



Chapter 1: Rebels with Good Cause

On holiday one of my favourite activities was jumping over waves at the beach. We would wade into the sea as a family and then as the waves came close, I would bend my legs and let the wave carry me to the shore. It made me think I was about 8 years old again. Absolute magic. But one day I came to the shore expecting to do this again and it was a little different. The tide was further out and instead of soft sand under foot there were sharp stones. I couldn't jump, the waves knocked me to my knees and the swell was stronger picking up more of the stones and bouncing them against my legs. This was not what I had bargained for. This was not fun. I had a couple of goes, but soon retreated to the safety of the sand somewhat disgruntled.

What was true of that day on the beach is often true of our lives. Often what we get is not what we would have

chosen. We get educated, choose a career, a partner and earn money with the idea that we will choose the way our lives go – but often it doesn't turn out like that. The job is not as good as it seemed at first, the people we love have faults and flaws which can seem impossible to live with – and sometimes disaster happens. I could walk out of the sea and choose to do something else – but with life, we have to embrace it as it is. When we have to live with a life we wouldn't choose, the story of Daniel and his friends is a great inspiration.

Daniel wanted to live the life of a good Jew in Jerusalem with his family. But as a young man, the Babylonian army took Jerusalem and carried him off into exile. If you've ever watched pictures of the destruction of communities that follows natural disasters – a hurricane or tsunami for example – you will get an idea of what this was like. Everything seemed lost. All hope was gone. Thousands of their neighbours were lying dead in the streets. He was hungry, weak – but he had to walk hundreds of miles in chains to a foreign land. The culture of Babylon was alien, its gods, its food, its language. Even when he was offered food from the King's table, he didn't want to eat it – not just because it was cooked with spices, not just because Jews had special laws about the preparation of food – but because it had been used in ritual sacrifice to other gods. The job eventually assigned to him was one he didn't want – handling Babylon's administration. This was Daniel's life – not even his second choice – in living in Babylon all his life he had no choice at all.

We often think that to have a fulfilling life we need to be able to choose what we do; to be able to fulfil our potential we need the perfect circumstances. The motto of our age

might be “I want it and I want it now”. If we don’t get what we want we think somehow we have failed – we may be tempted to give up – like me walking out of the sea – but with life we have to embrace it as it is. The story of Daniel and his friends shows us that second-choice worlds are not dumping grounds for losers . They are arenas in which God can show his power.

1) **The 4 young men had difficult choices to make.**

Should they stand aloof from the culture altogether. Should they accept being called by new names with occult roots? Should they take a stand over food? There was no precedent. He had the rule book of the bible – but it was written for people living in their own land. He had to work out how to apply it in different circumstances. Many second-choice worlds are like this. Some people face the choice each day: shall I lie or keep my job? What is the least evil? Shall I drink this coffee which has been made by exploitation or shall I refuse someone’s hospitality? Shall I continue working on this product even though it may be used for war? Shall I take this medicine tested by experiments I don’t condone? Daniel made compromises – he decided the best place to take a stand and he took it together with others, making the choices the best he could.

2) **Daniel and his friends stuck together.** They could have dealt with this situation separately. One could have said, “I’ll eat your food but I won’t have this strange name you’re giving me.” Another could have said, “I don’t want to train as an administrator.” They could have all reacted in different ways – but they

worked it out together. One of the reasons why church is so important is that we are family – when the chips are down we’re supposed to work it out together – to support each other.

3) **Daniel and his friends learned about their second-choice world and gave it their best.**

They took the opportunities they had and learned all the language and the customs. When we are in a situation we don’t like we have to learn to understand it – There may be a terrible atmosphere at work – swearing and gossip and backstabbing. We can stand aloof and just do what we are paid to do. Or we can put our heart into seeking to understand the good and the bad of the situation – we can become part of the solution. That’s what Daniel did. He wasn’t proud, aloof or judgemental. He gave his life to serving a holy God in the court by serving the people that were really there. And his life left a legacy that has lived down the years.

Archdeacon Sally Gaze

For more resources on Daniel go to

www.light-wave.org/onlineworshipresources

