

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A Royal Experiment

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus. (Daniel 1:8-21)

I love this passage. *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.* What do we truly "purpose in our hearts"? Daniel's "heart-purpose" was a commitment that he would not compromise his faith, that he would not defile himself with Babylon's alluring riches. He had been singled out as one of several participants in a royal experiment. If he "played his cards right," he could coast through this Babylonian thing with comforts on every side, unlike Ezekiel and those poor souls down by the riverside in the slave camps. However, so far as Daniel was concerned, there was only one game to play, and that was God's game. He wasn't so concerned with doing things his way, as he was with living his life God's way. If that decision brought him into disfavor with Babylon's elite, so be it. God was more important to him than Babylon.

Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. We sometimes think that a true purpose to serve God means that we look down our noses on those around us who are not—in our eyes—as holy as we with contempt, albeit thinly veiled. If we truly serve God, so we think, we can be as obnoxious and as belligerent as we wish to be. No, a thousand times no. God does not command us to

be as arrogant and offensive as we can possibly be to other people as we service Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40b) Do we grasp that God considers how we treat other people as if we were treating Him exactly in that way? When the repairman fails to get what you told him to do, and you "read his pedigree," do you consider that you are talking to Jesus with those words and that attitude?

Daniel was winsome and gracious in his conduct, devoted to his faith as he obviously was. His attitude won great favor with his Babylonian master. Melzar had little or no knowledge of Daniel's culture or Daniel's God, but he saw Daniel up close and personal. It was Daniel's attitude and conduct that won such favor in the Babylonian's eyes. We may work with near-pagans. Often we do. They may have little or no regard for our faith. That is frequently the case. However, if we manifest our faith in a gracious, winsome manner, they may utterly respect us and seek to come to our aide in ways that we would never predict or anticipate. They may value our contribution to our employer because of our conscientious attitude toward our work by our simple application of the Biblical principle that we perform our secular work conscientiously, "...as unto the Lord." (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:23)

That simple Christian ethic may well create immense respect toward us in the eyes of people who would otherwise be openly hostile to our faith in Christ. Does this idea surprise us? Why should it? Isn't this exactly what Jesus meant when He told the disciples?

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

Jesus did not tell the disciples to have love one "for" another, but to have love one "to" another. He focused them on active love, love in conduct and in attitude, not sentimental feelings. He directed them to show their love toward each other by action. When we perform our job description at work with dedication and a willing, enthusiastic attitude, we manifest the true effect of God's grace as it transforms our actions. We have all known those folks on the job—or in the church for that matter—who always do the right thing, but their resentful, joyless attitude left you thinking they wanted to be regarded as martyrs for simply doing the right thing. They exhibited little or no joy in their right actions. It was a trudging "duty," in their mind a "four letter word." Joy in their Christianity? What is that? They manifest anything but joy and excitement about their faith or about their faith-driven conduct.

Daniel not only intercedes for himself, but for his three friends, even though the eunuch's favor was clearly focused on Daniel alone. Such is the true spirit of Christian faith. It seeks benefit for others, not simply what is beneficial for self. Daniel can teach us many rich lessons.

The royal experiment included both food and education. Immerse these royal Jews in Babylon's whole culture. Give them Babylonian names, suggestive of Babylon's gods. Feed them Babylon's best food and drink. And, finally, expose them to Babylon's best education. At the end of the test period have a contest between these transformed (Likely in Daniel's mind the word should be "deformed," not transformed) Jews and Babylon's best men.

Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. The eunuch was fearful. He was under strict orders from the king as to the rules of this experiment. If the king discovered that he had broken the rules, and these Jews under his care proved to be inferior, both they and he could end up losing their lives. Daniel offered Melzar a reasonable alternative. He was considerate of Melzar's dilemma. He showed regard, not stubborn or arrogant contempt for the Babylonian steward. Conduct a brief ten day trial. Give Daniel and his three friends a vegetarian diet and

water, hardly Babylon's rich, excessive, diet, for ten short days. At the end of ten days compare these four men with other Jews who were given the Babylonian diet. If they were not equal or better, Daniel and his friends would submit to the rules of the test. However, if they proved equal or better, they would be allowed to continue with their simple diet. God blessed and honored their faith. At the end of the ten days, they were stronger and healthier than the other Jews who had eaten Babylon's diet. Not only so, but at the end of the royal experiment, they proved to be sharper mentally as well as healthier than their counterparts, so much so that they caught the king's eye and favor. Neither Daniel nor Melzar faced the king's displeasure. *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.*

What can we learn from this delightful lesson? What relevance does it have for twenty-first century Western Civilization Christians? I suggest that it reveals to us the critical reality of Biblical faith in a hostile, unbelieving, non-Christian, pagan world, just the kind of world where we live today. If we listen to the tide of human ideas, we could be tugged in a hundred different directions, each one rationalized and sterilized so as to appear superficially to be quite acceptable to our faith. However, we would know all the while that we had in fact compromised our faith, and we would thus be weakened in conscience to face the hostilities of our culture. There is no Biblical reason at all to interact with unbelievers in prideful arrogance, an attitude sadly common among so many professing Christians of our time. However, neither is there any reason to compromise our faith and submit to the ungodly allurements of our world. We may not fit into the "in-crowd" of our culture. We may not be named as their favorite friend, but the lesson reminds us that faithful service to God, faithfulness measured by winsome but firm actions, not waffling intentions that waver, assures us of God's blessings. At the end of the day the choice becomes simple and clear. Which do we prefer, the favor of other humans or the favor of God? No, it is not always possible to gain both. Sometimes God so blesses us in faithfulness that those friends we expected to lose remain our friends, but we committed to God regardless of their choice. Friends or no friends, God is first. Do we have such courage? Are we willing to put our lives on the line so fully for God? If we are, we join with Daniel and his friends, a circle, small though it be, that is supremely blessed and honored by God for faithfulness under fire. Thank you, Daniel, for such a lesson. We need it—oh how we need it.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor