

Session 1

September 3, 2023

DEVELOP STRONG CONVICTIONS

Daniel 1:3-13, 17-19

Things we believe tend to fall into two categories. *Surface beliefs* are those things that only stir our thoughts. They consist of preferences (“I think fried shrimp are better than steamed”); hopes and confidences (“I really believe FSU may go all the way this year”); and mundane but obvious truths (“The grass is green, the sky is blue, and this summer has been hotter than usual”). Surface beliefs may very well influence us, but not very deeply. There can be some flexibility with them. *Core beliefs*, however, are different. They are foundational, rigid, and unyielding. Simply put, they are our *convictions*. If surface beliefs are what we *live* with, convictions are what we will *die* for. Daniel chapter 1 provides a wonderful example of not only what it means to have convictions, but what it means to live by them...regardless of the consequences.

Pressure (vv. 1-7). The events of Daniel 1 are well known. The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BC initiated 70 years of captivity for the southern kingdom of Judah. In the midst of that captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Judah’s best and brightest young men (v. 4) brought to the capital city to be educated, trained, and groomed for service in the king’s court (v. 5). Daniel and his three companions were among that group (v. 6). It should be noted that this was no brief apprenticeship. For three years, these young men (or more likely teenagers) were to be “enculturated” into a new—and very different—way of life. They were expected to shed their Jewish identities and adopt Babylonian names, customs, and beliefs (vv. 4-5). Imagine the enormous *pressure* put on these young men to conform to the expectations of their captors. And certainly, there was an equal *temptation* to do so. These young men may have been Judah’s best and brightest in Judah, but they weren’t serving in anybody’s court back there! Now they found themselves, seemingly by the hand of fate, with a brand new start, filled with almost endless possibilities for a rich and extravagant future. All they had to do was take advantage of the opportunity that was presented to them. For reflection: *These men were young, frightened, and far away from home. What influence would all that have on the choices they made? Do you think you could have held fast under those kinds of circumstances?*

Priorities (vv. 8-16). While the education and enculturation may have been somewhat doable for Daniel, adopting the pagan religion of the Babylonians was not an option. But before that even became an issue, his own religious convictions were tested. Accepting the “royal food” and king’s wine (v. 5) would violate the dietary laws that acted as a very tangible and prominent demonstration of Judaism. Verse 8 is extremely important. The Hebrew word for “determined” is “set” or “placed.” But the Hebrew also has the phrase “in his heart.” Here, the King James Version said it best: “But Daniel *purposed in his heart* that he would not defile himself...” Notice some important details in the story. First, Daniel drew the line in the sand in advance. He could see where this was headed and didn’t wait until he had bellied up to the king’s table before trying to enact it! Second, Daniel shared convictions with his friends (vv. 11-12). Remember: there is strength in numbers. Third, Daniel could share his convictions more easily because he already had a good relationship with his supervisor (v. 9). Finally, Daniel worked through the system in place. Not wanting to harm his “big” boss (v. 10), Daniel worked out a deal with the guard who

was assigned to him (v. 11). In other words, Daniel didn't just spout off his beliefs in arrogance and rebellion. Rather, he made them known with *humility*. For reflection: *What do you think would have happened if Daniel and his friends ended up no better physically than the others? Would that have changed their convictions? Does Dan. 12:16-18 give us a hint?*

Power (vv. 14-20). The results of Daniel's food test were conclusive. Either as an aside, or more likely as a result of their faithfulness, God gave them "knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom" (v. 17). Notice the accolades given them: no one was equal to them (v. 19), so they began their service to the king; in every matter, they were "ten times better" than what the king had been depending on (v. 20); and in the end, Daniel served in the courts of numerous kings over the 70-year captivity (v. 21). For reflection: *Think about what would have happened if Daniel had given up on his convictions and blended into Babylonian society. How would the history of Judaism been affected? What about Christianity?*