

A Biblical Response to Change

DANIEL 1

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****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM****

It is good to be with you this morning! As most of you should be able to see, I'm including some more good news. The pictures on the screen are from a friend with some contacts in Pakistan. The man doing the baptizing was actually converted to Christ out of the Pentecostal faith. He was a denominational preacher, but he learned the truth of the gospel, he was baptized properly himself, and now he is out there baptizing others. These pictures were taken within the last week or so, as I understand it. Most of us can hardly imagine what it must be like to obey the gospel in a primarily Muslim country, but these people have taken this step, despite the risk of persecution. I share these pictures as a reminder of what it means to obey the gospel. We hear the good news, we believe it, we turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, and then we are raised up out of the water to live the Christian life. If we can help with this in any way, if we can study together, if we can serve you in any way, we hope you will get in touch by using the contact information on the screen. If you are joining us by phone today, our number is 608-224-0274, and we would certainly invite you to get in touch as well, either by call or by text to that number.

This morning, I'd like for us to study a request that was texted by one of our members last Sunday afternoon. In light of everything that's going on, she asked that we study a lesson concerning "how people in the Bible dealt with change." All of us have seen some huge changes over the past few weeks. So, this past Wednesday, I asked for your input – in our Wednesday class and also on a Google form that was put out there on Facebook and via email to all of our members. And the question was very simple and very open-ended: How has your life changed due to the pandemic?

- One of our seniors called and said, "a lot." Their lives have changed "a lot." All of this has caused them to have more empathy for those who are normally confined at home. They now truly appreciate the freedom just to do something simple, like going to the hardware store. They truly appreciate being able to just get in the car and go somewhere.
- And speaking of change, one of our seniors has become very good at saying "keep the change." And I laughed out loud at this! I know the feeling. Most of us do, now. You go through the drive-thru at McDonald's, and the change is \$2. Nope! Not worth it. I'm not touching it. That \$2 can go to the Ronald McDonald House.

- In terms of change, someone mentioned the new normal of using hand sanitizer and wearing masks everywhere.
- One of our seniors sent a text and said, "I don't have any great insight regarding change, but outside my door I have a little saying, "Without change there would be no butterflies." She gives the reminder, "Life is a blessing, and the best is yet to come." We appreciate that. Without change, life would not get better.
- One of our members said that their almost new car battery died from boredom, according to the tow driver. Also, having to depend on others for things I can usually do myself.
- One of our members says that life has not changed drastically for them, because they were already extremely cautious about any contagious diseases around them, due to an ongoing health concern in the family. The most significant change, though, has been the break in fellowship with friends and family. That fellowship has been critical in lifting their spirits and making it through some difficult times in the past, and now that fellowship is largely gone.
- One of our members suggests that everything has slowed down, and now she has the time to focus on what is truly important. "I'm taking better care of myself spiritually," she says, "studying and praying more than before. I'm also taking better care of myself physically. I'm more appreciative of a lot of things I took for granted. I have really good days, but then I have days that are 'off,' and I can't quite explain why it feels 'off,' or specifically what I mean by 'off,' but sometimes I just feel like I'm struggling. I went from working full time surrounded by people to just touching base online for a few hours a week. I had no concept of how much I would miss the people I work with. I'm mourning the changes but trying to remain thankful and optimistic. I pray more often; a lot more often. I am more accepting of the fact that I could easily die from COVID-19. It's absolutely the closest I've felt to my own mortality. The whole ordeal has helped me remember how much I can't control what is going on and that God is in control." [EDITED]
- One of our members has suggested that she's had to plan the family meals better, because it's harder to run out for take-out at the last minute. We plan our grocery shopping weekly instead of daily. As a teacher, she's needing to get lesson plans ready to push out a week ahead of time. It feels like there's less down time, because you are always trying to think and make sure you are ready for responsibilities. It takes more reflection to find things to be grateful for. It feels like it means more when people call or check on you.
- One of our members suggests that life has become more lonely. "Isolation is great," he says, "when it is the individual's choice. It can be burdensome when it is not chosen." I agree with that! I like being alone sometimes, but I've found it's much better when I CHOOSE to be alone!
- One of our members says, "I definitely have cabin fever! A big outing is to go to the bank, the gas station, or McDonald's to get a drink!" He says that his wife goes grocery shopping, because he personally cannot risk getting the virus, due to some pre-existing health issues. They facetime with grandkids, other family are afraid of getting the virus through exposure at work. He says that they get tired of watching the news and have to cut back a lot on watching it. He says, "We pray to God that this will be over soon!"
- One of our members talks about losing a grandparent and the difficulty of that loss happening without being able to be together.
- One of our Christian sisters talks about being at home with her husband all day now, "We used to just be together on the weekends, relaxing and spending time together, but now we're finding different things to do and we're being more open about telling each other when we need personal time without anyone being offended. Our marriage is definitely changing for the better as we go through this together. Working from home has been the biggest change. I have the hardest time separating myself from my work when my work is in a separate building, but I've been creating boundaries and it's helped me have such a healthier relationship with my job."

- One of our Christian sisters says, “I have no social interaction now, which, at first, was amazing, because I’m introverted; so, give me days that I can wrap up like a slug in a blanket with a book and a pot of coffee, and I’m so happy. But I just said to my husband, ‘I’m so sad I haven’t been able to see anyone lately.’ I think it’s making me value relationships so much more than I did before. We’re having to be really intentional about seeing people and talking with people, and it’s making those times mean so much more!”
- Someone responded online and said, “I miss worship on Sunday mornings and fellowshiping with Christians afterwards. This has caused me to be more reflective on the positive things people are doing and being thankful to God that so many have good hearts.”
- One of our Christian brothers says, “We are now much more reliant on internet access to do our work and catch up with friends and family. Going outside is something to look forward to when it isn’t raining. Cleanliness is much more important when you or anyone around you could have a killer virus.”
- One of our senior saints suggests that all of this has just been “really weird.” Her exercise routine has been completely disrupted – no water aerobics and no gym. She now has nothing to get up for, so her nights have been getting later and later, and her mornings have been starting later as well. She mentions having some really strange dreams now. But she keeps telling herself, “God is in control. God’s got this.” She’s done more Bible reading and more singing on her own. She discovered that our song books have a scripture index in the back. She said, “Our songleaders have probably known this all along, but I am just now discovering it!” As she reads through the Psalms, she finds the related songs in our book and sings them on her own.
- And for me, preaching in our garage has obviously been a pretty big change. I’ve had to cancel speaking engagements in Illinois and Minnesota over the past few weeks. We are in the process of canceling camp this summer. And right now I am supposed to be visiting my sister out in Washington. I’ve had to do a lot more snail mail, getting our bulletins to those without internet access, I’ve made a lot more calls over the past month or so. I miss the back and forth in our Wednesday classes. We’ve had to shift from a discussion to more of a lecture, and I do not like it! I am looking forward to being back together.

So, these are some changes we’ve been dealing with over the past few weeks. Thank you so much for your help with this. As we discuss this, I would invite you to be turning with me to Daniel 1. As you make your way to Daniel 1, I want to introduce something we’ll be using as our visual this morning, a lion from the ancient city of Babylon. They have two of these hanging on the wall at the Museum of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. If you have never gone, you need to go. In the image on the left, we have an artist’s rendition of where the lion on the right was discovered. It was basically a decoration on the main drag into the city of Babylon. In other words, this is absolutely something that Daniel would have seen. These are maybe 4 x 7 feet. I took these pictures back in October when I drove down to Harvard and took the train into downtown Chicago, and then a bus to the University. I went down there to meet some friends from camp who live in Detroit. Brian Sherrell preaches for the Hazel Park congregation. We met in the middle in Chicago and had a great time seeing some of these ancient artifacts. But the point is: As we study Daniel this morning, we are looking at something that Daniel would have seen during the 70+ years he lived in Babylon.

And as we discuss this question concerning how people in the Bible handled change, I can’t think of anybody in the Bible who handled more change or had more dramatic or painful change, than Daniel. And in 1 Corinthians 10 and in Romans 15, Paul tells us that we have the accounts of these people from the Old Testament as **“examples.”** We have these accounts as encouragement. And in Daniel, we have an example of how to handle change. And whether it’s a change in where we live, a change in our employment, a change in a relationship, or

maybe the death of a loved one, a good change or a bad change, Daniel serves as an example in how to handle it.

We know that Daniel was born into a Jewish royal family, but he was born at time when the people were not honoring God. And so, perhaps when Daniel was only a teenager (in 605 BC), King Nebuchadnezzar makes the first of three raids on the city of Jerusalem and takes away the best and the brightest of the young men to be reeducated for the purpose of serving in his administration back in Babylon. And although the attack on Jerusalem is God's punishment on the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Daniel (as a very young man) has personally done nothing wrong to deserve this. In this first raid, the temple is looted, and the most promising young men of Judah are basically kidnapped, taken away from their families, most likely castrated to serve as eunuchs in Babylon. These would have been the valedictorians of their classes, those who were gifted not only academically, but also athletically. These are the children of royalty, and it is done to humiliate the Jewish people. They are taken away and given new names to honor the Babylonian gods. All of this, by the way, was prophesied by Isaiah to King Hezekiah many years earlier (in Isaiah 39:5-7), where Isaiah said, ***"Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the Lord. 'And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials [that is, EUNUCHS] in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"*** God's people, then, had been warned, but they did not listen, and now the innocent young men were paying the price. And yet as steep as that price might have been, it was all a part of God's plan, as we will see in the opening chapter of the book of Daniel. Let's look at Daniel 1 this morning, and then we'll make a few observations on dealing with change. We start with Daniel 1,

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. 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. ⁵ The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. 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.

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.*

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.* 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.*

As we think about what this passage might teach us about navigating change, I want us to make several fairly brief observations starting with the fact...

- I. **...that although the changes we're going through might be difficult or unpleasant at the time, let us LOOK UP – and what I mean by that is, let us at least be open to the possibility that GOD MIGHT BE WORKING THROUGH THESE CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT THAT WE HAVE NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED – LOOK TO GOD IN TIMES OF TRAGEDY.**

This doesn't mean that God necessarily causes terrible things to happen, but he is often working on his people through the change or through the difficult circumstances. And so instead of immediately becoming bitter or resentful, instead of being overcome with fear, let us at least try to see all of this from God's point of view. And looking back at Daniel, these are obviously some terrible circumstances. Here we have a number of young men torn away from their families, separated from the regular public worship of God in the temple, taken hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem, and they are basically assimilated into Babylonian culture. They are taught the local language and literature, and they are presented with king's food. Their names are changed – from names honoring Yahweh to names honoring various Babylonian gods. Not only that, but as I mentioned earlier, in all of this they are also put in care of the guy who is in charge of the eunuchs. I don't know about you, but to me that sounds like a really bad thing! All of this is bad. These are some difficult circumstances. These are some difficult changes. In fact, the changes these young men endured are probably far more significant than anything we have endured over the past few weeks.

Outwardly, it looks terrible. It looks like the kingdom of God has been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. However, let us not miss something very important in the first two verses. Did you notice how this chapter starts? ***"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..."*** Are we clear here at the beginning that all of this is happening because God is allowing it to happen? As we learned earlier, this has all been prophesied. Isaiah and Jeremiah and the others have warned about it. In fact, if you remember Jeremiah's prophesy of the good figs and the bad figs (in Jeremiah 24), the good figs are those who are taken away to Babylon (they are the survivors, they are the ones who will live), but the bad figs are those who get left behind (they are the ones who will die). From a purely earthly point of view, those who are taken are the losers in this, but that is the opposite

of the truth. It might not look like it at the time, but these changes are actually a blessing. Thankfully, as the book progresses, Daniel seems to figure this out. We see this especially in Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9. Over time, he's able to see how God has been working in all of this.

Now, the point of this is not to say that COVID-19 is a blessing. It is not. It is a disease. However, even in this difficult time, isn't there a value to seeing the good that God is doing? Haven't we seen some good things happening? Over the past few weeks, haven't we been impressed with the baptisms all around the world? Haven't we come to appreciate our Christian family right here in Madison? Haven't we been blessed with some new ways of connecting? As elders, we've been so impressed and really amazed that some of our young men really started pushing us a year or so ago to do more online, to upgrade the website, to do more with video, to get some new equipment, to learn some new software. And we were really starting to work the bugs out and get a bit more comfortable with it, just in time for this to happen. It's hard not to see God working in that.

So, the first reminder here in Daniel 1 is how important it is to look to God during times like this. Try to see what God is doing during times of change. He's promised to never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), so let's live like it. Look to God.

II. **As we go back to the text, let's also notice that during this time of change, DANIEL MAKES THE DECISION TO LEAD BY COURAGEOUSLY HOLDING FIRM TO WHAT HE KNOWS TO BE RIGHT.**

In verse 8, the Bible tells us that, ***"Daniel made up mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank."*** There's so much we can learn here, starting with the fact that Daniel, even as a young man, seems to have known the word of God. We aren't told exactly what the problem is with the food, but since the text uses the word ***"defile,"*** we assume that either the food or something about how it was prepared would have been a violation against the word of God. Perhaps we're talking bacon and lobster (unclean under the Law of Moses), or maybe we're talking about meat from an animal that had been strangled (also forbidden under the Law of Moses), or maybe we're talking about meat or wine that had been offered to or dedicated to the pagan Gods. We learn from this that Daniel must have had some training. Even in a time when the nation had pretty much abandoned God, somebody had taught Daniel right from wrong, and he knew that this food was wrong. Daniel had been through so much – emasculated, re-educated, given a new name honoring a Babylonian god – but the food was something Daniel could control. The food was his decision, so we find that Daniel ***"made up his mind"*** about this. He made a decision. This is the hill I will die on.

But imagine the pressure. Imagine sitting down at the king's table. It would have been so easy to rationalize. God won't see me way over here in Babylon. It might be dangerous to refuse to eat this food. I might offend the king. I'll be ridiculed by the others. I'll attract too much attention. I'll starve to death if I don't eat this. I'm a teenager; I eat everything. Everybody else is eating this. I'm just a kid – nobody will care if I eat this stuff. My mom and dad will never know if I do this. How dare God's law tell me I can't do something; after all, God is the one who put us in this situation. There are so many ways Daniel could have rationalized eating this food. And yet, Daniel ***"made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food."***

And this is where I want us to notice that Daniel makes up his mind in verse 8, but by the time we get to verse 11, three others have joined in! Daniel makes the first move, and these others seem to join in. Not only that, but by the time we get to Chapter 3, the three friends stand up on their own, even without Daniel being there (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the fiery furnace). So, let's realize that as we endure change, the people around us are watching. And by acting with courage ourselves, we give them courage. Literally, we "encourage."

Of course, we no longer have the food laws that Daniel did (in Mark 7:19 Jesus declared all foods to be clean), but aren't we tempted in other ways? Even during a time of crisis, during a time of change, don't we face unique pressures? Over the past few weeks, haven't we faced some unique temptations? The encouragement from Daniel is to make up our minds: No matter what happens, we will always do what is right. And we will lead the way. Even if we are the only ones doing right, we will always do what is right. As the world changes around us, as we face challenges, we will set the example. In practical terms, maybe we need to decide right now: From this point forward, I will not be snippy with my family. Earlier this week, I saw a preaching buddy of mine would be preaching on that this morning, "How Not to Be Snippy with Your Family in a Pandemic." We might need that one. But we decide beforehand. Like Daniel, we make up our minds. We are proactive instead of reactive. We decide every morning, "In this time of change, I will have a good attitude today. I will be kind. I will try to call and encourage one person every day. I will read one chapter of the Bible," or whatever. We decide to do what is right, and even if we have to act alone, we lead.

III. There is a third lesson we can take away from Daniel this morning, and that is: As we deal with change, DANIEL SHOWS US HOW TO TREAT OTHERS WITH TACT AND RESPECT.

I thought about making this point: Do good, but don't be a jerk about it! Because that's about it. But Daniel shows us how to treat others with tact and respect. That sounds a bit more tactful and respectful. But I just want us to notice what happens in the last half of verse 8, *"...so [Daniel] sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself."* That's pretty simple, isn't it? He's not judgmental. He's not condescending. He's not demanding. He doesn't organize a protest or a hunger strike. He doesn't storm the capitol. But instead, he seeks permission. He even follows the chain of command here, doesn't he? In a time of chaos, Daniel works within the system, and he very politely asks permission not to participate.

We have the same power today. Sometimes our schools will ask us to do something that will violate our Christian beliefs. It has happened to me, it has happened to both of our children. But the Madison Metropolitan School District has a student handbook, and in that handbook they have a policy that gives a way out for activities that violate religious principles. Very respectfully, we've had to take that route a time or two. And we've found that when our children ask nicely, it tends to go very well. We see this in Daniel. We don't need to be rude or arrogant or obnoxious, but we handle change by treating others with tact and respect. Saying "no" is important, but it is also important HOW we say "no." As we navigate change, we don't need to agree with everybody, but we do need to love everybody. We need to treat others just as we ourselves would like to be treated. Or again: Do good, but don't be a jerk about it! At the same time, if we need to have a difficult conversation with somebody, if we need to take a stand on something, let's also remember that the God we serve is much larger than the person we are approaching. In other words, if I need to talk to a supervisor about a moral issue, I know that whatever happens, God will work it out in the end. And personally, that takes a lot of pressure off. I can be tactful and respectful, because what I am asking for is right.

IV. Somewhat related to this, let's also notice that during a time of change, DANIEL CAME FORWARD WITH A CREATIVE SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.

Again, he didn't just object, but he had a plan. This is often the difference between whining and a legitimate complaint. Leaders really appreciate it when you have a solution, not just a problem. We have a lot on the line here, and in verse 10, the guy in charge seems to know this. We also know this. In Jeremiah 39, we find that King Nebuchadnezzar will go on to capture a king, and to have the king's sons killed in front of him, only to then gouge out the eyes of the king so that his last memory would be of his sons being murdered. That's the king

we're dealing with here. In Jeremiah 29, he had other rulers of Judah roasted to death over a fire. That's the king we're dealing with here. But Daniel has a proposal. He doesn't rant and rave about how sinful this food is ("You people are going to hell for eating this stuff!" – none of that), but he suggests a test. He thinks very creatively. He knows what King Nebuchadnezzar ultimately wants, he wants strong and healthy people serving in his administration, so Daniel suggests a good way to get there. Ultimately, nobody really cared what Daniel ate, as long as he turned out okay. And so, in this time of change, Daniel has a solution. It is okay to break with tradition if we have another good way (a better way) of doing it. Let me and my friends eat only vegetables and water, and in ten days we'll see who is stronger. In other words, there's nothing to lose here. And the commander agrees to the experiment, which thankfully turns out well.

To me, it seems we might learn from this. If we're feeling pressured to do something wrong, we don't need to fly off the handle, but let's try something else, or maybe let's do something in a different way. Let's think of something that nobody has ever thought of before. Many years ago, I knew a young woman and her boyfriend who were really turned off at the cost of prom – and it wasn't just the cost, it was the waste. They couldn't stand the thought of wasting hundreds upon hundreds of dollars like everybody else – the dress, the tickets, the tux rental, and all that. So, she and her date decided to skip the prom completely and to take what they would have spent on the prom and to feed the homeless instead. They bought a bunch of food, they took the train downtown Chicago, and instead of going to prom that night, they used that money to hand out food all night long. I might not recommend that for everybody, but that's an example of one Christian who made a bold statement that she was refusing to eat the king's food. She was different and refused to be squeezed into the world's way of thinking. I see this in people who donate regularly to the Elizabeth House and CareNet here in Madison. Instead of standing on a street corner yelling at people about abortion, I see people sacrificing to pay for food, and housing, and diapers for young mothers who choose life. There are many other examples, but the reminder from Daniel is: In a time of chaos and change, be open to creative solutions.

V. As we come to the end, let's notice one more lesson here, and that is, in a time of change, WHEN WE ARE BLESSED BY GOD, WE LEARN FROM DANIEL THAT GOD WILL OFTEN ALLOW US TO BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS.

Daniel and his friends trust God, and the experiment with the food turns out very well. God does not miraculously free Daniel and his friends from captivity. God does not miraculously transport them hundreds of miles back home. God does not give back what the Babylonians had taken – there is no miraculous healing for Daniel and his buddies. However, God does make sure that Daniel and his friends excel far beyond their peers, and God puts them in positions of power where they are able to do good for many years into the future. Over time, in fact, Daniel becomes one of the king's most trusted advisors. And let's not miss what happens in verse 21, ***"And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king."*** And so, not only would Daniel outlive several Babylonian kings, but he continues serving in a position of leadership, even several years into the next empire. He transitions from one superpower to the next. He lives long enough, in fact, to see some of his fellow Jews start making the journey out of captivity and back to Jerusalem. Close to 80 years in government service, and not a single scandal. In fact, Daniel is one of the very few characters in the Bible about whom absolutely nothing negative is ever said. We have the dirt on Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Peter, and Paul, but not Daniel! And Daniel's usefulness in God's plan all starts with a seemingly insignificant decision to not eat the king's food. Daniel put his trust in God, and God uses him to bless others. I've heard some great things from some of you this week. I've heard from several of our teachers, how you reacting to change with grace has been a blessing not only to your students, but also to your fellow teachers. And that's true for all of us. If we live by some basic Christian principles, we have a way of standing out and doing well in this world – we work hard, we don't gossip,

we talk to people one-on-one when we have a problem, we treat people as we would like to be treated – and we have a way of doing well. And that’s what we find in Daniel. His obedience to God made him a blessing to others.

Conclusion:

So, in a time of change, Daniel looks to God, he sets his heart to always do what was right, he treats others with tact and respect, he is open to creative solutions, and his continued faith and obedience allow him to be a blessing to others. Daniel and his friends seem to have taken to heart Jeremiah’s message to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:11-13, ***“For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.’”*** In a time of change, we look to Daniel for encouragement. The book of Daniel is basically a record of several young people learning how to be God’s people in a changing world.

I am thankful for the request, and I’m thankful for the help all of you have given in preparation for today’s lesson. Again, if you have any questions or would like to study further, please get in touch.

Let’s close this morning with a prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you today for being the God of Daniel, for being a God who is able to use world events, even tragedies, to ultimately accomplish your will. We are thankful for Daniel and his three friends and for their faithfulness in very difficult times.

Today, we pray that we might be encouraged by Daniel’s courage and wisdom, and we pray that we might confront the changes we are facing right now with the same commitment to always do what is right. As strangers here on this earth, we ask that you would use us to build up your kingdom. Use us to be a blessing to others.

We continue to pray for those who work in healthcare and for those who keep us supplied with good food. Bless our first responders in the special challenges they are facing right now.

Be with those who are alone. We pray that you would comfort them and allow us to reach out in ways that are safe and helpful.

We are thankful for Jesus and for the forgiveness of our sins. We come to you this morning in his name. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com