness.

Nebuchadnezzar hadn't taken Daniel's warning seriously, Daniel implored him to change, and he didn't. The result was God fulfilled his promise.

Listen to another promise that God has made: ***For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*** (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Folks, unless we take the message of the gospel seriously, we'll have to face the day when God calls us to account just as he called Nebuchadnezzar to account. We need to respond to the message of the gospel; we need to heed Jesus' command to repent, not in some notional way but in an incredibly practical and real way.

The reality for each of us is this: One day we will stand before Christ, and we will have to give an explanation for all we have done. We will have to explain how we have or have not trusted in Christ alone. We need to be clear; God honours his word, as Nebuchadnezzar found out. For all who believe in him, who trust in him there is eternal life and for all who don't there is eternal separation.

This isn't just something that we need to take on board for ourselves, it's also something that we need to make others aware of because, God's promise, is just as much for them. If we believe the message of the gospel, then there is an imperative to warn people just as Daniel warned Nebuchadnezzar.

How do we give this warning? Daniel did it with gentleness and concern. There was no sense of Daniel scolding, no guilt, no pressure. Just genuine concern. He talked about wishing this message was for someone else, asking that the King would be pleased to accept his advice.

Daniel's message, the message of the gospel is not primarily a message of judgement. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar was warned about what would happen to him, yes, we are made aware of the

consequences of our sin and how that separates us from God. But that is not the point of the message. The point of the message is redemption.

Daniel wanted the King to bow to God and so avoid judgement and even the promised judgement itself, the madness and loss of the power and status was intended to restore the king's relationship with God. We're told in John's gospel that **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him** (John 3:17)

It is not our role to issue or pass judgement, that is reserved for God alone. Our role is simply to have the confidence to say that it is in showing genuine repentance, genuine love for God in response to all that Christ has done for us that we are not only forgiven but all sin is atoned for and dealt with. Not a message of judgement, but one of healing. Not a message to be delivered in anger, but in love and with concern.

To have the confidence of Daniel to speak out, even in difficult situations isn't about having the confidence that we know enough, or that we can win an argument, or that we are the right people to pass judgement on others. It simply about having the confidence in the message of the gospel to change lives, because God is the author of that message.

It is worth noting just how long passed between Daniel interpreting the dream and Nebuchadnezzar lifting his eyes to heaven and being restored. 8 years. A year before the king went mad, and 7 further years it seems before the King was restored.

Our success is not measured in how quickly people respond, if at all. We are simply called to have the confidence to speak as Daniel did.