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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Dare To Be A Daniel" Series
"Getting Into God's Mind"
Daniel 1

There was a test conducted by a university where 10 students were placed in a room. Three lines of varying length were drawn on a card. The students were told to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the longest line. But 9 of the students had been instructed beforehand to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the second longest line. One student was the stooge.

The usual reaction of the stooge was to put his hand up, look around, and realizing he was all alone, pull it back down. This happened 75% of the time, with students from grade school through high school. The researchers concluded that many would rather be president than be right.

It takes courage and fortitude to make the right choice especially when everyone else is doing the opposite.

Our text today in Daniel 1 is a case in point. Let's look at little more closely at what took place in Daniel's life, and see why he and his three friends made a choice which was entirely opposite of the choice the others made which seemed the best thing to do.

I. The environment in which Daniel found himself (Daniel 3-7).

1. The Ruler Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful ruler – reigning from 605-562 B.C. He built temples in many of the cities of his kingdom, but the main achievement of his reign was the rebuilding of Babylon, (Al Hillah - modern day Iraq) on a scale and with a magnificence never before envisaged. The city covered some 500 acres and was protected by massive double fortifications. The Euphrates River, which bisected it, was spanned by a bridge. In the great palace, built to replace Nabopolassar's, (his father), he created the terraced cloister known to the Greeks as the Hanging Gardens and reckoned among the Seven Wonders of the World. It was said that he built it to please his mountain-born wife, Amytis, daughter of Cyaxares, the Median king (Persia).

2. Nebuchadnezzar's enlightened policy.

(1) Select the brightest minds to serve in the king's court (1:4-5).

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was to employ the brightest minds in his kingdom regardless of their national or ethnic origin. Thusly, when he captured Jerusalem, and took many captive to Babylon, among those taken in 605 B.C were youths from the noble and royal families. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were a part of that group chosen by the king – good looking, intelligent, quick minds to learn, with the ability to serve the king.

Daniel's name meant - "God is judge."

Hananiah's name meant – "Yahweh (LORD) is gracious."

Mishael's name meant – "Who is what God is."

Azariah's name meant – "Whom Yahweh (LORD) helps."

Other Jewish youths were probably chosen, but these four young men are the ones mentioned for they had other ideas regarding the king's enlightened policy.

(2) Have the young men eat the king's food and drink. (1:5).

How great was this for these young men who had been taken captive from their homeland. Chosen by the king, they ate the very food that was served the king, probably rich and tasty. Very shrewd, on the part of Nebuchadnezzar, as this would show how much he liked these young men, and they probably would start to think that this king is not so bad, we really like him, for he gives us the very food that he eats. Sometimes, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. I would assume this also meant that they had some kind of royal place to live.

(3) Educate the young men chosen by the king at the University of Babylon.

Having selected the brightest minds to train to be a part of serving in his court, King Nebuchadnezzar provided a three year education for the young men (1:5). This three year education would include studying the Chaldean, Babylonian literature, and learning the Babylonian language. These young men, then studied the history and literature of the old Akkadian and the ancient Sumerian cultures from which the Babylonian culture had developed. It's interesting that Moses was educated at the University of Egypt. Paul was educated at the University of Jerusalem under Gamaliel.

(4) Change the names of the young men.

Daniel – no longer be – “God is judge,” but Belteshazzar, “May Bel protect his life.” – name of a heathern god.
 Hananiah – no longer be “Yahweh is gracious,” but Shadrach, “Command of Aku,” possibly the moon god.
 Mishael – no longer “Who is what God is, but Meshach, “Who is what Aku is.”
 Azariah – no longer “Whom Yahweh helps,” but Abed-nego, “servant of Nebo” – a heathern god.

3. What is Nebuchadnezzar up to here as he institutes his enlightened policy of change?

1. Those carried away captive could serve as hostages to keep the royal family of the kingdom of Judah in line.
2. Being in the king's court continually would be a pleasant reminder to the king of his conquest and power over Jerusalem.
3. Their careful training might be advantageous to the king if at a later time he needed help with Jewish affairs.
4. He wanted to make sure that these young men were Babylonians through and through – that they are conditioned to appreciate the king's food and care, they would think like Babylonians in their individual and political life, and that they would also adopt the religious life of the Babylonian people. Nebuchadnezzar wanted these young men to not be Jewish in their thinking and acting but be Babylonians in their lifestyle.

Serving the King of Babylon meant being like the king of Babylon:

In diet – food.

In culture – education.

In identity – name change –from Jewish to Babylonian.

In worship – The names given them were the names of different Babylonian gods.

Looking at what was happening from a purely human viewpoint, this was quite an opportunity for these young men who had been taken captive with their families. WOW! To be selected by the king of Babylon who took us captive, to serve in his court with food and education provided, even to have a name change, and to worship some other gods. This is an amazing privilege and honor. It can't get any better than this.

Is this how Daniel and his three friends reacted? They had quite a different take on the matter.

II. The thought processes Daniel displayed (Daniel 1:8a).

“Daniel made up his mind,” or “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with his wine which he drank.

This is one of the classic verses in the Bible, for it gives us a look into the inner life of Daniel, at the age of perhaps 17 or 18. It's interesting that Daniel didn't mention anything about the education, the name change, or anything about worship.

1. Daniel knew in his heart he could not defile himself with the king's diet.

Why the king's diet?

When the diet was presented, the spiritual light came on his mind. What was that? I believe it was the Word of God.

Daniel, I'm sure had grown up in a Jewish home where he learned the true stories of creation, of Noah, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had also learned about Moses and the law, the judgments, and the worship system and feasts.

I would think that Deuteronomy 6 had been carried out in the home of Daniel and well as his three friends.

"Hear, O Israel! the LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your should and with all your might. These words which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Daniel had been taught what the word of God said, and when he got into this situation, even now chosen to be a servant in the king's court, he did not let the circumstance of being elevated to this position, cause him to forget, or to ignore what God said in His Word.

2. Daniel obeyed the Word of God.

What did God say in His Word?

Exodus 34:14-15- For you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God - - otherwise you make the covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice.

Leviticus 11:44, 47 – "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten."

Daniel evidently knew that the king's food had been offered to idols, the gods of Babylon, before it would be eaten. For him and his three friends to eat the food and drink the wine would be to disobey what God had said – about not eating food offered to idols or food that was unclean. Their allegiance was to the true and living biblical God, and they must follow Him, and not the false gods, which is really giving Satan allegiance.

As Daniel heard what the commander of the officials in Nebuchadnezzar's court had said they would eat, Daniel's mind immediately started thinking about what? Not about what the commander said, or what he (Daniel) might think.

Rather Daniel started to process immediately what God said in His word, which he had been taught, and which he had assimilated into his own heart. Evidently, Daniel had hidden God's Word in his heart. He knew he must keep ceremonially clean under the law of Moses.

Knowing what God said in His Word, and believing it, Daniel must now act according to what God's Word said even though it would be against what the king of Babylon had said should be done, and what evidently everyone else was doing except Daniel and his three friends.

That certainly took, God's courage, conviction, without compromise. Daniel couldn't and he wouldn't eat the food and drink offered to idols and betray His God and Friend.

Remember, now, Daniel and his three friends were probably 17 or 18 years of age. They had been chosen by the powerful king of Babylon to train and serve in his court.

Yet in the midst of the pressure to conform to the king's ways, Daniel and his friends did not conform to the thinking of this pagan culture. They had gotten into God's mind revealed in the Word of God and it had changed their lives to do God's will as revealed therein.

3. The teaching From God's Word for us today.

How about us today? In the full revelation, we have Jesus Christ who provides us forgiveness and eternal life through His death, burial, and bodily resurrection. As believers in Jesus Christ, do our minds think God's thoughts of seeking to be giving rather than selfish, of seeking to build up rather than tear down. Of ministering to each other as husbands and wives (good reminder as we come into Valentine's Day), of children seeking to encourage each other – members in the family serving one another. Do we seek to be honest and forthright in our dealings? In the power of the Holy Spirit, we don't give into the old passions and lusts that lurk around to deceive us and cause us to misrepresent the Lord. For all of us, what we watch, and what we read, and where we do go has a direct affect on our lives.

Humility is the key here, which is submitting to God in His Word to do His will.

Young people are you a Daniel at school when temptations come to do what the crowd does which you know in your heart is not right to do. Have you made up your mind in the Lord to keep your lives pure until you are married. What is the music you listen to? Is it telling you to have relationships that are not pure.

Even for our children, Dads and Moms, I know your desire is as they come to know Christ personally, that they will grow to have discernment and do what the Lord wants and says in His Word. Children, if you can understand the Word of God as you read it, let it sink into your heart and do what the Lord says there. You will be glad you did.

Yes, thinking like the Lord affects our personal lives, our family lives, our church life, at our jobs, the communities in which we live, and how we understand what happens in our country and the world.

When Daniel heard what was going to happen to him in the king's court, he made up his mind to think like the Lord, to think biblically.

I trust that we think biblically, like the true and living God in our lives, as we daily serve Him, making Christ's decisions in the pagan world in which we live.

Even though Daniel and his friends wouldn't eat of the king's food, Daniel did something very positive.

III. The action Daniel took (Daniel 1:8b –16).

1. Daniel talked to the commander about their situation (1:8a).

Evidently from the text, Daniel in God's power talked with the commander and told him that he could not eat the king's food and drink the king's wine, for it would defile him and his friends. I would have liked to have heard that conversation. Note that Daniel did not rebel here, but in humility talked with the commander in charge.

2. God granted Daniel and his three friends favor and compassion (1:9).

God honored Daniel for doing His will, for obeying His Word. This man, probably a strict disciplinarian, listened to Daniel's words. It seems here that, as God blessed Daniel, this commander became sympathetic to Daniel's situation. Perhaps he realized, my, this is some young man who will not eat the king's food or drink the king's wine. He has some different kind of character than the others.

Then,

3. The commander responded to Daniel (1:10).

The commander told Daniel that if the king's food and drink weren't taken, they would not have the same appearance as the others. Seeing the difference of their appearance, he, the commander would lose his life. Certainly a legitimate response.

4. Daniel made his proposal (1:11-13).

Daniel asked the commander if he and his friends could have a vegetarian diet along with water for ten days. After the ten days, he could compare their appearance with the others who would eat the king's food and drink his wine.

5. The commander listened to Daniel's proposal (1:14).

It's obviously that God was involved in this situation. The courage of Daniel and his heart of humility caused the commander to let Daniel and his friends eat vegetables and drink water for ten days. How this all took place we are not told, for did the others in training know about this, or were the young men served separately? We are not told here. The commander brought vegetables and water to Daniel and his three friends for 10 days.

6. The appearance of Daniel and his friends was better than the others after 10 days (1:15).

At the end of 10 days, the appearance of Daniel and his friends was much better than that of the other young men eating the king's food and drinking his wine.

Does this mean we should all be vegetarians? Of course, not, although some are today, I realize. What is happening here again, is that God was in control. Perhaps though, the king's food was so rich that eating the vegetables and drinking the water provided the opportunity to have much better health.

The real reason, though, for their looking better in appearance than the other young men is because they obeyed the LORD.

God intervened and blessed Daniel and his friends for obeying Him and His Word.

IV. God's continued blessing on Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:17-21).

1. The diet they continued on kept Daniel and his three friends looking much better than the others involved in the king's program (1:19).

No one was found like Daniel and his three friends.

2. They mastered their studies with great strides and ended up at the head of their class (1:17, 20).

God gave them quickness of mind in learning at the University of Babylon. Daniel was even given insight into dreams and vision, that is Daniel was given insight from God into matters offering wise advice to the king. (Daniel would have known that participation in divination and magic would have been against the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)).

They were ten times better than all the other who were the king's wise men

3. They were taken into the king's personal service (1:19-20).

Daniel served until the first year of Cyrus the king – that is from 605 to 536 B.C. around 69 years.

What an account.

Daniel and his three friends are certainly models in that day for how the Jewish people were to remain faithful to the LORD as they lived in a pagan society outside of their beloved land without any temple at which to worship.

Today, Daniel and his three friends are still a model for us who claim to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior – for adults, for youth, and for children.

In the midst of a culture that knew nothing about the true and living eternal and personal biblical God, it is possible through faith in Christ to live for Him in a culture that is completely against HIM!

It comes down to what happens in our minds first of all. For, "as we think so are we," panned the writer of Proverbs (23:7).

Daniel made up His mind not to defile himself with the king's food and drink.

Since Daniel had gotten into God's mind through the Word of God, he obeyed the Lord and received God's blessings at that particular time and would be used in a mighty way for the Lord in this period of Israel's history.

Today, Christ has come, provided us His forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him.

Now Christ lives in believers, the hope of glory. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

When we come to I Corinthians 2:14-3:3 we discover how we can tell if we are really using the mind that God has given us, really the mind of Jesus Christ, to think like Christ.

Paul instructs us about four kinds of people.

(1) The natural person – or the one outside of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 2:14).

(2) The new believer in Christ – the infants in Christ (I Corinthians 3:1). Those who have just accepted Christ as Savior and need to become mature in Him.

(3) The immature believer in Christ – the believer who should be growing in Christ, becoming like him but he or she is in a state of the flesh or wilful – still wanting to do one's own will (I Corinthians 3:2-3).

These believers are still quite selfish and display jealousy, and create strife, which was happening in the church at Corinth, for their were party spirits, people vying for position and power, and attempting to be the fan of a man. Such can happen in the local church, and it can also happen in our relationships as individuals and in the family setting, which can cause all kinds of havoc.

(4) The mature yet maturing believer in Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 2:15-16).

This is what Paul calls the spiritual person, who has the mind of Christ, but he or she is an appraiser, a sifter, one who has God's discernment through the Word of God, who is able to discern right from wrong based upon the word of God, who has given up being selfish, but is willing to serve the other person, and seek the highest good in the other person. The person who realizes that some plant some water, there are differences of personality and spiritual gifts, but working together God gives the increase.

In the Old Testament economy Daniel was the spiritual, mature person at the age of 17 or 18. So age is not necessarily the issue here.

The issue today is how does my relationship with Jesus Christ – having His mind – affect my attitudes, my words, and my actions.

Certainly, the old sin nature still gives the believer challenges, but how you and I deal with that tug and deal with our sins when we sin, determines what the Word of God is doing in my life. If one is tempted, one says "No" through the Word of God, and when one sins, one confesses that sin to the Lord, and goes to another person asking forgiveness if such is the case.

God's mind is quick to obey, quick to forgive, quick to move on with God in using His mind in His Word to obey Him joyfully and with enthusiasm.

Let's be Daniel's this week to the glory of God as we live in a culture that needs to see Christ in action!