

Life in the Lion's Den
"Purposing Our Hearts"
(Daniel 1:3-21)
Lesson #2

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5 *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding."*

Introduction:

John W. Gardner, founding chairman of Common Cause, said it's a rare and high privilege to help people understand the difference they can make -- not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of others, simply by giving of themselves.

Gardner tells of a cheerful old man who asked the same question of just about every new acquaintance he fell into conversation with: "What have you done that you believe in and you are proud of?"

He never asked conventional questions such as "What do you do for a living?" It was always, "What have you done that you believe in and are proud of?"

It was an unsettling question for people who had built their self-esteem on their wealth or their family name or their exalted job title.

Not that the old man was a fierce interrogator. He was delighted by a woman who answered, "I'm doing a good job raising three children;" and by a cabinetmaker who said, "I believe in good workmanship and practice it;" and by a woman who said, "I started a bookstore and it's the best bookstore for miles around."

"I don't really care how they answer," said the old man. "I just want to put the thought into their minds."

"They should live their lives in such a way that they can have a good answer. Not a good answer for me, but for themselves. That's what's important."

Dr. Dale E. Turner, MSC Health Action News, July, 1993, p. 7.

Transitional Statement:

Church, how would you define your purpose in this life. Now, we have a pat answer for this question....God is our purpose!

But what if God sent the angle Gabriel down with a pencil, paper and a clipboard to go through your life as an observer only and take notes, what would he conclude by observance that your purpose really is? Would it match up with our pat declaration of "God is our purpose".

I. Nebuchadnezzar, as a vassal of God, humbles Israel.

Daniel 1:3-4,5b

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

5b "...appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service.

A. Can you imagine being among the captives and here comes Nebuchadnezzar's chief official Ashpenaz? You might be wondering who was going to lose their head next, but in a crazy turn of events he calls for the royal family and the nobles and starts looking them over and asking them questions about their understanding ...kind of like the show whose got talent.

1. As Ashpenaz hauls away the cream of Israel's crop, it's hard not to feel weakness and disparity.

- a. Like all is lost
- b. Like there is no hope.

B. My first question here is why does King Nebuchadnezzar want foreign slaves to be his personal servants.

1. If you were a King wouldn't you want to surround yourself with servants that you could trust and know would be loyal....instead of the enemy?

a. We must not forget that God has a hand in all these happenings.

2. We can understand Nebuchadnezzar's thinking from Ezekiel.

a. Ezekiel 17:12-14 says:

12 "Say now to the rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say, 'Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon.

13 'He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, 14 that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant that it might continue.'"

b. Nebuchadnezzar's plan as an instrument of God Almighty was:

1) To force Israel into submission by controlling the strongest among them.

2) To bring them down off their high horse.

a) Part of that was that he made them Eunuchs...Isa 39:7

C. But did you notice that of the royal family and nobles, Nebuchadnezzar specified that they be young.

1. Why the youth?

a. If you want to change the world...target the youth

b. Young people, if you don't think your important...here's a news bulletin

1) You have more potential than you can understand while your young.

2. In our world today we can see many people targeting our youth, because they want to control the world.

a. When the young are controlled by worldlinessthey get in gangs, they take drugs, they become involved in pornography....they effect generation, after generation to come.

b. Yet many youth think they really don't matter much.

1) Youth you matter !

D. So Nebuchadnezzar had these noble youth to learn the ways of his culture.

1. He used education to try and win them over.

2. Now let me get on my stump for a moment.

a. Education is a great thing...I'm all for it, when it is done in humble submission before God toward His will, plan and purpose.

b. But education as a whole these days promotes newness of thought

1) To a point that many times old truth is disregarded.

2) Today the platform for education is killing us.

II. King Nebuchadnezzar, as a vassal of God, takes away their last ounce of respect.

Daniel 1:6-7

6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

A. King Nebuchadnezzar had forced Israel into captivity and now he controls everything in their lives.

1. Now he pulls the last of the rug from beneath their feet.

a. He gives them new names.

- B. Perhaps symbolically, they had lost the right to bear their God given names.
 - 1. As a people they had not been responsible with their purpose as God's people.
 - 2. They had taken God for granted
 - a. And certainly taken their own personal names for granted.
 - b. But now they had lost the right to even wear their own name.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar would give them new names to identify them with his kingdom.
 - 1. Daniel would now be Belteshazzar
 - 2. HananiahSharrach
 - 3. MishaelMeshach
 - 4. Azariah.....Abed-nego
- D. Interestingly enough through the book of Daniel, it seems that God wants us to let go of our earthly designations and learn to wear the name of Christ with contentment.
 - 1. God's people there in Babylon had an identity crisis.
 - 2. And God is going to help them remember who they are.

III. Daniel sets his heart on purity before God.

Daniel 1:5a, 8-16

5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank,..."

8 But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, 10 and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king." 11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. 16 So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

- A. Out of all the people of Israel, including the older and the wiser, we find a single young man named Daniel who looks at the choice food from the king's table that is set before him as defilement. It was probably meat that was offered to some pagan God.

1. There him and the other young nobles could have indulged and filled their stomachs and the rest of Israel may never have known about it.
2. If the old adage is true that real character is built when no-one is watching, then Daniel proved to have much character.

B. The prophet Ezekiel had pointed to this very moment.

1. In Ezekiel 4:12-13 God tells Ezekiel:

12 "You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over human dung." 13 Then the LORD said, "Thus will the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will banish them."

C. But Daniel in the Hebrew purposed in his mind not to eat defiled meat.

1. "Purposed" means that he "made up his mind"
 - a. He established in his heart what needed to be done.
 - b. Oh how God's people could flourish if they set their purpose on God.

D. Daniel kind of put himself out there by asking to only eat vegetables.

1. He could have uncured the wrath of the king
2. But Daniel would rather die a man of purpose than wallow in the valley of sin

E. And God blessed this purpose and as vegetarians they grew fatter than all the rest.

1. Truly a miracle of God.

IV. With such faithfulness, God gives to them according to His purpose.

Daniel 1:17

17 As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

A. Nebuchadnezzar had mainly wanted the brighter young elites of Israel to be trained in the ways of Babylon, and for three years they were taught and trained

1. But beyond that God gave them:
 - a. Knowledge and intelligence.
 - b. And Wisdom
 - c. God even gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams and visions.

2. Latter we will see these gifts of God played out according to God's own purposes.

V. The end of the three years brought testing by Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 1:18-21

18 Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. 20 As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

Real eye opener for Neb to see God's wisdom on them not just facts and culture learned.

- A. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were found to be 10 times smarter than Nebuchadnezzar's own top advisors.
 - 1. So they were brought into close service with the king.
 - 2. I'm reminded of Acts 17:26 when Paul says while preaching on Mars Hill
 - a. That God has determined our times and even the boundaries of our habitation.
- B. Daniel and these guys have been strategically placed by God to serve His purposes.
 - 1. You know it might be our temptation to always have our focus on what is just over the next hill...to the point that we miss our intended purpose where we are at now.

Conclusion:

Have you purposed God in your heart?

-Have you set your heart on Him?

Or have you been defiling yourself with things of the world?