

## Sermon – 24/06/2007 am

### A Re-education Programme

Study Text: Daniel 1:3-7

To change a person's mindset, to change the way a person thinks, is not easy. When Chairman Mao swept to power in China in 1949 He sought to impose his new way on thinking on the whole population. He had to erase any thoughts about God, and fill the people's minds with humanistic thoughts. Millions were taken from their homes and placed in re-education or brainwashing camps. Dislocation was the first strategy. Next he imposed a vigorous physical routine, and then classes in which the thoughts of Chairman Mao (the 'little red book') were drummed into people day and night.

As we might expect younger people were more vulnerable to this brainwashing. Older people were slower to learn or just obstinate. Millions met their death under this re-education programme. In the new China, in communist China, men and women had to think and live like true comrades. Daniel and his friends were selected for a re-education programme by the King of Babylon at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Not all re-education programmes are as violent as that of Chairman Mao, or as rigorous. The same objective can be achieved in more subtle ways. The teaching of Darwinian evolution in schools has served to brainwash a whole generation, and more. Those who imposed this programme are surprised when they meet educated young people who do not believe in their theory. And then there is Hollywood. The pagan producers have generally succeeded in lowering the moral standards of our society, this new world in which we live.

In capturing Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar helped himself to the treasures in the temple, and also took with him a few of the young Jewish boys of the city. They were young royals and nobles. What did he intend to do with these boys? They were handsome young fellows. In those days it was thought that physical prowess went hand in hand with mental prowess. Also in those days only the elite got an education.

So these boys were selected for a re-education programme. Nebuchadnezzar was going to make them into new men, men fit to serve their new king. He was going to make them into Babylonians. He wanted them to forget their homes, forget their families and forget their God. In this new land there were new gods they would learn to serve. He would train them up to be his loyal servants. What was involved in this re-education programme?

### New Names

Among the Jewish boys selected by Nebuchadnezzar were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. There may well have been others, but these four feature in the following narrative. One of the first things the chief steward/eunuch did was to give them new names – Babylonian names. They had Jewish names which reminded them not only of their heritage but of their God – 'el' in the name refers to Elohim, one of the names for God in the Old Testament. Their new names on the other hand pointed to Babylonian gods. Abed-Nego means servant of Nebo.

Although we do not pay much attention to the meaning of names these days we can still identify a person's ethnic origin, or even religion, from their name. I had a student called Shivsankar in my class who changed his name to Isaac. Shiv is the name of Hindu god. He was faced with the dilemma, for in taking on a new name he would be accused of turning his back on his own culture and taking on a western culture.

We do not read that these teenage boys objected to being given new names; however, there is evidence that they continued to use their Jewish names. Years later even the queen of Babylon knew Daniel by his Jewish name (5:12). The King hoped that with a new name, a Babylonian name, these boys would quickly identify with their new home and culture, including the new gods of the land.

## **New Education**

In this foreign land and in this new situation Daniel was not only given a new name, he was given a new education. He and his friends were actually selected because they were *knowledgeable and quick to understand* (1:4). They were gifted students. The king was going to teach them all the knowledge of their new land. He wanted them to be knowledgeable and loyal public servants. A training programme of three years was set for Daniel and his friends.

What did this training programme entail? They would be taught *the language and literature/writings of the Chaldeans/Babylonians* (1:4). Was there anything wrong with learning the language and literature of the Babylonians? Well Daniel and his friends did not object to this programme. They were already knowledgeable, presumably in things related to the Jews and the God of Israel.

What they would be taught was the language and literature of the Babylonians. This teaching would have had a different focus to what they had learnt in Jerusalem. They would have been taught a different view of creation, and of man's place in this world. They would have been taught a different view about life and death. Their fellow students were magicians and astrologers (1:20, 2:13).

Even though they learnt about the gods of the Babylonians, about astrology and mythology, the true God was with them and helped them to learn. He even gave Daniel the ability to interpret visions and dreams (1:17). Knowledge is not intrinsically evil, but is of course potentially dangerous. Daniel was a top student even though he did not believe much of what he was taught. In fact this education enabled him to better relate to the king and the people and thereby declare unto them the true God – *there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets* (2:28).

What are children taught in our society today? Where are they taught? In public schools the teaching is largely humanistic. They learn little of the true God and may well be ridiculed if they believe that God created all things – there are of course differences between schools. But school is not the only place children learn. They learn in the home even before they go to school and they can learn in the church – if their parents bring them.

Children must be taught about God from the Bible if they are to stand on the truth and not be swept into humanistic and ungodly – or 'agodly' – thinking. Like Daniel and his friends they will be able to withstand attempts by the authorities to indoctrinate them into humanistic thinking – in the so called social engineering policies of state education.

We must be alert to other ways in which our children learn. From where do they acquire their world view? Friends can have a powerful influence on children. Do you know who your children's friends are? And then of course there is that box the children love to watch. Do they learn about the true God from watching the TV? If Nebuchadnezzar had had a TV he would surely have used it to re-educate Daniel and his friends. If just 30 seconds is all that advertisers need to get children to buy their product, what does an hour or two of Hollywood violence, corruption or immorality do?

## **New Food**

'The fastest way to a man's heart is through his stomach' – so the saying goes. The King was going to treat these boys with rich delicacies from his own table. They were to be supplied with rich food and wine daily (1:5). He wanted them to be healthy and happy in their new home, their new heathen home. With Babylonian names, a Babylonian education and rich Babylonian food the King hoped that in just three years these young men would forget all about their old home and their old God and be ready to obey his every command.

Satan is not averse to giving treats to his targets. Was it not a lovely fruit tree with delicious fruit that he used to lure Eve into disobeying God? Was it not the thought of being rich that lured Judas into betraying Jesus? Thirty pieces of silver was a lot of money.

Satan tried this trick on Joseph when he was in Potiphar's house – a young man in a foreign land. But the Lord was with Joseph (Genesis 39:21). Satan tried it on Moses also. Moses had pleasures and treasures in abundance in the palace of Pharaoh, but faith in God enabled him to turn his back on these. *He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin* (Hebrews 11:25). Even the Son of God was targeted by Satan when he was hungry, but Jesus refused to turn the stones into bread at his diabolical suggestion.

Daniel and his friends were very vulnerable to being brainwashed in this foreign land. How would they live in a society where there was no fear of God? How would they live whilst being taught myths and theories about creation and about life that were contrary to the revelation of the true God? Would they be seduced by the good things of their new society? Daniel and his friends faced a great challenge. Is it not the same challenge that you and your children face today? How will you then live!

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