Sermon Series: You Know You're Growing Up When…
Sermon Title: You Value Integrity More than Image

Text: Daniel 1:1-20 -- 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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. 9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. 16 So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. 17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Opening: One of the definitions that the **American Heritage Dictionary** provides for the word ***image*** is: ***one that closely or exactly resembles another***. Here in the United States the image we project to others is very important to many of us. Often, it is not a fair representation of who we really are, but who we would like to be. **In his book *John Wayne's America*, Garry Wills illustrates what a powerful effect the movie image of John Wayne had on American men for nearly four decades from the 40s to the 70s**. He notes that **General Douglas MacArthur** thought "***the Duke***" was the model of an American soldier. **Critic Eric Bentley** proclaimed that he was the most important man in the entire country. Politicians like **Ronald Reagan** imitated him, and phrases like "***saddle up***' and "***lock and load***" became battle cries for men everywhere. **But Garry Wills' book points out that the real man behind the legend was not always what he appeared**. The author notes that the big screen warrior, who referred to those who refused to serve their country during wartime as "***soft***," got out of serving in WWII so he could focus on his career. The star of so many westerns that featured him riding off into the sunset on horseback, actually hated horses. The rough and tumble cowboy who dominated the west was born in Iowa with the very unmacho name of **Marion Morrison**. **Gary Wills traces the creation of the mythic persona that many of us know as John Wayne to a collaborative effort between the actor and**

Hollywood executives whose only goal was to get millions of Americans to watch his films while the studios made boatloads of money.

This morning, we're going to be looking at the fourth evidence of maturity in our preaching series "**12 Marks of Christian Maturity.**" Simply stated, it is this: ***You know you're growing up when you value integrity more than image***. Now, if **IMAGE** is about acting deceitfully by representing ourselves to others in a way that isn't true to who we really are (i.e., Marion Morrison/John Wayne), then **INTEGRITY** is the exact opposite. **It is consistently acting in a manner that is faithful to one's core values**. ***For us as believers, it means that as children of God, we routinely live according to His teachings as they are found in the Holy Scriptures***. I can think of no one (**from the Old Testament at least**) who models integrity better for us than the prophet who brought God's revelation to the Israelites during the time of the **Babylonian Captivity from 605-536 B.C**. His name was **Daniel**. The events of the book bearing his name take place throughout most of his life, starting when he was only a young man of 14 or 15. In some ways, that is what makes his story so remarkable. ***At a time when many are just beginning to figure out the difference between right and wrong and what God's Word requires of us, Daniel was already demonstrating his commitment to live out his convictions***. **And he did this in spite of the fact that he was forced to endure a particularly difficult trial that saw him taken captive by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, removed to another country, and likely separated from his family**. LET'S TAKE SOME TIME NOW TO SEE WHY WE SHOULD VALUE INTEGRITY OVER IMAGE.

IMAGE FOCUSES ON THINGS THAT COMMEND US TO THE WORLD. It is based on the values of a particular culture and implies that those who meet the expectations of a specific group of people are the ones who find acceptance among them. Here in the text, we discover that image was an important factor (**as it usually is**) in the selection of those who were appointed to serve in the king's palace. **Ashpenaz, the chief of the king's court officials, chose Israelites from the royal family and nobility as Isaiah had prophesied in 2 Kings 20:16-18 -- Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: 17 Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. 18 And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Because these young men were athletic, handsome and intelligent, they were selected to receive special training**. These same characteristics are obviously similar to the values of our Western culture as well. HERE'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

- **Image demands the right social background** (**Daniel 1:6-7 -- Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego**)**.** Though the changing of their names came third in the biblical sequence, it probably happened first. **The king sought to <u>change their identities</u> by providing them with different names.** All four Hebrew names identified the young men with the God of the Jews. **For example, Daniel means God is my Judge. His name was changed to Belteshazzar, meaning Prince of Bel, one of the Babylonian gods**. The same was true for the other three. Their new names identified them with other Babylonian deities. **This was an obvious attempt to make them more socially acceptable by encouraging the worship of the same gods.**

  Now we all know that just giving a person a name doesn't guarantee it will have any effect on him. Take the name Randi for instance. It means "***wise judge.***" A while back, I heard a story about a football coach who went to the home of a potential recruit to see if he had what it took to play college football. The interview began with the question, "***How old are you***?" The young man did not reply at first. Instead, he counted on his fingers for a minute and then he said, "***I'm nineteen, coach***." The coach was hardly impressed, but he still fired off a second question, "***How tall are you***?" With that, the fellow laid down beside his parents' six-foot-long couch, estimated how far his feet stuck out past the end, and then said, "***I'm six feet three coach***." Finally, the coach asked the easiest question of all, "***What is your name son***?"

This time the young man paused, stared off into space, nodded his head about fifteen times and then finally said, "***Randi***." Well, that was too much for the coach. He said, ***"Alright, I understand counting on your fingers to figure out how old you are. I even understand laying down beside the couch to figure out how tall you are, but Randi, what was all the nodding of your head when I asked your name?***" "**Oh, that's easy, coach**" he replied. "***Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Randi…***" NOT THE BRIGHTEST GUY EVEN IF HIS NAME MEANS WISE JUDGE!

- **Image demands the right educational background** (**Daniel 1:4 -- youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans**)**.** The king sought to change their thought processes by providing a new ideology based upon **Chaldean beliefs**. This required **three years of indoctrination during which they would learn both the language and the literature of the Babylonians**. It was assumed that when their education was complete, these men would be **loyal subjects** ready for positions of leadership throughout the empire.
- **Image demands the right cultural background** (**Daniel 1:5 -- The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king**). The king sought to change their lifestyles by offering food and wine from his table for the men to eat and drink. **While it seems that the first two changes were not met with any resistance, this one was by Daniel and his friends and that brings us to a discussion on integrity**.

INTEGRITY FOCUSES ON THINGS THAT COMMEND US TO GOD (**Daniel 1:8-13-- But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see**). There is a little bit of confusion as to why Daniel and his three friends were unwilling to eat and drink from the King's table. Daniel said that he was unwilling to "**defile**" himself. The word means to "**soil, desecrate or stain** (**See Isaiah 59:2-3** *for another use of the word*)." Of course, this brings to mind the dietary laws of the Jews. ***If this is what he's referring to, however, why couldn't he drink wine which is permitted in the Law for everyone except those who have taken Nazirite vows***? Some have suggested that Daniel wouldn't eat the food because it was used in the worship of the Babylonian gods and therefore had been offered to demons (*something that is later prohibited in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul*--**See 1 Corinthians 10:20-21**). ***But this begs the question, why did he feel free to eat the King's vegetables, which were most likely also used in the worship of their gods?*** Others argue that to eat at the King's table was to accept his lordship. Daniel was completely dedicated to Yahweh and would never bow to anyone else. ***This might make sense, except that the four men did not take a public stand before the king on the matter. If they had wanted to make their point to him, there is no reason to think they would have been bashful about it.***

Perhaps the reason that makes most sense is this: By refusing to eat the food from the King's table, they were assured that there was no way he could get credit for their appearance. Only God would get the glory who had given them His favor. Whatever the reason, these young men took their stand. Now, in our last few minutes together, let's see what we can learn about integrity from their examples.

- **Integrity is evidenced in our willingness to STAND OUT among others.** While many young Jewish men were selected for this special training, only four were willing to speak up about the proposed diet. **The rest**

just went along with the crowd, which almost never seems to be the right thing to do in Scripture (**See Exodus 32:1ff where they worshiped a golden calf; Numbers 14:1ff where they refused to enter the Promised Land but instead said to stone their leaders; Matthew 27:15-22 where the Jews cried out for the crucifixion of Christ**). As Christians, we are often called as a matter of integrity to swim upstream and to do the hard and challenging thing for the sake of our spiritual values.

- **Integrity is evidenced in our willingness to STAND OUT for our convictions.** Daniel and his friends did not want to eat the food because it would have defiled them. ***The amazing thing is that they could have done so and not a single person would have objected, but still they chose not to because they believed it was wrong***. **D. L. Moody described integrity as what we are in the dark (WHEN NO ONE ELSE CAN SEE US)**. There are many people who for the sake of image, will perform a certain way when others are watching, but men and women of integrity live out their faith when only God Himself is there to see it (**Psalm 33:13-14 -- The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth**).
- **Integrity is evidenced in our willingness to STAND FIRM in our faith**. Daniel did not back down when the chief of the eunuchs was at first unwilling, even though the request could have resulted in his death. **He pressed until he got what he wanted…<u>the opportunity to walk in obedience</u>**. Perhaps the man gave in because God made him do it (*remember they had His favor*), or perhaps he gave in because it occurred to him that he would be able to eat their portions for the next three years. In either case, Daniel did not cave in at the first sign of resistance, but stood fast in his faith and trusted God for a good outcome. AND THE RESULT FOR THE FOUR YOUTHS WAS THE BLESSING OF GOD.

Here are three things to think about when it comes to INTEGIRTY:

- **IMAGE is fleeting, but INTEGRITY is enduring**.
- **IMAGE conceals what's inside a person, but INTEGRITY reveals it**.
- **IMAGE may please the world, but INTEGRITY will always please God.**

Conclusion: **What do you do if you have a zoo without a zebra? In most cases, you would simply not have a Zebra exhibit, but the *Marah Zoo in Gaza* recently took a different approach**. Embarrassed that they didn't have a zebra, they elected to bring in a donkey, cut its hair short, and dye its fur black and white. Then they put it on display as an "***Equus burchellii***," otherwise known as a Zebra. Most of the people who have visited the zoo have never seen one up close, and so the ploy has worked for the most part. **Mahmud Berghat, the zoo's director,** said to those in the know: ***"Don't tell anyone. The children love him***." The donkey, however, seems to know something is wrong. He stands in the back of his cage, with his head down, turning away from the spectators. ***That's the problem with trying to be something you are not designed to be. You may be able to fool others for a while, but you can't fool yourself***. You will always know that God made you for something different. You were created <u>to walk with God and live out the Bible's values for His glory</u>.