

Remnant Life Church
April 22, 2018
The Pursuit of Excellence
Daniel 1:8-17; 3:13-18

- A couple of Sunday's ago I shared with you my thinking on how we do things at RLC
 - No hand-written signs
 - How we display the refreshments
 - Making sure equipment bags are all hidden
 - Doing our best...

- So in light of that ... The Pursuit of Excellence

- Excellence def – the quality of being outstanding excellent
 - Excellent def – superior or eminently good
 - Excel def – to surpass in accomplishment or achievement

- The primary determining factor of excellence according to the world is realized through victory, or besting an opponent
 - The result desired is simply to win, self-glory, or to achieve the admiration and applause of other people
 - You outdo them, conquer them, out perform, out maneuver, out play, or simply beat someone
 - Watching the NBA playoffs is a perfect example of how the meaning of excellence has changed
 - 40 years ago the star players of the NBA were very different
 - Names like Jabbar, Erving, Hayes, Havlicek, McAdoo, Frazier, Walton, and Maravich dominated the game for a decade
 - Then – excellence was about how well you performed your craft
 - Today – excellence is about humiliating your opponent
 - Trash talking, chest pounding, screaming after a dunk (still only 2 points)
 - “They disrespected me!”
 - “Excellence” in professional sports today is the perfect representation of the world's definition of excellence

- The biblical perspective, however, is quite different
 - To demonstrate the biblical definition is to understand that excellence is a virtue
 - Virtue – conformity to a standard of right; a beneficial quality; a strength or courage
 - *Col 3:12-14 - Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these **virtues** put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

- Within that description of virtue is how we should do what we do – our pursuit of excellence
- **I Cor 10:31** - ...*whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*
- **Col 3:23-24** – *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.*
- This is not just an encouragement to take pride in your work or to not do things half-way
 - It is a foundational truth of our lives
 - It is also a theological truth of how we live as children and servants of the Most High God
- **NOTE** – both of those verses say the same thing - “*whatever you do*”
 - Not just the things we like
 - Not just when we will be seen
 - Not just when there is the opportunity to get ahead
 - The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle – “We are what we repeatedly do”
 - The American philosopher Will Durant expanded on that to say, “We are what repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not a single act, but a habit.”
- What that means
 - The pursuit of excellence is a direction, a journey, not a destination
 - We are pursuing excellence for God until the day He calls us home
- What does that excellence look like?
 - **I John 2:4-6** - *Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*
- Why is this important?
 - **I Cor 15:58** – (NLT) *So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.*

IMPORTANT – the pursuit of excellence will not be easy and it rarely brings instant results

READ – **Daniel 1:8-17; 3:13-18**

(Background – Jehoiakim King of Judah; time of Jeremiah; 605 BC Jerusalem conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians)

Four things to know about the pursuit of excellence in a world where the definition is completely different

1. Your pursuit will almost always seem foreign and strange to those on the outside looking in
 - a. **Dan 1:10** – the official could not understand why they would not eat the royal food
 - b. **Dan 3:14** – Nebuchadnezzar was angry that they would not bow to the idol

- c. The pursuit of excellence will often alienate you from those who are not on the same path or unwilling to support you
2. The pursuit of excellence will never compromise
 - a. **Dan 1:8** – Daniel and his friends would absolutely not give in – not even a little!
 - b. **Dan 3:17-18** – whatever God chose to do they would not give in
 - c. The most successful athletes in the world all had one thing in common – an unwillingness to compromise their pursuit to be the very best
 3. The pursuit of excellence will be costly
 - a. **Dan 3:19-20** – it looked to everyone watching that this was it for these three men
 - b. How convinced were they that they would not be burned to death?
 - i. Not at all
 - ii. They admitted that it may be their fate (**Dan 3:18**)
 - c. Conviction and commitment to your pursuit may cost you a little from time to time; it may cost you a lot
 - d. It may cost you everything
 4. Your pursuit WILL pay off in the long run
 - a. **Dan 1:15, 18-19** – not only did Daniel and the other 3 look better but they were also smarter and sharper than the others
 - b. **Dan 3:25, 28-29** – God not only saved them from the fire but the king was so convicted that he made a law that everyone had to worship the One True God

How important is excellence in your own life?

- What do people see when they look at you?
- This is not about impressing anyone with your level of goodness
- It is about representing Jesus Christ in everything you do
- What do people see, what do they hear, what will they know of Jesus Christ through your example?
- **I Cor 10:31** - ...*whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God!*