

Lemons or Lemonade 2

The wise little phrase “If life deals you lemons, make lemonade” has been around ever since I can remember. I don’t know who thought of it or particularly why but it does have a strong ring of biblical truth to it. The necessity of finding, maintaining, and expressing joy through times of suffering and trials is expressed throughout the bible.

James- “Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials.”

17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will triumph in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! **H**ab 3:17-18 (HCSB)

40 After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. ⁴¹ Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the name. **A**cts 5:40-41 (HCSB)

33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times you were companions of those who were treated that way. ³⁴ For you sympathized with the prisoners and accepted with joy the confiscation

of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves have a better and enduring possession. Heb 10:33-34 (HCSB)

¹² Dear friends, when the fiery ordeal arises among you to test you, don't be surprised by it, as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah rejoice, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory. ¹ Peter 4:12-13 (HCSB)

Daniel was dealt his first huge bag of lemons at a very young age. When he was still a boy or young teenager living in the land of Judah, probably his parents and most of the adults in Judah had turned away from God, particularly in the forms of idolatry and immorality. This left the whole region void of the protection and blessings of God and vulnerable to her many enemies.

After decades of God's messengers the prophets pleading with the people of Judah to repent, God allowed the Babylonian army under the rule of king Nebuchadnezzar to invade and conquer the land of Judah. Many Israelites were killed, some scattered to the hills and caves, and some, particularly the young, were carried back to Babylon as slaves, among whom were four boys named Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel. Somehow through all that and more, Daniel managed to find and keep his faith in the one true God.

What can we learn from Daniel that would help us to more effectively and appropriately deal with conflict and potentially destructive issues that we face in life, particularly in relation to

right now in our times of personal, as well national and international turmoil?

Daniel's **Recipe for Lemonade**

Obey God (so young, poor example)

8 Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief official not to defile himself. **9** God had granted Daniel favor and compassion from the chief official, **10** yet he said to Daniel, "My lord the king assigned your food and drink. I'm afraid [of what would happen] if he saw your faces looking thinner than those of the other young men your age. You would endanger my life with the king." **11** So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief official had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** "Please test your servants for 10 days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." **14** He agreed with them in this matter and tested them for 10 days. **15** At the end of 10 days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. **16** So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷ God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. ¹⁸ At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to serve in the king's court. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them 10 times better than all the diviner-priests and mediums in his entire kingdom. ²¹ Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Dan 1:8-21 (HCSB)

It would probably seem insignificant to us to eat a diet that we know, even according to God's Word, is not healthy for us because we do it all the time and we pay the price in our health and energy for those choices. But this kid Daniel, even when it came down to what foods he put in his mouth, chose to obey God. So what was the big deal about eating the king's greasy, fatty donuts, fried chicken, cheeseburgers, and french fries and drinking his booze?

Daniel knew what even the king of Babylon did not know. He knew, in spite of his nation's rebellion against God, what God's dietary laws were, as stated in Leviticus, so he chose to risk his life by respectfully rejecting the king's food and obeying God instead.

Was it really that big of a deal that Daniel eat some foods that were forbidden? Wouldn't Daniel have survived, as we do,

eating the king's food? It wasn't just about the food. Yes, God in His infinite power and wisdom knew exactly which plants and animals he put on earth would be best for keeping his people strong and healthy and He included this information in the laws He gave Moses, but it was also about the simple act of obedience. If God said it, whether he liked it, understood it, or agreed with it or not, Daniel was, and we would be, wise to obey What God said.

Daniel chose to obey God, and because he chose to obey God, the benefits gained from his obedience produced what was no doubt supernatural outcome. And, in addition to extraordinary looks and health, God granted Daniel the ability to understand visions and dreams and ten times the wisdom and understanding of all the others who were being or had been trained for similar duties. This caused Daniel and his three friends to rise quickly to positions of power and influence in Babylon, a heathen nation. All this began and happened because Daniel and his friends simply chose to obey God.

Be humble, give God glory

Nebuchanezzar had a dream which he could not remember and thus the meaning alluded him. He had called all the sorcerers, magicians, and wise guys he had at his disposal. None of them could even tell the king any details of the dream much less what it meant. The king in his fury gave the command that all the wise guys be executed. Daniel heard about it....

14 Then Daniel responded with tact and discretion to Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, who had gone out to execute the wise men of Babylon.^{**15**} He asked

Arioch, the king's officer, "Why is the decree from the king so harsh?" Then Arioch explained the situation to Daniel. ¹⁶ So Daniel went and asked the king to give him some time, so that he could give the king the interpretation. ¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and told his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah about the matter, ¹⁸ [urging] them to ask the God of heaven for mercy concerning this mystery, so Daniel and his friends would not be killed with the rest of Babylon's wise men. ¹⁹ The mystery was then revealed to Daniel in a vision at night, and Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and declared: May the name of God be praised forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ He changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. ²² He reveals the deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him. ²³ I offer thanks and praise to You, God of my fathers, because You have given me wisdom and power. And now You have let me know what we asked of You, for You have let us know the king's mystery.

Dan 2:14-23 (HCSB)

I could see it happening so easily for Daniel or any of us. We start seeing some daylight. Life finally gives us a cool, tall glass of fresh squeezed, perfectly sweetened, iced to perfection lemonade, and we started getting the self-reliant, I did this myself, big head.

Please learn from Daniel. From the prayer meeting with his three friends, to the revelation of the dream and its interpretation, to the presentation of it all to Nebuchadnezzar, and his continued rise in power and influence, Daniel remained humble, respectful, and most of all gave every bit of the thanks and glory to God. And not only that, he used the whole episode to make God known to a very ungodly, unbelieving king. How do I know that?

²⁷ Daniel answered the king: "No wise man, medium, diviner-priest, or astrologer is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about. ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days. ¹

Dan 2:27-28 (HCSB)

Daniel could have taken all the credit and glory for himself but he gave it to God and God blessed him for it. The dream itself was a vision of world-wide significance which would be fulfilled in the near and distant future. The final element of that vision is being fulfilled before our very eyes today regarding the end times and the return of Christ. And Daniel remained humble...

Be Faithful (publicly)

Remember Joseph had, through much personal conflict and suffering, risen to second command in all of Egypt. Daniel, though a slave through the spoils of war, rose to a position of similar authority in Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar. But the kingdom of Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persians

and all the Hebrew slaves were killed or imprisoned, right? No, Daniel amazingly rose up again to a place of prominence in the Medo-Persian government particularly under the rule of king Darius. In fact Darius was about to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom until his opponents tricked Darius into signing a decree declaring that “for 30 days, anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions’ den.” When Daniel heard about the edict he went into a panic then fell into deep depression. No!

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upper room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel petitioning and imploring his God. ¹² So they approached the king and asked about his edict: “Didn’t you sign an edict that for 30 days any man who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions’ den?” **D**an 6:10-12 (HCSB)

What was Daniel thinking? Why didn’t he just close the windows? He could still face Jerusalem. He could still pray and give thanks to God three times a day.... Daniel obviously chose to not let any outside circumstance, even the threat of his life, interrupt his faithful worship and service to God. He chose to be publicly faithful to God in spite of his fellow governors who hated him, in spite of their plot to bring him down, and in spite of the law passed making it illegal to worship God.

Daniel, through the many periods of conflict, testing, and threats of his life, never wavered in his faith or faithfulness to God. In fact, remember that it was his faithfulness to God which led to his ability to interpret dreams, the development of great wisdom and knowledge, and to grow in favor of two of the powerful kings of ancient history- Nebuchadnezzar and Darius who were both heathen but both grew to at the very least highly respect the God of Daniel if not believe.