

Kingdoms in Conflict – Week 2 – Daniel 1:1-21

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. -Daniel 1:2

The strange working of God's providence

Providence: *“The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were, by his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.” -Heidelberg Catechism*

1. What does it say about God and his providence that it was *His purpose* to hand his people over to exile?
2. How does this grate against what we often *want* God's providence to mean?

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. -Genesis 50:20

3. What is going on in your life or the world around you that makes it seem as though God is not in control, that He doesn't care, or that He has been defeated?

*“God allows Himself to appear defeated at times. He often does things that we don't expect”
...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. -Philippians 2:8*

4. What are we called to do when life is hard and we can't see or understand what God is doing?

Consider the gravity and implications of this passage in Romans 8:

Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience... And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 8:24,25, 28, 31, 35-39.

The dual identity of God's people

And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself

with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. **-Daniel 1:7-8**

1. Daniel and his friends were renamed to reflect the pagan gods that Babylon worshiped in an attempt to *redefine their identities*. How does this happen in our culture today?
2. The boys were re-educated within the Babylonian cultural and intellectual framework in an attempt to *reshape how they thought and saw the world*. How does this attempted education and re-education happen in our culture today?
3. Daniel drew a "line in the sand" in his indoctrination. He found a balance in his conscience between peaceful cooperation and a firm stance on who he was as a child of God in the world. What ought it look like for us to be authentic disciples of Jesus in the circles God has placed us in and amidst pressures to conform to the culture? Where should we draw lines? How do we do so in a way that honours and represents Christ?
4. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were initially chosen by Nebuchadnezzar because of their skill, wisdom, knowledge, and overall competence. They also stood out among the others for these reasons after being tested. This helped lead them to the positions of influence and witness they would have for the Lord within the kingdom of man. What does this teach us about how we ought to work, contribute, seek to grow in godly wisdom, and competence and skill in our craft where God has placed us?
5. What might it look like for us in our own circumstances to show the world a different and better way – to live in such a way that, like D.A Carson's friend, we can say, "watch me"?

Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. **-Daniel 1:3-4**

Consider Jesus' words to the 12 - "*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" **-Matthew 10:16**

The sustaining nature of God's grace

1. What does it mean that God sustains us and grants us favour and success by His grace as we live in the kingdom of man?
2. When you are able to stand firm in your faith in difficult circumstances, when you achieve a measure of success, receive blessing or favour, what is the immediate response in your heart? Is it thankfulness, praise, humility, knowing that it is entirely by God's grace? Or is your 'knee-jerk' reaction to conclude that you've earned it, deserve it, and can keep winning by your own ingenuity?

“We hold that man is never so near grace as when he begins to feel he can do nothing at all...Between here and heaven, every minute that the Christian lives will be a minute of grace.” -Charles Spurgeon

The surprising veracity of God’s servants

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. -Daniel 1:21

1. God already indicates to us how this story ends – By God’s grace Daniel outlasted every kingdom of man through Israel’s entire exile. What about the world and the powers of our culture would tempt us to forget that God is on the throne, that He has already won the victory, that His kingdom will not fail?

The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. -Psalm 103:19

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” -Matthew 13:31-32

2. Do you struggle to tangibly trust God and live with confident hope when the world and your circumstances look bleak and you can’t see what God is doing? How are the promises of God’s *providence* and His perfect *goodness* meant to inform our hearts, minds, and ultimately our worship?

“That we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will they can not so much as move.” -Heidelberg Catechism

For prayer and reflection:

If someone was to follow and watch your life closely, what would they see? Is it a life clearly changed by the radical grace of God? Is there conviction to draw lines, stand on what is right and walk in the ways of the Lord when it is hard and unpopular? Is there costly, sacrificial love and service to others? A zeal to steward and develop what God has given you to bless others, see those around you flourish, and bring glory to His name? Would they see an uncommon and beautiful hope in the providence of the God who holds the heavens and the earth through every trial and storm?

Spend some time in reflection and repentance where God has brought conviction in your heart. Let it sink in and give you courage that God is faithful, that all things are in His powerful and fatherly hands, that He is moving and working where you can’t see it, and that absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!