

Living for God in Exile

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Alexandria. Hopefully you have your Bibles open to Daniel chapter 1.! This scripture is indeed a fitting scripture for us to be considering this morning for the student service as we prepare our students to in some cases return to their various schools of learning and in other cases to be headed there for the first time.

And so let's bow in a word of prayer before we look further into God's word. Father, we are so grateful for this opportunity that we have to gather in the name of Jesus and on the ground of his finished work on Calvary's cross.

We thank you, Lord, that you have given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. You have not left us to ourselves. And Lord, most of all, you have given us your word.

We ask this morning that you would speak to all of us from your word. But in particular, we ask that you would speak to our students who are going to be returning to their various places of learning. Lord, we especially pray for our college students, those who are returning, those who are headed to college for the first time.

[1 : 31] Lord, their circumstances are varied as they individually are. And we ask that you would use this message this morning to speak to them as they need to hear it.

Lord, enable each one to hear in his or her own context. And Lord, then help them to apply it to their lives.

Pray to speak to parents in particular as well. Those who are going to be once again entrusting their children to others to educate them.

We pray for those who will be releasing their children into new environments, new schools, and even into new countries.

Lord, we ask these things because you're the only one who's able to do them. I pray that above and beyond my words, we would all hear your word. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[2 : 38] Amen. Amen. I want to begin by asking you a question. And the question is this, who are you? I know you probably are thinking, well, what kind of question is that?

That is so broad. That is so wide. So let me narrow it down a little bit. If you profess to know Jesus Christ, and you profess to follow him, who are you as you live life in this fallen world?

Now, though our answers no doubt will vary, God's word actually provides for us the most appropriate description for who we are living in this fallen world.

Those of us who have made professions of faith to belong to Jesus and to follow Jesus. And it's one word.

And the word is exiles. God's people in this world are exiles. We're foreigners.

[3 : 56] We're living in a land that is not our home. Listen to how Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2, 11 through 12. God says, God's people are sojourners or strangers, as the King James Version puts it.

We are exiles in a world that is not our home. And we should be concerned when we are feeling very comfortably at home in a place that Scripture says is not our home.

We see this theme of being in exile running through the pages of Scripture, culminating in Revelation 22, where God's people finally come home. They come to the city that Abraham was looking forward to in faith, a city with foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

But if we were to consider from Scripture, perhaps the best example of what it means or it looks like to be a sojourner, to be a stranger, to be an exile in this world, perhaps that example is the Scripture that we have just read this morning.

in Daniel chapter 1, where we find Daniel and his three Hebrew friends faithfully living while in exile in a place that was hostile, in a place that was foreign.

[6 : 01] we find these four men. And I think this account is especially relevant for our students, our students generally, because more and more education systems and places of learning are becoming foreign lands in an increasing way.

They're becoming foreign lands because they espouse many of the values and the convictions and the views that we who follow Christ do not hold to.

This is especially true in colleges and universities. And especially in the two places of primary choice where our students tend to go when they go abroad, and that's the United States and Canada.

Those of you who are university students or soon to be university students, in a sense, you will be living in a foreign land, whether that's a foreign land as in University of the Bahamas, for example, or in the United States or Canada.

You're going to be living in a foreign land. You're going to be living in a context where the culture and the values and the convictions are foreign. And to some extent, this is true whether you are a Christian or not, and you may have just grown up in a Christian home and you may not have, to this point, espoused faith in Christ.

[7 : 37] But the fact that you've grown up in a Christian home, it will be evident to you when you go into that environment that you have entered into a foreign land in many respects.

And so this is why this account in Daniel chapter 1 is especially relevant to our college students and our soon-to-be college students in particular.

Daniel and his three friends were actually college students. They were enrolled in the University of Babylon. and they were there for three years as we will see shortly.

In verse 5 of Daniel chapter 1, we read how the king assigned them a particular regimen of food. He determined what they were to be learning and he determined the time that they would be learning it and he said it would be over a period of three years.

[8 : 46] And so as we consider this account this morning, my prayer is that the Lord will use it. And again, I know that I speak across a broad spectrum of students this morning.

The youngest to the oldest heading to college. I pray that the Lord would use it to instruct all who are returning to school in some way, but especially those who are looking to head into university. The book of Daniel opens with a historical restatement of the captivity of God's people in Babylon. Instead of being in the familiar land of Palestine, they found themselves in the foreign land of Babylon.

And this was a difficult dilemma. As the book of Daniel shows, obviously the people would have had many questions.

They would have wondered how they were finding themselves in this particular predicament. In Psalm 137, we read how the psalmist recounts how God's people were in captivity and how they wept when they remembered their home in Jerusalem.

[10 : 04] and the psalmist recounts how the Babylonians would taunt them and require of them to sing a song. And their response was, how can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

God? And the psalmist doesn't tell us other questions that they may have asked, but I believe that another question that they probably asked was not just about how do we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

I believe that another question that they asked was, how can we faithfully serve God? God? How can we faithfully serve God while living in exile? How can we continue the practices, the system of worship?

How can we do that in a foreign land, in a land where we're different from everyone else around us? How can I serve God in a context in which I am an exile, a foreigner, spiritually speaking? I know that this question strikes you as being strange, but if you belong to Christ, if you truly belong to Christ, this world is not your home.

[11 : 43] Again, scripture teaches us that we are sojourners, we are exiles, our citizenship is from above. Our citizenship is from the heavenly Jerusalem.

And in truth, we all find ourselves in a world that is hostile to our beliefs and our convictions about who God is.

and therefore all of us, parents and students, every single one of us, we are living in exile if we belong to the Lord.

And so the question for all of us this morning needs to be how do we serve God while living in exile? How do we do that faithfully? So I trust that all of us are engaging and considering this question this morning and my hope is that we'll find some answers in Daniel chapter one. And I want to share three particular things about how we can live faithfully and serve God faithfully as we live as exiles in a place that is not our home.

[13:05] And first is this, maintain a divine perspective. We see this in Daniel, who is the author of the book of Daniel.

Daniel maintained a divine perspective and we see that divine perspective in the very first two verses. Let's look at it again. It reads, 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.

Daniel begins this historical recount by maintaining a divine perspective and here's what he says. He says essentially the reason we are in Babylon is not because Nebuchadnezzar was more powerful than King Jehoiakim.

The reason we are here is God gave Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was able to look beyond the natural circumstances and recognize that there was a sovereign God who was responsible for the circumstances in which he and all the other Jews who were living in Babylon found themselves.

[14:47] And I believe the reason is that Daniel read his Bible. Daniel understood what his Bible said about the nation that he was a part of and the reason that they would be in Babylon.

It helped him and it gave him a divine perspective. Because Daniel knew his Bible he did not as we say he didn't freak out and say this devastation is too horrific to be an act of God.

He didn't say how in the world could God be in this? No, Daniel's perspective was the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand meaning Nebuchadnezzar.

And so one of the first things I want to say to us this morning is that if we are going to serve God faithfully wherever we find ourselves whatever that school might be, however you get there whether you're transitioning from primary school and going into high school and maybe you had different options and that's not the school that perhaps you wanted to go to or maybe you are going to college and there's some particular details that aren't exactly the way you wanted them to be.

Let's learn from Daniel this morning. He overlooked all of that and he recognized there's a sovereign God above it. And so I say to you this morning settle the issue that no matter what your circumstances are as relates to education ultimately there's the sovereign hand of the Lord who has led you and brought you to the circumstances where you are.

[16:40] If you accept that you'll not be looking behind, you'll not be second guessing, you'll not be wondering, you will acknowledge and trust that God brought you, God is at work, God will lead you, God will direct you, you maintain a divine perspective.

You fix your eyes on him, not on your circumstances. One of the things that having a divine perspective does for us is it helps us when we meet with trials and difficulties.

difficulties and you will meet with trials and difficulties. I was just meditating on this thought the other day that it is quite interesting that sometimes whether we do this for an extended period of time or it's just a flash in our minds where we almost want to wish our circumstances were what somebody else's were.

We see something and say, boy, I'd like to be like that. And you know what? Every single person in this world, there's no one in this world who has a life that they are absolutely pleased with every single aspect of it.

And the reason for that is we live in a fallen world. We live in a broken world. We live in a world where there's nothing that is perfect and that will fully satisfy our hearts. you can find people with all the money in the world, more money than they could ever spend.

[18:17] Do you know what? There's still something in their lives that their money cannot buy. It doesn't matter who it is, what it is. And I say to you this morning as you return to school, as you head to schools for the first time, college for the first time, you're in a fallen world, you're in a broken world, and so you're going to meet with difficulties.

You're going to meet with some challenges. As Daniel mentioned, you know, you may meet with a difficult professor. Maintaining a divine perspective will help you to recognize, you know what? God, you're sovereign over all of that. You're sovereign over this professor whose class I now have. you're sovereign over the roommate that I now have. You're sovereign over these circumstances that I now face in this new chapter of my life.

If you maintain a divine perspective, you'll be able to process those things in a helpful way, trusting that the same God who led you is the same God who will continue to lead you.

The same God who cared for you will continue to care for you. No matter what those circumstances might be.

[19 : 38] And so I want to ask this morning, do you have a divine perspective about your life? Do you believe that there is a sovereign God who has given you life and given you birth, brought you into this world and led you wherever you are and that you can trust him, even if it's difficult, even if it's hard, and that he is sovereign above your choices?

If you don't have the divine perspective this morning, I encourage you to draw from how Daniel interpreted his circumstances and said, Lord, would you give me a divine perspective?

Would you give me conviction that you're the one who is really ordering and directing and leading my life? No matter how difficult it may be, no matter how hard it might be, Lord, help me to see that you are the one leading and directing.

Give me a divine perspective about my life. Teach me to say amen. That's the first lesson.

For living in exile in a land that's not our home, we need to maintain the divine perspective. The second is closely connected to the first, and the second is this, cultivate a discerning mind.

[21 : 23] Cultivate a discerning mind. We read in verses 5 through 7 that three things happened to and for Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Three things. First, we see in verse 5 that like all the other Jewish boys who were brought into Babylon, they were assigned a daily portion of food that the king ate and the same wine that the king drank.

second, we see in verse 5 that like all the other Jewish boys who were captured, they were placed in the University of Babylon and they were in a three-year program and it was designed to educate them in all of the culture and the ways of Babylon in its language, in its literature, and it was really designed to reprogram them.

It was designed to reprogram them from being Jews in exile to becoming Babylonians living at home, comfortable, knowing the language, and they were going to be incorporated into the king's service.

things. The third thing that we see happening to them is in verses 6-7. Their names were changed.

[22 : 49] Their names were changed from Jewish names that honored God to Babylonian names that honored Babylonian idols. Daniel, whose name means God is my judge, was changed to Belshazzar.

Hananiah, whose name means the Lord is gracious, was changed to Shadrach. Mishael, whose name means who is what God is, was named Meshach.

And Azariah, whose name means the Lord is a helper, was changed to Abednego. One of the things we learn from scripture is that naming is a very important activity because naming speaks about authority, naming speaks about character, and a name is supposed to be consistent with the thing itself.

It is supposed to be true to that thing internally. And so we see that right away that what the king wanted to happen was to have the identity of these young boys changed.

And I just want to pause and really say this. I don't think that this probably happens very intentionally yet in our school system and the younger grades, but as you progress in those older grades, it seems like there is an intentional effort to redefine who our students are.

[24 : 40] I've heard our students say that there's a particular professor at the University of the Bahamas that when you go into his class, he says one of his goals is to make all of the students who believe in God to be atheists, to dismiss out of their mind this notion that there is a God.

very concerted effort to redefine you. There's a very concerted effort to change your name from child of God, serving God, to a citizen of the world, to be secular and to have no reference to God. And there's a whole reward system designed to do that, where you are shamed if you identify with Christ, and where you are rewarded if you will distance yourself from Christ. And in a very real

sense, this is what was happening in this particular situation.

But what we see with Daniel in particular is that Daniel exercised discernment in the fact that he only objected to one of the three things that were done to him.

He didn't resist enrolling into the program. Him. He didn't even resist the new name that they gave him, because when you read the book of Daniel, you will see that they maintained their own names.

[26 : 08] They knew who they were. And they were fine with, I guess, the nickname that they were given in Babylon, but they knew who they were. They didn't see that as compromise.

They didn't see by not fighting back against the new name, or not fighting back against what they were being taught about Babylon as compromise. But there was one thing that Daniel objected to. From day one, Daniel objected to eating the king's allotted food and drinking the king's allotted wine. Look at verse 8.

Verse 8 says, but Daniel resolved, 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. Now, Daniel knew what the arrangement was.

[27 : 21] Daniel knew that the outcome of three years in the University of Babylon was to position him for a position of authority in the king's dominion.

Daniel knew that. But that didn't seem to be a priority for him. That did not seem to be to the forefront of his mind. Daniel resolved that he was not going to be defiled.

Now, we don't know the specific reason that he did that. Some commentators say that the reason is that the meat and the drink were offered to idols.

And so that's why Daniel resolved not to do it. But we don't need to know specifically why he did that. What we do need to know is that for some reason, for some reason of conviction, Daniel resolved, you know what, I'm not going to do this.

Now, one of the things that we could easily miss as we read this account is that there were more than four students in this freshman class, as it were.

[28 : 36] There were more than four boys from Jerusalem who were brought into captivity into Babylon and placed into the University of Babylon.

And we know this from verse 6. Verse 6 tells us among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

That phrase among these helps us to see that there were others who were also brought in. and when we consider that, we have to ask ourselves the question, why is it that when we read the account, only four of them had an issue with the food and the drink?

Only four of them resolved that they were not going to partake of it. The others partook of it with no problem. The others want a path to becoming Babylonian citizens.

No longer Jews in exile, but Babylonian citizens. And you may ask the question logically, why didn't they object? I imagine if we could interview them and say, why didn't you object to the king's food?

[30 : 03] They'd probably say, well, in Babylon you do like the Babylonians do. Or they may say, well, I think Daniel and those other three are too fanatical.

They're taking religion too seriously. Maybe they thought they were holier than thou. They were better than everybody else because they were acting and living differently.

But here's the real reason that they did not object to the king's food and do his drink. The reason they didn't is they lacked discernment.

They lacked spiritual discernment. Daniel had discernment and so did his three friends.

And that's why they were able to recognize realize that that was something that they needed to resolve to say no to, to resolve not to partake of.

[31 : 17] Now, when we think about it, it's easy to think that maybe this is just that Daniel and his friends were better than the others. God's empowering grace that enabled a 14-year-old boy like Daniel to have the courage to stand up against a king who had just invaded his land, destroyed it and devastated it and brought him into exile.

there's no human reason as to why Daniel would have that kind of resolve and that kind of conviction to be able to stand against the tide as it were.

Daniel was able to do it because God's grace empowered him to do it. And we should remember this. No amount of personal resolve, no amount of personal internal fortitude is going to enable us to do what God has called us to do.

We are only able to do it by his empowering grace that he makes available to us. And while it is easy to think that Daniel was all that, no, Daniel was not all that in and of himself.

God's grace was there enabling Daniel and his friends to do what they did. Now, why is it so important that Daniel opted not to eat the food and drink the drink that the king allotted to them?

[32 : 59] It's important, the rest of the book of Daniel bears it out. It's important because Daniel's unwillingness to compromise in that particular area pointed to his willingness later on in an ongoing way not to compromise his beliefs.

Think about it another way. If you have a hard time on day one saying no to something and let's say it's a one pound issue that you need to discern, what do you think you're going to do when it's ten pounds or twenty pounds or a bigger situation?

If you're not willing in those small areas to begin to pay that price, I mean Daniel I think knew that there were probably going to be implications for the stance that he was taking in terms of where he may be placed or not placed in the king's domain.

But later we see when Daniel had a position of authority when his fellow workers in the king's domain were jealous of him and they tried to entrap him and they had this fraudulent decree passed that anyone who would pray to any other god other than the king would be thrown into the lion's den.

Daniel knew what his fate would be and he continued the Bible says he continued to do exactly what he always did. He would open his window and face Jerusalem and he would pray.

[34 : 39] He didn't close the window. He continued to pray the same way knowing that his life not just a position now his life is at stake. And so I want to encourage you this morning especially college students.

Start with those small things. God will not just throw you to the lion's den on day one. But it will be those small opportunities that you have to make those decisions to resolve this is what I'm going to do.

You're being pulled to go over here and you know that that's not something you should be doing. Resolve no I'm not going to do that. Because again if you don't exercise the discernment and the courage to say no to those things you will find that it becomes increasingly more difficult to actually do that.

And so like Daniel you need to cultivate a discerning mind. Indeed all of us need to cultivate a discerning mind. And how do we do that? How do we cultivate a discerning mind?

By renewing it on God's word. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 12 verses 1 and 2. I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.

[35 : 59] Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God and what is good and acceptable and perfect.

I want to say to all of our students humanly speaking if somebody asks you the question or why are you going to school the human reason is I'm going to be educated.

That's the human reason. But you know the ultimate reason you're going to school? The ultimate reason you're going to school is to glorify God in the process of education.

That's the ultimate reason. The ultimate reason is that you are going to glorify God in the context of gaining an education.

We live for God and that is our spiritual worship. This is, think of that, you are students, think of it as if that is your job. That is what you are called to do.

[37 : 18] God's word promises us that when we renew our minds, we will be able to discern what God's will is. we will be able to discern what acts are permitted corporation, like maybe taking a course on world religions.

That's permitted. It's fine to do that. But what is prohibited is agreeing with your professor that all religions are equal.

There's only one rule. There are many roads that lead to the one destination, which is God. Are you willing to do that just to get a grade? Do you have the discernment to know where to draw the line? Do you have the discernment to know what are issues and what are non-issues? Do you have convictions and live by those convictions? Do you desire to please God more than anything else? even succeeding academically or in a career? See, again, if we don't settle this issue right up front, if we don't resolve like Daniel right up front, this is what I'm going to do.

[38 : 42] I want to please and I want to serve God and I will draw the line and not cross it if what I will cross over to will cause me not to serve the Lord and to honor him.

One of the reasons that many of us lack discernment, sorry, lack conviction is that we lack discernment. We don't see a distinction between things.

We think that everything pretty much is okay. God's word will inform our minds and will give us a divine perspective and that will transform our minds to be discerning.

Now, college students, many of you, I could remember my own initial entrance into the college world and just obviously shocked by so many things that I saw for the first time.

Many of you are going to be exposed to students who are using drugs, drinking alcohol, engaging in premarital sex, practicing homosexuality, endorsing other sinful conduct, and in many cases seeking your approval.

[40 : 08] What are you going to do? And I want to say to you, don't wait to get there to decide what you're going to do. What are you going to do? I want to encourage you to resolve in your heart right now to say, Lord, I don't know what all the situations I may face, but give me the grace to resolve to be faithful to you.

Give me the grace to say no to ungodliness and yes to righteousness. forgiveness. And here, I'm not saying to you that you just need to be a spiritual bully and pick fights, pick arguments and get in. No, don't do that. You don't need to pick them. They're going to come. You need to have the wisdom as to how to navigate them and how to discern how you can respond without compromising.

the Lord will help you to be able to do that. So if we're going to serve the Lord faithfully in exile, we, one, need to maintain a divine perspective and two, we need to cultivate a discerning mind and third and finally, we need to trust in a faithful God.

We need to trust in a faithful God. Our world has many substitute gods. The God of money, the God of success, the God of what I know, the God of what I've accomplished.

[41 : 49] But if we're going to serve God faithfully as we live away from our true home, we need to trust him. And we need to remember that he is faithful.

And we see God's faithfulness displayed here in Daniel chapter 1. God's faithfulness is displayed to Daniel and his three friends in verses 8 through 21.

If Daniel's trust was not in the faithfulness of God, he would have proposed, he would not have proposed this crazy test to Ashpenaz. Since Daniel asked only to be allowed to eat vegetables and drink water, I think it's safe to assume that the king's diet was high in calories, like meat and bread. God's food and so what would make Daniel think that after 10 days, I mean, you know, if it were me, I'd say a day, because maybe a day, you don't see much difference after a day, but he says 10 days.

He says, test us after 10 days on this low calorie diet of vegetables and water and see if we would not be in a better physical condition than our compromising countrymen.

[43 : 18] What would give Daniel the conviction that that would happen? I think most of us know that if you resort to a vegetarian diet, generally speaking, you're going to lose weight.

And we know that wine is high in sugar content, and so that will add calories as well, unlike water. What gave Daniel the conviction, the certain conviction, that at the end of 10 days, he would be, he and his fellow faithful brothers would be in a better physical condition?

There's only one thing. There's only one thing. His trust in our faithful God. His trust that a God in whom he would put his trust would not let him be ashamed.

His trust that a God who he wanted to honor, that that God would enable him to honor him, and would do what diet patients will tell us, is really not scientifically possible.

But there's a hint that we can see that Daniel was looking to God and trusting God to make him and his three friends fairer and fatter than the compromising countrymen of his.

[44 : 58] And it is the fact that he selected 10 days. He didn't select five days or 15 days or two or three days. He could have said about three days because a day for a month.

It's going to be three months. It's going to be a month for a year. No, Daniel chose 10 days because he knew his Bible.

And Daniel knew that 10 was the number of divine testing. And that's why God gave his 10 commandments. And that's why you find, for example, this would be one of numerous examples in the Old Testament where the Lord tells the nation of Israel in Numbers 14 22, you have tested me

10 times.

But we know over the 40 years they tested the Lord more than 10 times. Jacob said to Laban his father, Lord, he said, you changed my salary 10 times.

What he simply meant was you just tested me to the limit. That's why I'm going to leave. Daniel was trusting in a faithful God by choosing 10 days because he was in essence saying, God, I trust you.

[46 : 17] I'm trusting in you to honor me in this way. God's God. It's the same way the children of Israel trusted the Lord. We see in Malachi 3.10 concerning the tithe, the Lord says to them, put me to the test.

But here's what's clear. Daniel was not concerned about his rank in the class. He wasn't.

he was concerned with honoring God and not defiling himself. And see, here again, I want to say to all of our students, we want you to do well.

We celebrate when you do well. But we don't want you to do well academically if you suffer spiritually.

We want you to excel spiritually. And I've said to my own children, with as much conviction in my heart as I know and to speak the truth to them, no amount of good grades could give me the joy of their well-being if they're not doing well spiritually.

[47 : 43] And I want to say to you, settle it in your heart. to say, God, I want my soul to prosper. I want to do well. I want to serve you.

I want to be faithful to you more than I want to do well academically. And the good news is that you don't have to have one or the other. That's the good news. The good news is you can have both of them.

But what you're saying is, God, if I can only have one of them, I will choose this one at the drop of a hat more than the other one. One of the things I want to say to our college students, and particularly those who are heading off for the first time, one of the first things you really need to do when you get on campus, find the people of God.

They're there. God has his people everywhere. Find the people of God. Find where do the Christians meet? Who are they? Do they have a club? Is there a room they meet in?

And link with them. Daniel and his friends were a band of comrades. And you're probably going all by yourself. You're probably, you don't, maybe no other Bahamian who is there.

[48 : 55] No other Bahamian is going with you, but that's fine. Find the people of God and link arms with them. And together you will be able to serve the Lord, as Daniel said, with like minded friends.

what we see is that God was faithful. God was faithful to Daniel and his three friends. And notice that we see in this section, this latter section, from verses 8 through 21, notice, first of all, we see God giving.

Three different times it talks about God giving, and he's giving out of his faithfulness in verse 2. we read that God gave Jehoiakim and Judah to Nebuchadnezzar.

God was giving out of his faithfulness regarding his word that he would punish Israel's persistent disobedience. We see in verse 9, God gave favor and compassion in the sight of Ashpenaz.

God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of Ashpenaz. God gave a powerful man like him even listen to a 14-year-old exile who was probably also an orphan.

[50 : 16] And then in verse 17, we see God gave Daniel and his three friends learning and skill in all literature. And specifically, he gave Daniel a gift to understand visions and dreams, a gift that will cause Daniel to be promoted to the second place of honor.

in all of Babylon. Again, immediately what is evident is that Daniel and his friends' unwillingness to compromise on the issue of food and drink, something that we would say are non-issues, better position them not to compromise when they were later commanded to bow down to an idol.

or be thrown into the fiery furnace. And then we see God's faithfulness to them ran ultimately on graduation day.

Not only did they graduate head of the class, but God also gifted them with wisdom and understanding that they were found to be better than even Nebuchadnezzar's long-standing magicians.

That's like coming out of college, going on to a job, and you show up on day one, and it is evident that you are head and shoulders above those who have been serving ahead of you.

[51 : 44] Not because you're special, but because God is faithful. God honors those who honor him. Scripture says so. Honor the Lord, God will honor you as well.

But remember again, graduating first in the class was not their goal. Their goal was simply to serve God faithfully while they lived in exile.

And God was faithful to give them the gifts they needed to do well academically and then to position them for successful careers upon graduation, and what we see of their lives is they did not compromise.

And so I want to say to you students, what is your ultimate goal? No matter what you're majoring in, if you believe in Christ, if you follow Christ, your goal should be to live faithfully, to serve God while living in exile in whatever learning environment you find yourself in. whatever it may be. And part of serving God is working hard.

[53 : 13] It's working hard. It's being diligent. That honors the Lord. So if you are capable of getting all A's, then get all A's.

do it to the best of your ability. God has not created all of us. You know, we have this thing about everybody being equal. Yeah, we're equal in dignity.

We're equal in worth and value before God. But we're not all equal in our talents and our abilities. God has gifted us differently. God has to be. There's some people who have more athletic ability than others.

There's some who are stronger academically than others. There's some who are stronger artistically than others. God has given us different gifts and we receive them as good gifts from his hands.

But what he has called us to do is to be faithful with those gifts. That's the parable of the talents. Didn't give them all the same measure. But he called each one to be faithful and if they were faithful they get the same verdict at the end.

[54 : 21] Well done good and faithful servant. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10 31.

He says so whether you eat or drink whatever you do do all to the glory of God. That is what the goal is that we want to glorify God in whatever we do.

This is for all of us this morning. No, just the students. We want to glorify God in all that we do. And clearly if we can do it in eating and drinking we can do it in working.

We can do it in being a faithful husband, a faithful wife, a faithful father and mother, and certainly a faithful student. when you read the rest of the account of the book of Daniel, we see that the Lord blessed Daniel with tenure.

Daniel actually served for about 70 years over four different kings. They came and went, but this man, God sustained him and kept him, and he was able to serve with wisdom, with excellence.

[55 : 44] you read Daniel and you just don't see any particular defects in him, although we know he was a sinner just like we are.

Let me conclude by saying this. Daniel and his three friends are wonderful examples of men who served God faithfully while living in a context that was foreign to them, hostile, and was not their home.

They had to adapt. But the truth is that when we consider our lives against Daniel's life, I think we would quickly realize we are no Daniel.

like Daniel, we live oftentimes with a human perspective, not a divine one.

We rarely see God at work. Sometimes we lack discernment. We thoughtlessly adapt and adopt methods and manners and customs of the world instead of living as faithful exiles.

[57 : 07] Sometimes we live like full-fledged Babylonians. We live like full-fledged secularists. And our lives don't reflect the God we trust in, the God we claim to serve.

I said this morning, we don't do well looking to Daniel and looking to his three friends as examples. Instead of looking to them, we need to look to one, we need to look to the Lord Jesus, the one who was a voluntary exile.

He wasn't forced to come, he volunteered to come into this world. And he lived a faithful life toward God and lived a perfect life before God.

And that perfect life that he lived before God is credited to us, those of us who have put our trust in him. So that even when we resolve like Daniel that we will not defile ourselves and we fail.

And our resolve does not hold strong and true. God looks to him, not to us. He looks to his resolve, the Lord Jesus Christ's resolve of living a perfect life before him and he credits that to us.

[58 : 40] And that is where our comfort comes from. If we in a moment are drawing any comfort from our own goodness and our well-doing, trust me, it will be short-lived.

disappointment will soon set in. And so what we need to do is we need to look to the perfect one, the one who pleased God in every single point.

And we trust in his finished work to be accepted by God. And we trust in his finished work to give us grace to be able to live in this world that is not our home.

God and so I want to close this morning calling all of us to take our eyes off of Daniel and his three friends because ultimately their purpose in scripture is to point us to the ultimate faithful son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who showed that he came because we could never live this life that we are called to live.

and so I commend the Lord to our students in particular as you return to school, some of you as you head off to university for the first time.

[60 : 03] Let us look to Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith. I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing, but I want us to close by praying for all our students.

So after the closing song, I'm going to invite all the students to come. The rest of us are going to gather around and we're going to pray for you. We're going to commend you to the Lord.

So worship team, would you come? Let's stand.