

21 Sunday after Pentecost (10/22/23) SJ, SM

Daniel 1:3–21 ³Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. ⁶Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. ⁸But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." ¹¹Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. ¹⁷To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. ¹⁸At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Sometimes when I'm writing a sermon, I glance at sermons on the internet. You might find a great introduction about the Civil War, or a fascinating piece of information about customs at the time of Christ. Someone may see a sin that I never would have seen or thought about.

However, my favorite thing to do is to see some of the absolutely strange and crazy ideas some people have. Among some of the ones I found on today's text were these: Overcoming gluttony, diet and exercise, don't let anyone change your name – and my favorite, though I have no idea what they were thinking, "Benedict Arnold's New Name. The kinds of sermons that completely miss the point sometimes are helpful in seeing what the point really is. Plus, sometimes it is helpful for us to be reminded how people misuse certain passages of Scriptures, as well as to remember what the passage actually means. So today the book of Daniel teaches all of us:

Don't Compromise Your faith in Babylon

1. Don't defile yourself
2. Be certain of your true home

1. Don't defile yourself

Some of those who have talked about these verses have focused on the wrong things. People who are pro-vegetarian preach about not eating meat and instead following a vegetarian diet. Others look at the Babylonian names given to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, as well as to Daniel, and draw the conclusion that it's about not changing your name. If you study the verses, it is easy to see that the name change doesn't matter. It's a minor thing. We know Daniel best by his Hebrew name and not as Belteshazzar, but we know his three friends best by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

The food is important, but not for the reasons that most people think. The reason that Daniel and his friends didn't want to eat the royal Babylonian food wasn't because they only wanted to eat vegetables and not eat meat. No, the real issue was that as Jews, the food wasn't kosher. Most likely, the blood hadn't been properly drained from the meat as the law of Moses required. Or it might have included things like shellfish and pork, which they weren't allowed to eat, and it may even have been involved in sacrifices to the gods of Babylon. This meat given to them was unclean, defiled, and so no practicing Jew would have wanted to eat it, because it would make them defiled and unclean. Today we might say that it wasn't "kosher."

To "defile" something mean to take something pure or something holy and pollute it, to make it unusable or unfit. Kosher means clean or pure and is sort of the opposite of defiled. Kosher food could be eaten; defiled food could not be eaten.

God made it clear to Peter that in the New Testament we no longer have to worry about such things. Showing him a sheet filled with food that wasn't kosher, God told him, **Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.** (Acts 10:15 - NLT) Jesus explained it isn't what we eat that makes us clean or unclean: **Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'** (Mk 7:15 - NIV) The Apostle Paul explained that the rules on eating and drinking (and the Sabbath) pointed to Christ, **For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.** (Col 2:16, 17 - NLT)

2. Be certain of your true home

For us living today, the danger of becoming defiled doesn't come from what we eat, but of possibly being contaminated with the sinful world in which we live. Daniel and his three friends weren't living anymore in Israel, but in Babylon. They were living in a country where most people were unbelievers.

Even more than that, it wasn't home; it wasn't where they belonged. The temple was destroyed. They were strangers and foreigners living in a country that wasn't home and never would be.

God wanted them not to forget that even though they were living in Babylon, wasn't their home. Living like Babylonians and not like Jews could easily have made them lose sight of the true goal of their faith – going home to the heavenly Jerusalem, heaven.

Jerusalem has been called God's city and Babylon has been called the devil's city. In Scripture Babylon often represents everything that hates God and is opposed to God, unbelief, love of this world and love of sin.

Yet Daniel and his friend's rejected the world and chose God, and the result was that God blessed them. **The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.**

Sometimes being a believer means not having everything the world has to offer. Even blessed by God, Daniel and his friends still stayed on a diet of vegetables. They didn't enjoy the best food and drink of Babylon, yet they were still blessed as God watched over them, protected them, strengthened them in their faith, and safely saw them daily through their worldly pilgrimage. Even in the lion's den and the fiery furnace, God did not leave them or forsake them.

Like these four men, we face the choice of choosing God and his Word or the world. Is our ultimate goal to live for what this sinful and evil world — Babylon — offers us or what God — heaven — offers us? We know that when we chose God over the world and "Babylon," God will be with us and bless us just like he did with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He blesses us as he strengthens us in the faith, as he keeps safe in his love and reminds us of the one thing needful, which will not be taken away from us. (Lk 10:42)

These four young men never forgot who they were – children of God. Surrounded by the world, they refused to give into the world or to become part of the world. We too strive not to forget who we – children of God, and even though we are surrounded by the world, we refuse to give into the world or to become part of the world, as we live for God and our future home in heaven. Amen.

Lavaun Lankenau - at Olivia NH for 1-3 weeks for rehab