

Surviving Without A Scholarship

Daniel 1:1-8

INTRO:

In college sports, there is special kind of athlete known as the “**walk on.**” They are the people who can't quite qualify for an athletic scholarship but somehow manage to make the team. In some cases they may even manage to get a scholarship later in their college career. It's amazing that they are so **sure** of what they want and so **committed** to getting it that they often pass on scholarship gifts from other schools so they can attend the school of their choice. Then they work hard to make it on the team that had not thought them good enough at first.

ME:

All of this reminds me of four young men we will meet again, or for the first time, this morning. They were Jewish boys, taken captive by the armies of Babylon, and brought to the king's royal school to work on a premier scholarship program.

But there was something wrong with the program:

they would have to live in a way that violated their commitment to God.

So they had a little chat with the “**administration**” for the right to go off the scholarship program. They wanted to eat the simplest of foods. It seemed like they would have suffered from a lack of **nutritional benefit and culinary pleasure**. In the end they were allowed to do it the way they wanted. Let’s look at their secret to surviving without a scholarship.

YOU:

If you are to survive without a scholarship, that is, if you are to survive against the odds, you need to know a few things.

First let’s read the beginning of their story after we pray together...

GOD:

Daniel 1:1 In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods. 3 Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they

could be stationed in the king's court. 6 Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. 7 The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.

WE:

If we are to survive against the odds, or without a scholarship, we first we need to know:

I. Who God is

The most important thing to remember about these guys is that they intended to be **faithful** to God. This is unbelievable commitment. Remember they didn't have a church, or synagogue, to sustain them. The culture in which they lived was completely against them. If they had followed the old rule of when in Rome do as the Romans do, they would have soon forgotten God. But they knew their **priority** was to please God. Think about it, if God **is**, then **ALL** other issues and questions are secondary. God is the first question to be settled. When that issue is clear, everything else can more easily find its proper place. These four students obviously understood this.

We need to know who God is in the best of times and when times are tragic. Etty Hillesum was a Dutch Jewish thinker from Holland who died at the age of 29 at Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration camp. If any place was hell on earth and deepest darkness, it was Auschwitz. While she was there, in the few months that she lived there before she died, she kept a diary. Somehow the diary survived. She wrote this in her diary. I want to share you a little bit that is so amazing, because if you pay attention, you too will see beauty in the most unexpected places. Here is what she wrote:

“Sometimes when I stand at some corner of the camp, my feet planted on your earth ...”—talking to God—“... my eyes raised toward your heaven, tears sometimes running down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude, and I want to be there right in the thick of what people call horror and still be able to say life is beautiful. And now I lie here in a corner, dizzy and feverish and unable to do a thing. But I am also with jasmine ...”—Jasmine is a plant with a lovely fragrance used for perfume and tea—“... and that piece of sky beyond my window, and all of life becomes one long stroll. Such a marvelous feeling.”

When we know who God is we can see beauty even in the darkness of life.

The second thing we need to know is:

II. Who we are.

We can become so cynical by the number of people who are always trying to find themselves. But, and it may surprise you, people have always been

on this quest. 3000 years ago the Greeks were saying, "**Know thyself.**" so, it's no wonder we keep asking the question, besides most of us have found that life has no greater mystery than our own person. And whatever it is we learn about ourselves, we need to gain a solid basis of self-respect. This kind of respect is not found by selling ourselves a bill of goods. It is gotten the same way these four Hebrew lads got it—by seeing themselves in the eyes of God's purposes for their lives.

We need to know ourselves. Daniel was determined to stay on the right path. Verse 8 says "**He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat or the wine that he drank.**" Daniel knew the food had been offered to idols. Daniel knew there was lobster and catfish on the menu, and Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 said that these were on a do not list. Daniel decided he was going to stand up for God, no matter what it took.

You must make up your mind in advance. The prudent, says the Book of Proverbs, sees the evil and hides from it. Matthew 6:33 says, "**But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.**" **What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God?** Jesus taught us to pray "**Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" The kingdom of God comes to us when the will of God is done in our lives, when we are within the circle of God's will.

Plato described the human will as a charioteer with two headstrong horses each pulling in the opposite direction. Paul cried out in Romans 7 "**The good that I would do, I do not.**" I can identify with that, **can you?** One poet said it like this:

"There's a little bit of bad in the best of us and a little bit of good in the worst of us. So it behooves the best of us not to talk about the rest of us."

There is a civil war going on inside of us all. God's Spirit is with us to empower us to serve others and bring heaven to earth as we do.

The third thing we need to know is:

III. What matters most.

When we know who God is and when we know who we are, it becomes pretty easy to figure out what matters most. I feel sorry for people who invest so much time and money into things they don't really want but think are important because other people think they are important. Or they see these things advertised and promoted.

These young men in Daniel, knew what they wanted. More than the king's favor, more than wisdom and success in Babylon, even more than all the worldly comfort their privileged positions would offer, they wanted God and God's approval. When that was settled, *it was more than easy to give up the king's scholarship and became God's walk-on!*

A pastor shares a story that will bring this home for us this morning:

*Fifteen years ago I was walking in Newport Beach, Southern California with two friends. Two of us were on staff and one was an elder in the church I was involved with. We walked past a bar, and a fight had been going on inside the bar and had spilled out into the street, just like in an old western. Several guys were beating up on this one guy, and he was bleeding from the forehead. We knew we had to do something, so we went over to break the fight up. I didn't have much experience in this kind of thing. I missed the class in seminary where we learned about how to break up fights in a bar; I don't think we were very intimidating. We went over to where the fighting was and said, "**Hey, you guys cut that out.**" It didn't do much good. But then all of a sudden they looked at us with fear in their eyes, and the guys that had been beating up on the one guy stopped and started to slink away. I didn't know why until we turned and looked behind us. Out of the bar had come the biggest man I think I've ever seen. He was like six feet, seven inches, maybe 300 pounds, maybe 2% body fat—just huge. We called him "**Bubba**"—not to his face, but afterwards when we'd talk about him. And Bubba didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed; you could tell he was kind of hoping they would try and have a go at him. All of a sudden my attitude was transformed and I said to those guys, "**You better not let us catch you coming around here again!**" I was a different person because I had a great big Bubba. I was ready to confront with resolve and firmness. I was released from anxiety and fear. I was filled with boldness and confidence. I was ready to help somebody that needed helping. I was ready to serve where serving was required. **Why?** Because I had a great big Bubba. I was convinced that I was not alone. I was safe.*

God is our great big Bubba, in a way. We also are not alone when we go through life with or without a scholarship.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

We can get through life when we know who God is, when we know who Ayer are, and when we know what matters most.

YOU:

Do you know who God is? Do you know who you are? Do you know what matters most? If you do, then you can survive without a scholarship!

CLOSE:

Coach John Gagliardi, of Saint John University, is the winningest coach in college football history with an astounding 421-117-11 record. To say that he's done it in an unconventional way is an understatement. His "**winning with no's**" approach is noteworthy:

- No blocking sleds or dummies
- no scholarships
- no spring practices
- no compulsory weightlifting program; no whistles
- no "**Coach**" (players call him John)
- no tackling in practice (players wear shorts or sweats)
- no long practices (typically an hour and a half or less).

- Did I mention **NO SCHOLARSHIPS?**

Donald Miller comments on the genius of his approach,

"Players are asked to treat their teammates in the way they would like to be treated, with kindness, graciousness, and altruism. The players work as hard as they want to work, and when they come to practice they do exactly as the coach asks them to do, not because their positions are threatened, but because they care about one another, work as a team, and love their coach because they sense his love for them."

That sounds a lot like out "Coach" doesn't it? It sounds like his expectations of us too. So go now, in the season of Lent, and treat others the way you would like to be treated. Work as hard as you want to work. Serve others because you care about them and love our **"Coach"** because he first loved us.

Let us go to our "Coach" in prayer...