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Daniel 1:1-21
Obeying God and Men
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Alexis de Tocqueville, the Frenchman who studied American culture in the early nineteenth century, said:

> "I searched for America's greatness in her matchless Constitution, and it was not there. I searched for America's greatness in her halls of Congress, and it was not there. I searched for America's greatness in her rich and fertile fields and teeming potential, and it was not there. It was not until I went into the heartlands of America and into her churches and met the American people that I discovered what it is that makes America great. America is great because America is good; and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Alexis de Tocqueville spoke with the perception of a prophet. For in the twentieth century, American began to lose its goodness, and as a result, America also has begun to lose it greatness.

Biblical Christianity has lost its cultural leadership in America. As a result, Bible believing Christians in America are increasingly in a state of cultural exile. The Bible believing

Christian is increasingly surrounded by alien views, alien thoughts, alien attitudes, alien practices. American culture once promoted and guarded our way of life. Now we live in the midst of a culture that constantly opposes our way of life and tempts us with compromise.

If we want guidance on how to live in such a world, there is no better place to turn than the book of Daniel.

I. Daniel's Situation

Daniel was among the first group taken into Babylonian captivity. The first captive exiles were the cream of the crop, the best and the brightest.

From verse three, we know that these early captives were young people, probably in their early teens -- 14, 15, 16 -- and some were from prestigious families. From verse five, we know they were young men who were physically fit and mentally sound. They were the ancient equivalent of today's high school student who is on both the honor roll and the varsity squad.

We read in verse five that they were taken to enroll in a three year course of training, after which they would become civil servants. Daniel's experience has many similarities to the experience of the young high school graduate today who leaves the shelter of home and home schooling or a Christian school to move far away to the secular university where his faith and morals will be challenged.

II. Daniel's Dilemma

Daniel is put in a true Romans 12:1-2 situation:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The pagan world is going to try to mold Daniel into conformity with its beliefs and practices.

First, Daniel is enrolled in pagan education. Daniel is able to deal with that because one can master a system of education without believing it and committing oneself to it. Besides, there are advantages to knowing your enemy and his way of thinking. Daniel was here merely following the example of Moses in his early years in Egypt. We read in Acts 7:22:

22 "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

Colossians 2:8 says,
8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

This verse doesn't say to reject all philosophical learning. It says only to recognize that philosophy based upon the basic principles of this worldly system in rebellion against God is empty deceit that will cheat you. We can study worldly philosophy without being deceived by it and cheated by it.

We have our own understanding of life rooted in God's Word. And our philosophy rooted in Christ and His Gospel message is "mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

Daniel believed he could, with God's help, submit to a pagan course of education and not compromise his faith.

Next Daniel's name was changed to the pagan Belteshazzar. This was an expression of Babylonian authority over him. It served as a constant reminder to Daniel of the pagan conquest of his people.

Daniel accepted his new name, much as Joseph did when he was elevated to a ruler in Pharaoh's Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar may have given Daniel a new name, but God is still the one in sovereign control of Daniel's life. And Daniel knows that Nebuchadnezzar is but an instrument of God's judgment upon Israel.

Then there was the new pagan diet, and here is where Daniel draws the line. Here is where Daniel does not see how he can

obey men without disobeying God. For the Christian, that is the line of decision. The Christian views those in authority over him as authorities set in place by God. And he is to obey them unless he cannot do so without in the process disobeying God. And Daniel did not see how he could submit to the pagan diet without disobeying and dishonoring God.

Here is the commentator Leupold's explanation of Daniel's dilemma:

> "All meals served at the king's table were feasts, and among the heathen feasts were feasts in honor of the gods. That involved that a portion of the meat to be served would first be dedicated to some god in sacrifice. The eating of the remainder meant sharing in the sacrificial meal, which was, of course, in honor of the god to whom a portion had been sacrificed. To share in such a feast was the equivalent of honoring such an idol, admitting his claims and existence, and so practically denying the one true God. For that reason, Daniel refused such contamination" (p. 66).

1 Corinthians 10:21 says,

> 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

And apparently, it is from that perspective which Daniel viewed the wine and meat from the king's table.

III. Daniel's Solution

Matthew 10:16 says:

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Daniel didn't set aside his conscience and cave in, but neither did he vocally rebel and provoke those over him as if he were anxious to become a martyr. Sometimes such a confrontation is necessary, as in the cases of the fiery furnace and the lions' den found later in the book of Daniel . But we should avoid such confrontations if possible. We should be wise and serpents and harmless as doves, and try to find a way we can submit to both God and men.

As we examine Daniel's efforts to submit to both God and men, we see first Daniel's boldness rooted in his faith in God. If we believe that God is with us and that what we are trying to do is right and pleasing to God, then we will have that boldness that is rooted in faith in God's sovereignty and in our desire to please God.

With that boldness rooted in faith, Daniel approaches the chief of the eunuchs. This would be like scheduling a session with the president of a secular university. Daniel recognizes that God has brought him into favor with the chief of the eunuchs (verse 9), and he views this as a possible open door of opportunity which God has set before him.

Proverbs 21:1 says,

1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turns it wherever He wishes.

We know from an incident later in this book that Daniel was a man of prayer. Even a den of lions could not keep him from his daily prayers. We can be sure Daniel was praying before God as he presented his case to the chief of the eunuchs.

But Daniel runs into a bureaucratic snag. The chief concern of most bureaucrats is not efficiency or justice or any such thing. The chief concern of most bureaucrats is protecting their person and position. In Nebuchadnezzar's bureaucracy, a snafu could even endanger one's head. So the chief bureaucrat, the chief of the eunuchs, says no to Daniel's request.

So does Daniel give up and say, Well, at least I tried. No, he learns from his first endeavor and he tries again. He has learned that to have any success, he is going to have to think of some way to protect the bureaucrats over him from any possible risk. So this time, Daniel goes to the bureaucrat immediately over him, the steward. This would be like going to the RA at your dorm, the resident assistant. Daniel proposes a reasonable test, a ten day test that is short enough to protect the steward from any trouble but long enough to prove Daniel's point. Daniel asked the steward to allow him and his friends to have a diet of vegetables and water for ten days. This way Daniel could avoid the meat and wine of the king's table which were involved with

idolatry. Also, the diet of the king's delicacies was an overly rich diet. Such rich food and also wine are not healthy when consumed in abundance.

So Daniel was given permission, but he would be allowed to continue this non-defiling diet beyond the ten days only if at the end of the ten days, Daniel and his friends were at least as healthy looking as those who were eating from the king's table.

I'm sure Daniel prayed much during these ten days, but I believe he did more than that. I believe he and his friends did everything they could to promote their health during that ten days. I'm sure they cleaned their plates at every mean and even asked for seconds. Not to do that would be to tempt the Lord our God.

We err if we try, try, try, but never look to God for help and fail to give God all the praise for any success we may have. That is pride. We also err if we pray, pray, pray, but never make any effort, expecting God to do all the work. That is presumption. What we need to do is to pray, pray, pray because our success is totally dependent upon God, and try, try, try, because the responsibility is ours. That is true faith. This proper balance is found summarized in Philippians 2:12-13, which says,

12 ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

God blessed Daniel and their friends, and at the end of ten days, they were healthier than any others. Thus they were allowed to

continue their diet which allowed them to obey both God and men.

And no doubt they continued this God-honoring philosophy of life in all their endeavors at this pagan university. They did their best for the honor and glory of God, as explained in Colossians 3:22-24:

22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.
23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,
24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

And God blessed:

Daniel 1:17-20
17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.
18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.
19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.
20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times

> better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

God gave the four Hebrew children the combination of wisdom and faith that was needed for them not only to survive but to thrive in a hostile cultural setting. We more and more need that same wisdom and faith. And we need to prepare our children for living in the hostile world of cultural exile. Proverbs 22:6 says,

> 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

There is one other thing we also need to do. We need to work and pray for the revival and reformation which will bring an end to our cultural exile. We need to pray for the new covenant equivalent of the return from exile that occurred under Zerubbabel and Ezra and Nehemiah.

Cal Thomas once took a tour of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. As he stood in the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed, the guide displayed a printed copy of the document and asked how many had seen the handwritten original in the National Archives. A few raised their hands. The guide then urged the rest to see it soon because, he said, "The ink is fading and there is nothing anyone can do about it."

Mr. Thomas then went on to observe,

> "What a perfect metaphor for what ails America! The principles, values, and beliefs that once seemed indelibly

> written on our hearts, minds, and culture are fading and there seems to be little anyone can do to stop it."

Well, there is something we can do. We can pray for that coming day when God will again write His law upon the heart of our nation.