

Sermon Transcript
July 10, 2011

Living For Jesus in a Messy World

“Resolve to Remember”

Daniel 1

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SERMON TEXT

Daniel 1

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. ²¹And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

INTRODUCTION

See if you can finish this line, “It was the best of times . . . It was the worst of times.” Of course, this is the opening line of Charles Dickens’ famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Here is how the rest of the opening paragraph reads. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”

In this opening paragraph, you are immediately introduced to the tension of this novel. The tale that is being told by Dickens, may take place in two different cities; London and Paris. But the real tension of the novel exists between good and evil, wisdom and folly, light and darkness. The real tale that is being told in this novel is the tension and the struggle we all feel as we live out our lives. It is the tension between love and hate, good and evil, right and wrong, God and self.

It is somewhat reminiscent of another book that was written over a thousand years prior to Dickens and *A Tale of Two Cities*. This book was written by an important figure in church history. His name was St. Augustine. The book he wrote was titled *The City of God*. He began writing it in 413 AD, three years after the city of Rome had been captured by the Vandals. Rome had been called the Eternal City for a reason. No one ever thought that this glorious city, a tribute to human achievement and power, and the Roman Empire for that matter, would ever fall. But it did.

Trying to come up with some reasonable explanation for this terrible turn of events, many of the citizens of Rome began to blame the Christians. It was under Constantine, nearly a hundred years earlier, that Christianity became the prominent religion of the Roman Empire. Those who adhered to the waning pagan faith were quick to blame the Christians, claiming that the gods had abandoned Rome because many Romans had forsaken them and taken the new faith. These Romans claimed that Christians were not patriotic enough because they asked people to serve God rather than the state, and they advocated forgiveness toward enemies. More important, they said the Christian God had failed to protect Rome, as he should have done, since Constantine had declared him to be the one true God.¹

It is out of this context that Augustine writes his book *The City of God*, seeking to give a Christian explanation to history and the events unfolding in Rome. In this book, he too tells a “tale of two cities.” He writes of the tension that exists between the “city of God”

and what he calls the “city of man.” These two “cities” represent competing values, or as Augustine would say, they represent “competing loves.” The “city of man” represents the love of self, even to the contempt of God and the “city of God” represents the love of God, even to the contempt of self.² We all know the reality of this tension. As followers of Jesus, we all wrestle with the tension that exists between living for ourselves and living for God. The *Tale of Two Cities* is being played out in every heart here this morning that wants to follow God. Two loves are competing for our attention and our affection.

We open our Bibles this morning to Daniel 1, and in the very first verse we encounter two cities. The cities listed for us in this one verse are Jerusalem and Babylon. Just like London and Paris, these two cities were real cities that existed in real time. The events that unfold for us in this chapter are historical and we will spend time this morning considering the events described for us in this chapter. But can we begin this morning by pulling the lens back, and can we recognize that there is something bigger here than what gets played out in these two cities almost 3,000 years ago? See, just like *A Tale of Two Cities*, Jerusalem and Babylon are cities that symbolically represent the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God throughout the pages of Scripture.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, Babylon is symbolic for the pride of man and the rejection of God. From the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to the final judgment of man in the book of Revelation, Babylon stands for the pride of man and the values of the world. We see this symbolic use for Babylon at the end of the Bible in Revelation 18. Speaking of the final judgment that is yet to come among the nations we read, “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! . . . For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.*” When John wrote the book of Revelation and when his readers read Revelation 18 and saw the prophecy of the fall of Babylon, they would have immediately associated Babylon with the Roman Empire. The message of Revelation 18 is that the empire of man, the “city of man” and the pride of man, will someday fall before the judgment of God.

What do we see once the final judgment of man takes place? Here is what John writes in Revelation 21:10. “*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.*” There is that city Jerusalem. It is the “city of God” where the glory of God is worshiped and love for God is expressed. If you are here this morning confessing Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, this heavenly city of Jerusalem is your city. You are a citizen of this city. Your affection and your love is for the God of this city.

But here is the reality. The events of Revelation 18 and 21 are still future events. “Babylon” has not yet fallen. “Jerusalem” has not yet fully come down from heaven and filled the earth. It has come down in part, through the coming of Jesus. But it has not yet come in full. Therefore, we are simultaneously citizens of God’s kingdom while living in “the city of man.” We are residents of Jerusalem, living in Babylon. We are in exile. And do you not find that the values of these two kingdoms often collide and there are tensions we need to work through because our first loyalty is to Jesus? Do you not feel the tension of these two cities vying for your affection?

So here is the pressing question we want to answer as we make our way through Daniel 1-6 this summer. How do we live as citizens of God’s kingdom while living in the kingdom of man? How do we hold onto God’s values when the values of man are competing for our attention? How do we set our affections on God when this world is calling for our affections? How do we live for God in a messy world? I think we can learn a lot from Daniel and his three friends in this regard. As young men, they showed us how to live as citizens of God’s kingdom while living in the city of Babylon. They were citizens of Jerusalem living in the city of Babylon. So are we.

DANIEL MOVES TO BABYLON

I would like to introduce you to Daniel and tell you about his situation in Daniel 1. Perhaps a title you could give to the first section of Daniel 1 would be, “Daniel moves to Babylon.” Actually, the ESV has a better title for this section: “Daniel Taken to Babylon.” That is a more accurate picture of what actually happened. Daniel didn’t have much of a choice. The army of Babylon entered the city of Jerusalem by force and they took Daniel and brought him to the city of Babylon.

Daniel grew up as a boy in the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital city of the two tribes of Judah. But it was a far cry from what it used to be when David and Solomon reigned over the house of Israel. Over 400 years prior to Daniel, Israel consisted of twelve tribes. Jerusalem was the sight where Solomon built this glorious temple to God; and when the temple was dedicated, it said, in 1 Kings 8:10-11, “*a cloud filled the house of the LORD . . . For the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD .*” God was living with His people in the city of God, the city of Jerusalem. During Solomon’s reign Israel experienced unprecedented prosperity and peace.

But that was not the Jerusalem of Daniel’s day. Beginning with Solomon, there was a slow but consistent drifting away from God. It began with Solomon and his idolatry. After Solomon, the country of Israel split into two countries because of civil strife. There were ten tribes to the north who retained the name of Israel, but they never had a

king who loved God, so they were carted off by the Assyrians into captivity over a hundred years prior to Daniel. That left just little two tribes, known as Judah, and that is where Daniel called home. But Judah strayed from God as well, and they did not heed the words of the prophets to repent and turn back to God. And so, as God warned them, they too were sent into captivity. Daniel 1:2 is rather clear about God's hand in all of this. It says, "*And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.*" This is actually the first of three invasions the Babylonians made on Jerusalem. It took place in 605 B.C., while the second one was in 597 B.C., and the final one was in 586 B.C. The final invasion resulted in the complete destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple. How sad.

During this first invasion, it is interesting what Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, does. He hand selects the cream of the crop within the youth of Jerusalem and brings them to Babylon. His instructions read like this, "*bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace.*" This was the group Daniel belonged to. He came from a home of privilege. He scored well on his SAT's. He was elected to the "Future Leaders of Judah." Had Babylon never invaded his home country and had he lived his entire life in Jerusalem, there is no doubt in my mind that he would have occupied a position of power and influence in the land of Judah. But here he is being carted off with his friends into the city of Babylon.

I am convinced that the first time Daniel and his friends saw the city of Babylon, their jaws hit the ground. It was a magnificent city. There was nothing else like it. I have seen recreations of it, and it was magnificent. Though some think his description to be a bit exaggerated, the Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote in the 5th century B.C., said of Babylon: "It lay in the shape of a huge square, surrounded by 60 miles of walls, the greatest of which was 300 feet high and 87 feet wide. Within these walls, the streets of the city ran at right angles to each other. These boulevards were lined with houses that stood three to four stories high."

Next week in Daniel 2 we will read about a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had where God revealed to him the future. Through this vision, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the future kingdoms of the world, but each successive kingdom was inferior to the one that came before it making Babylon the most glorious kingdom of all. It was so glorious that 70 years later, when the people of Israel were free to return to their homeland, only a handful returned. I am quite sure that Daniel and his friends walked into that city for the first time and their eyes could not believe the splendor and the glory they were seeing.

But then, I wonder what they thought when they heard for the first time the opportunity that was set before them. I imagine it like this. They unpack their bags and can't believe how nice the room is where they are staying. Then they go to "captivity orientation," and it is here where they can't believe what they are told. They are going to be given a first-rate education. They had a full ride for the next three years to the Harvard of Babylon. They were going to be trained in the literature and the language of the Chaldeans and, at the end of the three years, they will be presented to the king for assignment. In addition to this training, they would also eat the finest food of the land and never have to worry about taking care of their daily needs. So, in other words, if they play their cards right, they are on the fast track to the top. They are on their way to power, prestige, security, accomplishment and affluence. It is like the kind of change that would come to your life if you won American Idol, or were drafted number one by a professional sports team, or won the lottery, or got an all expenses paid scholarship or finally got the big break in Hollywood. Daniel was handed an opportunity to grab the silver spoon in the greatest city and the greatest empire in all the world. Daniel was presented with what would seem the opportunity of a lifetime.

BEWARE OF BABYLON

I want to pause right here and I want you to see flashing red lights turning on and off and spelling out the phrase "Beware of Babylon!" It looks good, but it has some real dangers for the "citizens of Jerusalem." Do you know what we call it? We call it the "American Dream." Be careful with the "American Dream." There are certain challenges that come to "citizens of Jerusalem" living in "Babylon." I think the temptation presented to Daniel in this passage is the same temptation we face in America. The temptation and the challenge that comes from living in Babylon is that you can quickly forget who God is, and you can quickly forget who you are.

How can living in Babylon tempt you to forget your God? How can living in this world cause you to question the existence and the presence of God? I think there are several ways our hearts and minds are pulled from "Jerusalem" towards "Babylon."

Did you notice that Daniel and his friends were going to be educated in the literature of the Chaldeans? What do you find in literature? It is here where the values and the worldview of a culture are taught and expressed. It is here where you learn how to view life and what is at the center of life. It is here where the morals of a culture are shaped. Daniel and his friends were going to be steeped in the education of a culture that denies the God of Israel. They had been taught, since early on, that the beginning of wisdom is found in the fear of the Lord. Now they are being taught that wisdom and knowledge comes from within. Does that sound familiar?

Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1. *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* While living in Babylon, remember, God is the source of wisdom.

We have trouble remembering God because the “city of Babylon” is what we see with our eyes and the “city of Jerusalem” is an unseen city. So, at times, our eyes deceive us and we lose sense of reality. We look around and see the prosperity and the success of those who have nothing to do with God, and we begin to wonder whether or not the values of “Jerusalem” are worth it. And it is not just competing values that are at play here, it seems like “Babylon” is getting stronger in our country and those of faith are being pushed more and more to the periphery of the culture. I heard a pastor say recently, and I am inclined to believe him, he said; “We need to wake up to the fact that we have lost the cultural war.” Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Convention said recently, “The breathtaking pace of the moral revolution now transforming Western cultures staggers belief. In the course of a single generation, the sexual morality that has survived for thousands of years is giving way to a radically different moral understanding.”³ He was speaking specifically to the issue of gay marriage and the changes made in our culture with regards to marriage. At times, you look around and it seems like “Babylon” is much stronger than “Jerusalem,” and by sheer force, if you are not careful, it can pull you away from God. Beware of Babylon. Do not allow Babylon to cause you to forget your God.

I think the other danger that comes from living in Babylon is that you can forget who you are. When Daniel and his three friends arrived for “captivity orientation,” they were given packets with name tags on them so everyone could know each other’s names. Daniel raised his hand and said, “I can’t find the packet with my name on it.” Ashpenaz, the one in charge of these new recruits said, “Let me see. . . No, you have the right packet.” And Daniel said, “But this is not my name.” To which Ashpenaz said, “It is now. You are no longer Daniel, but you will now be called Belteshazzar.” And your friends are no longer Hannaniah, Mishael and Azariah. Rather they will be called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These name changes were not cute nicknames

given to these young teenagers. Nebuchadnezzar was seeking to change their identities. See, their names once meant, “God is my judge” and “Who is like God” and “Jehovah is gracious” and “Jehovah is my helper.” And now their names bear the names of the gods of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar wanted these four boys to forget that they were citizens of Jerusalem. He wanted them to forget that they belonged to the city of God.

Here is the danger of losing your identity. If you forget that you are a child of God and a son or daughter of the King of Kings, you will become an authority unto yourself and you will give into the temptations you face every day. Babylon is a city filled with temptations. There is a great verse in Proverbs that reads like this, “*Where there is no prophetic vision [that is divine revelation] the people cast off restraint.*” In other words, when God is out of the picture anything goes. I had a guy say to me this week that he is most successful in defeating temptation in his life when he reminds himself of his identity in Christ. When the temptation presents itself he says, “I am a child of God and so, as a son of God, I don’t want to do that.” He said to me that this simple reminder makes it easier to walk away from temptation. Don’t let living in Babylon cause you to lose your identity. In Christ, you are a child of God even though you live in Babylon.

Here is the reality. We don’t have a choice. Like Daniel and his three friends, we live in Babylon. We are citizens of Jerusalem, living in the city of Babylon. What can we do to make sure we don’t forget our God and don’t forget who we are as children of God? We can do what Daniel and his three friends did to help us remember.

RESOLVE TO REMEMBER

Do you know what Daniel did when he moved to Babylon? It is pretty amazing. He resolved to remember his God and who he was as a citizen of Jerusalem. In verse 8 it says of Daniel, “*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. . . (v. 12) Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. . . (v. 16) So the steward took away their food and wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.*”

So here is the pressing question. What was it about the king’s food that led Daniel to make this request? Some say that he was driven by the dietary laws of Israel. He wanted to remain “Kosher.” That may explain part of his motive, but wine was not forbidden under the Old Testament Law. So there must be more to it than that.

Some have suggested that he didn’t want to eat meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to idols. But there is good reason to believe that the vegetables and the grains would

have been offered to idols as well. Some have suggested that Daniel was a vegetarian and so he asked for a vegetarian diet. But that is unlikely. In Daniel 10:3 you get the sense that Daniel didn't live the rest of his life with this voluntary diet, it was just something that he did at the beginning of his time in Babylon. Why? Why did he voluntarily adopt this special diet during his early days in Babylon?

Can I just read for you what the ESV study note says about this? I can't think of a better way to explain Daniel's motive. "Daniel and his friends avoided the luxurious diet of the king's table as a way of protecting themselves from being ensnared by the temptations of the Babylonian culture. They used their distinctive diet as a way of retaining their distinctive identity as Jewish exiles and avoiding complete assimilation into Babylonian culture. With this restricted diet they continually reminded themselves, in this time of testing, that they were the people of God in a foreign land and that they were dependent for their food, indeed for their lives, upon God, their Creator, not King Nebuchadnezzar."

Not only do I think that interpretation is accurate, I believe it is highly instructive to us for how to live as citizen of Jerusalem while living in the city of Babylon. What discipline do you practice that reminds you of your God and that you are a child of God? Dallas Willard says that spiritual disciplines are "activities undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom."⁴ The spiritual disciplines we practice and the way we deny ourselves may vary from person to person. I am not here to prescribe a list of disciplines for you. But I am here to say that we should learn from Daniel. There needs to be some discipline, some form of denial, that I voluntarily embrace to remind me that while I live in Babylon, I am a citizen of Jerusalem and my life is dependent upon God.

May I suggest to you that you are practicing a spiritual discipline right now. It is not a very popular discipline in New England. You can attest to that by virtue of how little traffic there is on the roads on Sunday morning. Setting aside time each week to corporately worship God and listen to God's Word being preached is a discipline you practice that reminds you that God is indeed the beginning of wisdom and that you are a citizen of Jerusalem living in exile here in Babylon.

Psalms 73 is one of my favorite Psalms. The beginning of the Psalm finds the writer of the Psalm wrestling over some of the inequities of life and he is actually wondering if following God is even worth it. Pragmatically, it just doesn't seem to work. Things don't always fall into place for the godly. But then he says, in verses 16-17, "*But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then discerned their end.*" It was time in the sanctuary that brought

life into perspective and gave strength for the journey. This discipline of corporate worship is part of what you do to help you live for God in Babylon.

When we think of spiritual disciplines, we often think of reading our Bibles, prayer, fellowship and so on. I think these are fitting and right to practice and pursue. But Dallas Willard says that there is a list of disciplines called the “disciplines of abstinence” that we often neglect that I think get at the heart of what Daniel did to remind himself of God and who he was. These disciplines include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice.

For example, when we fast, we voluntarily go for a period of time without food. Why? We do so to remind ourselves that *“man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* When we practice the discipline of frugality, we deny ourselves certain luxuries to free us up to care for the needy and the impoverished. Solitude and silence allows us to spend time in quiet and to remove the noise of our world so that we can hear the voice of God. Do you see it? What discipline is God leading you to practice for the purpose of reminding you how to live as a citizen of Jerusalem while living in the city of Babylon? Give it some thought.

Daniel “resolved” to remember. I am suggesting to you that Babylon poses the temptation of causing us to forget our God. What will you resolve to do to remember your God while living in exile here in Babylon and what will you do to help you remember that you are a child of God? It takes a measure of resolve.

GOD REMEMBERS US

The story of Daniel 1 ends with Daniel and his three friends being presented to the king at the end of their three years of training. The last two verses of the chapter read like this: *“And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.”* God blessed Daniel and Daniel was useful to the kingdom of Babylon. Daniel was used for good in the city of Babylon but he did not compromise his faith. God sees that and God honors that.

CONCLUSION

We live in “Babylon” but we belong to “Jerusalem.” Let’s not forget our God and let’s not forget who we are in Christ. Resolve to remember! Practice the disciplines that help you remember your God and that help you live for God in this foreign land. Like Daniel, God wants to use you for good in this land.

¹SparkNotes Editors. (2005). SparkNote on Saint Augustine (A.D. 354–430). Retrieved June 20, 2011, from <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/augustine/>

²Augustine, *The City of God, in a Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 282-282

³Albert Moehler “Now it is the Other Way Around—The Moral Revolution in Full View” www.albertmoehler.com, January 21, 2011

⁴Dallas Willard *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) 156

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