

Daniel 1: 1-21; “Gifted in All Wisdom”, Sermon # 1 in the series – “The God Who Reveals Secrets”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 22nd, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

It will be good for all of us, especially young men, to realize that the Bible was given to us by inspiration of God. It was given to us that it might be profitable to us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. It is a book which is designed by God so that He might speak to your heart about what it means to know God, and what it means to live a righteous and a holy life. It is meant to speak to you about practical matters of everyday wisdom, whether you are prayerfully reading it on your own, or whether you are hearing it preached to you. God’s design in giving you the Scriptures is so that you would be wise with the wisdom which is from above. It is a very good thing, if from childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

This particular book, of Daniel, was given to us so that we might understand that God is the One, and the only One, who is the Source of true wisdom, whether it is in earthly things like eating and drinking, or whether it is the wisdom related to how God is to be worshipped; whether it is wisdom in taking your stand for God’s truth, or whether it is in understanding the secrets related to Christ’s kingdom and its advance to conquer among the nations of the earth. All of this wisdom is found in this precious book. And it was just this kind of wisdom that was given to Daniel and these three young men by God. And so, this afternoon, I want to set before you the ways that these young men were gifted in all wisdom. 1st of all – They had the wisdom to hold fast to the true and living God in the midst of a foreign culture which worshipped false gods. 2nd – They had the wisdom not to be defiled by the King’s philosophy of education. (verses 8-16) And 3rd – They had wisdom given to them by God when He saw that they would be faithful to Him. (verses 17-21)

1st of all – They had the wisdom to hold fast to the true and living God in the midst of a foreign culture which worshipped false gods. (verses 1-7)

We need to set the historical context to really understand what’s going on here. It’s the third year of the reign of king Jehoiakim. He was the king of Judah and one of the sons of Josiah, the great reformer in Israel. However, Jehoiakim himself was not a godly man as his father had been, and so God brought Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon against him, and he besieged Jerusalem and overcame all their defenses. Upon gaining this victory, he decided to bring some of the king’s descendants, some of the sons of the nobles, back with him to Babylon. Among them were the young men who are mentioned in our text – Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They are called, “some of the king’s seed, and of princes” in the King James Translation. They were young men of the nobles or the dukes of the land, it appears. And Nebuchadnezzar gave instructions to his chamberlain, the master of his eunuchs, to provide for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies; the meat that he ate, and also of the wine which drank. And he was instructed also to give them three years of training, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar had brought back the best specimens of youth that he could find in Judah and Jerusalem. It says in verse 4 that there was no blemish in them, but they were good-looking, gifted in wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the very best, but I want you to understand that God was expecting those who were going into captivity to give their very best to serve Him in that unusual situation. The same is true today. Young people, God will have you to serve Him where you are. There will always be a conflict between the wisdom of men of the world, and the wisdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar deliberately chose the cream of the crop of young Jewish men, to come back to Babylon to serve him. Why? Listen to the puritan commentator Matthew Poole: “The reason why they were delicately trained

up was, that they being in the flower of their age should be allured with the delights of the court, and should thereby be brought to forget their father's house and their religion; this hath been the artifice of the Turk in taking Christians' children, and making them Mamelukes and Janizaries, that thereby they may become as renegades, the greatest champions for Mohammed, and enemies to the Christians." A renegade is one who is faithless to principle or party; a deserter. One who is an apostate or false. One who is false or breaks a promise. So the intention of Nebuchadnezzar was to treat these young men so smoothly, so well, give them such an elite education and cultural experience that they would become renegades to Israel and Israel's God.

Nebuchadnezzar took these young men from Judah back to Babylon that he might make use of them as a great resource to himself, in their service to him. He also thought that it would be a great weapon to promote discouragement among the Hebrew people. He knew that they would come to understand that best of their children were not serving the only true and living God, but rather they were being used to serve Him and his false god. They would become some of the chief "lieutenants", so to speak, of the king of Babylon. He would make the best selfish use of them that he could, in order to promote his own kingdom and his own glory. They would hopefully forget their own country, their own customs, and their own religion, and become accustomed to this foreign culture and be satisfied with it, instead of the culture which they had been in before.

The commander of the officials even assigned new names to them, it says in verse 7. He gave to Daniel the name Beltshazzar, taken from the great Babylonian idol Baal, or Bel, which meant "the keeper of his treasures". Bel was the chief idol of the Chaldeans. The name Daniel means "to judge", or "judgment of God". Hananiah means "one who has obtained mercy from God". Mishael means "required or demanded by God", and Azariah, "the help of God" or "one whom God helps." (Calvin's Commentary) Hananiah's name was changed to Shadrach which means – "the inspiration of the sun"; being derived from Shada, "to pour out", and Rach, "a king", a name given to the sun by the Babylonians." Mishael's name was changed to Meshach. "Meshach is derived from a Babylonian deity named Shach, or from a goddess called Sheshach, and is thought to signify "He who belongs to Shach". And Azariah's name was changed to Abednego, which means, "the servant of the sun, or the shining star". (Joseph Benson's commentary)

Now, the purpose of all this was to make these young men so comfortable in that idolatrous culture of Babylon that they would not hesitate after 3 years of training, to serve and support Nebuchadnezzar and his false gods. What kind of training was it? They taught them the Chaldean language, and they also taught them the literature of the Chaldeans. And I would apply it this way to ourselves. Being introduced to the prosperous intellectual culture of the society which you live in, can so influence you by its false intellectual theories and worship of materialism, that you may be seduced away from the worship of the only true and living God, and you may depart from Christian culture in which you were raised; that culture which is built up around, and which is built upon, the word of God. These young men, thankfully knew the difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom which comes from the true and living God. They knew that the Old Testament Scriptures which they had learned in their years before their captivity were the truth of God. They had received them from their parents, and they had believed them, and now that they were being exposed to something which was culturally different and theologically in error, they nevertheless held fast to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures which they had learned from their parents and teachers, when they had lived in Jerusalem. That was true wisdom.

2nd – They had the wisdom not to be defiled by the King's philosophy of education.
(verses 8-16)

"But 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; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." When Daniel was purposing in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, he was actually purposing not to be defiled by the

king's whole philosophy of education. The king's meat and the king's wine were the symbols of this. The meat may have been pork or some other food which was considered unclean under the Old Testament dispensation. Daniel probably remembered Proverbs chapter 23, verses 1-3. "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite." "Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food." (Literally – "the bread of lies".)

The king's wine represented to Daniel, his enjoying too much of the world's pleasures, and the desire to see this world's pleasures as the meaning of life. He probably remembered the words of Proverbs 31: 4-7, the words of Solomon's mother to him: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted." "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart." "Let him drink and forget his poverty., and remember his misery no more." If you were raised in a Christian home, or you are still living in a Christian home, it may be possible that you might be seduced away from the true Christian culture, and from holding fast to the word of God. How does this happen, you ask? It happens when a person begins to read books, in depth, which are doing battle with the whole idea of the Bible being true.

What is the meaning of life, is the question that these young men asked themselves. And they no doubt discussed it among themselves. It was to know God and walk with God wherever you live, whatever kind of philosophy of education is set before you, from people of the world, or people who worship other gods. That is what you are called to as a Christian. And for those who are considering becoming a Christian, let it be understood by you that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father; no person knows God, except they come through Jesus. Let not the philosophies of education of this world rob you of the eternal life that is only found in Him. There are men from the atheistic culture of the world who very much want to attempt to disprove the word of God, our Bible. And so, in your college class you may be assigned reading which says that the world is not 6,000 years old as the Scripture chronology represents it; it is millions of years old. There may be studies of many sorts that will attempt to convince you that people are not fallen sinners in Adam, they are people who are basically good; that there is no such thing as original sin or total depravity. There is wisdom already in you by nature and you can figure out life for yourself.

I am saying that there is a great danger in this. For in the word of God, in the book of Psalms, it says: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates, day and night." Now, think about it. You cannot meditate day and night upon the good word of God, and at the same time be continually dwelling in the books which teach you the atheistic philosophies of the world. You may study them, but you dare not dwell in them. You are in the world, if you are a true Christian, but you are not of the world. It is true that Daniel and his three friends were educated in these philosophies of falsehood. But it is also true that they weighed them in their minds against the truths of the Scriptures which they knew, and they did not receive anything that was false that they encountered. They were able in their minds to learn to separate the precious from the vile. And you must pray to do so also. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with any of the king's delicacies. May you have the same purpose by the grace of God.

3rd – These young men had wisdom given to them by God when God saw that they would be faithful to Him. (verses 9-21)

Now, I find it very interesting that it says in verse 9 that it was God who brought Daniel into the favor and good will of the chief of the eunuchs, this chamberlain who was watching over their education on Nebuchadnezzar's behalf. It was God who was providentially watching over Daniel in this whole process of his education and his preferment in the sight of the king.

We should remember that if we will purpose not to be defiled with the world's wisdom and ways that God will do the same for us. This chamberlain said to Daniel – "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed you 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." Daniel said to this steward – "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink." "Then let our countenances be examined before you, and the countenances of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." "So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days."

This was a very wise thing which Daniel said to the steward. He was saying: Please look at the actual result of what our countenances look like after we eat these vegetables and drink this water, versus what the others, eating their food, the king's food, look like, after ten days. He was unafraid of the results of this test. At the end of ten days their countenances appeared better and they were fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies." Why was this? Because God will always establish his wisdom in both the little things and the great things. I hope that each of you will take notice of this. If you follow after God's wisdom, the wisdom that God gives you through the Scriptures, you will really be bettered by it. And your countenance will look better as well. Your countenance will not look better because you are eating vegetables and drinking only water, although that may be true, but your countenance will look better than the unbelieving people around you because your conscience is clear, your sins are forgiven you for Jesus sake, and because you are trusting in the true and living God to lead you and guide you into all the truth. "They looked to Him, and were radiant, and their faces were unashamed." (Psalm 34: 5)

Those young people who follow the Lord closely should not be afraid of the tests that they are given when they are being interviewed for a job or a position. If they are walking uprightly before God, and if they have studied hard, and if they are meditating day and night upon His word, they shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water "leaf shall be green", as it says in Psalm 1. And they will be able to spread out their roots by the river, as it says in Jeremiah 17: 8; the rivers of grace. They will not fear when heat come; but their leaf will be green." "They will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will they cease from yielding fruit." They will do well in most situations because God will bless them according in relation to how they have purposed in their heart. If they have been partaking of the food which others no nothing about; that is doing the will of God from a cheerful heart, and looking to Him for the wisdom and grace that they need, they will be abundantly provided for; even in situations where they might be surrounded by unbelievers.

Verse 17 says that, "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." Now this was not the knowledge and skill which came from simply reading the books that they found in the library in Babylon. This was the wisdom and skill from God to know what was true and what was false in the library in Babylon, and the ability to bring God's wisdom and truth to bear in all the situations that were presented to them by the king of Babylon. They received spiritual gifts from God to be able to wisely apply all the truth that they learned. And Daniel had a very special gift given to him; the Old Testament gift of prophecy; the ability to interpret visions and dreams. And so, when the king interviewed them after their three years' time of training was over, it says that "among all of the students in Babylon, none were found like these four men". And so, they served before the king. And when they served, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. Let us take notice of this; God helped them to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. And he can do the same for us as well.