

[Dan 1:10-11, 13-21 ESV] 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.

A few weeks ago we took notice about the book of Daniel being primarily **about God**. We emphasized that point in **two passages**.

The first is where we read in chapter 1 that,

"The Lord **gave Jehoiakim** into Babylon's hand." So we saw that **God** determines the outcomes of wars.

We also read this text.

"God **gave Daniel** favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs." So **God** determines the likes and dislikes of human beings.

Today we will see **other areas** where God does amazing things in chapter 1. We read,

“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.”

So it is God who determines the mental ability that people have, and He can increase it whenever He wants.

He also grants **spiritual gifts** that allow a person to do things that could **only come** from God.

As we continue we will see far more. We will just touch on them this morning. I want to show you what I mean about this being a book about what God does.

In **Daniel 2:19-23** We see that **God determines** what **dreams** people have. He also determines who He will communicate that information to.

In **Daniel 2:44-45** **God** sets up a final kingdom that will topple all other kingdoms and can never be overcome.

In **Daniel 3:28,29** we see that **God** delivers people out of the physical principles of nature. He can keep things from being heated in the midst of great heat. The Hebrew children were completely free from all the natural consequences of being in a fire, while all those around them were affected by the heat.

In **Dan 4:24,25** God drives men mad at will. He also grants sanity at will.

God also tears kingdoms **from** people and **He restores** kingdoms to people at will.

In **Daniel 5** God punishes those who treat the things **that represent Him** with disrespect and mockery. He can punish idolatry **immediately** if He chooses to do so.

In **Daniel 6** God causes wild animals to do exactly what He wants them to do.

A proper understanding of Daniel will drive us to understand that **reality is very different** than how we normally experience it. We experience events in life as things that happen randomly and without reason. Sometimes we think they **all** have a natural cause and effect. **Big** armies beat **small** armies. Lions **kill** people. Fire **burns** people. While that is usually true, it is not true when God is best served otherwise.

What we see in Daniel is the supremacy of the **purpose** and the **power** of God.

God caused situations that appeared to be horrible to serve a wonderful purpose.

God intervened in the natural cause and effect elements and had them go backwards temporarily.

Sometimes we make the point that **God does not need to use us to glorify Him.**

He does not **need to use us** to **spread the gospel**. His will being done is not **dependent** upon our obedience.

Daniel is a book that displays this.

Look at the part that the **people of Israel**, God's chosen people, **played at making God's name known** throughout the world at the time. These people were taken into captivity because of their **disobedience**. They were being punished. They, as a whole, are never mentioned in the Old Testament as having a great effect on the Babylonian society. It was not their sheer numbers nor their being obedient that made the difference.

God chose, in this instance, **4 guys** to make things happen. And He did it by putting them into the crucible of trial, in order to inspire **2 kings** to announce to their whole kingdom the glory of God. God got Nebuchadnezzar and Darius to proclaim his glory. **Two heathen Kings** became God's evangelists.

Our God is never limited. He can accomplish His will **at any time** through **any person or any thing**. That is one of the points that comes through loud and clear in Daniel. The idea that God cannot reach the world **without us** is **not true**.

Anyone who preaches that God **needs us** to do **this thing** or **that thing** does not really understand God. The truth is it **pleases God** to reach the world **through** us. It **pleases God** to accomplish His will on this planet **through** His children. Maybe that is true so that more people can be involved in seeing His acts of grace in this world. But one thing is for sure. We need God. God does not need us.

OK let's look at the text.

[Dan 1:10-11, 13-21 ESV] 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."

The chief of the eunuchs was being smart. He liked Daniel. He wanted to do what Daniel wanted. But he was scared for his life. The chief is not going risk his life for the preferences of some Hebrew children. That is reasonable for a man that high on the corporate ladder. Daniel did not disdain that fear. For one thing, Daniel had no **power** in this relationship. The chief laid out his thinking. He was honest with Daniel. This gave Daniel an **opportunity** to figure out a way to meet the chief **where he was**. Daniel did not accuse the chief of being anti-semitic. He didn't come up with some religious way to make the chief look bad. He did not set himself up in opposition to him. He simply took his reservations into account and came up with solutions.

Sometimes solutions are wonderful things. At work, I was taught that before I bring up a **problem**, I should usually do the work of coming up with a **solution** when I register the complaint. I think this is a good idea in most relationships. It keeps complaints to a reasonable level, and it **costs the complainer** as much as it costs the one **being complained to**. How many of your complaints would be offered if they had to be accompanied with a solution? Might that improve our relationships?

We do not know what would have happened if Daniel had not come up with a plan. We only know that he did.

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.

I had never noticed before that Daniel never laid out his plan to **the chief**. He had already requested the change of diet **to the chief**, but the chief said **"no"** and for good reason. Daniel probably knew that the chief was never going to give in.

We need to look at this. Daniel has **the favor** of the **chief** of the Eunuchs. And as we go through this story, we see that this man had a lot of power and influence. He also probably had a lot of employees.

Daniel laid out his request to the chief and the chief said **"no"**. What would we have done at that point? Would we have given up? Would we have accepted the first **"no"** we ran into?

God has given us all some degree of **imagination** and **creativity** and **cleverness**. I believe we are to **exhaust all those things** for the Kingdom of God. For instance, Christian Aid cannot get money to some missionaries the way they always did. The governments of those countries said **"no"**. Should they give up? No. They just needed to get more creative in their approach. They **figured out another way**.

Is there a ministry to a person you are trying to do and that person does not seem interested? Sometimes it is time to move on. But sometimes it is time to be creative. What else might you do that would give you an opportunity? **Obstacles** are not always **road blocks**. Sometimes they are just **detours**.

So Daniel got creative. He did not beat his head against a method that was **sure to fail**. He clearly thought about it and came up with a better plan. He laid out his plan to the man that **answered** to the chief, the **chief's employee**. Daniel probably knew he had a better chance with an underling.

Do you think Daniel knew if his **nutritional plan** would work?

I seriously doubt that he did. He was not a nutritional expert. And the Jewish culture is not naturally vegetarian. So he may have had no experience in nutrition. It looks to me that he chose the **only path he knew** that could escape the idolatrous and non kosher food. He was trying the most faithful plan he could think of.

He did the most faithful thing he knew how to, and trusted God with it fully. What happened from there on Daniel trusted into God's hands.

Maybe Daniel would have accepted eating the king's food if the experiment failed. Just like being given a new idolatrous name that Daniel could do nothing about, Daniel may have been willing to accept his fate of eating idolatrous food. But he would not accept that condition until he knew that he had **done everything in his power** to be faithful.

We will never know because the test WAS successful. God honored Daniel's faithfulness.

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.

We are not told if the vegetarian diet was just **that much better** than the one they were on, or if God **simply blessed** it. We just know it worked. It seems odd that they would get fatter on a vegetarian diet than on one with lots of meat. But it worked. They fattened up and were healthy looking.

Now keep in mind, Daniel and his friends had, essentially, just voted for the **potato bar** instead of the **steak house**. This was a very Spirit led decision. They were willing to pay a **significant price** to please their Lord. And God clearly blessed their decision.

What would we have done? Would we be willing to sacrifice the luxuries of this world to be submissive to the will of God? That is something we need to continually consider. We cannot live for the love of this world.

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.

We mentioned this earlier. We need to notice, **God Gave Them.**

Have you ever been proud of how clever you are, or how smart you are, or how talented you are? I think we are all prone to that. There is something in all of us that wants to take credit for **anything that we do** that we think is somehow admirable. I want to take credit for **what I know**. I want to take credit for **some things I do**. I want to take credit for the **11,180 days** that I got up and went to work. There is a part in all of us that wants to say, "See how wonderful I am." But at the end of the day, all that we **think and do** is a result of what God has given us. What would we do if our IQ was 20 instead of 120? What would we be like if we were born in poverty in a land of poverty? Any good that we do is based on how God has treated us. Pride is stupid. It is uncalled for. It is not based on reality. It has no basis in truth. Any pride that we have is based on illusion. Apart from the gifting of God, we could literally **do nothing**.

The 4 Hebrew children were given a **predisposition** for learning stuff. They may have **even** been given **information** supernaturally. They were quick studies. They were exceedingly talented. Daniel was given something **additional**. His gift was very specific to him. And this was, for sure, not a natural talent. Daniel even says so. This was something that God gave to Daniel supernaturally **when** and **where** God wanted to.

Can you imagine what would have happened if these guys started comparing themselves with each other? That would have just been foolish. Instead, they should each thank God for the gifts God gave to each of them.

Note too that God gave them **exactly what was needed** for them to serve His purpose. That is true of everyone. Are others **smarter** than you, or **better looking** than you, or **more clever** than you, or **more skilled** in one way or another than you? Well guess what? You are **PERFECTLY suited** to what **God wants to do with you**. Don't get distracted by what you **are not**. I can assure you of one thing. God is not **regretting His mistake**. You have exactly the raw materials **He needs in you** to accomplish what **He has in mind** for you.

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.

Given what we are told, it is likely **the chief** never knew that the Hebrew children were vegetarians. Nor did the chief care.

This is so much like the corporate life. I frequently tell my guys that our job is to make our boss look good. That is how you get promoted. It is how you have job security. It is simple. And the boss will rarely care about **the methods** you use to make him or her look good, as long as they won't get him or her in trouble. This chief evidently trusted **those under him** to use their **own ingenuity** to accomplish the end goal. The steward did his job and now the chief is presenting the steward's work to the King.

So after the three years of education the Hebrew children had a chance to show what they learned. Talk about finals, this would have been a doozy.

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.

It looks like the King first spoke to **all the graduates** in an effort to weed out the best. The longer the King talked with them, the more the **4 Hebrews** stood out. They were the best of the best.

This got them the equivalent of a **second interview**. Now they stood before the King and started answering the harder questions. This was likely used by the King to validate his choice. He wanted to make sure these guys were the real deal or if they had just gotten lucky.

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.

In the first round of questioning these children were being **compared** to their **schoolmates**. In the **second** line of questioning they are being compared to the **King's existing staff**.

We will see something in the next few chapters about Nebuchadnezzar. He was brutally pragmatic. We don't get the idea that he was ever very impressed by the magicians and enchanters. He did not get where he got by having a **weak mind** or a **weak hand**. He used what worked. And he did not have much time for words without action.

I think it is likely that **what** the Hebrew children told the King **resonated** with the King because it **matched the reality** he saw. And he liked it. These people were not blowing smoke with no way of proving the reality of what they were saying. What these children were saying was **wise**. They were able to take the facts and use them well and accurately. They understood complicated things at a deeper level than their competitors.

Maybe I can illustrate it this way.

Secular humanism tends to say that people are basically good. If humans behave badly, it is because of their **genetics** or their **environment**. That is fundamentally a religious belief. It is an outcome of humanist theories about our existence. And the humanist can go on and on about their theories about how people are evolving for the better. The theory can be very convincing. It makes some sense. But a guy like Nebuchadnezzar is going to say, **wait a minute**. Your belief does not fit the real world I live in. Children are rebellious from birth. It takes a lot more training to get them to say **yes** than to get them to say **no**. Your theory does match the cold hard reality I can see. A guy like Nebuchadnezzar would be aware of those sorts of things. So those who speak of their **idealistic beliefs** without **proof** will not get much traction with a man like Nebuchadnezzar.

But a man who says, **we are all born broken**, we are all born **rebellious** against God and authority, we are all sinners.... **that** would gain traction with a man like Nebuchadnezzar. It matches the **real world** he lives in. It describes reality accurately. And it would instantly put those who are speaking truth 10 times higher than the idealists and religionists.

That is the truth that the Bible reveals. That is why we all **do things we regret**. It is why **we all carry guilt**. And it is why we **need a Savior**. We need someone to take **our guilt** upon **Himself**. We need someone who can **take God's wrath for our sins** so that we can **be forgiven** of our sin. We need someone who can **grant us a new heart** so that we can be **freed from the power of sin in our lives**. We need a Savior. We need Christ.

Next chapter we will see just how **pragmatic** of a man Nebuchadnezzar was. But here we see just how well it served those who saw and spoke the truth. No matter how skilled at **telling the truth** the Hebrew children were, they were going to have to stand a test that required **more than talk**. Nothing short of the **power of God** was going to deliver them from their next final.

Finally we are told that Daniel was in Babylon up to the first year of Cyrus. I am not sure why that is there. In Daniel 10:1 we see Daniel alive in the **third** year of Cyrus. So it is probable that this reference in Chapter 1 was simply to let us know that Daniel lived through the whole captivity.

As a final note this morning, I was gripped with something this week.

Those of us with kids have probably said things like this:

Work hard and you will be promoted.

Do everything you do with excellence and it will eventually be rewarded.

My brother gave me a cup with some excellent corporate advise. It said, "Stay awake, stay employed." His estimations of my capacity for success may have been limited, based upon my early performance... which he remembers and I conveniently do not.

Anyway we give this kind of advice to our kids because it is good advice. It is generally true. We could quote much of the book of Proverbs at this point.

The interesting thing is how little we are told in the book of Daniel about the **work ethic** of the Hebrew children. We know for sure that they were **principled**. We are **told** about that. They were committed to obeying God at the cost of their lives. That is surely a wonderful example to follow.

And I suspect that all of these guys were actually hard workers. They seemed to have success in everything they did. That does not normally come through laziness and luck.

But my point is this. In the book of Daniel, **God** seems to take **all the credit**. It is not primarily a book about what Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did. It is a book about what **God did through** these men.

He arranged their circumstances.

He gave them talents.

He gave them gifts.

He created situations to bring those things that **God had given them** to the forefront.

He brought threat after threat against them to **show Himself off**.

Their hard work and accomplishment and gifted-nesses were sometimes promoted. But sometimes they ended up singling them out for adversity. There was no **simple formula** in place. We can expect the same in our own lives.

The beauty of this truth is that we can accept whatever situation we find ourselves in as a working of the hand of God. If we are promoted due to our work

being **valued, praise God**. If we are demoted because our work was **devalued, praise God**. Certainly we may have lessons to learn in the process. If our demotion is a **result of failure**, we should train ourselves to see and tell the truth about that and **adjust accordingly**. But even if it is due to our failure, it is still in the hand of God.

It is our God who does all the things needed for us to succeed in our sanctification and in our ministries. So no matter what befalls today, we can know that **it is God who works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. We can work confidently because it is He who works in us continually.**

Maybe a good application this week would be not offering a **complaint** before determining a **solution**? How much would that improve our relationships.

Another might be to think about ways where we have accepted **the first "no"** we experienced as a **reason to quit**. What are ways to succeed that we simply did not consider? Have we given up **too early** in our ministry to others?

Another might simply be to meditate on just how Sovereign this God of ours really is. He does not need us. But we so desperately need Him.