

Where Does Our True Hope Lie?

In my previous article from Daniel 1, we looked at the topic of what makes a real hero. Daniel and his friends—along with many other people from Judah—have been taken captive by the Babylonians. The king of Babylon has chosen a number of “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...” (Daniel 1:4) It’s the king’s intent that these young men will serve *him* rather than serving the God of Israel. These three young men have a firm resolve to follow the teaching of God given in his word, the Bible. Let’s continue our look at these young men under the heading:

—Favor Given

Daniel had asked the “chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.” Look with me now at verse 9: “And *God gave favor* and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs...” This is now the second time in this first chapter that we’ve seen this phrase, “And God gave...” or “the LORD gave” (vs. 2). Again, we’re being reminded of the sovereignty of God in the life of Daniel and his three friends. Even though it’s not given explicitly in the text, it’s almost certain that Daniel, as a godly young man, would have taken his request to God in prayer. Clearly, it’s God who *gave favor* to Daniel and the favor he gave, which we see in verse 9, is to grant Daniel a measure of “compassion” in the sight of the “chief of the eunuchs.”

This is an important lesson for all of us. Daniel could have boldly refused to eat the king’s food. But, wisely, he humbly appeals to the one who is in authority over him to grant his request. It seems that the chief eunuch is, at least, willing to listen to what Daniel has to say. And yet, as we see in the text, the chief eunuch is not in agreement with Daniel’s request because of his fear of the king. He knew that if he didn’t give Daniel and his friends the king’s food, he would “endanger my head with the king.” His life is on the line! Why should he risk his life for this young Hebrew? Even though Daniel’s request is not initially accepted, in verse 11 we see Daniel taking another opportunity by appealing to the next authority in line—the “steward.” This is the person who’s been directly assigned to him and his three friends by the “chief of the eunuchs.” Daniel proposes a 10 day test to eat only vegetables and drink only water. Then at the end of the test period the steward could compare Daniel and his three friends with the other youths who actually choose to eat the king’s food.

We need to pause once again and see God’s hand in this test. There’s no reason, humanly speaking, to assume that a vegetarian and water diet for 10 days will make Daniel and his three friends look healthier than the other young men. And yet, by God’s grace, the steward went along with the plan. At the end of 10 days, Daniel and his three friends looked more fit. The text says that they were “*fatter in flesh* than all the youths that ate the king’s food.” (Daniel 1:15) A straightforward reading of the text reveals that this is clearly the work of God in the lives of these young men who’re seeking to be faithful to him. Their faithfulness shows itself in their

ongoing dependence on God and not on the king and his delicacies, nor any of the pleasures that the pagan culture of Babylon has to offer.

If we look back at an earlier portion of scripture, we can highlight the sovereignty of God in another way in this particular situation in the life of Daniel and his three friends. All the way back in 1 Kings when King Solomon dedicates the Temple he prays a prayer that is, *in a very particular sense*, fulfilled here in Daniel. In Solomon's prayer—literally hundreds of years prior to where we are at this time in redemptive history—Solomon acknowledges the sins of the children of Israel. He prays that, when they are sent into captivity because of their unrepentant sin, God would “grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them away captive...” (1 Kings 8:50) All these years later the captivity has begun and God remains faithful to his covenant promises. Particularly in this case, he has seen to it that favor is shown to Daniel and his three friends by their captors. Even though God doesn't guarantee that every prayer that we pray will be answered in the way that we prayed it, we can be sure that God is always faithful to his covenant promises given to his people. He will take care of his covenant children out of his infinite love and according to his perfect will for our lives (Romans 8:28).

Even though Daniel and his three friends could be said to be heroes in one sense of that word, I noted last time that Jesus Christ is the true hero of the Bible. He is the only one who perfectly obeyed his Father in every situation. Speaking of obeying his Father, Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven to do the will of him who sent me...” (John 6:39). That perfect obedience is credited to the account all those who trust Jesus by faith. Even though we can learn from the faithfulness of Daniel and his three friends, our true hope must always be in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.