

Text: Daniel 1

Theme: Series-Faith Under Fire: Co-operation without Compromise

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 05/03/2017 at 10.30am

As with many stories in the bible of those we regard as heroes, God is the real Hero, because each of these stories reveal to us more about the person of God, and how, though obscure at times like in the story of Esther, He is still in control of the world He created.

For example, when you look at Daniel chapter 1:

v2. - God is in control delivering the king

v9. - God is in control causing the official to show favour

v17 - God is in control giving the four men understanding.

How can God's people remain faithful to Him while living in a totally different culture? How can I live my life in my current situation when experiences do not tally with what I have believed.

The story begins with what we can call an apparent theological disconnect (verses 1-3). One morning the Jewish state of Judah woke up to find their king taken away to captivity and a surrogate put in place. The temple is sacked and its ornaments taken to Babylon! The theological problem was as significant as the practical problem.

Up to this point the people of Israel had the notion of how things should be. They believed that their special relationship to God will always translate to goodies for them. No illness, no deaths, no calamities as experienced by other nations.

The line of David would always provide a king and the temple would remain central; an inviolable as the place where Yahweh was worshiped. And then, one morning, their dreams changed.

The Lord gave Judah into the hands of the Babylonians for mainly two reasons. The first was Israel's idolatry and the second was their failure to observe the Sabbaths for the land (Leviticus 25:1-7 and 26:2-35).

The confiscation of the articles in the temple and their deposit in a Babylonian temple was a dramatic declaration by Nebuchadnezzar saying, "my god is better than your God." Now the God of Israel had to vindicate Himself.

This was a low time for Judah and God's people. It seemed that the God of Israel lost out to the gods of Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. The Book of Daniel shows God vindicating Himself at a time when the conquest of Israel might have brought God's reputation into disgrace.

Verses 3-5: Nebuchadnezzar not only confiscated holy things from the temple but also the shining lights of Judah's future (young men perhaps 13 to 17 years old).

How were the young men to explain their predicament? Where do we go when disaster strikes? What do we do on that day when our heart cries in emptiness when a relationship we thought would last a lifetime goes up in smoke? What do we say when we are faced with an illness and for several years have sought the face of the Lord and there seems to be no improvement? Where do we stand when our faith does not seem to square up with our experiences and our notion of God is being questioned?

Daniel tells us about four of the youths who were taken to Babylon. They were given a five-star accommodation with five-star restaurant facilities, a first class University and opportunities to advance in the Civil service of Babylon!

They could have taken one of three positions:

1. To say when you are in Babylon, do as the Babylonians, after all God allowed us to be taken to captivity and he did nothing.
2. To withdraw and turn into freedom fighters and see nothing good in Babylon and suspect all their motives.
3. To choose to cooperate but without compromise.

If they said yes to everything, they would have been absorbed. If they said no to everything, they would have been withdrawn. But they did cooperate without compromise on what really matters.

These Hebrew children realized they lived under the scrutiny not only of Nebuchadnezzar but of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

They were given Babylonian names to redirect their focus from Yahweh to their own God.

- **Daniel** (meaning *God is my judge*) was changed to **Belteshazzar** (meaning *Bel's prince*).
- **Hannaniah** (meaning *Beloved by the Lord*) was changed to **Shadrach** (meaning *Illumined by Sun-god*).
- **Mishael** (meaning *Who is as God*) was changed to **Meshach** (meaning *Who is like Venus*).
- **Azariah** (meaning *The Lord is my help*) was changed to **Abed-Nego** (meaning *Servant of Nego*).

Three years of training was earmarked for them: The purpose of the food, names, and education was simple. This was an effort at total indoctrination, with the goal of making these young Jewish men leave behind their Hebrew God and culture. Undoubtedly, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to communicate to these young men, "look to *me* for everything." Daniel and his friends refused, insisting that they would look to God.

Satan uses a similar strategy against believers today, wanting to indoctrinate us into the world system.

v.8 Daniel's decision to be faithful.

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.

Daniel did not object to the name given to him, because he knew who he was and others could call him what they wanted. Daniel did not object to the Babylonian education, because he knew what he believed. Daniel *did* object to the food from the king's table because eating it was direct disobedience to God's word.

The *king* ordered the menu. Rejecting the menu was rejecting the king, and could result in severe punishment. Refusing the food might have branded them as being *uncooperative*, and could have *spoiled all chances of advancement* (many other Hebrew youths *did* eat the food).

There was a *real threat of punishment*. Ancient kings were well known for the severe and often sadistic punishments against those who crossed them. Nebuchadnezzar was capable of great cruelty. He murdered the sons of one king of Judah before the king's eyes then immediately gouged out the eyes of the king, so his last memory would always be the murder of his sons

(Jeremiah 39:6-7). Other rulers of Judah were literally roasted to death over a fire (Jeremiah 29:22).

It was easy to *think that God had let them down* by allowing them to be carried away into Babylon. These exiles, kidnapped from Jerusalem, might have said: "Why should we risk our neck for a God who let me down?" Yet they were committed to obedience even if God did not fulfill their expectations.

- i. The *heart must be set*. Daniel **purposed in his heart**, making up his mind *beforehand* that he would not compromise.
- ii. The *life must be positive*. Daniel found favor with his superiors.
- iii. *Protest must be courteous*. Daniel **requested** to be excused from the king's table. He made a polite request, showing discretion. Making a stand for Jesus Christ does not mean we must be obnoxious.

Please test your servants: Daniel saw the situation through the steward's eyes and addressed *his* legitimate concerns. He wouldn't let the chief of the eunuchs pay the price for Daniel's conscience. In it all, Daniel was willing to put himself and his faith in God to the test. There was something so *reasonable* about Daniel's approach. He could have gone on a hunger strike or made some other kind of protest. Instead he made a polite request, he made it to the right person and said, "Put us to the test."

These young Jewish men *gave themselves to the Lord* in a remarkable way and God *blessed them* in a remarkable way. J. Edwin Orr remembered something Billy Brice said to him: "Edwin, if Christians would only give over and above their reasonable service, the Lord would give over and above the usual blessing." Daniel and his friends understood this principle, and God blessed them for acting on it.

None was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: These young men from Jerusalem were immersed in the study of Babylonian culture, literature, and religion; yet they remained faithful to God. The work of the prophets like Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk was not in vain. They were *in* Babylon, but not *of* Babylon.

"Show me a person who has fallen away from their walk with the Lord, and I will show you a person who started making compromises in his or her life long ago."