

Resolved to stay pure

Sunday 9th
Daniel 1:1-20

Don't we just love the book of Daniel?

It captures our imagination as it reveals the will and purposes of God, and demonstrates a depth of character and spiritual courage, in the face of great adversities, that is rarely seen in one man.

Daniel was only a young man, around 14-16 years of age, when he was taken captive. The brutal war-lord king, Nebuchadnezzar, led his Babylonian army to invade and conquer Israel. As a result, Daniel was sent away from his home and his family into slavery in Babylon. This all took place around 605BC, in the third year of King Jehoiakim of Judah (vs.1).

Daniel was just one of many young men of Jewish nobility to suffer this fate. It was part of the culture of the time for conquering armies to take the leadership and young people away into captivity to persuade compliance by the defeated and subjugated nations.

Once in Babylon, Daniel, and three of his friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah), were chosen to be trained and educated for service in the royal court of Babylonian (vs.4). They were chosen because of their breeding, intellect and good looks.

It was a smart move, to train up and use the children of the conquered nations, so the King could better understand their culture, language and attitudes. Today's reading opens with young Daniel commencing this training and preparation. In vs.5 we read; *'.. the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, ...'*

The king's delicacies and wine! Not bad for slaves.
If you want the best, then you have to invest.

For the next three years Daniel and his friends were to undergo a rigorous 'university' style training, so that they would become proficient in the ways of the Babylonian culture and language.

Today, we might call it indoctrination, but the training was never intended to break them, just mould them.

The king also realised that, to get the best out of these young men, he needed to provide them with good living conditions and quality food. This is an interesting point in light of our current immigration issues. The king's command was that they would eat the same food as he ate, BUT, Daniel had other ideas.

As a Hebrew, there were certain foods that he would not eat, for religious reasons. To be forced to eat them would result in his defilement before God, and therefore separation from God.

In vs.8 we read; *'Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank ...'*

By doing this, Daniel placed himself in a precarious position, because it could have been seen as an act of defiance against the orders of the king.

The issue of defilement is, even today, a touchy one among many peoples. For example, most Jews will not eat certain meats, especially pig, and they have Kosha laws on how food is to be handled and prepared.

Many Muslim people have very similar food laws, and also refrain from some meats, including pig. Their food handling and preparation laws are called Halal.

Hindus will not eat beef, because they consider cows to be a sacred animal. As a result, many Hindu's are vegetarians and, even so, there are strict laws on what they can and cannot eat.

By comparison, in many western countries today, our food practices are very poor, resulting in ailments like diabetes, various cancers and obesity (even in children), just to mention a few.

We could learn so much about healthy living from some of the more traditional food practices, BUT, that would have an impact on the profit margins of companies like McDonalds, Pizza Hut and KFC.

Daniel's decision to remain faithful and pure before God was HUGE! His decision did not just effect himself, but also impacted on his friends, who accepted his peer leadership. Daniel's decision also created a great difficulty for those who were charged with his care.

In verse 10 we read; *'.. the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."'*

Obviously, the man saw this as an issue that could be a matter of life and death.

Today, many young people, and some not so young, are being faced with similar difficult life choices that place them at odds with prevailing attitudes and authorities. Certainly, it is much easier to just follow the crowd, do what everyone else is doing, BUT, do they (we) run the risk of defiling themselves (ourselves) before God and separating themselves (ourselves) from His blessing in their (our) lives?

Issues of moral conscience, and what is 'right or wrong', can create huge problems of social acceptance. Many young people are being bombarded by so many issues and activities today that simply expect them to just yield and conform.

Where can people today, both young and old, find the courage and resolve to think through crucial issues for themselves - and remain pure?

Daniel, in his first demonstration of wisdom, courage and determination said to the steward; *"Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, .."* (vss.12-13)

This was so smart! Daniel challenged the steward to allow them 10 days of eating the foods that were acceptable to them, and then the steward could see for himself that the diet of vegetables and water was better for their health and complexion than fatty meat and alcoholic wine.

Even today, dieticians would say that eating vegetables and drinking water is excellent for cleansing the body and maintaining good health.

Of course, as we read in vss.15&16, at the end of the ten days the young men appeared to be far healthier than all the other captives who had been fed the kings meat and wine. As a consequence, the steward continued to supply the food that Daniel had requested.

For the next three years, Daniel and his friends grew and developed into healthy young men. God honoured and blessed them, **because they honoured Him** (vs.17).

At the end of the three years, Daniel and his friends were finally presented to the king and chosen, above all others, to serve the king. They were found to be far wiser and far more knowledgeable than all the other candidates.

I like what it says in vs.19; *'.. none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.'*

Purity can reveal itself in many different ways.

Daniel and his friends were not only **pure** in the foods they ate, but also **pure** in their devotion to God; **pure** in their attitudes and relationships with others; **pure** in their thoughts, speech and actions.

For the next 80+ years Daniel served in the courts of the kings of Babylon until ~520BC. He would have been almost 100 years old when he died. During his life he was elevated to positions of great authority and on many occasions Daniel distinguished himself with profound wisdom and great insight.

Throughout his life, Daniel maintained his character of purity before God, and those under whom he served. Despite the times of prejudice and persecution Daniel's character remained steadfast before God, and he never wavered.

Is purity of character something to be valued or shunned today?

It seems to me that expediency and compromise is what the world is teaching today. It is based on the notion of situational ethics, where absolutes no longer have any place.

But, is this how God wants us to live and behave?

I believe our culture and civilisation, to our detriment, is trying to live in the 'post' era. Everything that has been part of defining the foundations of our lives is now 'post' - behind us, and we have now supposedly moved on. We now have no defined moral basis to our society - just laws. **Moral responsibility has given way to legal opportunism.**

This is a tragedy today for many of our young people and children who have no guiding family heritage or background. Is it any wonder that we are now facing some enormous social problems that are threatening the very fabric of society.

So many people today don't know who they are, because they don't know where they have come from. Daniel, in his purity before God, knew exactly who he was and where he came from. It was his faith heritage that enabled him to not only endure a life of captivity, but in fact thrive through it.

He never lost sight of the fact that he was a child of God; loved by God; special to God; living in a right relationship with God that carried with it both privileges and responsibilities.

Daniel's example of purity before God impacted not only his whole life, but the lives of those around him.

Is it time for the people of God, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, to reclaim our purity before God and have done with trying to fit in with the world? Is it time for God's church to stop marching to the beat of the world's band and once again step forward and give leadership in a largely dysfunctional world?

Our message of purity does not have its origins in any human philosophy or culture. It comes from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who has now restored us in a right relationship with the one true eternal creator God. Our life and message of purity, our sense of belonging and purpose, is focused on Jesus; his sacrifice on the cross, and his resurrection.

As the old hymn says, written by H. Ernest Nichol in 1896; 'We've a story to tell the nations'; and we had better get out there and start telling it again.

As we read in 1 John 4:4, *'You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.'*

The world desperately needs to rediscover its relationship with, and dependency upon God.

It needs His cleansing and guidance, and only then, like Daniel, will people experience the purity of the presence of God.