

What Makes a Real Hero?

Over many years the secular culture has sought to set before us heroic characters. In the 20th and 21st centuries these heroes could range from cowboys, to comic book heroes. And yet, there have been young boys who dreamed of being heroes in every century. In his classic book entitled, *Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad tells a story, set in the 19th century, of a young man named Jim who went to sea early in life. Jim is a quick learner and in a short time becomes a chief mate, i.e., someone who supervises ordinary seamen and deckhands. Jim has many thoughts about his future as a sailor, *he reads a lot and daydreams about becoming a hero*. Finally his chance comes.

One late night, the ship that Jim is serving on called the *Patna*, which is carrying 800 Muslim pilgrims to Mecca, strikes something under the surface of the water and the undercarriage of the ship is ruptured severely. After Jim surveys the damage, initially, he wants to wake the passengers and begin taking them off of the ship and loading them on small boats. In a short time, though, he comes to believe that the ship will sink too quickly and that there's no time to save the passengers. The captain and two other officers—against all common understanding of the protection of life as well as longstanding principles of nautical ethics—have already climbed into a small boat in order to save themselves. In one fateful moment of time Jim, in a swirl of confusing thoughts and emotions, leaps into the small boat with the captain and two other officers leaving the other crew members as well as the passengers to go down with the ship.

But, as it turns out, the ship is crippled but not fatally damaged. It doesn't sink and the people on board are later rescued. Even with a seemingly happy ending to what could have been a terrible loss of life, there's going to be a price to pay. The story is told in all its tragic detail. When the officers reach land they quickly leave town rather than show up at the official inquiry into their conduct. Jim chooses to stay and is left alone to face the shame, disgrace, and the consequences that will be handed out by other seamen who make up the official representatives at the inquiry. When all is finished, Jim is stripped of his officer's certification and never allowed to sail again. But much worse than that, for the rest of his life, he lives with the guilt of his momentary decision.

What is it that makes a real hero? Although secular literature has responded to that question in different ways, it's often the case that a hero is one who, among other things, shows great courage in time of need. The Scriptural hero or heroine is never a person who exhibits anything resembling perfection but one who cannot be rightly envisioned apart from his or her priority focus on and obedience to God in their daily lives no matter what comes. One biblical scholar has written that, ".....heroism doesn't develop overnight, nor is it created in a vacuum. It is the mature fruit of lives and characters that have been forged by experience, by the tests and trials of the providence of God, and by faithfulness and obedience to Him. *Present* heroism cannot be explained apart from *past* faithfulness." As we come back to the book of Daniel today,

we're going to get a further look at Daniel and his three friends. What choices will they face in a hostile land in which they've been taken captive by foreign invaders? How will they respond when they're tempted to follow the dark culture of Babylon? Are these young men *heroes* in the biblical sense of that word? I want to begin this next section of verses under the heading:

—Standing for God in a Godless Culture

In verse 8 we'll begin to see the *firm resolve* of Daniel and his friends to turn away from anything that would not be pleasing to God. "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." "Resolve" is an *important focus* in this section of the chapter. The word "resolve," both in Hebrew and in English, carries the idea of being "firmly fixed in some position, choice or action." It can refer to being "unyielding or unbending."

Most likely, these delicacies of the king given to these young men are meant as a sign of special privilege. Daniel and his friends are especially chosen and will be honored by the king. This food is representative of the best of the best; food as tasty and as good as these young men could ever have imagined. This would have been designed, not merely for their health—although some of it may have had positive health benefits—but this exquisite food was meant to be an example of the pleasures of life with the king. We can imagine that this would have been only the beginning of a whole new lifestyle of tasting and experiencing the pleasures of Babylon in every way. This is just one example of the ways in which—things like food that may not be wrong in and of themselves—can lead us into a state of unhealthy desire and dependence if we're trusting in anything or anyone besides God for our *ultimate* joy, happiness, and fulfillment in life.

"Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself." Implied in this verse is that, because Daniel is firmly *resolved* not to partake of the king's food, he's aware that he may have to face certain severe consequences. In Daniel's case, it could likely have *cost him his life* to refuse the king's wishes. How willing are we to turn away from things offered by our secular culture that go against the word and ways of God? Daniel was a sinner like we are but, by grace, he sought to honor God in a difficult situation. Jesus Christ is the true hero of the Bible. May we seek to honor and rest in Jesus Christ in all of the difficulties that we face.

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