

A tale of two cities

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[0 : 0 0] Our first Bible reading today is from 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 9 to 17. This can be found on page 1220 of the Church Bibles.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the Emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

[1 : 2 0] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the Emperor. Our second reading is from Daniel chapter 1 and can be found on page 891 of the Church Bibles.

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 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. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance, and skilful 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.

The 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.

[3 : 0 2] Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishal, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar.

Hananiah he called Shadrach. Mishal he called Meshach. And Azariah he called Abednego. 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. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

And 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. Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishal, and Azariah.

[4 : 09] Test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then 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. So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. At 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.

So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom.

And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At 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.

And the king spoke with them. And among all of them, none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishal, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.

[5 : 23] 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 his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. Let's pray together, shall we? Let's pray. Our Father God, we live in a world where most people think you are weak, pathetic, ignorable, irrelevant.

So much in our world appears to deny the truth that you reign. Please would you persuade us that that is the true state of affairs as we read your word this morning.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Good morning, everybody. I want to start with a very personal question.

I want to ask who gets your vote. And I'm not thinking there about whether it's Teresa or Jeremy. I'm not thinking about whether you are pro or anti-Brexit, whether you think this is all somebody else's fault or whatever.

[6 : 36] I'm talking about the issue of loyalty. The person, the organization, the system, the thing, the idea, the whatever. The thing that, basically, the thing to whom you are ultimately loyal.

In other words, when they play the tune, you dance to their music. And that is the question that lies behind the book of Daniel. Who rules? Who is boss?

Who calls the shots? Not just in general terms, but for you. Who calls the shots for you? Now, of course, this book is in the Bible, so you won't be surprised to know that the right answer is God.

But it is a bit more complicated than that. There are lots of ways of summarizing the storyline of the Bible. To read it as a single story.

I'm sure you do understand that the Bible is not just a collection of a whole load of little stories that are bunged together a bit like a bookshelf of novels. You know, there's no connection from one novel to the next.

[7 : 41] No, in the Bible, all of the books together tell one single story. And that single story is not about you. One way of summarizing it is that it is about two cities.

Jerusalem and Babylon. Jerusalem is God's holy city and it's where God's true people belong. And if we want to see Jerusalem, we shouldn't look down south to the eastern end of the Med.

We need to look up. Jerusalem isn't here yet, but it is coming. It is the eternal heavenly home to which God is taking his people, Jerusalem. Jerusalem. The other city is Babylon.

Babylon in the Bible stands for the city where everybody lives. It's a city that represents human depravity. It's a fitting place, actually, for people who've kicked God into touch.

And Babylon is where God's people live. God's people live here in Babylon, in exile, if you like, until the new Jerusalem comes, the place where we really belong.

[8 : 52] And all the time we're here in Babylon, we're aliens. We're strangers and we can't wait to get home. Now, as I say that, of course, that is not so different for us, is it?

I mean, us living here in London. God's people, far from our heavenly home, living like exiles, strangers, aliens, in a city that largely doesn't acknowledge God.

And this is where the question of loyalty kicks in, isn't it? We live in Babylon, but if you're a Christian, you belong in Jerusalem. You live in one city, but you belong in the other one.

And Babylon is still very much all around us. And Jerusalem is far, far away. And it's in the future, and it's currently a bit vague. We know it's important. We know it's more significant than Babylon.

But at the moment, it doesn't seem nearly as real to us. So let me start with my first question again. Living here in Babylon, to whom are you loyal?

[9 : 55] Or to which city are you most loyal? And that is why Daniel is a great book to read. It's going to do us lots of good these next three Sundays as we think about it.

It's going to help all of us to live in Babylon, knowing that we belong in Jerusalem. So we're going to look this morning at chapter one. You've got an outline on the service sheet of my headlines for this morning.

And here is the first one. That God rules when things go badly. And I want to say right at the beginning, that is a surprising statement, isn't it? That even when the bottom falls out of whatever, to say that God still rules then, even then.

So you look down to the first couple of verses here. In the first year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God.

And he brought them back to his land, the land of Shinar, to the house of his God. And he placed the vessels in the treasury of his God. Now, those verses are easy to read out. But they actually are a crisis for everything that the nation stood for.

[11 : 05] Because God had made the Jews his special people. And his promise to them was they were going to be a great nation and they'd live in a prosperous land. And that was a promise that God kept as the mighty children of Israel, two million plus of them, walked out of Egypt and walked into the land that God promised them.

We're picking up the story about a thousand years after the Exodus. And that once united nation has now divided into two. And the northern half has been threatened by the world superpower, who are Assyria.

And Assyria has basically carried them off into exile and they effectively disappear from history. Meanwhile, in the south, which is the bit of the nation that we're thinking about, Judah, they enjoy a brief reprieve before the next bully comes along, and that is Babylon.

And that's what verse 1 is saying, isn't it? The land was invaded. Look down to verse 3. The best people are carried off, including Daniel, who is a teenager probably, an undergraduate student.

Probably 14-ish. They were much more intelligent in those primitive times. And later, all the people are going to end up being deported as well, and the city is going to be destroyed.

[12 : 25] Now, the reason for saying that is that Daniel is basically crisis literature. It's 999 literature. How can you make sense of it? You know, is God any good?

God looks about as all-powerful as a jelly. You know, he is just another poor choice in the cafeteria of divine also-rans.

Whereas Babylon, full of its pathetic pseudo-gods that are just carved out of lumps of wood, that's clearly where the power is, isn't it?

You know, the tyrant regime can pull on its jackboots, march in without so much as a buy-your-leave, and stamp out the people of God and drag them out of their land.

How can you say God is in charge? I mean, saying God is in charge is a bit like saying the Wizard of Oz is in charge. When you finally get to the end and you see what the wizard is like, he's just a pathetic, befuddled old man with a megaphone.

[13 : 23] Is that what God is like? So now see what verse 2 says. Look again down to verse 2, because it says that God did this. He delivered them over.

The Lord gave the king of Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. In other words, this isn't something that happened despite God, against his better judgment.

God was ruling, no less, when his people are in chains. And in fact, this exile is God doing exactly what he said he would do. He promised that things would go well for the nation if it was loyal to God, and things would go badly for the nation if they were disloyal to God.

Covenant blessing for obedience. Covenant cursing for covenant disloyalty. And the rest, as they say, is history. This nation, Judah, was disloyal.

God kept sending messages through the prophets saying, turn around, come back, repent. They didn't. And now, of course, here in verse 2, God did what God said he would do.

[14 : 30] Exile. Dragged away from the place of blessing. So this thing that seemed like an absolute disaster, that was God keeping his promises.

It's exactly why they get taken into exile, why they're punished. It is because God still rules. But my point is, think about what this would feel like.

You know, it is hard to believe, isn't it, that God is in charge, that he rules when you're in a situation like the beginning of Daniel. An older preacher that I really admire once said this, that the whole of the Bible is written to convince us that God is in charge because we don't really believe he is.

Do you think God is less in charge when things are tough? When some absolute disaster happens to you, you know, some relationship falls apart and then there's bad feeling and hurt?

Or the plans that you've got for this stage of your life or the next stage of your life and that just don't work out? Or your computer crashes and you lose all this morning's work. And yes, it really can be as trivial as that, can't it?

[15 : 47] You know, something quite tiny in the big scheme of things. And we think, oh, where is God when you need him? You feel as if God has failed you somehow.

But when things go swimmingly and everything is sunny, well, then we think God is in charge. We're so shallow, aren't we? God rules. Full stop.

If things go badly for us, it's not because God has lost some of his magic superpowers. And if things go well for us, that's not because God is suddenly powerful again.

Behind troop movements on the ground, God is moving nations and his purposes onwards. One example of this that's often quoted is what happened in China in the early 1950s.

You probably know how the China Inland Mission was established by Hudson Taylor. And then early in the 1950s, the Maoist Chinese regime expelled all the Western missionaries.

[16 : 52] And that affected my family. My father thought at one stage he was going to be going as a missionary to China. And I understand that in that time, there were enormous shockwaves through the Christian world in the West.

You know, how can God do this? How can it be that God is in charge, and yet every Christian witness in China is expelled? You know, if you believe in a God who wants mission, and you believe in a God who is in control, how can God allow the Maoist anti-God regime just to kick evangelism out?

That's the question all the Christians in the West were asking. Now, of course, now we see it differently, because there's a revival going on in China. If you compare the average growth rate.

I saw a pastor on Newsnight just a few years ago saying that he thought China could become a Christian nation. Extraordinary. But whether or not it gets that happy ending, God still rules.

And still ruled in the 1950s. Or what about Afghanistan? It's over 99% Muslim. A tiny handful of Christians, virtually wiped out.

[18 : 08] Christian evangelism is prevented, and yet God still rules. A couple of years ago, I was in Zanzibar. I met this man, a secret believer.

He's a convert from Islam. He, because of his conversion, was tried under Sharia law. The punishment was that he was beaten up. His back was broken. His right side is sort of paralyzed.

His right leg completely deformed because of how he was treated. He can only get round now in a hand cart like this. Hand bike. He can't live openly.

Can't go to church. Can't get a job. Can't have a house. Can't be seen in the streets. He lives in the shadows. And yet he's still believing. And there's still a church in Zanzibar. There are still people becoming Christians.

God still rules. Second thing, God rules when things go well. Look down to verse 3.

[19 : 08] The king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the youths of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance, skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace and to teach them literature and language of the Chaldeans.

The 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. In other words, enter the king's service.

Now, what's going on? Obviously, there's a bit of clever political maneuvering here, isn't there? You know, you indoctrinate the potential leaders of the regime you've taken over.

And you indoctrinate them at undergraduate level. He takes them off to his private university, and all things Babylonian are pumped into them. So he's molding potential rebels into dependence.

Clever. But I think there's a greater significance here as well, that what this king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, is doing, is attempting to order the world, to reorder the world with Babylon and its king at the very center.

[20 : 24] It's an attempt to impose unity. One language. One social policy. One common bond of education. A national curriculum. And in verses 6 and 7, they get new names, imposing a new identity on them.

All of the names, the new names they get, link them to Babylon and its gods, and therefore to Babylon's king. This is an attempt to order the entire world with Nebuchadnezzar at the center.

A challenger to God, if you like. Opposing God. And yet God is still ruling, and ruling as much as ever. Look down at verse 9 and see the evidence of this.

See, at 9, after Daniel and his friends decide that they're not going to eat the royal food and wine in verse 8, we're told in verse 9 that God affected the official so that he showed favor to Daniel.

But notice how verse 9 is worded. God makes this happen. God gave. It's the same word as in verse 2. God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the eyes of this man.

[21 : 40] Look down to verse 17. It's the same thing again. God gave knowledge and understanding. Even in pagan literature and culture. Notice again, though, it's God who gives them this.

And given what we're told in verse 9 and verse 17 explicitly, I presume that what's going on in verse 15, we're supposed to take that the same way. You know, there's stuff in the paper every week, isn't there, about diet.

Whatever we're meant to not eat this week. Burnt toast or bacon is now. Lots of people were eating bacon at the Needham's house yesterday. I don't think we should have done it. I think we're all going to die now. And maybe it is simply that this simpler diet was more healthy.

But even if that scientifically explains verse 15, the theme of the chapter is that God has done that as well. He rules. God rules so that a government official shows favor.

God rules when we are healthy. God rules when we pass exams at a secular university in secular studies. That's quite a thing to say, isn't it?

[22 : 53] Now, this is important because one of the images in Daniel, it comes in chapter 4. It's one of the ideas, one of the pictures that comes in one of the dreams. It sees this Babylonian empire, this reign of Nebuchadnezzar, as a huge spreading tree.

We used to have a tree a bit like this, a copper beech, in our drive up to our house in Nottingham. Oh, the days of greenery and trees. The one in this dream, though, was considerably larger than this.

It was visible to the ends of the earth. And in its branches, the birds of the air would build their nests and be safe and provided for. And in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar has to come to realize that the greatness of the tree belongs to God and his kingdom is like a great tree, only because God has made it so.

But you get the point of the image for Daniel and Daniel's people in exile. They found themselves not like castaways on a desert island facing terrible deprivation.

They found themselves like birds of the air resting in the branches of a great empire. There in Babylon, they did very well, actually. The Jews shared in the pagan prosperity.

[24 : 11] And when God sent them there, as he said he would for their disobedience, he said that they would be there for a while. And because they were going to be there for a while, they were to settle in and to build houses, not live in tents.

Plant perennials in their gardens. They should have families rather than putting off having kids till we get back home. They should care about and pray for the welfare of Babylon.

In other words, I take it it's not wrong for Christians to care about the economy of our country or the prosperity of London or how the company we work for is faring or the degree we might get because God's sovereign rule extends to this and everything else.

His rule isn't limited. His rule isn't limited to just what we might call religious activities. I mean, when you're combing your hair tonight and you look down at the hairs on the brush, for some of us, there may be a lot of hairs on the brush at that moment.

For the others looking around, there may not be very many hairs left to go on the brush. But whatever it is, the Bible says not only does God know how many there are on the brush and how many there are left on your head, but also that they only got from the head to the brush on his say-so.

[25 : 37] God's rule extends to that. See, this anti-God pagan wasn't outside the rule of God, however much he may try and establish a rival regime.

He wasn't outside the rule of God. God was still on the throne and Nebuchadnezzar's prosperity was actually God's very generous provision even for him and for the people who are nesting there.

God rules when things go badly. Well, well, he rules. And because God rules, thirdly, live as exiles. And that, I think, is why the stand of Daniel and his three friends, that's what's significant here, I think, that they refuse to eat the royal food and wine.

And this is the point, I think, in this story in chapter one, where they show whose side that they are on. They go public, if you like. They say courageously that they serve a higher king.

That they're throwing in their lot with the ruler with a capital R, not with Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler with a little r. And in some way, they model what it means for us today in our world as God's people.

[27 : 01] In Babylon, belonging in Jerusalem. Exiles from our true home. And the message is, yeah, settle down there. But don't settle down.

Yeah, you belong there. But you don't belong there. Look down to verse eight. Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

And therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. The key word in the verse is the word defile. That for Daniel and his friends to eat this food and wine from the king's table, that would have been defilement.

Now, I don't think the message of the chapter is, be a vegetarian. Sorry, veggies amongst us. It's clear elsewhere in the story that Daniel did eat rich food and wine.

Nor do I think is this about Jewish kosher food laws. Nor, I think, is it that this food would almost certainly have been closely connected to idol worship.

[28 : 11] I think it is more that this food is a bit like a business lunch. That the kind of lunch where the food is all about buttering up the client. It's the way to cement a deal or an agreement.

Just as it is for many in the city today, you have the talks, you reach the agreement, you go out for lunch. In other words, in this situation here, to eat food from the king's table would be a sign of total dependence on the king.

Of total loyalty to him. It would be saying, we need him for everything. We need him for food. We're going to be loyal to him in every respect or as our provider. And as far as Daniel was concerned, this is the point to say no.

This was the moment for the citizens of Jerusalem to make it clear that there were limits to their loyalty to Babylon. Even if they would say yes over their education and yes over their political career and even yes over their new names, which seems extraordinary, doesn't it?

Actually, some have suggested that verse 7 and verse 8 should go really closely together because both verses use the word set upon. So when Babylon in verse 7 tried to rebrand these guys, it's a bit like, giving them a Babylon tattoo.

- [29 : 34] You know, a Babylon God's tattoo. Setting upon them, which is what they're doing, they set upon them their anti-God identity. That is the point, verse 8, for Daniel and his pals to set upon their hearts, the word that's translated resolved, to set upon them, themselves, the greater loyalty to the Lord.

This is the point to say no to total loyalty because loyalty to God mattered more. Now just think about it. I wonder if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego hadn't said no here, would they in middle age have said no when they were expected to fall down in front of the king's idol in chapter 3?

If Daniel hadn't learnt here as an undergraduate to say no, would he have made the stand when he was in his mid-80s? Yes, mid-80s, and he's threatened with the lion's den.

All kinds of people may claim allegiance from us as a rival lord to the God who rules.

That when they play the music, we're expected to dance. It could be team loyalty, the company spirit, the person in the office whose approval we desperately want, big formal institutions.

- [31 : 05] I mean, Babylon is full of people who expect our total loyalty. And if we belong to God, there is a point to say no to food from the king's table.

A point at which we graciously but boldly make the stand here and no further. My first loyalty is to God. I'm going to nail my colours to the mast here. I am a Christian.

This culture and all it stands for is not my home. I've got another home I'm heading to and there's a point where I need to make that clear. So, for example, when it comes to Brexit and all the debates are about national self-interest, you know, there may come a point where we have to stand up to that relentless pursuit of national self-interest and say, there's something that matters more to me than that.

I've got a higher loyalty. I'm not making a party political point here. Same for whichever party is in government. So, too, with the leaders of church denominations.

There may come a point where we say, we respect you, we pray for you, we submit to your leadership, but there is a point where we have to say no to bishops' reports as they drift further and further away from the Bible.

- [32 : 23] For God rules, not the general synod. But, of course, in some ways, a very principled stand against public institutions would be easy.

But I guess for all of us, for 95% of the time, saying no to the king's food is a lot more mundane. And it's more like Daniel chapter 1.

It's over something like food. It's not an obvious right-wrong issue. It's maybe not the issue that we would pick as the battleground. It may be even something quite small, as small-seeming as what you eat.

And Daniel 1 is tricky to apply, I think. And maybe the key idea is not so much what it is that they make us stand over, but the fact that they make us stand at all.

That we do is more important than what we make the stand over, maybe. that we express somewhere, somehow, our higher loyalty to the king of kings and lord of lords.

- [33 : 30] And we announce graciously but boldly, God rules, and I'm on his side. So, a point for the Christian undergraduate to say in the science seminar, I won't simply adopt all that accidentalism that your theories of origins assume.

Or to say in the arts faculty, God has spoken words, so words mean something, texts do have meaning. Or a point for the person at school to say, I won't join in with your weekend drinking culture, because I'm a Christian.

I've got a higher loyalty, even than my friendship with you, being part of your gang, a higher loyalty to the king who rules. To say at work to the boss, yet Tuesday night is my Bible study at church.

I can work late, but not Tuesdays. That's the one night I can't work late. I can think of a man in a church where I used to work. He worked for the council, and it was his job to draw up the contracts for the employees of the council.

And as he said it, most of the people he was drawing up the contracts for were not blessed with the greatest intelligence. And his job was to hide in the small print of the contracts lots and lots of loopholes so that the council could dismiss them if circumstances changed.

[35 : 02] And when he became a Christian, he went to his bosses and said, as a Christian, I won't do that anymore. So he was moved sideways. Complication in this story is that his wife wasn't a Christian.

He's got two daughters who are 12, 14. Imagine the conversation when he went home and told his wife what he'd done. You did what? You mad? See, if you don't make a stand now, what makes you think you'll make a stand later in life?

You know, when you want to marry a non-Christian. Or when your career masters treat you like a slave and think you've sold out on everything. Or when prosperity so sedates us and soothes us and smooths off every edge of Christian distinctiveness.

And because God rules, we know that one day we will rule alongside him, which is what I think the very last verse of the chapter is about, verse 21, which is this crushing statement.

Here is Nebuchadnezzar the tyrant establishing world rule, enforcing world domination, and yet, according to verse 21, Daniel, the slave, outlasted him.

[36 : 34] And Daniel outlasted his son's reign as king of Babylon as well. And Daniel outlasted his entire dynasty and the kingdom.

Now, the point, I think, to learn from verse 21 is not that Christians will always keep their jobs or will always do well or will outlast their boss.

Verse 21 is only saying that this happened here. But it is, I think, a picture of a greater truth that the book of Daniel will enlarge and that is because God rules, those who side with him will rule alongside him.

Not necessarily now because in the now Christians continue to be trodden on. God's people are in chains in this book in our world, in our day. But in the future world, where things are put to rights, God's people will turn out to be the winning side.

They will be the cup victors. They will be the battle victors. And that's why we, too, live as exiles.

[37 : 43] We, as Christians, do. because we are citizens of heaven, of the eternal city. We have a hope that stands the test of Tim. I think it's actually the test of time.

I don't know who Tim is, but the hope that we have that we were seeing about earlier is one that stands the test of, more significant than Tim, the test of time. That is our citizenship, a certain home.

And so, here, if we are sojourners on earth, we're just staying here for a little while. It's our time on earth.

It's a bit like a weekend away in a hotel. That's all we're doing here. We don't pretend we live here. We've got to go home soon, pack our bags, go back home at the end of the weekend.

We're aliens, strangers, exiles. I mean, hotels are nice to stay in, but you wouldn't live there, would you? But we know who rules, even over this world, and whether we feel things are terrible for us, or whether we're enjoying every blessing of Babylon, because we know who rules, the wise thing for us is to throw in our lot with him, to live for him, not to fear those who might oppose us, but to fear him who will be the victor and reign forever.

[39 : 06] let's pray together. our Father God, it's such an extraordinary thought that every darkest corner of this world is under your sovereign rule.

There isn't any place where things are happening despite you. Thank you for your rule. Thank you that you rule when things go well or things go badly.

Thank you that that is true. The alternative, that you didn't rule, would be utterly frightening, terrifying. Please will you help us to believe what your word has told us today.

And please would you help us to be so convinced of this truth that we throw in our lot with you. Please help us to work out how we can declare that allegiance, that higher allegiance to you.

All the different situations that we're in, how we apply this chapter. May there be lots of good conversations over coffee and lunch today as we think about what this might mean in each of our situations.

[40 : 37] But for those of us who do know you and who believe this truth, please may we in our daily lives express this allegiance to you, our loyalty to you.

We thank you for your word to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen.