

## **Seeking the Welfare of the City**

### **Daniel 1:8-21**

Daniel makes a stand and refuses to compromise. How can you do that in a way that wins people rather than alienates them? And what gave Daniel the green light to work within a pagan system, rather than withdraw from it?

#### **The Welfare of the City**

In the aftermath of the exile Jeremiah recorded a vision of two baskets of figs. One was good the other bad. The good ones were the people sent into exile: God would bless and establish them. Knowing that would have transformed how these young men saw their time in Babylon: this where God wanted them to be. Jeremiah also wrote to the exiles telling them to pray for and seek the welfare of the city of Babylon. That's why Daniel doesn't withdraw from a city and a culture whose world-view is totally opposed to his. To be in Babylon was to be a part of God's plan to bring salvation and blessing to the world. The same is true for us: as we know God will take care of our welfare, so we can seek the welfare of others, whatever comes our way.

However, the tone in which we do that matters crucially.

#### **Winning Hearts as Well as Arguments**

In going first to the Chief Eunuch Daniel shows respect for both the man and his authority. But the eunuch admits to being afraid. He drops his guard like this because God has opened his heart to Daniel. We need to be people who others can trust to do this with, on whose hearts God has worked, to make us gracious, so that they feel able to be open to us.

But sometimes Christians do not have a reputation of gentleness and respect. Our attitude must become more like Christ's.

#### **Inner Confidence, True identity**

Ashpenaz feared the king. Daniel feared God. One leaves you afraid of others and what might happen; the other leaves you free to risk. But Ashpenaz is also concerned about appearance and image. He knows of no other source of wellbeing than the king's food. Daniel knew that inner wellbeing comes from having God as your lord and your identity rooted in him. Ashpenaz didn't have that. So Daniel goes to the steward and suggests a 10 day trial.

#### **The Favour of God**

God honours those who honour him. It is the only honour that really matters. Living in the world, there is always the pressure that Ashpenaz feels – to get the honour of the world: the pressure of image and reputation. If you don't conform you risk being marginalised. But if you do – you risk losing what really matters: God as your supreme treasure.

God honours these young men. They discover, and so can we, that when we live for God's glory God gives us what we need, when we need it. All this was God's doing. These 'defeated' Jewish boys come out on top. It is God's subversive grace. And the chapter ends mentioning King Cyrus. It's a reminder that Babylon will fall, but Daniel is still there. And when every other king is in his grave, Christ will be the last left standing. That's why you should choose not to defile yourself, and graciously seek the city's welfare. Instead of worrying about being on the wrong side of history we just a longer view of history.