

## Sermon – 08/07/2007 am

### Knowledge and Wisdom

Study Text: Daniel 1:17-21

A friend of mine in India was a professor at the college where I taught. He was a fine academic. You can imagine my amazement when one day I saw him worshipping a cow! This intelligent man regarded the cow as a god.

We are taken aback by similar behaviour in our own society. Doctors charged with terrorism, top doctors are convicted of patient abuse. Top lawyers are convicted of perjury and tax fraud. Top scientists convicted of falsifying research results in order to get publications and notoriety. Well-educated men and women are not always wise in the way they use their knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing!

### Knowledge and Wisdom

*God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom (1:17).* Daniel and his friends had been selected by the king of Babylon to undertake three years of training for the public service. The king selected them for their good looks and ability to learn. They possessed knowledge and were quick to understand (1:4), but he wanted them to learn more about the culture of Babylon. They joined local Babylonian boys in this training programme.

Lessons on local myths and legends would have been included in this training. We know that the Babylonians had their own creation story. Daniel would have studied astrology, as well as history and mathematics. Daniel and his friends excelled in these studies. The king *found them ten times better than all the scholars and astrologers in his realm (1:20)*. Daniel was quick to learn and his knowledge became vast, even though he did not believe much of what he was taught, and never worshipped the gods of this foreign land.

The king found Daniel better *in all matters of wisdom and understanding/knowledge (1:20)*. Why was Daniel such a good student? Many parents strive to make their children into scholars. They send them to the best school and then to private tuition. No expense is spared in getting their children top grades and into good jobs. Daniel did not have any parents around to make him study. He was actually an exile or refugee. Besides he had to study in a foreign language.

What is the secret to making a top student? If you knew the answer you could be a rich person! Is it genetics, or is it the environment? Is it nature or nurture? Is it the child or is it the parents, is it the teacher or is it their friends? There is no one factor of course but we do learn one factor in this passage which many people fail to consider – which we will come to shortly.

Daniel faced many setbacks in this foreign land, but we have already learnt of his determination to honour God in his life. He would have sought to honour God in his studies. This was his motivation. No doubt he applied himself to his studies. Personal motivation is an important factor in education – *whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17)*.

## Source of Knowledge

Genetics, good teaching, personal motivation – is this all? Daniel was from a noble family. As the king's chosen student Daniel had the best teachers in the land. But was this why he and his friends excelled in their studies? Not according to the passage before us. *God gave them knowledge* (1:17). Ultimately it was God who made them excellent students.

How is that you may ask? Many today would ridicule the idea that God had anything to do with their learning, but others can testify to the truth of this text. It is not a matter of superstition of course, of seeking to please God by praying and going to church just before an exam. It is a matter of acknowledging God, and honouring him in all things.

*Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you* said Jesus (Matthew 6:33). Jesus was talking about food and clothes, but **all things** could include education. When we put the Lord first in everything he promises to bless us in all things – including studies. God made Daniel and his friends excel in their studies.

Many students think the more time they spend in study the better their result will be. Now study is essential – the Lord does not bless laziness. But the Lord has made a time for everything. There is a time to study and a time to sleep. Good students do not deprive themselves of sleep. Moreover God has given us a day of rest from work and studies – it is called the Lord's Day. It is a day for rest and worship.

Do you think Daniel studied on God's day of rest? Daniel knew that God was giving him success in his studies. God had already given him favour in the eyes of the chief steward (1:9). Daniel had already determined to honour God in what he ate. Daniel was going to worship the true God in this new land. The locals may have studied on the Lord's Day but Daniel had decided to honour the Lord. He knew that God honours those who honour him.

## Source of Wisdom

God not only gave Daniel knowledge; he also gave him wisdom. Someone had defined wisdom as the 'constructive ability to rightly apply knowledge acquired, and do so in the fear of God'. Knowledgeable people are not always wise people. That is why some lawyers are in prison and doctors also. Wisdom is actually rare among men. It is not a learned trait. If knowledge is given by God, then wisdom much more so!

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wise men like Daniel fear God. Solomon was the wisest man in the whole world. *Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt* (I Kings 4:30). How did Solomon get this great wisdom? He asked God for an understanding heart that he might discern between good and evil. God gave him a wise and understanding heart (I Kings 3:12).

True wisdom comes from above, it is given by God. It is different to the wisdom of this world. Such wisdom is earthly, sensual and demonic. It envies and is self-seeking. This is why earthly wisdom leads to corruption, to lies and all manner of evil.

Wisdom from above, or wisdom that God gives to those who fear him, is *pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy*

(James 3:17). This is the sort of wisdom that Daniel had. Daniel acknowledged that God *gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding* (2:21). Do you have such wisdom? Do you seek after heavenly wisdom, or earthly wisdom? What is your prayer today?

### **Special Understanding**

Daniel was also given a special ability by God – the ability to understand visions and dreams (1:17). The other three were not given this ability. God was going to use Daniel to show his glory before foreign kings. Some suggest that Daniel’s witness led to the wise men of the East knowing about the King of the Jews and coming to Bethlehem at his birth over 500 years later.

Through Moses God showed his omnipotence to the king of Egypt and brought this heathen king to his knees. Through Daniel God would show his omniscience to the king of Babylon and bring him to his knees. God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and even to tell the king what his dream was. The king was amazed and declared *truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings and the revealer of secrets* (2:47). God is omniscient. God is omnipotent. God is great.

God was with Daniel as he was with Joseph and Moses before him. Daniel was a faithful and God-fearing man, and God blessed him with knowledge and wisdom. He gave Daniel special knowledge that he would use for the glory of God. Through Daniel God would make himself known in this heathen land as he did through Moses in Egypt.

The apostle Paul was also given knowledge and wisdom by God. Before he met Jesus on the Damascus road he had great knowledge but no heavenly wisdom. The Roman ruler told him his great learning was driving him mad (Acts 26:24). But the Lord gave Paul wisdom from above, a wisdom that is regarded as foolishness by the world. With great knowledge and divine wisdom Paul witnessed before kings of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of Lords. In the wisdom and power of God he called upon all men to repent and believe in Jesus.

Has not the Lord given each one who fears him wisdom from above? Are you not wiser than those who have no faith and no fear of God? ‘Do you not know that the saints will judge the world’ said the apostle. *Do you not know that you will judge angels* (I Corinthians 6:2, 3)? Is the Lord using you to confound the wicked? The ‘foolishness’ of the gospel of Jesus Christ is wiser than all the wisdom of this fallen world.

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