**OUR BACK OF HOUSE GOD**

**(Daniel 1:1-21)**

 I have learned that the world of theater and the operation of restaurants use some similar terminology. They both use the term *house* as in *front of house* and *back of house.*

 In both the theater and the restaurant, front of house refers to where the people are and where they are allowed to go. Whether you sit to watch or sit to eat, both times you are in front of house, which includes the lobby, the entrance, the waiting room, the bar, the bathrooms, the stairways, the box seats, or the balcony. Front of house is where you enjoy the wonder of the theater or the delights of a restaurant.

 Both the theater and the restaurant also have their back of house. Back of house at a restaurant is where the kitchen is. It is where the chefs cook your meal, and the dishwasher sanitizes your dinnerware. It is also where the manager has his office. Back of house is a busy place.

 Back of house at a theater is where the props are made and the equipment is stored. Sometimes it is where the lighting is controlled. It is where the stage manager cues the entrances and the exits of the actors.

 It occurs to me that this building in which we sit is not really God’s house. The world in which we live is God’s house. The Psalmist declared, “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). It is in the front of house that we live, and work, and worship.

 Although it is unseen to our eyes, there is a back of house to this world. It is where the throne of God is located. It is where the angels live. It is the place from which Jesus reigns supreme over the kingdoms of this world.

 It would be silly after enjoying a meal at a restaurant or after being moved or inspired by a play to say, “I don’t believe in the back of house. I’ve never seen it. I think it is all just a myth.”

 Yet, there are people who deny there is a back of house to this world. They deny that God resides back of house.

 The Bible has a word for what you and I call atheists. That word is *fool.* We read in Psalm 14:1, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

 Not only is it foolish to deny the God’s existence, it’s also foolish and irresponsible to live your life as if there is no God.

 The reader of Daniel is clearly shown that God exists and that God is working back of house. There are four things I want to say about “Our Back of House God.”

1. **OUR BACK OF HOUSE GOD IS THE LORD WHO GOVERNS HISTORY.**

 Look at Daniel 1:1. King Nebuchadnezzar was not just the big kid on the block. He was not just the bully who lived next door. King Nebuchadnezzar was the Emperor of the vast Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful and the longest reigning king of that empire. He became King upon the death of his father in 605 BC. That year also saw the first of the three deportations of the Jews from their homeland to Babylon. Daniel was taken captive in the first one which also was when the fewest were taken.

 Notice what we find in v. 2. The text does not say that powerful, King Nebuchadnezzar conquered the King of Judah and took vessels from the house of God. It says God gave them to the King. The point is that our God is the God who is in full control. Nothing happens without His permission.

 King Nebuchadnezzar did not sneak into Judah while God’s back was turned. God Himself orchestrated the event. He delivered Judah over to King Nebuchadnezzar. The King of Babylon didn’t take it; he received it because the King of all Creation gave it.

 Our God is the sovereign Lord over this world and over history. As they say, “history” is His Story. He is the author. Not only did God write the story, He is also directing it.

 About a hundred years after Daniel there was a Jewish girl named Esther. Unlike Daniel, she was not upfront about her faith in God. For a long time, she kept her faith and even her true identity as a Jew secret. Her story is found in the book that bears her name. It is an odd book to be included in the Bible. The name of God is never mentioned, not even one time. There are no prophets to declare His message. There are no miracles. There are no plagues. Yet, the fingerprints of God are found all over the events that are described in the book. God was at work in the seeming coincidences that took place. It just so happened that:

* A Jewish girl became the Queen of the land.
* Her uncle, Mordecai, saved the life of the king.
* One night the King couldn’t sleep and when he had the official records read to him, the heroic deeds of Mordecai were what was read.
* The plot to exterminate the Jews were uncovered.
* From her position as the Queen, Esther was used to save the life of her people.

 “For such a time as this . . .”

 When we read the newspaper or watch the evening news, we think to ourselves, “Oh, that’s bad. Oh, that’s bad. Oh, that’s really bad.”

 We must not forget that God can take the bad, even the really bad, and bring good from it for the benefit of His people and for the glory of His name. Our back of house God is cooking up something in the kitchen to bless His people and to move His kingdom forward.

1. **OUR BACK OF HOUSE GOD IS THE LORD OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.**

 Let’s look at vv. 3-7. There were not a great many that were taken to Babylon during this first deportation, but those who were taken were the best and the brightest. They were young people who were the sons of the leading families in the City of Jerusalem. Only four are mentioned by name, but here would have been others, as well.

 Consider what they faced. They are living in a new place far from home, far from their families. They are forced to learn a new language and live according to a new culture. They are now required to eat new food that were forbidden by their religion. They are given new names. Their old names honored the God of heaven, but those names were replaced with new ones that honor the gods of the Babylonians. They are being forced to abandon their religious beliefs and convictions. When they complete their education that will have to serve an evil, evil man.

 We are not told so, but I would not be surprised if these young men were castrated. The King would have had a harem in his palace. They would have been in close proximity to these young men who were chosen because they were handsome. The one over them was the chief eunuch. That means there were others.

 Nowhere in the Old Testament are we told that these young men ever had wives or children.

 These young men had lost their homes. They lost their families. They lost their dreams of the bright future they once had. They lost their Jewish way of life. They may have lost some other things dear to them.

 Where in the world was God?

 Have the circumstances of your life ever caused you to wonder where God was?

* Where was God when that oncoming vehicle crossed the center line and your family members were taken?
* Where was God when the doctor called you in to his office to deliver the bad news?
* Where was God when the company downsized and you were let go and had to endure financial hardship?
* Where was God when the one you loved said that he doesn’t love you, that he loves somebody else?
* Where was God when the circumstances of your life that were wonderful are now far different and not at all what you wanted?

 Where is God? He’s back of house, working and weaving and bringing about something beautiful that He will show you in due time.

 Paul Young is the author a block buster book entitled, *The Shack.* Very likely, some of you have read it. You may not be aware of his background. Paul grew up as a missionary kid. He was sexually abused as a child. He grew up hiding his brokenness and addictions. He hid them from his church, from his friends, from his wife, from his family. One day his life came crashing down around him, and there was nowhere to hide.

 His wife stayed with him, but life wasn’t pleasant. He didn’t know if he could hold on. He concocted a plan. He decided to fly to Mexico City where he would take his own life. His reason in going to Mexico was that would ensure that no one in his family would be the one to find his body. He thought that was the best he could do for them.

 Shortly before leaving, a friend talked with him and gave him some needed encouragement. He cancelled his plans and went to see his counselor. They worked hard, and Paul began to get better.

 His book *The Shack* was originally a gift he gave his kids. Some other people saw it. Interest was generated, and within a couple of years after writing it, the book became a huge best-seller. It was published in other languages and received international acclaim.

 Paul was invited by Wade Burleson to come to Enid, OK to speak at Emmanuel Church on a weekend. As he was preparing to come, he got a call from two men who were from New Zealand. They had been wanting to interview Paul, but they had never been able to get together. They happened to be in Texas. They asked if they could drive up from Texas and meet him here in Enid to do the interview. Paul asked Wade if that would be alright. He said, “Sure, bring them up.” Paul spoke Friday, Saturday, did two services on Sunday morning, and he spoke Sunday night.

 During the Saturday talk, Paul told about the plan he had hatched to go to Mexico City. He talked about some very deep things.

 After the Sunday evening service, Wade arranged a place for the interview to be conducted. Before the interview, one of the men from New Zealand handed Paul his I-phone and asked him to read it. The man walked around the corner. Paul looked at the man’s phone. He had typed a message for Paul. The first sentence said, “This trip to America was supposed to be my Mexico City trip.” This man had come to America to kill himself, far from his wife, and two young children. He came back from around the corner, gave Paul a hug, kissed him on the cheek, and said, “I’m a missionary kid, too.”

 Our back of house God is the Lord of your circumstances. He is going to use the circumstances of your life, both the good ones and especially the bad ones, to reach people that others will not be able to reach.

1. **OUR BACK OF HOUSE GOD IS THE LORD WHO SEES OUR**

 **FAITHFULNESS.**

 Unlike Esther who stayed quiet, Daniel spoke up. Look at v. 8. Look at vv. 9-10. This is the second time in this chapter in which we are told that God gave something. He gave Daniel favor with the chief Eunuch. Does this mean the man in charge said “yes” to Daniel’s request? No. In fact, the man said, “no” to Daniel’s request. So, in what way did the man favor Daniel? Mainly, he didn’t have Daniel killed.

 The King himself was the one who had done the menu planning for these young men. To not eat what the King had ordered would be a capital crime. The chief eunuch did not give Daniel a yes, but he was looking out for Daniel. In fact, that is why he said “no.”

 Do you know that God can give you favor in the eyes of others, such as your boss, your spouse, your neighbors, a prospective employer? Not only can God do that, but God wants to do that.

 We read in 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him.”

 God wants to bless you. He longs to act on your behalf, and He stands ready to do so if you will seek Him. The way to keep ourselves blameless toward God is to do what Daniel did—not compromise our convictions.

 We have a saying, “When in Rome, do what the Romans do.” Daniel could have said, “When in Babylon, do what the Babylonians do.” No, our motto needs to be, “While in this world do what Jesus did.” Jesus didn’t back down; He didn’t back off; He didn’t back away.

 Ron Hutchcraft is an author and an evangelist. He told about a visit to Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina:

 As the tour boat approached Fort Sumter, I wondered whether the guides would be dressed in blue or in gray. Sumter had been a Union fort in Confederate territory when the Civil War began. It had changed hands several times.

 We were greeted at the gate by a “soldier” wearing a blue coat and gray pants! This uniform wouldn’t have worked very well back in 1861. It would have gotten its wearer shot on both ends!

 It’s not a good idea for a follower of Christ to send double signals to his world either. Compromise increases stress over the long haul. The deception, the half-heartedness tears us apart. When people aren’t sure of our stand, they keep pushing.

 Daniel made his stand clear, and God blessed him. When he didn’t get the answer he wanted, like every good teenager, he asked somebody else. Look at vv. 11-16. He made a deal, and God blessed it, and him and his buddies. Keep striving to do what God has called you to do. He will notice, and He will reward you.

1. **OUR BACK OF HOUSE GOD IS THE LORD WHO GIVES US WHAT WE NEED.**

 In v. 17 we see the third thing God gave in this story. God gave Daniel and his friends learning, skill, and understanding.

 Many young people go to college to get a degree. They would be better off if while they were in school the asked God to give them learning, skill, and understanding. If God gives you those things, you will never lack a job. People will come looking for you; you won’t have to go looking for them.

 Look at what happened in vv. 18-21. God knows His own, and when you belong to Him wholeheartedly, He can make you ten times better than what the world has to offer. He will give you what you need; so, trust Him. Commit yourself to Him. Let Him bless you and use you.

 As we get ready to observe the Lord’s Supper, I want to emphasize something. Our back of house God did not stay back of house. In the person of Jesus, God came to the front of house. He came to where we are. He became one of us. He mingled with us.

 While back of house, God planned our redemption. He ordered the events of history. He was in charge of all of the circumstances, and then as Scripture says, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law” (Galatians 4:4-5a).

 Jesus came to front of house to bring redemption, and the price of our redemption was hefty. Peter wrote that God redeemed us “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

 We come today to remember Jesus and His death on the cross.