**The Ambition of Daniel**

If I told you a man with great ambition had become a high-level government official, you probably would not be surprised in the least. But if I told you the man had no *political* ambitions, you might be confused.

Daniel was a young man from a prominent family in the kingdom of Judah in the reign of Jehoiakim, and in 605 BC, he was taken into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. He was placed in a special three-year training program to prepare him to serve in the court of the Babylonian king. To make a short story even shorter, Daniel eventually became ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

I would like to focus on two important questions in the case of Daniel: What was his ambition in life and how could that ambition possibly lead to his political success?

Daniel’s greatest ambition was to please Jehovah God. In turn, his commitment to exemplary performance of his assigned duties and acting in the best interests of the realm were consistent with God’s will. The prophet Jeremiah had admonished the Jews who were being taken into captivity, “Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

Nebuchadnezzar, and in later years, Darius the Mede, knew that entrusting greater levels of responsibility to Daniel was in the best interest of the kingdom. Besides being wise and competent, he was a man of integrity who truly cared about the nation and the rulers he served. I believe that Daniel (and Joseph before him) stand as excellent examples of healthy ambition.

James warns about “selfish ambition” (James 3:16) and Paul says that a desire to become rich can lead to ruin and destruction (1 Timothy 6:9). A person whose primary goal in life is to become CEO of a company needs to ask themselves some tough questions about what motivates them.

There are devoted Christians who do very well. They have developed the necessary skills to support their families as God has directed. They work hard for their employers as if they are working for the Lord. They recognize that a lot of good people depend on the success of the enterprise for job security and they work and pray to that end. It is little wonder that these people are promoted to a level of responsibility that is in the best interest of the company.

Good people in positions of influence is a good thing. Let’s get there by devoting ourselves first to God, then to the welfare of others around us. That is what Daniel did, and his selfless ambition made all the difference.

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