

DANIEL 1

UNWAVERING: COVENANT GOD, ANCHORED HEARTS

I. CRISIS! CHANGE! CHOSEN?! (v.1-7)

- At heart of story, 4 young men ...
 - In age, probably younger than most of the students here at World Assembly
 - Their lives were completely CHANGED in a very sudden way
 - Found themselves DISPLACED and EXILED because of CRISIS in their nation

- From Jerusalem to Babylon
 - Jehoiakim's Defeat → Nebuchadnezzar's Triumph!
 - Judah's Loss → Babylon's Gain!!
 - Jerusalem, the city where YHWH dwells
 - is besieged, defeated, shamed! (cf 2 Kg 24:1-4; 2 Chr 36:6-7)
 - articles from the temple of YHWH taken into the treasure house of the Babylonian gods
 - Judah is left asking, "Has the LORD (YHWH) been rendered powerless?"

- From Captives to Chosen
 - CHOSEN for the King's service!
 - A sudden turn from Captives to Chosen
 - Passed the TEST of lineage, physical attributes, aptitude for learning!!
 - Yet, NO CHOICE!!
 - language & literature of Babylonians (complicated, immense!)
 - 3-year program
 - assigned: **daily amount** of food & wine from King's table
 - NO CONTROL over their lives / destiny!
 - Identity STRIPPED

- Jewish names which proclaimed Who YHWH is was changed, given names which honored Babylonian gods instead
 - An attempt to strip them of their loyalty to YHWH, making them servants of Babylonian gods
 - DANIEL (God is my JUDGE) → Belteshazzar (Bel / Marduk protect his life)
 - HANANIAH (The Lord shows GRACE) → Shadrach (command of Aku, Sumerian moon god)
 - MISHAEL (Who is what God is?) → Meshach (Who is what Aku is?)
 - AZARIAH (The Lord HELPS) → Abednego (Servant of Nego/Nebo i.e. Nabu)
- In their shoes ...
 - What would you do as a young person?
 - How would you advise them as a parent / staffworker?
 - If you could make only ONE change ... either SUBJECT of study, SCHOLARSHIP or NAME CHANGE .. what would be your choice?

II. CHOICES amidst NO CHOICE (v.8 - 14)

BEING IN A POSITION OF NO CHOICE!!

- No one like to be here!
- Faced with NO CHOICE, many experience Fear, feel Trapped, Resentment, Victimized or end up Blaming others
- Not so with Daniel and friends!

• A Courageous Resolve

“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. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ **BUT the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink.”**”

- Contrast of 2 responses ... 2 very different motivations for choices at such a time!
 - v.8: **But Daniel resolved ..** -> Courage
 - v.10: **But the official ..** -> Fear
- At such a time, Daniel found d! SPACE to make a COURAGEOUS CHOICE!
 - He was not alone! His friends were TOGETHER with him in this resolve!
 - Courage to make a RESOLVE (often a private decision) and to SPEAK UP for it!

- **A Compassionate Surprise**

- Daniel DID NOT expect ...
 - the official's CONFESSION of fear & dilemma
 - opportunity for CONVERSATION
 - COMPASSION in his favour!

How often, my friends, we are crippled by fear before even trying!
In this instance, COURAGE opened the door to COMPASSION and SURPRISE!!

- **A Creative Alternative**

- "TEST US" please! 10 Days!!
 - 10 days compared to 3 years = a reasonable request!
 - Only Vegetables + Water !!!
 - "Power to decide" in officials' hand ... "Assess d' outcome & treat us accordingly!"

For Daniel & friends, food was an important matter in keeping themselves "undefiled". Strict requirements of what was clean / unclean. Food & wine from the king's table would have broken all rules - their identity as God's people shaken to the core!

For us today, in our context, what would "defile / compromise our identity as God's people"? What is happening around us? What is stealing our identity and witness as God's people? Paul's exhorts us in Phil 1:27, "Whatever happens ... conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel". Are our choices are worthy / unworthy of this Gospel that is given to us?

III. **OUTSTANDING, UNWAVERING!! (v.15 - 21)**

- **After 10 days ..**

- .. They were **Healthier + Better Nourished!**
 - compared to all the young men who ate the royal food
 - permitted to keep their resolve!!

- **After 3 years ..**

- .. **NONE found EQUAL** amongst all in their batch!

- tested by the King.
 - entered the King's service

- .. **10x BETTER**

- in every matter of wisdom and understanding
 - compared to all the magicians and enchanters in the whole kingdom

- **After 70 years ..**

- .. **Kings he'd served have died one after another; Kingdoms had changed**

- yet, Daniel remained!

- .. **Daniel remained**

- in ROYAL service (1st year of King Cyrus - decree to return home from exile!) c.f. 2 Chr 36:22,23
 - in FAITHFULNESS to YHWH, The King of Kings
in INTEGRITY .. No Corruption!
in LOYALTY to the kings he served
 - lived long enough to see God fulfill His promise through Jeremiah; the first exiles RETURN home to Jerusalem

IV. WHO IS GOD IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS & NO CHOICE?

- **Our God is Unwavering!**

- He Covenants with His People, Keeps Covenant**

- It was the LORD who delivered Jehoiakim; gave victory to Nebuchadnezzar & permitted him to carry off the items ... (v.2)

- Even the Exile - promised in His warnings to His People! (Lev 26:23, Deut 28:15,64)

- Keeps His Promise, brings them HOME from exile (Jer 25:11-12)

- **God With Us**

Contrary to traditional beliefs, Daniel and friends discovered in the midst of exiles that God DID NOT remain in Jerusalem! Nor did He abandon them in exile!

- **GOD WAS PRESENT, with them** in crisis, in exile
 - .. Involved and In the midst of their circumstances
 - .. God was not “Missing-In-Action”

- He is a God who **REFUSES to be defined** by HUMAN EXPECTATIONS. **Refuses to be confined** by physical location or human boundaries

- **God, Mover of Hearts**

Even when NOTHING MAKES SENSE, and all seem dark and impossible, God alone can MOVE HEARTS!

- Nebuchadnezzar & Cyrus were both pagan kings, evil and self-serving. Yet God MOVED THEM to accomplish His purpose.
- Ashpenaz was an official doing his job, following instructions. Yet it is the LORD who CAUSED HIM to show favor and compassion to Daniel and his friends.
- Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah thought they had NO CHOICE but it is God who CHOSE them and GIFTED them to become His witnesses in this pagan society.
They were DISPLACED from their homes, yet it is God who PLACED them right smack in the centre of power and evil of that time as His INFLUENCE.

Unwavering! Our God who covenants, Our God who Keep Promises. Our God who is with us!
Unwavering. Whatever happens are those whose hearts are anchored in Him!

What makes these four young men so different from all the others of their generation? What is it that give them this kind of faith — unwavering, anchored in the LORD?