

August 7, 2022

A True and Living Faith

Scripture: Daniel 2:46 - 48

The Book of Daniel highlights this pervasive theme in Israel's history - Humankind's power is no match for God's power. Let me repeat that - Humankind's power is no match for God's power. Because we find ourselves living in intimidating external circumstances and that does not mean we should abandon our belief in God and forgo a living faith. Humankind's power is no match for God's power.

Daniel's life experience provides lessons in how to live within these tensions and how to be true to self and to God while serving those in power over us.

King Nebuchadnezzar brought Daniel into exile in Babylon. Daniel held God's favor by his heroic obedience and steadfast faith in God. While being trained in Babylon for indoctrination into their society, Daniel learned a new language, court protocol, dietary changes, and new social graces. Daniel was even given a new name of 'Belteshazzar'. They changed Daniel's geographical location but they did not change his spiritual disposition. Daniel remained true to God.

Daniel ascended the ranks of leadership in Babylon by his skills to decipher the king's dreams and to foretell the future. Daniel was honored for his determination to hold on to his faith at all costs, even while in service to

his superiors. Daniel was an exceptional example of the power and sovereignty of faith!

In our scripture reading of Daniel's story we have some of the harsh realities of deportation, captivity, and exile. The conditions of detention in Babylon, while not disastrous, still presented severe challenges for Daniel. While the period of indoctrination and training was difficult, Daniel seemed to have the hardest time adjusting his bland dietary needs to the taste of Babylonian food and drink. Throughout the whole process, Daniel remained true to his faith.

All empires and nations have the capacity to transform conquered nations into vehicles for their own end. Assimilation is cultural and political. But Daniel, as in the case of Joseph in Egypt, was granted a measure of political power because he had proved himself a trustworthy servant of the empire through his dream reading of the King's dreams.

The process of completely absorbing the exiles into Babylonian culture was a primary objective of King Nebuchadnezzar and future kings. It was emblematic of a basic plan of training and social integration. By changing their names and their sensory tastes for food and wine, they would receive a complete makeover into the ways of the Babylonians.

A person being integrated was expected to do what they were told and to obey every command given by their masters. However, meeting the external requirements for selection for service did not mean internal compliance.

For Daniel complete assimilation into Babylonian culture did not mean his total assimilation into those social, political, and cultural systems which demanded obedience and loyalty in matters of personal faith. It also did not mean that Daniel lose his personal sovereignty.

Daniel's faith in God provided a measure of resistance and insulation. Daniel's faith in God prevented him domestication. Daniel was willing to pay the price of his life and he would not be forced to choose between God and the imperial regency of Babylon. God's sovereignty was realized in the religious autonomy of Daniel. The Babylonian regency could not enact unmerited influence over Daniel. Daniel became a cultural and political insider because he had won the trust of the king's sponsors and Daniel was granted positions of provincial authority while not surrendering his faith in God.

I like the story of Daniell!

So what can we learn from Daniel? We may not be under the severe pressures to conform as Daniel was in Babylon, but we are under pressure to conform to communal, social, political, and worldly norms. We must be like Daniel. We must become cultural and political insiders so that we can win the trust of people around us and we will be granted positions of authority. We need to become socially active but we must never surrender our faith in Jesus Christ. We need to become politically active, letting the teaching of Jesus Christ of love and compassion guide our way but we must never surrender our faith in God. We must never stop striving to serve our God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ!

Let us pray:

Dear God, let us have a true and living faith in you and your Most Holy Son. Let us never assimilate to the world's standards but let us be like Daniel - let us surrender our faith to you, O Lord.                    AMEN.