

Nebuchadnezzar is the kind of man who is very proud, the kind of man who always gets his way. And when we meet him here in Daniel chapter 1, he's actually on his way back from finally defeating Egypt. Because the only nation that really ever gave Nebuchadnezzar problems was Egypt. They were the only ones that ever really were a thorn in his side. But now they're done. Nebuchadnezzar has defeated them, and they will never be a problem again. And so you can imagine him in his pride and the height of his power deciding that he was going to take care of the rest of these problems too, all of these little nations in between Babylon and Egypt, many of whom had been allies of Egypt, many of whom had actually been vassals or servants of Egypt as well. And Judah was one such kingdom. Jehoiakim was a servant of Pharaoh for many, many years. In fact, Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, was only king because of what Pharaoh had done for him. But now Pharaoh wasn't around anymore, so it didn't take Nebuchadnezzar very much to conquer Jerusalem and to put an end to this potential problem. Nebuchadnezzar was on fire. He was going to win every battle that he set out to win. After all, who was like him? Who could stand before him and his armies?

But now Judah needed to know who the real and new master was. They needed to know, and he wanted to make sure that they knew, that he was the new law in town, that he was going to be the one calling all the shots from now on. And so that's why Nebuchadnezzar does a couple of things that we learn in the first part of our lesson. The first thing is that he takes some of the vessels of the house of God back with him to Babylon and puts them in the house of his God. This would've been things like cups and pots and pans and plates, the little things made of gold and of precious metals. But the reason why he did that was for a couple of reasons. One, to really drive home this point: "My god is better than your god. My god defeated your god. And because my god defeated your god, your god is now the servant to my god. And so as a good servant, he should pay tribute. That's what all of this stuff was: tribute to my god." To really drive home his second point: "If my god rules over your god, then I also rule over you. So you'd better not cause any problems."

But Nebuchadnezzar also did something else to drive home this point, that he was now their new master. He took some of the very best of the young men of Judah and brought them back with him to grow up and to be in Babylon. He was going to make them into good Babylonians. He had a couple reasons for doing that. Because on the one hand, after giving them a good education and showing them how good it was to be part of Babylon, maybe someday they could go home and tell all of their fellow countrymen: "We shouldn't fight. Don't fight back against the king. It's so much better to be a Babylonian than anything that we could do. So let's all just get along, and let's all submit to the king of Babylon." Or if that didn't work, at the very least he could say, "Well, I'm holding them hostage. They're with me, and if you start anything, you don't want to know what's gonna happen to them." So, either way, it was a kind of insurance policy, a way of keeping Israel in line, because Nebuchadnezzar was the one in control. Nebuchadnezzar was their new master.

But Nebuchadnezzar really did want these young men to love him. He wanted them to be loyal to him. And among them were four men who we have here: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And he was going to win their loyalty in a lot of different ways. First of all, he gave them a very good education, the very best you could have in the whole world. Babylon was a power in those days that was great in science, that was great in

mathematics, that was great in literature. It was a world-class education that you could get nowhere else. And Nebuchadnezzar was giving it to them for free! Who wouldn't be loyal to someone who did that for you? That's a wonderfully generous thing to do. And then on top of that, he gave them food from his own table. "You're going to literally eat like kings as long as you're here in Babylon. That will also make you loyal to me." But above all, he gave them new names. "Daniel he calls Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he calls Meshach, and Azariah he names Abednego." These are good Babylonian names to show that they are no longer Israelites. They're Babylonians. Everything that they had had come from Nebuchadnezzar. Everything that they were had come from the King. They owed everything to him. Or at least that's what he wanted them to think.

And that really was Daniel and his companions' temptations, Christians. To think that they had received everything from the hand of the king, that they were who they were and that they had what they had because of Babylon, because of the world. And I think that's still a very real temptation for us. To define ourselves, to identify ourselves by what is around us in the world, to try to find meaning in the world and in the things of this world and to attribute what we have to the world or to our own two hands. Let me put it in a real concrete way that would really drive home this point. It's as if someone would come and say: "The government has given me everything. I have food because of the government. I have a job because of the government. I have money because of the government. All of it is coming from the government. That's why I'm taken care of. That's who I am." But that's a very worldly way of looking at things and of attributing the things of this world as making us who we are, rather than finding who we are in the things of God.

Because Christians, ultimately you are who you are and you have what you have because of God and God alone. That's the point of our text over and over again. Because it is not Nebuchadnezzar and his own power that gives him the victory over Egypt. It is the Lord who gave him victory over Egypt. It is not Nebuchadnezzar and his own power that gives him victory over Jehoiakim and over Jerusalem. The Bible explicitly says that the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. It is not Nebuchadnezzar and his power which cause the vessels to be taken to Babylon along with the young men. It was the Lord who took them there. It was the Lord who gave them into his hand. And it was not Nebuchadnezzar and his power which gave Daniel his wisdom. Daniel's wisdom and his education came from the Lord and the Lord alone. In God we have everything. In God we receive everything. And apart from the Lord we have nothing.

And that's the point of Daniel's little test in the second half of our reading, where he wants to be given only vegetables and water to drink. This is not some super secret biblical diet that will give you a lot better health. That's not the point of this text at all. The point of this text is that even though Daniel was eating a very, very poor diet, God was still going to take care of him. Because when the eunuch comes to him and says, "If you go on this diet that you want to go on--just eating vegetables and water--you're going to start looking sickly. You're gonna start looking terrible. And if you look terrible, I'm gonna look terrible. And if I look terrible, the king's going to have my head. So I don't want to do it. I don't want to be killed because of your plan." But Daniel says to the steward, "Give me just ten days. Ten days of vegetables and water. And then you can judge for yourself who is actually better." And if on this diet that was barely sufficient to

live on Daniel could survive and even thrive, it would drive home this very point, that God was in fact in control of all things. Because if Daniel had gotten worse like the steward thought that he would, that would at least show that Nebuchadnezzar was the reason why he had everything, that the world had given him all these things. But if Daniel got better, then only God through this miracle could have done it. And that's exactly what happens here. God causes Daniel to not only survive but thrive, so that he becomes better in appearance than all of the young men who were with him. God had given this health to him even on such a poor diet as this one. And Daniel also in his education, even though he had the same education, even though he had the same teachers, the same schools, the same everything as all of the other wise men in Babylon, God gave him greater learning and greater wisdom, so that he and his companions were ten times better than all the wise men of Babylon. God is the one who makes us who we are. God is the one to whom we owe all things. And when we are in his mighty hand, Christians, we need not be afraid.

So I think there's really three things we can take away from all of this tonight. And the first thing is remembering that God is the Lord of heaven and earth. That he is the one who directs all things. That he is the one who controls all things. That he is the one who commands all things. Everything in this world, including the nations of this world, are here because of the Lord. And that is one of the main messages of the whole book of Daniel, to remind us again and again and again that God is God and there is no one like him.

The second thing I think we can take away from this is that we owe everything to the Lord. You have what you have in your life because of the Lord. You are who you are because of the Lord. And you are going where you are going because of the Lord. God directs our steps everywhere we go.

But those two things together drive home the third point that we can take away from this. If God is the Lord of heaven and earth and God has given us every good thing, we can stand firm in the day of trial. When things aren't going the way that we would like and we are tempted to defile ourselves with the things of this world, we can remember that we are in God's mighty hands. And even if we don't always understand how we got to where we are or where we're going, yet we know that all things belong to God and that God will lead us wherever we go. Christians, God is in control, and God hold you in his hands, so that we can stand firm in the face of every trial. Not only the little ones like food, but also the big ones, as we will see in the coming chapters in the coming weeks.

Will you pray with me? Lord God, heavenly Father, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords who rules over all things and to whom all things belong, we pray that you would watch over us and guide us as we go throughout our daily lives, helping us to remember that you always have us in your mighty hands. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.