**DANIEL’S DECISION OF FAITH**

June 18, 2017

Daniel 1:1-21

Key Verse 1:8 “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.”

We are starting the study of the Book of Daniel as part of our study of the key verse of this year, “Live holy and godly lives.” We want to study those who lived holy and godly lives. We studied Ruth. In the Book of Daniel, we will study the life of Daniel. Chapter 1 mentions Israel’s historical background of the time. Because of their sins, the people of Israel were being dragged into Babylonian captivity. Daniel was one of them. For a moment put yourself in Daniel’s shoes. This was not at all what he planned for his life. In a short period of time his life was turned upside down: From a carefree teenager to a servant of a foreign king. He was taken from family and would never see his homeland again. He would never worship in the temple in Jerusalem or see his family again. He lost his spiritual mentors and taken to a land where God was mocked. He was taken 800 miles to a new home on the Euphrates River. I am sure he had many doubts and concerns. He may have asked, “Why did this happen to me?” Did God bring judgment on Daniel because of some sin he or his parents committed? No. Daniel was caught in a culture that forgot God. When a nation forgets God, everyone suffers, the righteous along with the unrighteous. At the time Daniel probably didn’t see the hand of God at work as he traveled the 800 miles. But God’s ultimate plan was for Daniel to influence the highest leaders of power in the ancient world. That meant relocation. God was at work behind the scenes preparing a young man to play a key role in the preservation and restoration of his people. In this chapter, let’s see what Daniel did in a tragic and adverse situation.

Look at verse 1. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded, he killed huge collective masses of the people of Israel mercilessly. The holy Jerusalem was burned down to ashes. The holy temple was desecrated. Why did this tragic event happen to God’s chosen people? The first part of verse 2 says, “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” It seemed as if it were an international political problem. But the author of Daniel says that it was a sovereign act of God. When God saw his people, they were corrupt and worthless. They needed divine discipline. Out of his divine love, God delivered his people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. For God, it was an unbearably painful event. Of all the nations, God chose Israel to be his people. (Ex 19:5,6) They were God’s covenant people. (Gen 17:7) God gave his promises to his people Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Most importantly, they were a priestly nation called to fill the earth with the knowledge of God, and thus fulfill God’s plan of world salvation. As he had promised, God brought them to the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey. God wanted them to live as God’s chosen people and a priestly nation in the promised land so that they might win the Gentiles over to God. God gave marvelous grace to his people. But they did not maintain God’s blessing.

Nebuchadnezzar was a conqueror. He was also a wise man. When he took a lot of plunder from Jerusalem, he also took some of the Israelites from the royal family and nobility, young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. (3,4) In short, he took with him the idea banks from Jerusalem to train them for the future service of his empire. Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. (6) These youths were to be indoctrinated in the arts and sciences of Babylon. They were cut off from their families, their church, and they would be fed a steady diet of Babylon’s humanistic teachings. Nebuchadnezzar wanted all traces of their past lives cut off to make it easier for them to adopt Babylonian culture, so even their diet was to be changed. They were to be fed from the king’s table. Nebuchadnezzar understood the importance of the battle of the mind and it must always begin with the youth. Hitler understood this and used it well. Before he gained control of Germany, he began a youth program to indoctrinate the youth of Germany through his “Nazi Youth Corps” and they helped in paving the way for his rise to power. Mao Tse Tung used “the little red book” to indoctrinate youth in China in the cultural revolution. However, no one understands it as well as the devil, for he knows that in order to capture a generation, you must begin with the youth. It is not a coincidence that youth today are unruly with a lack of respect, and skeptical of God. Satan is working very hard.

On top of this, Nebuchadnezzar even changed their names. Now we know that names were very important in Jewish culture. Names often displayed a characteristic of that individual. Note the Hebrew names of these four young men and what they meant. Daniel = God is my judge, Hananiah = God has favored, Mishael = who is like God? Azariah = Jehovah has helped. These were changed: Daniel to Belteshazzar which means, “the holder of the treasures of Bel.” Bel was the chief god of Babylon; Hananiah to Shadrach which means “illumined by the Sun-god”; Mishael to Meshach, which means “He who belongs to the goddess Sheshach,”; Azariah to Abednego which meant “the servant of Nebo, the shining fire.” Thus these servants of God were dedicated to Babylon’s four leading gods; Bel, the Chief-god, the Sun-god, the Earth-god, and the Fire-god. Nebuchadnezzar, in changing their names, was trying to change their identities as well. That’s exactly what Satan desires to do with us today, change our identity as a child of God, to becoming a child of the world. When we compromise our faith, we lose our identity. That’s why so many Christians today don’t really understand what Christianity is all about. They become just like worldly people. For example, the divorce rate of Christians is the same as that of worldly people. Many Christians do not think it is wrong to live together before marriage.

Every spring break, many students go to exotic places like San Padre Island, or Cancun, or Palm Beach; no parents, new places, new faces, and nobody knows who you are. For many, it is a deadly trap that often has terrible consequences. We don’t know how many of those youth that gave in to the temptation of Babylon, but we do know of one who did not. Daniel could have said, “Hey, I’m just a kid, why should I turn down the good life?” Or he could have said, “Everybody else is doing it. The other Jewish boys from the youth group are doing it. Why should I deny my desire?” Or he could have thought, “Mom and Dad are not here, the pastor is not here, who is going to know?” Someone once said that the true test of character is what we do when we know absolutely nobody else will find out. Daniel could have said or thought all of those things, but here is what the Bible says that he did.

Look at verse 8. “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” In that tragic situation, Daniel was chosen by the king to be a fellow member of the royal academy with a promising position in the palace for his future. In that situation, most people would jump at the opportunity and go along with it. In a desperate situation, most smart people are in danger of becoming opportunists and being blinded by their selfishness. Daniel could have eaten royal food in the court and just studied. Humanly speaking, he was lucky. But he did not think he was lucky. He was sorrowful because of his people who were under God’s wrath and anger. But he did not just sit down and cry about it. He sought God. In that tragic situation he loved God. As an expression of his love for God he did what he could do. He made a small decision of faith. It was not to eat royal food in order not to defile himself. For this, he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way; not to eat all kinds of luxurious royal food, but only vegetables and water.

It is worthwhile to think about why Daniel made such a decision in that tragic situation. His resolution seems too small to change the world. Anyway he made a decision of faith. Obviously he resolved not to eat royal food in order to keep the dietary law based on Leviticus. There were many kinds of animals and fish that the people of Israel were forbidden to eat. (Lev 11) It is most obvious that he resolved not to eat royal food in order to keep his faith pure. Also the meat had been offered to idols. As we know well, the people of Israel lived a wandering life without one place of settlement for 2,000 years. But they were able to survive as a nation such a long time because they had a firm resolution in their hearts to have faith in God. Daniel is one of their ancestors. He wanted to keep his faith pure. So from the beginning he made a small decision not to eat royal food.

Daniel’s small decision seems to be a small matter, for he looked as if he were a little fish in the vast ocean. But when he made it before God, he became a useful person to God; otherwise he could have been one of the corrupted people. Daniel’s decision of faith in that tragic situation was indeed great in the sight of God. Daniel made a decision of faith to live as a man of God. Then God blessed him. Verse 17b says, “And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.” God gave him spiritual eyes to understand spiritual things. God promised his people that whoever sought God and loved God, God would be with them and bless them and make them a blessing. (Deut 28:1-14) This promise God kept to Daniel. God gave him what he really needed. Since he was chosen to be a fellow in the royal academy, he needed wisdom and understanding so that he might study better than others. This God gave him. This is a spiritual secret: When we are in tragic situations we should not sit down to despair or fall into self-pity. We must seek God and love God with all our hearts. Then God gives us what we really need.

Many people complain about their human conditions. This is not wise. Like Daniel, we must seek God and love God. We must make a decision of faith to live a pure life before God. Then God gives us everything we need. Ephesians 1:18 says, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you....” This is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians to love God and seek God so that God would give them wisdom to do everything well and to have spiritual insight to see what God is doing.

Look at verses 18-20. After three years and at the appointed time, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in the whole kingdom. When Daniel made a decision of faith to live a pure life, God blessed him and his friends to be the most excellent fellows in the royal academy. God helped him become an eminent leader throughout his lifetime who served over eight kings. God promoted these men of pure faith above others not just for their benefit but to use them for his future work. God promoted them so that they might be spiritual leaders and shepherds even for Babylonians. God is with those who seek him and love him, and blesses them and makes them a blessing to others. Like Daniel, we must make a decision of faith to seek God and love God by living a pure life before God.

Many theologians say that we are living in the time of exile like Daniel, surrounded by hostile and godless people. We no longer live in the time of Joshua, conquering unbelievers around us. We need one decision of faith to live before God, to keep our identity as people of God. There are not many things we can do in this world, surrounded by people hostile to Christianity. But we can keep our identity as people of God, instead of following people mindlessly. We should challenge secular cultures around us, not bowing to them. It does not mean that we throw temper tantrum. A Christian soccer player Jaelene Hinkle, 24, has withdrawn herself from the roster of the national U.S. Soccer team for two international friendlies this month because she will have to wear gay pride jerseys. She will miss the great opportunity to play but she is making a statement that she does not support the wicked lifestyle. She said, “If you live for people’s acceptance, you’ll die from their rejection.” We are greatly encouraged by her courage. Making a decision of faith to keep our identity can be simple. It does It can be as simple as decision to read the Bible every day. It can be as simple as decision not to stay up late watching godless youtube videos.

In this chapter we learn that we must make a decision of faith to seek God and love God earnestly in any situation and God will give us wisdom and strength to overcome the world. Let’s remember that one person’s small decision of faith can change the course of world history.