

May 20th, 2017

# Subversive Grace

Daniel 1:3-21

## Hitler-Jugend

In 1922, a new youth movement was founded in Europe. After the close of World War I, Europe was rebuilding, and many youth were seeking to find their bearings in a new post-war world. The momentum behind this youth movement was other worldly. By November 1923, it sought to overthrow the government in Munich, Bavaria. After it's defeat, it went underground in smaller units under assumed names. By 1926, this youth movement re-emerged into public life. By 1930, 25,000 boys made up it's membership aged 14-18. By 1933, this youth organization became the sole voice of a nation replacing the Boy Scouts and all church youth groups. They had their own books, their own songs, and their own doctrine. They even had a new identity, in German, they were called "Hitler-Jugend" that is, Hitler Youth.<sup>1</sup> Claudia Koonz in her book "The Nazi Conscience" tells us of the strategy behind this youth movement:

"Having led their band of fanatical followers from the margins to the mainstream of political power between 1929 and 1933, they thought it reasonable to assume that the momentum would continue and soon every member of the *Volk* (the Nazi word for race) would be converted. Barely a year after their takeover, however, Nazi leaders' [cheerful]<sup>2</sup> predictions vanished. Hitler consoled himself with the thought that even if many German adults withheld their total loyalty, the future belonged to Nazism because his regime would indoctrinate Germany's youth."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler\\_Youth#Doctrine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler_Youth#Doctrine) accessed May 19, 2018

<sup>2</sup> original—"ebullient"

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pg. 131

On November 6, 1933 Adolf Hitler said “When an opponent says ‘I will not come over to your side,’ I calmly say, ‘Your child belongs to us already...You will pass on. Your descendants, however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing but this new community.’”<sup>4</sup> Hitler was right, for another 12 years, Hitler-Jugend became the indoctrinational headquarters, and recruitment center for every thing Nazi, dominating all of Germany until it’s undoing in 1945.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Youth**

Hitler understood how to play the long game. That’s what we see Nebuchadnezzar doing in our passage. King Neb had already “won” the short game. He is now turning to the long game. Swords and arrows had defeated Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Now Neb is going to change his tactics by creating his own youth program—Nebuchadnezzar youth. He takes the best and brightest of Judah’s upper class, youths, 14-15 years old, and seeks to take Jerusalem out of their hearts forever. His strategy was the same as Hitler’s give them a new education, with a new appetite, and with a new identity.

### **American Youth**

Dear congregation, this is the same strategy that you daily face, especially in the West. Our persecuted brothers and sisters around the globe are often being killed through cruelty, but here in the West the church is being killed through comfort. The world system is playing the long game with you. The short game is bullets and bombs. The long game is wealth and welfare. Recall what Jesus said about the seed that fell among the thorns. “the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no grain...they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (**Mark 4:18-19**). Puritan

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> This is of course from his perspective—Daniel 4:30; but we know Who handed Jerusalem over to him—Daniel 1:2.

Thomas Brooks in his classic book *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* said "Where one thousand are destroyed by the world's frowns, ten thousand are destroyed by the world's smiles. The world is siren-like, it sings to us and it sinks us...all the glory of this world is but sweet poison, that will endanger us, if they do not eternally destroy us."<sup>6</sup>

### **Subversive Grace**

Daniel resolved not to taste of this sweet poison. There were other youths who did. Some who went into Babylon never returned to Jerusalem when God released them from captivity. They had grown to comfortable. They changed their citizenship. The question is: how did Daniel overcome? How will you overcome?

First, Daniel resolved in his heart not be seduced by this world. We argued last week that God sovereignly controls and appoints everything event on planet earth. Yet this does not relieve you of your duty to take up your cross and follow Jesus Christ. Daniel resolved to follow the Lord. Others did not. Secondly, and ultimately it is God's grace that is the undertow of this entire chapter. Three times, we see that God is giving grace for His people to overcome. Look with me.

**Daniel 1:2** "And the Lord *gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand,"

**Daniel 1:9** "And God *gave* Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,"

**Daniel 1:17** "As for these four youths, God *gave* them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom,"

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<sup>6</sup> "Ah! how many [of those who once confessed Christ] for a time followed hard after God...till the devil hath set before them the world in all its beauty and bravery, which hath so bewitched their souls that they have grown to have low thoughts of holy things, and then to be cold in their affections to holy things, and then to slight them, and at last [with the rich young man in the Gospel] to turn their backs upon them... The beauty of the world foils a Christian more than the strength; the flattering sunshine more than the blustering storm. In storms we keep our garments close about us." Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg. 102-103

God gave. God gave. God gave. It's God's grace, His subversive grace, that is undermining the Nebuchadnezzar youth. That's how Daniel overcame. And that is the only way you will overcome.

☆ God's Silent Grace

☆ God's Subversive Grace

☆ God's Sustaining Grace<sup>7</sup>

### *The Big Idea...*

By God's grace you will overcome the seduction of this world, therefore be resolved to follow Him no matter what sorrow it gives you

## I. God's Silent Grace (v.3-7)

### How did we get here?

So here we are in Babylon. It's 605 b.c. The Jews had enjoyed being an independent nation since God brought them out of Egypt through Moses. They had endured hundreds of years of warfare, but now judgment has come. Why? God had warned them in **Deuteronomy 28:47** that this captivity would come "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart," Above all things God wants you to be glad in Him. That's the essence of obedience. As we saw last week "God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy [in Him]."<sup>8</sup>

We also discovered that Babylon and Jerusalem are not merely geographical locations, they are symbolic representations of all of humanity.

<sup>7</sup> Much help here is seeing this from Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 30-36

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Taylor, quoted in John Piper's *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 9

Jerusalem represents the city of God—those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; and Babylon represents the city of man—everyone else.<sup>9</sup> There is perpetual warfare between these two cities (**Gen. 3:15**). That’s the story underneath the story as we read this passage.

### **How To Brainwash Friends and Alienate People**

At this point we don’t know a lot about Daniel or his three friends. We know that they are teenagers. In **v.4**, King Nebuchadnezzar commanded that out of his captives, *youths* be brought—not children, or adults, but young men—teenagers. And we know from **v.3** that these teenagers belonged to one of two classes—either the royal family itself or to nobility.<sup>10</sup> These were kids who were privileged. And these kids had to be good looking and smart thinking (**v.4**). Neb had one main goal with these kids: to systematically remove every vestige of Israel and Israel’s God from their heads, hearts and hands. If he could do that, well then the rest of the Jews would eventually follow. His strategy had three steps: he would 1) provide them a new education, 2) prompt them to a new appetite, and 3) produce in them a new identity.

#### **1. Provide them a new education**

At the end of **v.4** we read that these young men would be taught “the literature and language of the Chaldeans.” In God’s economy education is highly prized. Education is nothing less than looking at all the glories of God in all the different disciplines (**Psalm 111:2**). Both Moses and Joseph were educated in the worldly systems of Egypt. There would be much that these youths would

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<sup>9</sup> “These were the companions with whom I walked the streets of Babylon. I wallowed in its mire as if it were made of spices and precious ointments, and to fix me all the faster in the very depths of sin the unseen enemy trod me underfoot and enticed me to himself, because I was easy prey for his seductions. For even my mother, who by now had escaped from the centre of Babylon..still loitered in its outskirts” Augustine, *Confessions*, (London, England,: Penguin Books, 1961), II.III

<sup>10</sup> A fulfillment of what was said to King Hezekiah in Isaiah 39:7 “And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Two questions that linger in my mind are 1) Was Daniel a eunuch? and 2) Was Daniel of the royal family itself, i.e. of David’s line?

gain from this education. The question is, what was Nebuchadnezzar aiming at? Indoctrination. He wanted these youths to stop thinking like citizens of the city of God—of Jerusalem, and start thinking like citizens of the city of man—of Babylon. The world has an entirely different standard of right and wrong.<sup>11</sup> Even in some instances where there is seeming agreement, underneath the surface there is a different universe. Take for instance murder. In most cases the world agrees with God’s people that murder is wrong. But can you imagine sitting in the Ada County courtroom downtown during a murder trial, the judge rules on the case guilty. And then inexplicably, he tells the defendant “Sir, what you have done against your fellow man is notoriously evil, but the real crime, the true crime is that you robbed the world of an image of God. Your real crime is that you have sinned against God<sup>12</sup> and His great glory by destroying a person made in His likeness.” Can you imagine how shocked the courtroom would be to hear that? The world defines what is right and wrong in terms of the individual’s preferences or at best in terms of how it affects society. But the Christian sees what is right and wrong in terms of God and His glory. Evil is anything that obscures or ignores or outright despises God and His Christ. God is anything that displays the greatness of God for who He is.

Neb’s brainwashing program included a whole curriculum of education that was gutted of God.<sup>13</sup> Babylonian education simply ignored the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That’s step one, provide a new education.

## 2. Prompt them to a new appetite

Look at v.5 “The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank.” This was a royal meal! These young men were given the very food that the most powerful man in the world was

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<sup>11</sup> cf. J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. 277-278

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 51:4

<sup>13</sup> As a supplement to this idea, the dictum “whoever controls the language controls the debate” underlined Neb’s policy. See <https://godfatherpolitics.com/whoever-controls-the-language-controls-the-debate/> accessed May 19, 2018

eating. The tastiest delicacies, and wine. What prisoners are treated so well? That is exactly the point. King Neb wanted these boys to see that now *he* was the one from whom all blessings flow. Not Yahweh. I imagine Nebuchadnezzar knew that God had already given the Jews a particular diet they were to follow. Certainly Antiochus Epiphanes the evil king that Daniel prophesied about knew of their diet, when he commanded them to eat pig's flesh which began the Maccabean revolt in 167 b.c.<sup>14</sup> Regardless, Neb was providing a new exquisite diet for these captives. That's step two, prompt a new appetite.

### 3. Produce in them a new identity

Look at v.6-7 “Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names” The significance of these name changes cannot be overemphasized. It is a complete identity reversal. Daniel's name which means “God is my judge”<sup>15</sup> was changed to Belteshazzar which means “Bel's prince”<sup>16</sup>—Bel was another name for the Babylonian god Marduk.<sup>17</sup> Hananiah's name which means “The Lord is gracious” was changed to Shadrach which means “The command of Aku” who was the moon god of Babylon.<sup>18</sup> Mishael's name means “Who is what God is” was changed to Meshach which is another reference to Aku. Finally Azariah's name “The Lord is a helper” was changed to Abednego which means “a friend of Nebo”, Nebo being the god that Nebuchadnezzar was named after. The effect of re-naming all of these youths was that God's name was obliterated from their vocabulary. That's step three, prompt a new identity. God was now removed from their education, from their diet, and from their very names.

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<sup>14</sup> Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Antiochus-Epiphanes.html> accessed May 19, 2018

<sup>15</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 9

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H1095&t=KJV> accessed May 19, 2018

<sup>17</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bel\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bel_(mythology)) accessed May 19, 2018

<sup>18</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 30

## God's Silent Grace

The devastation of this strategy cannot be overestimated.<sup>19</sup> If Hitler wasn't stopped by the Allied Forces, the world would belong to his youth program. Neb's plan here was flawless. This is how you effectively erase God from the hearts and minds of a whole generation. But the dominant verse in this section is not what Nebuchadnezzar is doing. Nebuchadnezzar is loud and out front. But God is graciously working silently behind the scenes. **v.2** tells us "And the Lord *gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand." Which means God is still in control. Just because his grace is silent doesn't mean it's not active. Beloved this verse is the verse that always precedes all of your trials. Maybe you feel God to be silent right now. 'God where are you?' Everything seems to be conspiring against you. Hold on. This is not the end of the story.

## II. God's Subversive Grace (v.8-16)

### The Daniel Diet

Please look with me at **v.8** "But Daniel *resolved* that he would not *defile* himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to *defile* himself." Commentators do not

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout history there has been a repeated attempt to wipe the city of God off the face of the earth. It was done when Pharaoh drowned the baby Jewish boys in Egypt (Exodus 1:16). It was done when Haman persuaded King Ahasuerus to decree death against the Jews (Esther 3:11). It was done when the Jews and Herod, and the Gentiles and Pontius Pilate crucified the Lord of glory (Acts 4:27-28).

agree why Daniel believed this food would have defiled him.<sup>20</sup> So I'll give you my opinion and you can judge for yourself.

I think Daniel is abstaining from the king's food because He saw to the *heart* of the dietary laws that God prescribed. The dietary laws didn't exist health reasons as some suppose. We know this because Jesus declared all foods clean (**Mark 7:19**).<sup>21</sup> No God prescribed Israel's diet to point to something much deeper. Please turn with me to **Leviticus 20:25-26**. The main chapter for dietary laws is found in **Leviticus 11**, but here God provides a wonderful ground for why these laws exist. Beginning in **v.25** "You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. [26] You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."

### God uses food to make us think about him

What's going on here? God is using food to make us think about Him. He told the Jews "don't eat *these* things because I want *you* to be holy because I am holy." Holiness here means "set apart." Set apart from what? Common things. **Leviticus 10:10** says "You are to distinguish between the *holy* and the *common*, and between the unclean and the clean," **The antithesis of holy is not**

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<sup>20</sup> I think Dale Davis provides a good synopsis: "What was wrong with the royal food allotment? Some think the problem was *dietary*—food from the royal table likely included meats, for example, that were off limits ('unclean') for Israelites (Lev. 11:1-23). This, however, does not explain Daniel's rejection of the wine. [I (Josh) would answer that there might be another reason for the rejection of the wine—in other words, a combination of this option (covering the meats, cf. Leviticus 3:17 & Ezekiel 4:13) and Davis's defensive view (covering the wines, pg. 32)] Some think the objection was (what we would call) *religious*—the food may have been offered to idols before being taken to the king's table. But what would guarantee that the vegetables Daniel requested (12) had not also been part of an idol offering? Still others hold the difficulty was *symbolic*—sharing in the king's food was a token of dependence on the king and a tacit sign of loyalty to him. But even Daniel's alternative diet would have been 'government issue'; it would have been impossible to avoid indications of dependence." Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 31-32

<sup>21</sup> He even commanded Peter to eat such foods in a vision—Acts 10:9ff

**wicked, it is common.** God is saying ‘you are no longer a common people’ (v. 26) “I...have *separated* you from the peoples, that you should be *mine*.” I am not common. I am unworldly. I am unlike anything you have ever known. I want your diet to reflect that. I want you to be *uncommon* in your diet, because I not a common thing.’<sup>22</sup> When you read the OT, you see these food laws, and you think, ‘man this is so strange.’ Why would God command such things? The food laws are exceedingly strange to modern ears. They are meant to be. They are meant to make us think: what kind of a God would command such a things as these? Indeed. What kind of God is this?

### **The crisis of the universe**

This is why I believe Daniel is standing his ground. He sees something we don’t see. I mean look at Daniel 1 as a whole. The crisis in this chapter is over food and wine. Why is this a crisis to Daniel? Because he sees the true crisis of humanity. **Anything that pulls your heart away from the Lord God is a crisis.** It is *the* crisis. The supreme good of the universe is being drawn into the loving embrace of God almighty. **Psalm 27:4** “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” That is the supreme good of the universe. The supreme evil of the universe is anything that separates you from Him. **Psalm 16:2** “I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have *no* good apart from you.”

At every turn Daniel was being stripped of God. He couldn’t worship at the temple. He couldn’t get his education in the Torah. He couldn’t even control what his new masters called him. But he thought, in this one thing, in my diet, I am resolved. God will be my God in what I eat.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ultimately*, these dietary laws pointed to the unworldly and uncommon Savior Jesus Christ (**Col. 2:16-17**). *Ultimately*, we know that abstaining from certain foods do not create heart holiness. **Romans 14:17** was true in Daniel’s time just as it is true now “ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

## Holiness is the most dangerous lifestyle in this world

Holiness is the most dangerous lifestyle this world affords. Because our culture has their own laws regarding what is unclean. Every culture does. The ancient Egyptians in Joseph's time believe it was "unclean" to be a shepherd (Genesis 46:34).<sup>23</sup> In our time, Propositional truth claims like "Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him." is an "unclean" thing to our culture. Any action that doesn't celebrate personal autonomy is punished as an "unclean" thing—which is why Colorado baker Jack Phillips was forced to go to the Supreme Court. They will decide if his "uncleaness" against personal autonomy is enough to punish him. You see anything that runs contrary to the world's standard of right and wrong, of clean and unclean is dangerous. In other words holiness is the most dangerous lifestyle in this world. We are going to see this over and over again in Daniel. Holiness is what caused the three Hebrew boys to be thrown into the fiery furnace. Holiness is what caused Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den. And holiness is dangerous here. When Daniel asks the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself (v.8), the man response in v.10 "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."

## God's Subversive Grace

And really why should this chief eunuch give a rip to Daniel's request? As far as he is concerned, Marduk the Babylonian god is in charge, not Yahweh. This would be like asking Donald Trump to appoint Hillary Clinton to be the new secretary of state. It's not going to happen. The king has commanded your diet, and that's that. Period. But v.9 is what determines Daniel's outcome. Please look with me at it. "And *God gave Daniel favor* and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs," God's grace is subversive. Meaning, it undermines,

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<sup>23</sup> "you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

and overthrows all of man's intentions to resist Him.<sup>24</sup> There is no earthly reason why anyone in Neb's palace should listen to a 14 year old boy making a special request for food. But God's grace subverted all earthly reason.

Last week I spoke about how we as evangelicals often under-define sovereignty. Many times when people call God sovereign, they only mean that He is King, *not* that He is in control. The same thing is true about God's grace. Evangelicalism as a whole radically *under-defines* what grace *does*. Grace is *not* that thing that may or may not work. Grace is not cheap sentimentalism. It's *not* as if we hope God's grace works, but are not confident that it will. That is not how grace works. Grace always works. Grace is invincible Divine favor. There is not one place in the Bible where God gave grace and His desired end did not invincibly come to pass. Paul said in **1 Cor. 15:10-11** "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

### **Veggie Tales**

When God gave Daniel favor and compassion (v.9), it is what determined the rest of the story.<sup>25</sup> So Daniel goes to the steward, the underling of the chief eunuch, and pleads very humbly (grace had changed him as well). He says in v. **12** "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. [13] Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to

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<sup>24</sup> SUBVERT', verb transitive [Latin subverto; sub and verito, to turn.]

1. To overthrow from the foundation; to overturn; to ruin utterly. The northern nations of Europe subverted the Roman empire. He is the worst enemy of man, who endeavors to subvert the christian religion. The elevation of corrupt men to office will slowly, but surely, subvert a republican government. This would subvert the principles of all knowledge.

2. To corrupt; to confound; to pervert the mind, and turn it from the truth. 2 Timothy 2:14. (Webster's 1828)

<sup>25</sup> This is exactly what King Solomon prayed for when he dedicated the temple, foreseeing a time when God's people would sin against Him and be brought under the thumb of a foreign people. 1 Kings 8:50 "and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them"

what you see.” Daniel was leaving the results in God’s hands. What happens? **v.14** “So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. [15] At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. [16] So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.” There’s several miracles here. First is the miracle that teenage boys refused a meal of the finest meats and wines for a tray of veggies. Second is the miracle that these boys became fatter from veggies. “Normally people don’t get fat on a simple diet of fruit and vegetables.”<sup>26</sup> Third is the miracle that this only took ten days. To be able to see such results in so short of time screams Divine intervention. Furthermore, what it proves is that God’s subversive grace is what’s chiefly on display here. Not Daniel’s faithfulness. Daniel is not a book that says ‘Hey pull yourself up like Daniel, and everything will be ok.’ No it’s a book that says ‘Behold the grace of God that causes teenagers to defy the city of man and defend the city of God.’ That’s God’s subversive grace.

### III. God’s Sustaining Grace (v.17-21)

#### God sustains the Nebuchadnezzar youth

We’ve seen two times thus far that “God gave.” **v.2** “the Lord *gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand,” and in **v.9** “And God *gave* Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs” Now we see the third God gave. **v.17** “As for these four youths, God *gave* them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”

Now remember King Neb’s three step strategy. **First**, he provided them a new education. **Secondly**, he prompted them to a new appetite. **Thirdly**, he produced in them a new identity.

Yet in each of these cases God works directly against his plan. **First**, after three years of this Babylonian education, these teenagers exceeded all the other

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<sup>26</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 14

young men, but *not* because of Babylonian reprogramming. No. God is the one who *gave* them supernatural learning and supernatural wisdom (v.17) **Second**, Daniel and his three friends did not succumb to the defilement of eating the king's exquisite foods. They retained the uncommon diet of God's people because God gave them favor (v.9) **Third**, Daniel did not lose his identity. Although Daniel's three friends are called by the Babylonian names in chapter three, Daniel essentially remains Daniel. Neb's successor calls him Daniel in chapter five, as well as King Darius in chapter six. Neb was not in control of this captivity, God is the one who gave them over (v.2), and consequently God remains in control.

### **From zero to hero**

This chapter ends with these youths being brought before the king at the end of the three years. v.19 says "And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. [20] And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom." This is quite remarkable. As Dale Davis says here "If we step back and look at all of Daniel 1, we discover an irony that is almost amusing. At the beginning of the story we find captives from a subjugated kingdom (3-4), but these very captives stand at the head of the palace royal service corps."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 35 And this means that God was using them not only to help protect the Jews, but also to be a blessing to the Babylonians. God did not use His grace to remove them from the world. Jesus specifically prays for His people in **John 17:15** "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." The solution to the world's seduction is not retreat to the Christian ghetto. Nor is it to indulge in Babylonian gluttony. The solution is grace. The solution is knowing that God remains on the throne. As the old hymn goes:  
 God is still on the throne, And He will remember His own;  
 Tho' trials may press us and burdens distress us, He never will leave us alone;  
 God is still on the throne, He never forsaketh His own;  
 His promise is true, He will not forget you,  
 God is still on the throne.

Source: <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/g/i/s/gisonth.htm> accessed May 19, 2018

## Back to the Future

And this truth is emphasize by how chapter one ends. Look with me at **v. 21** “And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.” Why is this relevant? Because Cyrus was the King of Persia whom God promised in Isaiah 45 that he would bring back the Jews to Jerusalem. We find his story in Ezra chapter one. **v.21** is forecasting 70 years in the future. Daniel is over eighty years old. He survived the captivity. Babylon didn’t. It was defeated by another kingdom. And then that kingdom was defeated by another kingdom, and so forth. In **v.21** we see God’s sustaining grace.

## The Church will stand over the BBC’s grave one day

“Alistair Begg once told the story of Lord Reith, the first director of the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corp. He was a tall man, six feet six, an intimidating figure who had big bushy eyebrows that he liked to peer through as he looked at you. But early in his tenure as director, he saw some of his employees huddled together, whispering about something. Later that day Reith called one of them to his office and asked what the group had been discussing. The young man said, “Oh, we were talking about how to produce a radio program that will be a fitting burial for the Christian faith. It’s time for that nonsense to be put to rest.” Standing up and towering over the young man, a red-faced John Reith looked through bushy eyebrows and growled, “The church will stand over the BBC’s grave one day!”<sup>28</sup>

Daniel stood not only over Nebuchadnezzar’s grave, but Babylon’s grave. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18** “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” God’s grace is sustaining. God’s grace has staying power. It will outlast all the Hitler’s all the Nebuchadnezzar’s, every bullet or banquet that the world can throw at us.

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<sup>28</sup> Source: <http://www.thetimesnews.com/article/20150410/Business/304109819> accessed May 19, 2018

# Application

## Our Doctrine: The American Captivity of the Church

When Martin Luther was trying to free the church from the clutches of Rome in the 16th century, he wrote a book called “The Babylonian Captivity of the church.” He wasn’t referencing the Babylonian Captivity in Daniel’s day, but rather how Babylon (Rome) was holding the church in captivity through its false worship of God specifically in the seven sacraments. What’s intriguing about Luther’s point is that there is a captivity of the church in every age. There is an American Captivity of the Church. And it really follows the three-step strategy that Nebuchadnezzar used on the Jews.

First, the Babylonian strategy of **providing a new education** is seen whenever Christian doctrine is attacked or simply ignored. In his book *The Courage to Be Protestant*, David Wells calls this new type of Christianity, Christianity Lite. He says “What catches our attention—an our breath—are the vast numbers of Christian misfires. Almost half of America is claiming to be born again, but fewer than one in ten has even the foggiest notion of what it means to be a disciple of Christ in biblical terms.”<sup>29</sup> The latest Ligonier Ministries poll found that 64% of evangelicals believe that “God accepts the worship of Christians, Jews, and Muslims” which prompted Christianity Today to say that “Most American evangelicals hold views condemned as heretical by some of the most important councils of the early church.”<sup>30</sup> American Christianity has received a Babylonian education. At many points, she is anti-intellectual and anti-doctrinal.

Second, the Babylonian strategy of **prompting a new appetite** is felt in Neil Postman’s analysis of our culture in his book *Amusing Ourselves To Death*. In

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<sup>29</sup> David F. Wells, *The Courage To Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today’s World*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), pg. 61

<sup>30</sup> Source: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october-web-only/new-poll-finds-evangelicals-favorite-heresies.html> Accessed May 19, 2018

it he compared two apocalyptic visions of the future: George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave new world. This is what Postman said.

“What **Orwell** feared were those who would ban books. What **Huxley** feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. **Orwell** feared those who would deprive us of information. **Huxley** feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. **Orwell** feared that the truth would be concealed from us. **Huxley** feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. **Orwell** feared we would become a captive culture. **Huxley** feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As **Huxley** remarked in Brave New World Revisited, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In 1984, **Orwell** added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, **Orwell** feared that what we fear will ruin us. **Huxley** feared that what we desire will ruin us.”<sup>31</sup>

I don't know how any Christian living in our time who can't immediately resonate with Postman's analysis. Sadly, at too many points, the American church has indeed been given a new appetite.

Third, the Babylonian strategy of **producing a new identity** is felt in our church's drift to a radical individualism. William Donnelly has called our generation “the Autonomy Generation.”<sup>32</sup> No longer do we think in terms of a community of believers. We live in the age of personal autonomy. And this is not merely a problem “out there” it's a problem “in here.” Listen to what David Wells says on this point: “The fact is that we are living in a time of the most extraordinary paradoxes. Never have we had so much in our society and yet

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<sup>31</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, 20th Anniversary Edition*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2005), pg. xix-xx

<sup>32</sup> David F. Wells, *The Courage To Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), pg. 81

never have people had so little. Never have we had more affluence, despite some economic ups and downs, and yet seldom have we felt so empty. We have brilliant technology but disconnected, fragmented families. Never has so much talk filled the air through the radio, television, and the Internet, and yet never before has so much talk been left unheard. We are connected to everyone, potentially in every place, and yet never have we felt so alone...<sup>33</sup> I feel the truth of what Wells is saying in my own heart. We are broken like this. Large parts of the church, this church, my heart, you, have adopted the new identity of radical individualism, and we are suffering massive loneliness as a result. That's **our doctrine**: The American Captivity of the Church.

## Our Delight: God gave us Someone better than Daniel

The modern church is pretty discouraging sometimes. But so was the church in Daniel's day. The reason why is because it's made up of people like you and me. You see, if we are honest, we are more like the other youths who ate the king's food and less like Daniel and his three friends. The good news of Daniel is *not*, "If you behave like Daniel, then things will work out." You know you are *not* like Daniel. The good news of Daniel is *not* that God works for you if prove yourself undefiled.

The good news is that we have an undefiled Savior who delivers those who have been seduced and defiled by sin. The good news is that God's giving didn't begin with Daniel nor end with Daniel. In our passage, God *gave* three times. God *gave* Jerusalem over to Babylon, showing that He was King. God *gave* Daniel favor and compassionate in the sight of his captors. God *gave* Daniel and his friends supernatural wisdom and understanding. All this pointed to the ultimate *gave*. "For God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**)

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<sup>33</sup> "If the church cannot become the place where all these issues are given their deepest and truest treatment, then the church will have lost its reason to exist." *ibid*, pg. 33

Daniel is a picture of Jesus' faithfulness, not yours. Daniel had to leave Jerusalem. Jesus had to leave Heaven. Daniel came into Babylon and took on new responsibilities in a pagan court. Jesus came into this world and took on human flesh. Daniel obeyed God's will though it may have cost him his life. Jesus did the Father's will and it did cost him his life. Daniel as a result of his obedience rose to a place of great authority. Jesus as the result of his was exalted to the very right hand of God where He now sits until He comes back to bring us to glory.

And the greatest description that we learn about Daniel in this book is made very clear, because it has been repeated for us three times.

**Daniel 9:23** "you are greatly loved."

**Daniel 10:11** "O Daniel, man greatly loved"

**Daniel 10:23** "O man greatly loved,"

Daniel succeeded in Babylon, not because He was exceptionally brave, but because He was exceptionally loved. God's grace had overcome his sin. That's the good news beloved. That although you have been unfaithful and defiled and compromised and seduced more than you would or could ever admit out loud, you are more loved and accepted and precious in His sight than you can or will ever know. Belonging to Jesus means that He has been faithful for you in your stead, and that He was punished for your unfaithfulness.<sup>34</sup> Jesus is the hero of Daniel.

If you are not a Christian, you are still a captive. I don't have to prove this to you. You feel your captivity. You feel your guilty conscience. You feel the truth behind this message. You deserve punishment because you have only ever disobeyed God. You need Somebody who will deliver you. That somebody is

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<sup>34</sup> And that means that no enemy can or will ever overcome you. As Lloyd-Jones said "There are things that bombs cannot smash, and tanks cannot crush. There are things beyond the range of the most powerful gun...No man can touch your soul and no man can kill your soul." Iain Murray, *D.M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 27

Jesus Christ. He calls out this morning “Come to Me. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” Isn't that the kind of Savior you want? Isn't that the kind of Savior you need? One that says “I will never cast you out?” Hope in Him. He's not waiting for you to prove yourself. You've already shown that you can't Trust that He is enough. That's **our delight**: God gave us Someone better than Daniel

Our Duty: Be resolved by God's grace not to be a captive

Beloved, because the gospel holds those two truths together 1) that you just as unrighteous as the devil, but 2) just as loved as Jesus Christ, you are now free to no longer be a captive in this culture. Those three things that hold American evangelicalism captive don't have to hold you captive. **First**, be resolved not to be reprogrammed by new education policy of the world that tells you doctrine doesn't matter. Jesus died because doctrine matters (**Matthew 26:65**). And Jesus tells us that doctrine is for our joy. He said in **John 17:13** “these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

**Second**, be resolved not to take on the appetite that the world offers by amusing yourself to death. If you spend your weeks indulging in endless entertaining, gorging yourself on delicacies that the world offers, ask yourself: do you feel fatter in your soul? Do you feel satisfied? Did God design you to live in such a way? Jesus has already freed you not to be a slave to such things. Your soul is a greatest thing in God's creation. It's not meant to be spent on such trifles. It's meant to be spent on pursuing the King. Paul says in **Phil. 1:22** “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.”

**Third**, be resolved not to take on the identity that the world offers of radical individualism. Jesus bought you *not* so that you could remain an isolated individual, but so that you could be part of the body of Christ. Let God's grace show you a better way. You need the body, and the body needs you. Choosing to isolate, choosing to just do your own thing, is not how Jesus calls you to love the church. Don't demand to be free like the world. You already are free in

Christ. Paul says in **Galatians 5:13** “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” That is **our duty**: be resolved by God’s grace not to be a captive.