

Resolving to trust the God who rules.

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Date: 17 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Good evening and welcome again to Church Online. Can I just say, personally, thanks so much to people who have been in touch to encourage, to say that they're praying, to say that they're appreciating the content.

It's really helpful when you're speaking into the ether to remember that we are a community, we are family. Let me take the chance as well.

I've said it a little bit, but just to say thank you so much to Kellan, whose music ministry and also his work on YouTube has been such a gift to us.

As a church, we're so fortunate to have both his gift and his willingness to serve in the middle of his own busy schedule. So thanks to Kellan and thanks as well to Sarah, our administrator.

The gift of administration is so useful and valuable to a church. And maybe never more so than in times like this and keeping us connected. So thank you to Sarah.

[1 : 02] Thanks to everybody who tunes in, who connects. It's really encouraging that we can be together around God's word.

And to that end, let's begin our call to worship. It comes from Lamentations. Lamentations, a lament of the prophet Jeremiah.

Things were incredibly hard in his experience. And yet there are words of hope. Wonderful words. Lamentations 3 at verse 22. Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed.

For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, the Lord is my portion.

Therefore, I will wait for him. Let's wait on God with expectation now as we gather together that he would speak truth to our hearts and lives.

[2 : 07] That he would do us good as we sing, as we pray, as we hear God's word, as we reflect on it. Let's hear God's word. Let's read in Daniel chapter 1.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand and qualified to serve in the king's palace.

He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years and after that they were to enter the king's service.

[3 : 22] Among those who were chosen were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names. To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar.

To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Mishael. And to Azariah, Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.

Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel. But the official told Daniel, I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink.

Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? Then the king would have my head because of you. Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Please test your servants for ten days.

Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.

[4 : 35] So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the other young men who ate the royal food.

So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.

And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.

The king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. So they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Amen. Thank you both.

[5 : 47] Now, if you've got your Bibles, keep them open. Daniel, chapter 1. Last week we did an overview. This week getting into the main text of chapter 1.

And our big idea is resolving to trust the God who rules. Daniel is a book that begins when everything turns upside down.

Daniel and his three friends as teenagers are flung into unimaginable change. Taken away from their family to a foreign country.

Exposed to a new language. A radically different culture. Now working for an emperor as part of an empire that has just attacked and defeated their whole nation.

Surrounded by a different religion full of other idols. Experiencing a different diet. And all the while, they're part of a nation facing exile.

[6 : 58] Facing the judgment of God. That's some significant change, isn't it? What we see in the Daniel story, and it comes to mind because we recently studied the Joseph story, is the parallels.

Remember Joseph as a teenager? He was taken a prisoner to Egypt and he spent the rest of his life there. Well here, Daniel will spend the next around about 70 years serving four different emperors in Babylon.

So the story of Daniel is a story of national grief and national shock as exile has come. And the question for the people in Daniel's day then was, how can we be restored?

And Daniel and his friends serve for them as a model to imitate. Restoration would come when the people would return to serve the Lord.

When they would resist and reject idolatry. And when they wouldn't compromise their faith. Now Daniel's situation is not our situation.

[8 : 16] But of course we recognise that our upheaval is still real and significant and life-altering. And he is at the same time a model for us. Daniel chapter 1 says to us, Resolve to trust.

Resolve to follow the one true God who rules. So let's see that together. The story begins starkly. Because it reminds us that God rules in judgment. You can read again verse 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

So this sets the scene for us. Incidentally, knowing that some of you like museums and artefacts, you can go online to the British Museum and you can search their database.

And if you look for the Babylonian Chronicle, you'll find stone tablets that have been really helpful for dating the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, which have helped people to set what happens here at the time of 605 BC.

[9 : 32] So this is stage one of the fall of Jerusalem. But the significant question that the Bible would have us answer is, why did this happen?

And when we read the Bible and we read the history of the Bible, we discover that biblical history is at the same time the theology of history.

It looks to show where God stands in relation to world events. So verse 2 begins, And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hands.

This is not an accident. This is not down to the aggressive expansion plans of the Babylonian Empire. No, the judgment of God has come on Judah through Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

And the reason for that is because of the people's covenant disobedience. This is something they had been warned about from the beginning as the people of God.

[10:43] But there were some particular warnings in the build-up to this. So in 2 Kings chapter 20, we meet Hezekiah. Hezekiah, a good king, but he made an unwise choice in showing the treasury to the Babylonians, hoping to forge an alliance or relying on an alliance with Babylon, which was folly rather than depending on God.

And then the message of Jeremiah, which gave warning after warning to the people against following false gods, against turning from God's truth, against their spiritual adultery, where they were breaking off from being faithful to God and were being unfaithful, where they were guilty of great injustice.

So if you can imagine the picture, the storm clouds have been gathering. And what happens when storm clouds begin to gather? Our instinct is to find shelter.

But the people of Judah, they did not take shelter from the storm of God's judgment that was threatening. There was no repentance. You read a chapter like Leviticus 26, and you see that God in His patience would give warning after warning after warning to the people.

And those warnings would be ignored, progressively ramping up the pain and the suffering they would feel, but still there would be no turning back to God. Our story, the story of Daniel, begins with that warning becoming reality.

[12:26] To reject covenant with God is to receive God's judgment and not God's blessing.

For the exiles, the message is clear. Your response to this crisis must be to repent of your sin, of your idolatry, of your compromise, and to return to the one true God.

And when we read stories like this, there is no room for us to have complacency. The Bible speaks of the day of the Lord, which is coming, the day of the Lord's judgment.

When Jesus returns, He will judge the living and the dead. And for us, knowing that as reality, we are to find shelter in Jesus Christ, in His cross, in His finished work, of Him taking the storm of God's judgment against sin on Himself so that we might be spared, so that we might know blessing. So here in verse 2, we see God delivers. God delivers His people. God delivers the articles used for worship in the temple, and they are taken off by their enemies and put in pagan temples.

[13:51] But still, in this chapter, we see glimpses of hope. Just like in Eli's day, Eli who came before Samuel, when the ark was captured in his day and was taken to the temple of the god Dagon, what happened there was a wonderful, both comedy and the power of God.

Here's the ark of God, and Dagon was, believed to have defeated and shown himself superior to the god of Israel. But morning after morning, when the people would arrive in the temple, there was Dagon's statue smashed on the ground in front of the ark.

Here, God gains glory in foreign lands, and God will gain glory in exile. Here, God will gain glory through Daniel and his three friends.

Through their story, the rule of God will become evident. The glory of God will be apparent. God's deliverance will take centre stage, even as they are exiles living in a foreign land.

So there is judgment, but even then, there is hope. For you and I today, there is encouragement for us to trust in Jesus, the one who is God with us.

[15:22] To trust to that new covenant established in the body and blood of Jesus. To trust that he is with us when everything is upside down.

To trust that God is able to gain glory in the middle of suffering and trouble. It's an encouragement to us to trust that God rules for the good of his people.

We may not know why God is doing what he is doing, but we can trust that he is working out his good purposes, saving purposes for his people and for his glory.

So God rules in judgment. And we'll turn to the rule of God at the end of the chapter. But in between, we meet Daniel and his friends.

And what we see from Daniel in particular is that he resolves to trust in God. And he does that despite huge cultural pressure.

[16:25] You begin to read verse three to seven and you see some of that. So those that were taken to serve in the king's palace, they were to be taught in the language and literature of the Babylonians.

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine. They were to be trained for three years. And the chief official gave them new names. There's a lot going on. Nebuchadnezzar as a king had

what we might call a shock and awe approach to warfare.

The shock of a devastating conquest. Nations submitting to his rule and power. But then the awe as he sought to dazzle the brightest and the best with Babylonian wealth and culture to make them effectively Babylonians.

So for our four teenagers, there are significant cultural pressures that they are facing. First of all, there's the mention of the language and literature of Babylon.

Now, this is not the equivalent of, you know, here's your book of Shakespeare in Babylonian. Now, Babylonian stories and culture was full of stories of the gods.

[17 : 36] Many gods. Not all gods were equal. Lots of warfare among the gods. Gods that were connected with nature. So Daniel and his three friends, they needed to have a strong faith, a strong understanding of the truths about God so that they would be able to discern what was true and false as they engaged with the culture of Babylon.

They needed wisdom and they needed truth. In verse five, they enjoyed the king's luxuries for three years.

Here was their taste of success. As it were, if we stick in with this king, the idea was, well, wealth and prestige and honour will be ours.

Where will the loyalty go? And we'll come back to that. And they were given new names. They wouldn't be spoken to and identified as people of Israel's God.

Rather, they were given names connected to Babylon's gods and culture. Nebuchadnezzar's aim, establish new identities, establish new loyalties.

[18 : 52] Let the influence of the glory of Babylon pull people away from their ordinary and previous allegiance. Some of our American friends, I guess, will be familiar with the idea of pledging allegiance to the flag.

We'll hear for Daniel and his friends, the pressure is on to pledge allegiance to the flag of Babylon. With no family support, with no temple to go to, with no Bible to read, with no limits from a religious community around them, how will they work hard and work well and honour the emperor but maintain their loyalty and devotion to God?

That's a real challenge. That'd be a real challenge for any of us, never mind for a teenager. I guess it makes us ask some questions of ourselves.

Do I have a biblical worldview that is strong? That as I look and read and watch what's happening in culture, read the novels, watch the movies, can I see what is true and what is false?

Can I see what would agree with God's view of the world and identity and values and what is opposed to them?

[20 : 29] Daniel had his particular pressure points in his day. What are my pressure points and what are yours? What behaviours or beliefs do my friends and my colleagues hold to that don't match up to what the Bible teaches but where we're being pulled in that direction?

Fundamentally, does knowing Jesus define me? Is that vital to who I am, how I think of myself, how I live or is it an optional extra?

I can leave aside if it doesn't seem convenient for the moment. Like Daniel, if we're Christians, if we're trusting in Jesus, we're citizens of heaven but we're living in Babylon and so we need much wisdom and much resolve to trust in God in that context with all those pressures around us.

what we're going to see very clearly is that Daniel resolves to put loyalty to God first. And it all centres around verse 8, doesn't it?

In verse 8 we read, So what's this about?

[22 : 06] And again, you can read lots of different opinions about this. So some people will say, well perhaps the food was sacrificed to idols, perhaps it didn't have the blood drained, perhaps it wasn't kosher.

I'm not persuaded by that because later on in Daniel, Daniel chapter 2, we read, at that time, this is many years later, 60 or so years later, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.

I ate no choice food, no meat or wine touched my lips. So three weeks of fasting from choice food, meats or wine.

Still in Babylon. So what I think is happening here is that Daniel is taking a stand to say my first allegiance is to God.

In the ancient Near East, to share a meal with someone was a commitment to friendship. And in a sense, all this luxury was Nebuchadnezzar looking to secure friendship and loyalty from those who

were now in his service.

[23 : 28] Daniel and his three friends say no because they want freedom to be loyal and to trust in God. So what they choose instead, verse 12, very simple test, very simple diet.

Please test your servants for 10 days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. They want to eat what God provides. They want to express dependence on God, the creator. And of course, what's the outcome of that 10-day diet? Verse 15, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

This is not an advert for vegetarianism. This is an advertisement for God's glory and God delivering and God honouring his faithful followers.

If covenant disobedience has brought the people under God's curse and judgment, then obedience is bringing blessing and favour.

[24 : 39] Now when we think about this for a moment, this was a costly resolve, wasn't it? We might imagine some people around Daniel saying, but Daniel, you're risking missing important opportunities.

you need to stick in with the king. Don't stand out as being different or awkward. Just eat the food. You can still honour God in your heart.

Look around Daniel, it's no big deal. Other exiles are doing it. But Daniel and his friends, they resolve to trust in God, to express their dependence and loyalty to God.

And again, it's important for us to ask ourselves, do I have the resolve to put loyalty to God first? Now we will see in the story of Daniel and his friends that it's tested in much more significant ways. Can I put God first in the little moments and in the big decisions?

[25 : 46] when it comes to family, perhaps our house feels absolutely chaotic right now.

Can you and I put loyalty to God first so that we want to obey God's commands and to be wise as parents and wise as children and to respond and live for the glory of God?

When it comes to our work and to our studies, are we resolving to put loyalty to God first so that we work with integrity and honour, that we show compassion and care to those around us, that we make time for them, that we speak truth and we speak only what is kind?

With our finances, do we consider that we are stewards of God's money and we are to use it in ways that will love and serve others?

Crucial for us in resolving to trust in God is that we see the glory of God, that we see that glory as our great treasure, that above all else, we would value his welcome and friendship, that we would live for his well done, good and faithful servant.

[27 : 27] Back to the rule of God at the end of the chapter, God rules in mercy and salvation. Again, there are Joseph parallels in this chapter.

In verse 9, did you notice that God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel? Same thing happens in Potiphar's house and even when he's in prison with Joseph. And then in verse 17, to these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. God gave knowledge, he gave gifts, including visions, just like with Joseph.

And Daniel, just like Joseph, would come to find a high place in a foreign court. God raises Daniel and his friends because they are vehicles for bringing glory to God.

God will have glory in Babylon. God will deliver his faithful people. God will cause enemy kings to recognise the supremacy of the God of the Bible.

[28 : 41] I really appreciate in verse 19 the simple fact that it says there, the king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

So they entered the king's service. They're not Belteshazzar, they're not Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Shakespeare, asked what's in a name. For Daniel's friends, there's a lot.

They answer to their Babylonian names, absolutely. But in their hearts, they belong to God. They keep their identity as the people of God.

Here, in a sense, is the key to surviving and thriving in lockdown. Here is the key to enduring with joy, enduring suffering.

Here is how to live well when the world, our world turns upside down. It's to know who you are in Christ and to live out our identity as a child of God, trusting in our good, good father.

[29 : 53] But above all else, when we recognise that our resolve fails, we see Daniel as a man of resolute faith, but what about when our faith fails?

And sometimes we know this, we fail miserably, we let ourselves down, we let others down, and above all, we let God down. And we don't want the message to simply be, work really hard to try and be like Daniel, use your own courage, use your own strength, and be steadfast.

that's not what we say first and foremost, we say we must look to Jesus, who is our greater than Daniel. Jesus left home, Jesus perfectly resisted every temptation that came his way, Jesus was absolutely loyal and obedient to his father and pursuing his father's glory, trusting in his father's plan, even as it took him to the cross where he would die in our place for our sins to secure our forgiveness and bring us peace with God.

He died to establish the new covenant and now he's in glory and he prays for us. Jesus is our way home.

In the letter of Peter, he describes Christians as exiles. This is not our home. Glory is our home. Heaven is our home.

[31 : 32] Being with God is where we belong. Jesus is the way to God and where Jesus is now in glory we will follow.

But while we are in exile, Jesus as he prays for us, as he sends his spirit to us, as he speaks in his word, he provides guidance and strength for us in exile as exiles so that our faith and dependence will endure even, even when the world turns upside down.

peace.

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