

Another Day

Biblical reflections for busy teachers



Seeking the welfare of our Babylon

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”
Jeremiah 29:7

The exiles sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept as they remembered Zion. How could they sing the Lord’s song, they asked, while in a foreign land and far from home? (Psalm 137) If John Denver had been with them, perhaps he would have composed for them a variant on his *Country Roads* song – “Desert roads, take me home, to the place I belong”.

Daniel was one of the exiles but I somehow doubt that he would have spent much time joining others in their nostalgic longing for Jerusalem. For him, Babylon was a place in which to serve God. Had he read the letter sent from Jerusalem by the prophet Jeremiah from which the above verse comes? We do not know but it is apparent from the story of his life that he was truly a seeker of the peace and wellbeing of the city where God had placed him.

The word for ‘peace’ is that lovely Hebrew word ‘shalom’, of which Nicholas Wolterstorff writes this: “to dwell in shalom is to find delight in living rightly before God, to find delight in living rightly in one’s physical surroundings, to find delight in living rightly with one’s fellow human beings, to find delight even in living rightly with oneself”.^{*} This cannot be reduced to the mere material wealth of a prosperity doctrine which is not worthy of the followers of the Man who had no home and who died on a Roman cross!

Sometimes, sitting in a classroom at the end of the day, we may weep and long to be somewhere else. Babylon can be a hard place but we can promote shalom there, and in the wider community in which God has placed us. This is education for godly citizenship. Let’s dare to be Daniels today!

Lord, you have called us to be resident aliens in our Babylons. Help us to seek shalom in our classrooms, schools and communities. May those we teach discover something of what it is to dwell in shalom in right relationships with their physical surroundings, with one another, with themselves and, yes, with you, the God of peace. Amen.

^{*} Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004) *Educating for Shalom*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmanns, p. 23.