

Lake Cities Community Church
June 29, 2008
Book of Daniel (1-6)
Pastor Craig Schill

“Beautiful, Balanced and Blessed”
Daniel 1:3-21

I would guess that most of you have not heard of Arthur Chickering. Chickering is a psychologist who does research in the area of student development theory. Google his name and you will quickly see his profound influence on college campuses all over the world. His most lasting contribution is what is known as *Chickering's 7 Vectors* –a theory he published in 1969. The theory presents seven stages that most traditionally aged college students pass through as they establish their own new identities apart from their family of origin.

I became familiar with Chickering as a Residence Hall Director at Northern Arizona University in the early 1990's. It was taught to us Hall Directors and we in turn taught it to our Resident Assistants. I won't bore you with a description of each stage, but basically the theory observes that when a young person leaves home they go through a process by which they are exposed to new ideas, new experiences and different worldviews. This is unsettling because some of the new ideas, experiences and different worldviews clash with what the person learned from their family, church or community. There is dissonance even rebellion sometimes as a young person passes from youth to adulthood. According to the theory: “Values taken from authorities during earlier stages of life are reviewed. Some values are rejected, and those found suitable to the emerging identity are retained, personalized, and internalized.”

The Chickering theory teaches and underscores for us that the stage of life of late teens to early 20's is a critical stage of a person's development. It is a time when a young man or woman forms their own identity, as they move into adulthood.

On one hand – this can be very positive. For example, a young man who grew up with legalism or a young woman who grew up with racism may reject those values and instead embrace grace and acceptance. On the other hand, it is in this transitional period of life that we see many young people, who grew up in the church - discard Christianity. Christianity does not make the “cut” as a value to be brought into the adult experience. How many of you – please raise your hand have known a person who has left the faith during this period of life?

Well on the table today is a young man who is in his late teens to early 20’s. He has been raised in a good God-fearing home. He went to religious services all his life. He is about to embark on a three-year degree program at a secular institution. The question is -- will he keep the faith or conform to the world?

Of course we are talking about Daniel and the year is 605 B.C. We learned last week that Jerusalem – as God’s punishment – has fallen to King Nebuchadnezzar. Some people, including Daniel - have been taken back to Babylon - not to put them in chains as prisoners of war - but (surprisingly) to usher them into the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Daniel and his friends are on the fast track to serving the most powerful king in the wealthiest nation on earth.

Daniel – the Beautiful and Privileged Youth (3-7)

We begin to understand the situation in chapter one, verses 3-7 where Nebuchadnezzar has ordered Ashpenaz – the chief of the officials to bring in the Hebrew cream of the crop – verse four: “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 the ability for serving in the king’s court and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldean.” (4).

First - why? Why this training program? Recall that this is the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign? Like Barak Obama or John McCain will do in the first year of their administration – Nebuchadnezzar is setting up his leadership and wisely ensures that group will include the best people from the conquered nations. To be part of the new administration, the young men had to be (1) physically perfect, (2) handsome and (3) intelligent. In addition, many were royalty - from the King's own family in Jerusalem. In other words, if you were looking for a rags-to-riches story – you will not find it in Daniel. Daniel came from the right side of the tracks – he was part of the Jewish elite. In Dallas - he would have lived in Highland Park and attended St Mark's school. He comes from a position of privilege – probably even royalty. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Let me just mention, in passing, that if you and I were alive then – we may not have wanted to hang around Daniel – because some of us have a *prejudice against the privileged*. Those people who are beautiful, wealthy and intelligent - those from well known families – they make us uncomfortable. But this is a sinful attitude. Paul said, “Not many of you are wise from the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.” (1 Cor 1:26). Not many – but some are! Praise God that He works with all kinds of people. He works with the average and the elite - the poor and the wealthy. What blessing when a privileged person like Daniel uses his position of influence for God's glory.

Now the program included learning the language the literature and culture of the Chaldeans. Joyce Baldwin, a commentator on Daniel said, “To begin to study Babylonian literature was to enter a completely alien thought-world. It included omens, magic incantations, prayer and hymns, myths and legends, scientific formula for skill such as in glass making, mathematics and astrology.” (Baldwin, 80). New ideas, new experiences – a different world view.

Also new for these youth was a Babylonian set of names (verses 6-7) – Each Jewish name of Daniel and his three friends had a definition that was a testimony to the God of Israel and each Babylonian name was a testimony to a god of Babylon.

The goal of all this was to fashion their new identity as Babylonians – so that at the end of the three years they would be re-trained, re-programmed, re-conditioned. In go Israelites and out come Babylonians. Total transformation. But we know from the next set of verses and the rest of the story - it didn't work. Not exactly. Oh they learned their Babylonian history and language – but never lost their identity as children of the God of Israel. *Daniel and his friends were able to be in the world, but not of the world.* They practiced great wisdom – they knew when to “go along to get along” and when to fight a battle – to stand up for their convictions. Look at verses 8-16

Balanced Response to Staying Pure - Verses 8-16

There is no recorded objection to the education itself – though much of it must have been objectionable to them, and there is no objection stated regarding their new names. But there is an objection stated in verse 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.**”

This objection has puzzled scholars. Why the problem with meat or wine? What was wrong with the meat and wine? The OT does not teach that meat and wine are prohibited in themselves. There are three possibilities. First, it could be that the meat was against the dietary laws. Pig and horseflesh were not uncommon in Babylon. That is a possible reason and is consistent with the desire for ritual purity – but that doesn't explain the prohibition against wine, and also in a sense - all food in a pagan nation was unclean (Ez 4:13, Hos 9:3-4). Second, it could be that Daniel and his friends knew that the meat and the wine had been offered to Babylonian Gods – and therefore would not eat them. That is possible, but again there was no way to guarantee that any food weather

vegetable, grain or meat was clean in this regard, as all could have been offered to a pagan god. A third possibility may be the most powerful- - and that is the rejection of the King's food, was a symbolic rejection of the King's ultimate authority over him. In the Old Testament to share a meal was tied to relationship closeness and even to establishing a covenant. Take the Lord's meal as a symbol of the new covenant between God and man. By rejection the King's food and instead eating other food, Daniel and his friends may be saying – *“Thank you for the wonderful educational experience, and the broadening discussions – but our identity is ultimately and firmly established in the God of Israel.”* Baldwin said, “It would seem that Daniel rejected this symbol of dependence on the king because he wished to be free to fulfill his primary obligations to the God he served” (83).

It is at this point that God's sovereign involvement in the story is again brought to light. Daniel asks permission not to eat the King's food, and verse 9: **“God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials.”** However even though Ashpaneaz wants to do Daniel a favor – verse 10 – he knows that if things don't work out he will answer to the King with his head on a platter. So, with great balance and tact, Daniel proposes a trial period of 10 days in which verse 12 - **“Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.”** Most translations say vegetables, including the NASB – but we don't have to picture Daniel with a plate of carrot sticks for 10 days. The Hebrew word included anything that is from seed – so the diet could have included fruits, grains, breads and so forth. At the end of the time, the issue was revisited, they appeared very healthy – more so than the others and they were allowed to continue with this diet.

Daniel's response in these verses show us a young man committed to purity before the Lord, and they show us a young man with wisdom and diplomacy. He exercises great balance. He does

not (on the one) hand overreact – and call for a hunger strike. On the other hand – he does not say, “Woe is me – there is nothing I can do.” Often the path of wisdom produces a win-win situation and the path of foolishness results in a lose-lose. This could have had a horrible outcome – escalating conflict and most likely death or dishonor, but rather with a word of wisdom Daniel - and his friends remain pure before god. The official wins as he receives commendation for the healthy students under his charge and the King wins as new recruits are brought into his service.

When I was in my MBA program – I was in a seminar program where the professor was teaching us to make decisions using New Age techniques including rolling dice and consulting ancient Eastern holy books. It was one thing to sit and learn – with polite disagreement – about these business techniques – but then the professor wanted us to take the dice in our hands – to clear our minds and think of the business problem we wanted to solve – role the dice and consult the old book sitting on the table. That for me was to become defiled. By God’s grace my turn did not come up in that class period. There was another Christian in the class with similar concerns. She and I met with the professor and respectfully explained our objections to the practice – though he did not understand where we were coming from, he excused us from the exercise and thanked us for the way in which we handled the situation.

Daniel Blessed by God 17-21

Now look at verses 17-21. In narrative literature – the story now telescopes. What I mean by that is a bunch of time goes by in a few sentences. When you watch a TV program and the narrator says, “three years later.” That is telescoping. Well... three years later Verse 17, “**As for these four youths, Go gave the knowledge, and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of dreams.** They go before the king – verse 19 – “**Not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah – so they entered the king’s personal service.**” Verse 20,

“as for every matter of wisdom the king consulted then, he found then ten-times better than all the magicians and conjurers were who in all his realm. And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.” In other words – Daniel – the beautiful handsome privileged youth, was balanced and wise in a very difficult situation – and God blessed him greatly. Beautiful youth. Balanced and Blessed.

Application

Here is our application this morning. First – if you are between the ages of 13 and 23 here is your application. As you move into adulthood - how do you know that you will not lose your faith when you leave your parent’s home? When you go into the military, or into college or when you get married – when you go to your Babylong and travel through Chickering’s 7 vectors – will you keep Christianity – or will you discard it?

When I was camping with Trevor and his friends two weeks ago, one of the other leaders led a devotional and asked the boys: “What does your walk with Jesus look like?” So – I am asking you 13-23 year olds – “What does your walk with Jesus look like? If you can’t answer that question – then chances are that Christianity is still your parent’s faith. Your identity as a Christian is still rooted in their reality, not yours. For Daniel – we have learned today that as a young person – his God was not just the God of Israel, not just the God of Jacob, not just mom and dad’s God. But he was Daniel’s God. Teenager – Trevor, Hayden, Samantha, Bryan, Daniel, Angela – Is God your parent’s God – or your God?

The second application is for all of us - This story is a prime example of a person who found the balance of living in the world, but not being of the world. Daniel could not escape Babylon to a monastery – he had to live in a place that was hostile to his faith. But he was not conformed to its mold. It is a hard balance to find isn’t it? Sometimes we want to just run away and hide – but Jesus

prayed that the Father would not take you out of the world – but to protect you from the Evil one (John 17:15). It is a balance – push too far one way and you will lose your purity before God. Push too far the other way and you will lose the opportunity to be used by God to bring His message of hope to a hurting world. This is a very important factor in living the Christian life and will be part of our sermon series in the Fall – finding that balance – so hang onto that thought this week. Beautiful, Balanced and Blessed. We may not be as beautiful as Daniels was – but we can be balanced and blessed –and two out of three is not bad. Let's pray.