

Last week we saw King Jehoiakim and his Kingdom of Israel reach such a level of wickedness that in the year 597 BC God GAVE them into the hands of Nebuchadnazzar. We learned that Jehoiakim had a wonderful, good, and godly father who is referred to in scripture as the "good King Josiah".

This led us to observe that God has no Grandchildren. Each of us must have our own personal walk with God. Just because our parents might have had a relationship with Christ, it doesn't mean we will. And the only way we can begin in right relationship with Him is to put our faith, confidence and trust in the finished work of Jesus upon the cross.

Secondly, we observed that "Whatever a person sows, that is what they will reap".

Let us stand in respect of God's Word as we read today's passage

- 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles,
- 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.
- 5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to ^benter the king's personal service.
- 6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.
- 7 Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.¹

¹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.* (1995). (Da 1:3-7). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Now the text presents us with some of the primary characters in our unfolding story. The passage introduces us to and identifies several main players in the drama of the exile of the Jews from Judah to Babylon.



Let's look again at the scripture we just read. Verse three and the first half of verse four tell us that these young captives were the best of the best of the Land of Judah. The Jewish Library says the captives taken were "professionals, priests, craftsmen, and the wealthy. They were the influential of the land of Judah. The 'people of the land' (*am-hares*) were allowed to stay. So Jewish history, then, has two poles during the exile: the Jew in Babylon and the Jews who remain in Judah." ²

In describing them, the Hebrew text says regarding these young men that they were "from the seed of the kingship even the nobles" (literally). This means that these boys were either King David's own descendents or they were from nobility of the greatest leaders of Judah. They were from the highest strata of society. They were the "creme de la creme."

Verse 6 tells us also that they were from the tribe of Judah, and the great historian Josephus tells us that Daniel and his three friends were members of King Zedekiah's family. Hence, you will remember that last week I referred to Daniel as a young prince.

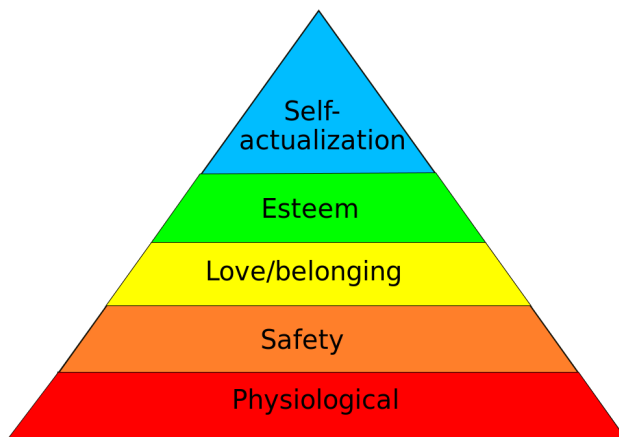
So why would the Babylonian King want to bring these young Jewish nobles into his court? He did it to create a new identity in the nobility so in time their allegiances would be to their conqueror, Babylon.

These Jewish boys were brought to Babylon to be enrolled in a 3 year brainwashing program. This was to insure that the boys would forget all of their roots. The idea was to make them fall in love with their new culture. It was important to make these Hebrew lads forget their identity and to begin to think of themselves as Babylonians.

² <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Exile.html>

Remember when I spoke last week and said that inside of every human being there are three basic needs. Need No. 1 is the need to be "loved and accepted", Need No. 2 is to have "Value and Worth", and **Need No. 3 is the need for "Identity"**. Nebuchadnezzar was trying to change the self-identity of these young men. If he could do this they would forget not only WHO they were, but they would forget WHOSE they were. They would forget that they were Jews and they would forget that they knew YHWH as their one true God and worshipped Him alone.

Identity - is a term we hear much today in the news. We all watched with great curiosity when an odd white anglo-saxon woman named Rachel Dolezal said she "identified" as a black woman and she ended up running a local chapter of the NAACP until they threw her out as a fraud. Then we all stood by even more perplexed when 1972 decathlete Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner said he "identified" as a woman and had his body changed to Caitlyn Jenner through medical procedures and hormone therapy. These people are extreme examples of so many people lost in America today who are desperately trying to figure out who they are.



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Nebuchadnezzar starts out by teaching them the Chaldean literature and the Chaldean language. Language is very important in personal identity. Just think for a moment of the term Hispanic. This is not describing a race of people. It is describing a group of people who speak the language of Spain. After the English conquered the Scots and the Irish they outlawed the speaking of the Gaelic language. They wanted the Gaels to forget who they were and they wanted them to start feeling English so their loyalties would lie with England, a foreign power. This is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did in attempting to make these young men forget they were Hebrews and start speaking Chaldean. He also had them learn Chaldean literature to gain an understanding and an appreciation of how the Babylonians viewed the world. He wanted them to have a Babylonian world-view.

³ Maslow's need pyramid

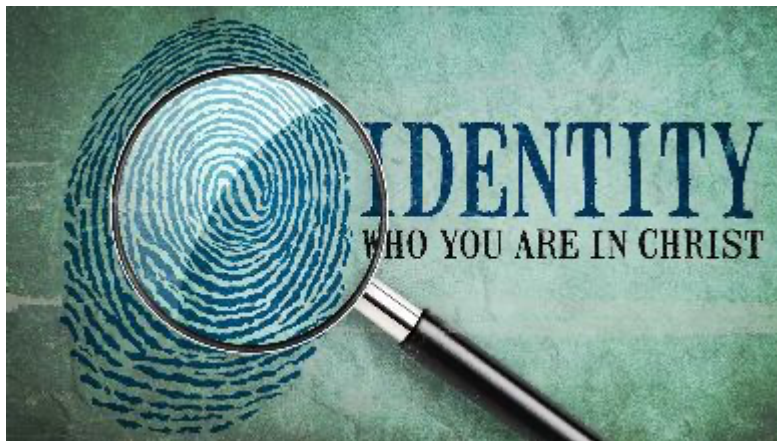
He then gave them the food and drink of Babylon. Now why would he do this? In case you didn't know it, food is important! About twenty years ago our family moved to do a work assignment in the country of Chile. The things we missed the most were of course our friends and family, but food followed close behind. I remember living in Chile and I would imagine eating BBQ, Tex Mex food and drinking coffee at McDonalds. Over time we ate more and more Chilean seafood and delicacies and we didn't think so much about food back in Texas.

The Babylonian conquerors knew that if they could put a taste for other foods into their mouths these boys would be a step further in forgetting who they were.

Then the King changed their names. He cleansed them of their Hebrew identity. These boys were named:

ORIGINAL NAME	NAME APPLIED BY BABYLONIANS
Daniel - God is my Judge	Beltshazzar - Bel protects his life
Hannaniah - God is my Grace	Shadrach - Servant of Aku
Azariah - God is my help	Abednego - Servant of Nebo
Mishael - Who is like God?	Meshach - Who is like Aku
-IAH = Yahweh	- EL = God

SO WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS SCRIPTURE?



WE MUST KNOW OUR IDENTITY when we live in a world that is hostile to God and the things of God, we must understand Biblical truth of our identity or we will forget WHO we are and WHOSE we are.

Example: Try to rename a child in the congregation. Explain that renaming them will not change their real name or the "real them".

Did you know that God has given us each an identity? We need to avoid any self-image or self-identification that is not from God. Church, let me make this personal to you.

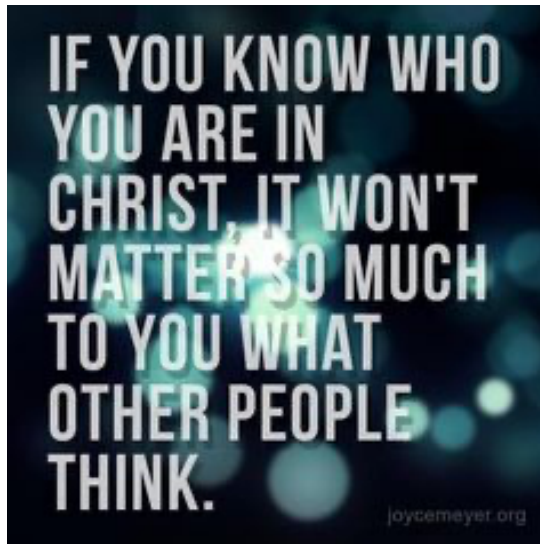
"What this means is that you must abandon any image of yourself that is not from God. You must stop accepting what others have said about you, how others have labeled you, and how others have defined you. You start believing what God says about you, that he is pleased with how he created you, and that God defines you. You're not defined by your feelings. You're not defined by the opinions of others or by your circumstances. You're not defined by your successes or failures. You're not defined by the car you drive, the money you make, or the house you say you own when the bank really does. You are defined by God and God alone. He identifies you as his own (2 Corinthians 1:22)."⁴

Let's start with some basics



Embrace Your Identity In Christ

⁴ Pastor Rick Warren



If you know who you are then you won't be vulnerable to people telling you who you are. God tells you who you are and frankly no one else has a vote in the matter. Cindy Croncich has taught me that the identity issue is absolutely essential to living an Abundant Life. Many believers have no joy because they don't know who they are. (John 10:10)

Who does God say that YOU are?

1. You are not a fluke of evolutionary history - **You are made in God's image.** Genesis 1:27

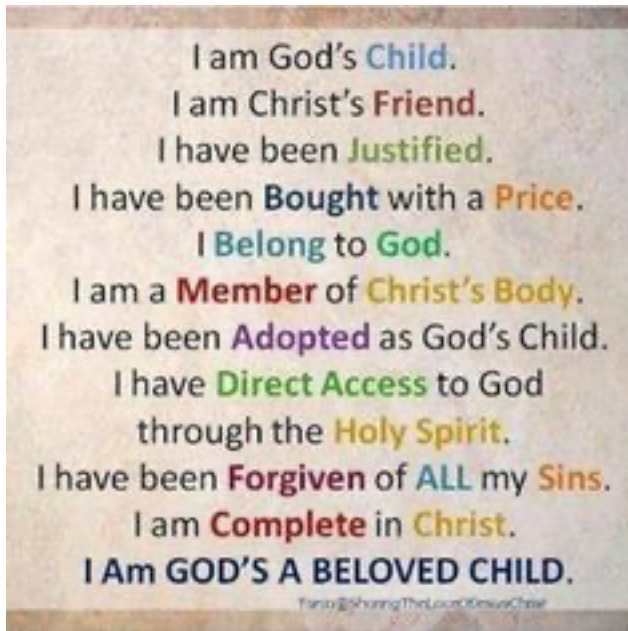
You are a 3 part being:
 - a. Spirit - relates to God
 - b. Soul - relates to other people
 - C. Body - relates to the world around you

2. You are not "just that way" - **You are a "New Creation"** - 2 Cor 2:17 When you accepted Christ and put your faith in Him, you became a "new creature". You have a living spirit now instead of a dead spirit. You are a spirit being that is accompanied by a soul, living in an earth suit.

3. You are "a defeated loser" - **You are "more than conquerors"** - Romans 8
You are "not rejected" -

4. You are not just a creation - **You are a child of God.** John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.

5. You are not rejected - **You are accepted** . "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7



God loves you so much that he relentlessly is pursuing you. As my old dad used to say, "God is broadcasting 24/7 on KGOD saying, 'I love you, I like you, and I want a relationship with you.'"

The 4 Hebrew boys never forgot WHO they were and WHOSE they were. We all have a chance to profess our identity to the world in which we live. And, we have seen good examples of this last week at the Olympics. Most of us know of Michael Phelps's devotion to Jesus Christ, but here are to lesser known divers.

David Boudia and Steele Johnson



Two Olympians who won silver medals for the United States on Monday revealed their true identity and how that allowed them to focus on the games and not get too carried away by the pressure involved with competing.

David Boudia and Steele Johnson won silver medals in the men's synchronized 10-meter platform, which was Boudia's third all-time Olympic medal and Johnson's first. Boudia won a gold and bronze medal in the 2012 Olympics. They credited their Christian faith for getting them where they were.

Johnson said Boudia's description was "flawless," and added that going into the competition knowing his identity was "rooted in Christ" and not in the results of the competition gave him peace and let him enjoy it.

"If something went great, I was happy. If something didn't go great, I could still find joy because I'm at the Olympics competing with the best person, the best mentor — just one of the best people to be around. God's given us a cool opportunity, and I'm glad I could come away with an Olympic silver medal in my first-ever event," he said.

It's awesome to see people stand up and declare their **faith in Christ**.

Some of you listening today are waiting for God to prove Himself to you. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Today you've heard the Word of God. It is not time for God to prove Himself to you. It is time for you to prove yourself to God.

Hebrews 11:6 (New International Version)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.