



DEVOTIONAL TIME

03-16-2015 @ 0900

"The Lord Allowed It!"

Daniel 1:1-5

Because He Lives!

God sent his Son...His Son! They called him "Jesus"; He came to love, heal, and forgive!
He lived and died to buy my pardon; an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living...just because He lives!

Daniel 1:1-5

"In the third year that Jehoiakim was king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia attacked Jerusalem, and surrounded the city. The Lord let him capture King Jehoiakim and seize some of the Temple treasures. He took some prisoners back with him to the temple of his gods in Babylon, and put the captured treasures in the temple storerooms. The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief official, to select from among the Israelite exiles some young men of the royal family, and of the noble families. They had to be handsome, intelligent, well-trained, quick to learn, and free from physical defects, so that they would be qualified to serve in the royal court. Ashpenaz was to teach them to read and write the Babylonian language. The king also gave orders that every day they were to be given the same food and wine as the members of the royal court. After three years of this training, they were to appear before the king."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever looked around you in this world, and wondered, "Why do 'bad' things happen to good, 'God-fearing' people? Shouldn't God do something about that?"
- Have you ever pondered your own "situations", and wondered, "Has God somehow forgotten all about me? By the way things are going, do I matter to God at all?"
- As these "situations" developed, have you detected a "deeper design" at work? When you "look back over your shoulder", is God's Guidance and Grace more evident and wondrous?

We now begin the Book of Daniel, which starts on a tragic, even disastrous note. "God's People" are under attack, surrounded by enemies, only to have some of the "best and brightest" led off into exile. (It doesn't look good for the "Home Team" at all. Isn't this the way many of us feel at various times in our lives, completely surrounded by "hostiles", and beset by severe troubles? When we've assumed that "faith in God" should spare us of "tough times" and "bad breaks", problems we face can head us toward depression and defeatism. We can begin to "question our faith" while others simply abandon all "belief in God".) Now look closely at the Spirit's perspective we find in Daniel: "The Lord let him (Nebuchadnezzar) capture King Jehoiakim and seize some of the Temple treasures. He took some prisoners back with him to the temple of his gods in Babylon..." *The Lord let him do this!* It wasn't an "accident", a "bad break", or a "misalignment of the stars"; God Himself set this up...to reveal Grace and Glory in a whole new way! God arranged circumstances to *favor* and *bless* Daniel and the three Hebrew children! God, grant us an "expansion of vision", in which we begin to see that You are most "in control" when our circumstances look most dire! Enable us to discover Your Grace at work in the toughest of times, as we face the fiercest of foes. As You sustained Daniel, and delivered the Hebrew children, You are "ready", "able", and "willing" to deliver today all who will trust You with a daring and obedient faith. Help us to see past what You "allow", so we see truly what You "align"!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

03-17-2015 @ 0900

**“Stand for God’ or Fall for All?
It’s Time to Make Up Your Mind!”**

Daniel 1:6-10

Because He Lives!

God sent his Son...His Son! They called him “Jesus”; He came to love, heal, and forgive!
He lived and died to buy my pardon; an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living...just because He lives!

Daniel 1:6-10

“Among those chosen were Daniel, Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah, all of whom were from the Tribe of Judah. The chief official gave them new names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel made up his mind not to let himself become ritually unclean by eating the food and drinking the wine of the royal court, so he asked Ashpenaz to help him, and God made Ashpenaz sympathetic to Daniel. Ashpenaz, however, was afraid of the king, so he said to Daniel. ‘The king has decided what you are to eat and drink, and if you don’t look as fit as the other young men, he may kill me!’”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself “pressured to conform” in ways that would “compromise your Covenant”? Did you conform to “secular culture”, or stand tall for the Lord of All?
- If you asked for “time to prove your point”, how did that work out? Did the “doubters” and “disbelievers” find that you and your God were “as good as your word”?
- Can you remember witnessing the “active faith” of truly admirable believers whose genuine determination and deep commitment to their God persisted even the face of criticism?

The light coming toward you is quite bright and getting brighter...suddenly, you realize you’re standing on a set of tracks. It dawns on you “That’s a train headed my way; run, jump, or lay down, but DO something!” Failure to decide is invitation to disaster, so you’d better settle on a course of action, or this moment will not end in your favor! Other moments are not quite so “clear-cut”, so there is great temptation to “capitulate rather than confront”, to “go along to get along”, but the price paid for such “compromise of conscience” is steep in the long run. It’s easy to “go with the crowd” when emotions run high, or “peer pressure” questions our “guts” or “brains” (or both!) But people of faith often find it necessary to “go countercultural” when “glitter & glitz” point a different path than the “Holy Way” God has laid out for our deepest happiness. Sometimes we can “buy time” as Daniel did, but that only comes after we have already decided on the “faith-full” way and a “life of integrity”. There is a deep part in each heart that knows “we owe God big-time”, but when we must face the glare of public opinion among those we truly wanted to impress, (coworkers, new friends, boss, or that special someone,) we suddenly find the “limelight” very bright. Before we know it, we are responding to what they, (these suddenly important people,) thought about us was more important than what God has asked of us. Daniel illustrates for us the “need to know” how to “stand for God” regardless of the tides of public taste and temptations to temper devotion with diplomacy. God, grant us the Grace of true Devotion and steadfast Decision. When the world around us demands compliance, teach us to get creative and countercultural...so we STAND with You and for You, regardless of the risk to life and limb. Your Love and Faithfulness are our models of “all-in” devotion and “all-out” fidelity.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

03-18-2015 @ 0900

"God's Way Just Works Best!"

Daniel 1:11-17

Because He Lives!

God sent his Son! They called him "Jesus"; He came to love, heal, and forgive!
He lived and died to buy my pardon; an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living...just because He lives!

Daniel 1:11-17

"So Daniel went to the guard whom Ashpenaz had placed in charge of him and his three friends. 'Test us for ten days,' he said. 'Give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare us with the young men who are eating the food of the royal court, and base your decision on how we look.' He agreed to let them try it for ten days. When the time was up, they looked healthier and stronger than all those who had been eating the royal food. So from then on, the guard let them continue to eat vegetables instead of what the king provided. God gave the four young men knowledge and skill in literature and philosophy. In addition, he gave Daniel skill in interpreting visions and dreams."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Were you ever "on the fence" about God's "requirements"? ("Surely God won't mind if I skip the tithe this month; money's tight!" "Fast for guidance? But there's a party tonight!")
- How did the "corner-cutting", "skip 'n' scrimp" approach work for you in the long run? Did your "situation" improve as you "held back" from God's "unreasonable" demands?
- Did you finally "take God seriously", follow "divine directions", and find yourself amazed and delighted at how much *better* "things worked out" for you?

A favored position at the court of the king? What an amazing opportunity! A whole new world of wealth, power, influence, and status opens before you. "Go with the flow", and the potential for promotion is mind-blowing; advancement is assured, and suddenly an entirely new existence expands before you. However, some of these "perks", "privileges", and "priorities" are clearly against everything your training has taught you of God's Will for your life; now the pressure is on. If you "hold your ground" to "stand on the Promises of God", will you sacrifice all these new opportunities? If you stay true to the "Law of the Lord", are you going to "lose big" in the eyes of the king...and "everyone else who matters"? These questions and possibilities probably weighed heavily on Daniel's mind, too, but he "made up his mind" to not compromise. In this example, God helps us see that He always "has our back", especially when we willingly take "a solid stand" for Him. Daniel is willing to put God and His Promises to the test. "Test us for ten days, ...Then compare us with the young men who are eating the food of the royal court, and base your decision on how we look." Are we willing to be such a "test case" for God's Promises and Grace? (Have we decided not to pay our tithes because "funds were tight", and we figured God would "understand"? Did we sense a "need to fast" over a certain situation, but decided to "wait until the holidays are over", so we wouldn't have to explain not eating during all of the parties, hoping God "wouldn't mind"?) God, grant us a faith like Daniel's! Empower us to "stand on Your Words", confident You will "work out all things needed" in our favor. You blessed Daniel and his friends with health, knowledge, and skill above all of the others. Your Way always works out better than any plans of ours. As Daniel proved it then, help us prove it now!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

03-19-2015 @ 0900

**“When God Opens the Door,
Don't Worry; Just Walk Willingly in His Way!”**

Daniel 1:18-21

Because He Lives

God sent his Son! They called him “Jesus”; He came to love, heal, and forgive!
He lived and died to buy my pardon; an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living...just because He lives!

Daniel 1:18-21

“At the end of the three years set by the king, Ashpenaz took all the young men to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them all, and Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah impressed him more than any of the others. So they became members of the king's court. No matter what question the king asked or what problem he raised, these four knew ten times more than any fortuneteller or magician in his whole kingdom. Daniel remained at the royal court until Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, conquered Babylonia.”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself “fearful” at facing a “tough task”? Were you worrying over “deadlines”, or whether or not you would be able to meet all the needs the job “required”?
- Can you remember facing some very “thorny issues” at work or home... “Challenges” that “drove you to your knees”? Were you suddenly aware of “solution”/“resolution” after prayer?
- Did you ever have people tell you how “helpful” or “wise” you were, when all you had done was “follow the ‘lead’ of the Lord”? (Did you remember to give Him thanks and glory?)

The Scriptures assure us that God “shows no favoritism”, but seeks to bless all who approach the “Throne of Grace and Mercy” with humility, obedience, and faith. This is “awesome news” to us all, because it means that what God did for Daniel and his friends long ago, He is ready, able, and willing to do for us today. If we will only make up our minds, as Daniel did, to “stand on the high ground”, and “go all-in” for God, we will know blessing after blessing as our God grants us “Grace upon grace”! As we “live the Gospel” of Jesus Christ, God will bless us in all that we do...(though not always in any way we expect, or at the time we might wish!) In holy Providence, God will open doors for us and elevate us into areas we never would have imagined, let alone expected!. Now notice how God did not just “elevate” Daniel and his friends; He also “equipped” them with wisdom and knowledge greater than all the other “candidates of the court”. God's Word affirms that Daniel and his friends were not necessarily “brighter” or “smarter” than anybody else; it was God who gave them this extra wisdom, insight, and knowledge. What God did then, God can still do now. We need to understand that the One who opens doors for us also equips us with the wisdom needed to work well once we enter. Too often, we “make it all about us”, instead of trusting God. If it's His “Work” we are to do, we need to remember “where to turn” for the “skill sets” and “energy” required. God, grant us the Grace of child-like dependence. When You open doors to new opportunity, teach us to “take a page from Daniel”. Make us faithful to You in all things, eager to give You the glory for any “success”, and humble enough to walk where You lead with a grateful heart and a “servant mind”! Unlike Daniel, we have Your beloved Son as an even clearer Model of “faith and trust”! Teach us to follow His Example, share His Gospel, and live in His Peace, so our lives reveal Your Wisdom every day!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

03-20-2015 @ 0900

"Be Where God Wants You!"

Daniel 2:1-13

Because He Lives!

God sent his Son! They called him "Jesus"; He came to love, heal, and forgive!
He lived and died to buy my pardon; an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living...just because He lives!

Daniel 2:1-13

"In the second year that Nebuchadnezzar was king, he had a dream. It worried him so much that he couldn't sleep, so he sent for his fortunetellers, magicians, sorcerers and wizards to come and explain the dream to him. ...They answered the king... "Tell us your dream, and we will explain it to you." ... The king said "I have made up my mind that you must tell me the dream, and then tell me what it means.... The advisers replied, "There is no one on the face of the earth who can tell Your Majesty what you want to know." At that, the king flew into a rage and ordered the execution of all the royal advisers in Babylon. So the order was issued for all of them to be killed, including Daniel and his friends."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever felt as though you had finally "arrived" at the right place in the right time when "life turned upside down" so suddenly you wondered if both "place" & "time" were "all wrong"?
- Did you ever encounter a situation in which you were "set up to fail"? (Was someone putting you in an "impossible" position, facing an "insoluble puzzle", with "zero support"?)
- Were you "rescued" by some sort of "divine Guidance" and/or "holy Providence"? (When did you notice "a helpful person" or discover "a new approach" to your crisis/issue/task?)

Talk about a "rollercoaster ride"! Daniel and his friends are on a "ride for the records"! As "nobility" among their people, they are well-trained in their ancestral Faith, and hold a privileged place in their culture. BUT their leadership falls into sin; pagans invade their land; their "holy City" is captured and devastated, and they are carted off to another land as political refugees. Prospects look bleak, BUT their faith in God drives them to insist on restricted dietary practice, which when tested, proves most effective in sustaining their health, and maintaining their growth in wisdom. Life takes on a beautiful glow as they find themselves royally clad, and favored with a life of luxury in the king's own palace. This "serving God" thing seems to "lift God's children" to new heights of opportunity. BUT the king gets a "crimp in his crown" over some dream, and life scores a "sucker punch" they never saw coming. Daniel and his friends have done nothing wrong, and yet they find themselves scheduled for death. How is *this* part of God's Plan? (Have you ever been there? Did you ever feel God's blessings had finally rested upon you, and God placed you right where you were supposed to be? You could see for yourself "Life is good" and "God is great"! Then you "wake up one morning" to find "the bottom has fallen out"! Sooo.... "Where are You, God?" is an honest and painful question.) BUT, remember how this book started: "the Lord allowed it". This same Lord and God is still at it...and still in control! Daniel and his friends now need to "trust God" and push back panic to make room for revelation! God, grant us the Grace of Patient Trust and Enduring Devotion. Put us where You know we are needed most to reveal Your Will. Help us stand strong for You, and stay confident of Your ability to deliver all who dare to declare Your Divine Design. Make us ready to "ride" right where we are!