

Wisdom For Challenging Times

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship now, singing first of all in Psalm 106, in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 106, that's on page 378.

Singing verses 1 to 5, give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is He, His tender mercy doth endure unto eternity. God's mighty works who can express or show forth all His praise. Blessed are they that judgment keep and justly do always. Psalm 106, verses 1 to 5, if you're able to stand, please stand. We'll stand to sing.

Give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is He, their tender mercy doth endure.

And to eternity. God's mighty works who can express or show forth all His praise.

Blessed are they that judgment keep and justly do always.

[1 : 48] Remember me, Lord, with the love which thou do not bear. Remember me, Lord, with the love which thou do not bear.

Remember me, Lord, with the love which thou do not bear. God's mighty gloriousaja das Heim hat alive. You are the only one who's ■■■■nahme an devotion which thou do not bear but earn.

That thy right chosen's good mercy, and in their joy rejoice, and may with thy inheritance triumph with cheerful voice.

Let's now join together in prayer. We're praying at this time for the Sunday School and for the Young Folks' meeting, so we'll pray especially for them at this time. Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks that we are able to come together of all ages to worship you today, and we give thanks for the way that your interest in us is not confined to any particular age group, but we give thanks, O Lord, for your grace that is extended to us all.

We thank you today for the young people and for the children that belong to us as a congregation, and we thank you, O Lord, for the way that they give us such delight in seeing them come to learn the things of God, coming to join together in public worship, and coming to understand the importance as they grow up of those things that are foundational to life from the teaching of your Word.

[3 : 58] Bless them, we pray today, and give them as they learn more of you, and as they learn more of your Word and its meaning and its significance. Lord, help them today to increase in understanding and in the application of this to their lives.

Bless them in their homes, their parents and families. We ask that you bless them in whatever else they do in life, and as they grow up especially, we pray, they will grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Receive our prayers for them, we pray, and help us to be a means of encouragement and help to them, and bless those who give up their time today to teach them or to look after them in creche or tweenies and in the Sunday school and Bible class.

We thank you, Lord, for their dedication and for their commitment to these wonderful tasks of teaching our young people. Receive our thanks, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, you'll notice if you go into supermarkets these days that there's usually or almost always now a section of free from food.

[5 : 07] Anybody notice that? Any of the children here? Stick your hand up if you noticed free from food, or if you know anything about why free from food is now important for some people.

Some people do. Okay, well, there's always a section now on free from food. Why is it necessary to have a section there on free from food? What is free from food, and why is it important to some people?

Well, it's important because some people have a really bad reaction to certain things you find in some foods. For example, in ordinary bread that's not free from, it contains gluten.

And some people have a bad reaction to gluten and can become very ill if they eat something with gluten in it. The same with dairy products. Those who have problems with dairy products can't eat dairy products because, again, they have a bad reaction to it.

So nowadays, you get food that's free from those types of things. Nuts is another thing that people react badly to. Some people do. Don't panic if you know that there are certain things that people react to in that way.

[6 : 16] This is really something that affects only a certain number of people. But, of course, it's important to them that they actually can't take ordinary bread or any nuts or stuff like that.

They need free from food. And our grandchildren, for example, a number of the boys have always had difficulty with gluten and dairy products, and they have a bad reaction to that.

And that can actually be very dangerous if it's really quite acute. So they always need free from food. But their mom always has to check the jars or the tins of stuff she buys because the ingredients, the stuff that's in the food, is listed on the jars.

And she has to make sure that there's nothing in that that can really prove to be harmful or would really cause a bad reaction or be dangerous even to the children that have these allergies and intolerances, as they're called.

And the ingredients, the stuff that could be harmful nowadays, are highlighted in bold, bold letters, big black letters. So you can see there if there's anything that's going to be harmful, obviously you put it back.

[7 : 23] And it's important to check that. Otherwise, it could be very dangerous for children that have these problems or for adults as well that have these problems. Nuts, gluten, all that sort of stuff.

Now, the Bible has nothing bad in it. Nothing in the Bible that will be harmful to you. Nothing in the Bible that will damage you. It's the other way about, in fact.

Everything that's in the Bible is good for you. That's why we want to learn it. That's why we want the young folks as well to learn it more and more and to learn its teachings for themselves.

And, oh, there's nothing bad in the Bible. It does tell us about many things that are bad for us. And just as you need to be careful with food if you've got allergies to nuts or whatever, so we need to be careful about what sort of stuff, spiritually or morally, we take into our lives.

And we need to be sure that we have a free-from diet as far as possible with those matters that will harm us spiritually and morally. The Bible tells us very specifically at times things that we are to avoid to have in our spiritual food, if you like.

[8 : 39] When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, he listed a number of things that were really harmful. Telling lies was one of them. Always, he says, be truthful with one another.

Bad language. Just because the world uses bad language doesn't mean it's okay. It's bad for us. It's not good. The same thing with hatred, disobedience to parents.

All these things are mentioned in the Bible as harmful or bad for us and will damage our lives and will damage the lives of other people as well.

Laziness. Laziness is mentioned in the Bible as something bad as well. Because God didn't make us to be lazy. He made us to work, to work hard.

He made us to actually work so that it will benefit other people as well as ourselves. And bad company. Getting with or being always with people who hate God, who don't love God, who say bad things about the gospel, who don't like God's church.

[9 : 52] We want, of course, them to come to know the truth. But the Bible says that bad company corrupts good manners, good behavior. So free from is very important in foodstuffs.

For those who have allergies and intolerances, free from is also important spiritually for us. Leave out of your life, young people. All the things the Bible tells you are harmful to you and harmful to other people.

And that way we will live a life that's pleasing to God. A life of what the Bible calls holiness of life. A life that wants to get rid of all the harmful, sinful stuff and get God's help to enable us to do that.

Okay, so next time you see in the supermarket, look for the free from stuff. And it reminds you of how important it is to live as far as possible free from everything that the Bible tells you is bad for you.

Well, let's now say the Lord's Prayer together. Amen. Amen. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[11 : 06] Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen. Let's sing again to God's praise from Psalm 12. Psalm number 12.

Again, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 213. We'll sing the whole of this psalm. Lord, help, because the godly man doth daily fade away, and from among the sons of men the faithful do decay.

And to his neighbor everyone doth utter vanity. They with a double heart do speak, and lips of flattery. Here is the psalmist, times when those who believed in God were becoming few in his day, as he saw it at least.

And he's crying out to the Lord for help, not only for himself, but for the world in which he was placed. And that's what we too pray to God about. Psalm 12.

[12 : 10] Help, Lord, because the godly man doth daily fade away. Help, Lord, because the godly man doth daily fade away.

And from among the sons of men the faithful do decay.

And to this day let everyone doth utter vanity.

God, Lord, because the godly man doth daily fade away. God, Lord, because the godly man doth daily fade away.

And to this day let everyone doth daily fade away. God, Lord, because the godly man doth daily fade away.

[13 : 47] We'll with our tongue prevail our lips, our marches for your eyes.

For the open stand for the sight of me, the right will I.

Safe, fraud, and in vain safety set from such a sin he died.

The words of God are words close pure, in divine silver dry.

In heaven, by the seven times, the top finger high.

[15 : 19] Lord, thou shalt and bring seven feet forever from this grave.

On its side walk thou wakest when I'll lend our high embrace.

Our reading today of God's Word is from the book of Daniel, the book of the prophet Daniel in the first chapter. We'll read through the chapter from the beginning through to the end of the chapter.

The book of Daniel, it should be run about page 890, 891 in your pew Bibles. So, reading through the first chapter.

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 and some of the vessels of the house of God.

[16 : 48] 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 skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

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.

Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

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.

[18 : 20] For why should he see that you are 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, Mishael, and Azariah, 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.

[19 : 31] And the king spoke with them. And among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.

And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. And we pray God will bless to us this reading again of his word.

Let's join together again in prayer. Let's pray. Our gracious God, our Father in heaven, we have been reading your word and singing your praises.

And as we now call upon you in prayer, we ask that we may be guided again by your Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit whose presence and power we require to enlighten our minds in the knowledge of your truth.

[20 : 32] And also to guide our thoughts as we speak with you. As we bring before you our petitions and our thanksgivings. Our requests. Lord, we thank you today for this privilege we have once again.

To gather here together to be a worshipping people. And to be known publicly as a people whose desire it is to worship God. And to bear testimony to him.

And to bear testimony not only to the fact that he is and exists. But that he is our God. That he is our creator and our redeemer. That he is one to whom we owe our allegiance.

Our very life. We bless you, Lord, today that as we come before you, so we bring our thanksgivings. We thank you, Lord, for all that you have been to us since the last time we met here.

Every week that goes by, Lord, your goodness is made known to us in so many ways. Even throughout the matters in life that we see as ordinary. Yet we, Lord, I recognize that all the good things we do receive and are familiar with are your gifts to us.

[21 : 38] And we thank you today that we can come together to thank you for them. For there are many people we know in the world in which we live that have to do with so few. Indeed, sometimes without any of these things, even our basic footsteps.

Help us, Lord, to realize that it is by your blessing that we have them. By your will that we enjoy them. And that we are answerable to you. And so as to give thanks as your word requires.

Bless us, we pray, as we come here together once again round your word. Bless your word to us and lead us into these avenues of your truth that your word contains.

Help us, we pray, to be mindful of our own native lack of understanding. Of our need of your spirit to open our minds. To bless your word to us.

To enable us to increase in our understanding and knowledge of it and of yourself through it. Help us, Lord, today that we may lay to heart things which we need to know.

[22 : 39] And need to apply in all aspects of our lives. We bless you, Lord, today that you have taken account of all that we need to be in this world. And all the things that we will meet with in this world.

And your word brings us counsel and teaching against them in relation to them all. We pray today that we may be thankful that you have remembered us, Lord, in that way.

So as to provide for us this light for our path. This lamp for our feet. We pray today that you bless us as a congregation. Bless us, we pray, in our services of worship.

Bless us in the activities that are related to them. Bless the children in their Sunday school classes and Bible class. Bless, too, those who are in tweenies and those who are in creche.

And those who look after them and care for them. Bless us, we pray, in our homes. Help us, Lord, there to be faithful to you. Help us to be in public and in private the same.

[23 : 39] And help us to realize, O Lord, that you have given us your word so that we may apply it in all of these different facets of life. We thank you today, O Lord, for the way that you provide for us

in our daily living.

We pray that you would help us to be faithful to you in whatever calling you have called us to work in this world. And to be known to others as a people who love and value the Lord.

We pray, Lord, for those who, at this time, are anxious over their work. For those who have lost employment during these difficult times. We pray that you would be gracious to them and provide for them and for their families.

We pray that you would bless those today who have particular difficulties in their family circles.

Those anxieties over loved ones. Difficulties, Lord, in coping with these issues themselves.

Those who have problems in themselves, O Lord, of mental health or other types of challenges in life that we need to face. Lord, bless them all, we pray. Help us to be supportive to them.

[24 : 47] Whether they belong to us as a family or in a congregation or out with it. Help us always, Lord, to be mindful of the needs of others. And to bring all as we can to bear upon them in practical help and prayerful remembrance.

We pray, too, for those who mourn the passing of loved ones today in our communities. In the congregation here, bless them, we pray. Help them, Lord, as they express their grief.

And as they find the pain of parting. To be so real, help them, Lord, we pray. And be with them at this time. And comfort them and be their portion in life.

We pray, too, Lord, for all those who serve you in public life, in public office. Remember them before you in our local government. Bless our local council and councillors and council officers.

Bless, we pray, those who help with the administration. Help also those who take up responsibilities and duties. In regard to caring for others in the medical sphere.

[25 : 53] Remember, our hospital, our hospice, our care homes, our doctors, our nurses, and all the agencies that help them. Macmillan nurses and all others, Lord, who go about from day to day in our community.

And seek to bring help to day in our community. And seek to bring help to those who are in need.

We pray for the work of Crossroads. We ask that you bless them also. We pray, too, Lord, for those who are involved with pregnancy crisis ministry.

And we ask that you'd bless them here in our own congregation. Bless them elsewhere as well. In a world that takes life, Lord, so casually and many times treats life so cheaply.

Whether it be the life of the unborn or those who are old aged. Lord, we pray for them. And we pray for all who have different challenges with themselves. Whether it be in mental health or other disabilities.

Lord, we ask that you'd bless them. Bless those who don't have the same faculties as most people have. The same abilities intellectually or otherwise. Bless them, we pray. Bless their families as they seek to continue to give them support and help.

[27 : 04] And we ask, Lord, that you would bring them as they come to be. Many of them familiar with your word. Bless that to them. And help them, Lord, we pray, to assimilate that in their own way of life and understanding.

We pray your blessing too for our street pastors as they go out to help those who end up in need, Lord, at different times of the week, especially in the evenings and weekends.

We pray for our street pastors and for all who help, Lord, in that regard. We pray that you'd keep them safe and enable them to be of help to those they meet regularly, Lord, each week.

We ask that their ministry may indeed prove to be continually beneficial to many others. And that especially as they come with opportunities to speak about you and about their own faith.

Bless that, we pray, to those who hear them. Those who bear witness to their desire to make Christ known, as well as being of practical help to others.

[28 : 08] Bless, we pray, our nation at this time. Bless, we pray, our nation at this time.

We pray, O Lord, that you'd bless our government at this time. We ask that you'd be with them in Westminster, here in Holyrood. We commend them to you, not merely because we are required and commanded to do that from your word, but because, Lord, our heart is burdened that we be led in a way that would be exalting to us in righteousness and would be pleasing to yourself.

Once again, we pray for those who are seeking office of first minister. We pray especially for Kate Forbes and her constant Christian testimony and witness.

We pray for our Lord and her family and all the pressures that she has to meet with at this time.

Whatever our political persuasion may be, Lord, we know that we have to pray for your people and

we have to bring them before you, especially when they face such difficulties and trials as she faces in these days.

And so, Lord, whatever the outcome might be, we pray that you would continue to be with her and to assure her of your presence. Bless us as a church, as a denomination.

[29 : 46] Help us, Lord, we pray in all the activity that we engage in, in gospel services, in outreach, in evangelism. And help us in all the church plants and all the other aspects of ministry that we are engaged in.

Bless those who are training for ministry. We pray for Scott here with ourselves. We ask that you would bless him and bless all others with him at this time, O Lord, who are going through their period of training.

We pray that you would be with them and assure them and make them, Lord, more and more capable and endowed with your Spirit so as to make known to others the beauty of Christ and the claims of Christ in our society.

Hear us then, we pray now, and continue with us, pardoning all our sin and cleansing us freely for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Once more, we're going to praise the Lord this time in Psalm 147, 147. It's in the Sing Psalms version on page 192. We'll sing verses 1 to 7. O praise the Lord, how good it is to sing him songs of praise, how pleasant to give thanks to him for all his gracious ways.

[31 : 03] Psalm 147 and verses 1 to 7. O praise the Lord, how good it is to sing him songs of praise, and blessed to give thanks to him for all his gracious grace.

The Lord, how good it is to sing from ourp The Lord, how good it is to sing him ceux- ■■■■ in the world.

Who reaches the children of Israel to bring his exiles for whole?

He heals, he heals, he heals, broken hearts, which torches to salvation.

He sets the number of persons and calls them each by name.

[32 : 41] Great is our Lord and great in power, his wisdom is profound.

The Lord's substance can be cut out, the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord with thankfulness, with joy his faithful praise.

And with the new shape of the heart, give glory to his name.

Let's turn now to the scripture we read in Daniel chapter 1. Daniel chapter 1, we're looking at the chapter, especially the first seven verses of it.

[33 : 59] Daniel chapter 1, which we'll call Wisdom for Challenging Times. Now, the historical setting for Daniel, as I'm sure you know, as it says here, is during the days of King Nebuchadnezzar.

This passage is certainly set in that context. Nebuchadnezzar ruled around about 605 through to 562 years before Christ.

So it's going back a long time. But at that time, the Babylonians, over which Nebuchadnezzar was king, to which he belonged, was the superpower of the world.

It was really the great powerhouse in the known world of the time. It had a magnificent city in Babylon. The hanging gardens of Babylon were the envy of the world.

They were one of the seven wonders of the world at the time. But through the Bible, Babylon is more than just a geographical location. And the Babylonians, or Chaldeans, as sometimes they're called, are more than just a reference to an actual people who lived long ago.

[35 : 11] Although that is, of course, true. That's what they were. In the Bible, Babylon represents all that is contrary to God's kingdom, to God's reign.

Babylon represents evil, corruption against God's people, against God himself, against the known church, if you like, of the time in the people of Israel, Judah.

So, all that you find in the Bible about Babylon and that way of teaching is about powers and forces that are against God and against his people.

That's all the way through until you reach the end of the Bible in Revelation chapters 18 and 19, in the judgment of God bringing us right through to the end of the world, where Babylon is judged, where Babylon has fallen, and where Babylon is judged by God.

In other words, these powers of evil and corruption and anti-God coalitions of various kinds throughout the centuries, they are actually brought under the judgment of God at the end of it all.

[36 : 16] And the Lamb, Jesus, and his people prevail. They are the ones whom God shows to have the victory on their side, because God is on their side and they have his salvation.

In other words, Daniel really is a timeless book in this sense that although it is important that we remember it is talking about history, it's history with a purpose in the presentation of this Word of God.

It's timeless in the sense that Babylon, if you like, and the powers that Babylon represented, as we've mentioned, they're active in every generation. Something to do with Babylon, with the powers of Babylon, with the powers of, if you like, of worldliness, in whatever form, that's always present to battle against God's people, to resist the call of God in the gospel, to try and undermine the church, to try and infiltrate the church, to try and overthrow the teaching of the Bible, in whatever ways that's possible for it under God.

And it seeks Babylon's powers. Babylon seeks to take captive the minds of Christians as well. Let's remember this. Because the powers that are represented by Babylon, the powers of evil and corruption and ungodliness and worldliness, everything that's opposed to the gospel in every generation, it wants to take your mind captive and my mind captive, to take us away from faithfulness to God, from allegiance to God, and throw our lot in with Babylon and its so-called values.

[37 : 57] And it uses ideologies, different types of ideology, to actually carry out its plan and its purpose. Institutions, individuals, nations, churches, schools, government systems, they're all subject to infiltration and the powers and the persuasion of Babylon in order to try and do more to undermine the gospel of Christ.

And that's why we must see the contents of Daniel and the passage we're looking at today in that wider perspective, in that spiritual perspective, that spiritual and moral dimension that Babylon in the Bible represents.

The first thing, I'm going to look mainly at the first point, which is the king's three-year program. The three-year program mentioned here that King Nebuchadnezzar set for these young people that he had brought captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.

This three-year program you'll find in verse 5, this was his purpose. He assigned in verses 3 to 5 these youths that came and were skillful in wisdom and knowledge, understanding and learning, and it was to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

They were to be educated for three years and then they were to stand before the king. So this was a program deliberately set up to try and educate or really re-educate these young people that had come from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[39 : 42] The king's three-year program. And then more briefly, although it's not unimportant, of course, because the rest of Daniel deals with it, God's faithful people in Babylon, in that setting, in those circumstances.

And you can see already how up-to-date Daniel is as we're looking out over the world in which we are placed, as we're seeing Babylon represented by all the powers and the ideologies that actually are in conflict with the gospel.

The king's three-year program. Well, he wanted, first of all, the ablest youths that came from Jerusalem. He brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his God.

He placed the vessels there. And then he 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 skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, and learning.

In other words, he wanted the very best. He wanted the very best as a potential for the service of Babylon. He wanted the choice young people of Jerusalem, of Judah, to come and be in the service of the king of Babylon and to take up the values of Babylon and the aims of Babylon and the purpose of Babylon and, as we'll see, even to come to be identified as Babylonians.

[41 : 06] That was his purpose. And only the best would do to serve the kingdom, the intentions of Babylon.

Now, you can see in verse 4 there, 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 that actually involves both understanding and communication. And these two are always important. Because to the king of Babylon, to the aims of Babylon, understanding coupled with communication skills was always going to be an important combination.

And it still is an important combination. That's why he wanted the best, those who could understand, those who could quickly assimilate the teachings of Babylon and also be able to

cogently explain them or communicate them to the world around them.

That is what Babylon is still aiming to do. That's why there is today, in this very building, an interest in you and in your minds.

[42 : 12] An interest on the part of these forces that oppose the gospel of these satanic-led powers that really have in their mind, even if they would never associate themselves, of course, with Satan and with Satan's intentions and plans and strategies.

Well, the Bible itself tells you all about that. But here is what is seeking to bring your mind today captive and lead your mind away from the teachings of Scripture, of the Word of God, of these principles and values of the gospel.

So, understanding and communicating abilities are so important to the world, so important in the world that we live, so important to Babylon, so important to all the ideologies that oppose the gospel.

But this is the thing. They are also important to those who support the gospel, to those who promote the gospel. That's why our prayer is that God will raise up people of understanding and able to communicate the gospel.

That's why we have the likes of Scott as a trainee minister in training and others like him in different congregations throughout the country. That's why we're thrilled when God calls people to actually come to minister the gospel by the preaching of the gospel, but also, like many of yourselves, to be living witnesses to God in your own place of work, whether it's in education or wherever it is.

[43 : 37] Learning and competence in communicating those principles that have to do with righteousness and truth and integrity are so important. They are crucial to the aims of Babylon, but they're also crucial in resisting and overcoming all that Babylon wants to bring about.

That's why you must give your mind and I must give my mind to Christ, to the teachings of the Bible, to the Holy Spirit of God, to these things that the Bible itself tells us are absolutely crucial and foundational if we are to be the kind of people that bear witness to God in this world.

The world needs you and the world needs that particular witness, that particular understanding and communication of God's truth. But secondly, he didn't just want the ablest youths, he wanted them to be turned into Chaldeans.

And three points under this briefly. First of all, you'll see in verse 4, the end of the verse there, to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

He wanted them to be skillful in both the literature and language of the Chaldeans. In other words, this was a curriculum with purpose, a curriculum with a specific purpose.

[45 : 00] He wanted to turn them from being Jews or being associated with Jewishness and turn them into Chaldeans effectively and practically. He wanted them to think of themselves no longer as a people of Judah, but a people of Chaldea, of Babylon, who had taken up the aims and the purposes and the intentions of Babylon.

He wanted to erode their Jewishness as they developed an allegiance to Babylon. See how up-to-date that is? You see how relevant that is to the world in which you and I are placed today? Where education is so, so important, but where education sadly all too often drifts into indoctrination because that's what Babylon was about.

He wasn't there just to educate their minds so as to give them different things to compare. He was there to bring their minds over to the business and the intentions and the identity of Babylon.

And Babylon is still at it. That's why we need to pray for our teachers. Not just for the Christian teachers, but especially our Christian teachers.

[46 : 18] Because they are facing from the top, from government intentions and government provided ideologies, they are actually infiltrating the education of our children and in some parts of the country at least.

Our children, even at their youngest years in primary, are being subjected to teaching that really belongs only in the adult field, sadly. That is Babylon at work.

seeking to win young minds over to these ideologies in order to provide very skillful communicators for that particular type of ideology or teaching to actually spread that throughout the world.

Now you can see how dangerous that is. You can see how important it is to pray against more infiltration of that type into our system of education. Where all kinds of ideologies are seen as acceptable and where, for some at least, our very youngest children have to be subjected to these things even from their youngest days.

See, that's Babylon at work. That's King Nebuchadnezzar's three-year program being rolled out in our society to take minds captive in order that they then serve the values and the aims of Babylon. [47 : 48] to erode, to normalize, to normalize what the Bible says is not acceptable, is ungodly, is contrary to righteousness, to uprightness, to truthfulness, and in their place to put the values of Babylon.

Friends, please pray for our teachers. Pray for our education authority. Pray for that throughout the land.

Pray for all our schools where there are Christian teachers placed Christians are still concerned at having or being called upon to teach things which they themselves find unacceptable.

Pray for Christian schools wherever they are. Pray for those who sincerely intend to bring children up in the values of Christ.

Pray for parents. Pray for parents who have to actually face this with their children from day to day. when they come home from school, even in primary school, and say, the teacher today was teaching us to ask questions about ourselves and who we are.

[49 : 12] Are we really male or female? Are we a boy? Am I a girl? That's what's going on in some of our schools throughout our land. That's where children's minds are being messed with. That's Babylon at work.

We have to be aware of that and pray over it and also, as we bring it before the Lord, ask the Lord to bring a change around. So there's the education that sadly sometimes becomes indoctrination. There's secondly incentives. You see, verse 5, he gave them the incentives, he assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate and the wine that he drank. In other words, they were made to feel really special.

They were singled out from the others as favorites of the king. They were made to feel that they really should surely serve this very kind king, this person that brought all of these things to them and made them feel so special compared to others.

The design was to make them feel advantaged, to make them feel special, to make them feel this is really the right way. We're surely not wrong in following the king's requirements and taking up this teaching that he wants to give us of the things of the Chaldeans.

[50 : 28] And you can see how similar that is to the idea today that if you follow the Christian way, if you're especially open about being a Christian, you can't possibly get on in the world if that's what you commit yourself to.

That's the ideology of Babylon. That's what Babylon will say to you. That's what worldliness will say to you. It will say, if you really want to get on in the world and progress your life and make something of a career of it and get promotion in whatever field you're working, you've got to take on the world as of equal validity and equal value to the Christian life.

You just have to embrace that. And we're being told by certain ideologies today, it's not enough in the old style tolerance of just saying, well, I don't agree with that, but I leave you your freedom to believe that and to live that way of life if that's your choice.

I don't agree with it. But I don't agree with persecuting you for it. Now, the new ideology, the new tolerance really says, I think I mentioned this last week, it's not enough to say, well, I don't agree with it, but you're free to follow it if that's your choice.

The new ideology says, you must see this as of equal value to your Christianity. You must take it and celebrate it the way you celebrate your Christianity.

[51 : 50] That's Babylon at work. The idea that you really must embrace the world in every facet of the world in its thinking and in its behavior.

If you really want to get on in the world, that's what you have to do. And Daniel teaches us otherwise. Daniel, as we'll see, teaches that God has to come first.

That God is the one who must, at all times, all times must have allegiance to Him. And that, of course, doesn't mean hating others.

That doesn't mean being obsessed with and taken up with phobias, the way the world actually presents it. Phobic this and phobic that. We're called upon to love people, to love people whatever their ideology, to love people whatever difference there may be in their way of life throughout Christian life.

love. But love is not that sort of wobbly thing that the world presents to you. Love is love. Love is primarily faithfulness to God.

[52 : 58] A love for God. A love for His principles. For His truth. For His values. For His people. And so we really resist the idea that to get on in the world you have to embrace the world.

God and its values. Daniel is going to teach us that. Again, teach us you that as you work your way through the book of Daniel. And especially these opening chapters. So there's education.

There's incentives that are given for them to actually throw their lot in with Babylon. But there's thirdly, identity. Look at verse 7. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, tribe of Judah.

And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah Abednego. What's that about? Is that just saying, well, this is just a change of names and nothing more?

Of course it's not. It fits into the teaching, the theology of Daniel. And what it's saying to us is part of the strategy of Babylon is actually to give you an identity associated with being a Babylonian.

[54 : 08] This was a deliberate part of the strategy because he was concerned that the more they forgot their own native names given to them as Jews, and you notice these names, as they often did in Judah and Jewish names, had some element to do with God in them.

Daniel, it has the word El, the same word Mishael, Meshach, Azariah, the name Yahweh or Jehovah, and built into these Jewish names you have something to do with God, something to do with a relationship with God, something to do with what God is or who God is and what he is to you. They're substituted by thoroughly pagan names, and the hope is that as they forget the significance of their Jewish name, their Jewish name that's rooted in the name of God himself, so the more they will take up these pagan names, the more they will be associated with Babylon and being Chaldeans.

That's the strategy. That's the three-year program the king set for them. That's the aim to gradually incorporate them so that they come effectively to be Chaldeans.

That's what the world wants you to be. That's what the world is calling you to today. That's what worldliness has as its intentions through whatever ideology that wants you to lose sight of your identity as a Christian.

[55 : 42] Where is the Christian's identity? What is it that identifies the Christian? It's not your name given by baptism. It's not your name given by parents, important though these may be, precious though these may be.

What identifies you as a Christian is what you are in Christ. And what you are in Christ means what you are to God and what God is to you. That's your identity.

That's who you are as a Christian. And that's who the world must see. You are. A person who belongs to God and to whom by grace this God belongs as your Savior, as your King, and whatever Nebuchad and Ezra arrive on the scene.

That's the aim of the three-year program. He wanted the ableist for himself. He wanted to educate them with the element of indoctrination.

He wanted to give them incentives. He gave them incentives to help them on that way. And he changed their identity, at least by name, so that gradually they'd come to see themselves, no longer us people of Judah, but people of Babylon.

[57 : 05] What's the counter to that? Well, this is our final point. The second point, briefly, has to do with God's faithful people, because as the chapter goes on, you can see how God gave Daniel wisdom, along with his companions, to actually not just to offset, but to overcome the strategy of Babylon and this three-year program.

In other words, what you really find in the chapter, as throughout the book, in fact, is that the main figure, as always really in the Bible, the main figure is not Daniel, it's not his companions, it's actually God.

God gave Daniel, he resolved that he wouldn't defile himself, God gave Daniel favor and compassion, verse 9, in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

Where did Daniel get his wisdom from? It wasn't from the ideology of the Babylonians or of his own ingenuity, it was the wisdom that was God given. God gave this to Daniel, he gave him favor.

God arranged it that the chief of the eunuchs actually went along with Daniel's strategy, counter to the strategy of the king of Babylon. And of course we know how that ended up. And he showed himself superior to all the rest, to all the people that belonged to Babylon who ate the king's food.

[58 : 32] Daniel and his companions turned out to be ten times more superior than they were. You see, God's favor, Joseph proved it before, didn't he?

Daniel proves it here. Many others have proved it down through the years, that God's favor is of so much more value than the favor of the world.

God's favor is the chief thing in your life, surely. To know that you're living a life that's pleasing to God, not because it's a perfect life though you'd want it to be, not because it's a better life than other people live, not because you see yourself as superior to others, but because you know this is what God requires of you.

That is your privilege to live as a Christian life, as a Christian in life. That is your privilege to serve God, your privilege to be openly on His side because there are so many openly against Him.

To have God's favor, friends, is the most important thing in the world for you and for me. To know that you have that, to show openly that you have that.

[59 : 50] Nothing's more important than that, that you have the favor of God upon your life. And these were people of principle in other words.

It wasn't just the fact that God gave them this favor, that God opened up the way for them, that God endowed them with all of these abilities, which He of course undoubtedly did. But they themselves were people of principle.

They were committed to God, by the grace of God, by the blessing of God, yes, but they were still themselves committed to God, to the ways of God, to serving God, to be true to God.

And that's why Daniel in chapter 2, just flick forward for a minute, chapter 2, verse 48. As they came to Nebuchadnezzar following the interpretation of his dream, which none of his own mystery men were able to do, then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

See what's happened? Here's a man who's been faithful to God, who has made known his allegiance to God, who has not stepped back from being a man of Judah in the captivity of Babylon.

[61 : 17] And yet what happens? The king of Babylon promotes him. He sees that he has special qualities that none of his own people have. And not only that, but he made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of Babylon.

But Daniel remained in the king's court. Now chapter 3 tells you the difficulties associated with that. There's the furnace. There's the fiery furnace. There's all the intimidation, all the antagonism, all the suffering, all the persecution.

Nevertheless, you'd rather be in that fiery furnace with the fourth man, the figure of a son of the gods, a figure of God himself with his people through the fires of persecution.

You'd rather be there than be in the service of the king of Babylon, whose only reward is at the end of the day, death, and open shame before God.

One of the commentators, a small book, a brief commentary on Daniel by D.S. Russell, and he puts it this way when he speaks about these, writing about these young people of Judah as people of principle.

[62 : 37] He said, to act on principle is sometimes an expression of stubbornness and pig-headedness, but that is no excuse for denigrating the act itself. People of principle find greater favor with God than people of property.

They are prepared to pay the price for the stand they take. They accept the penalty of being the odd man out. They are willing to be counted among the dissenters and the dissidents, whatever the outcome may be.

When principle ceases to matter, then religion, truth, honesty, and integrity are all at risk.

People of principle, in other words, people who are true to God, come what may as Daniel himself and his companions prove to be.

And it does give the lie, doesn't it, to the allegation, to the suggestion that Christian people, people who believe the Bible, will never make suitable leaders for a nation.

[63 : 46] Daniel gives the lie to that. Allegiance to God, publicly and openly, does not make a person unsuitable to lead a nation, or a people, or a church.

Indeed, put it the other way, surely there's nothing more important than to be a person of integrity, a man or woman of God, who will be true to God, and will lead people in the right direction.

May God bless these thoughts on his word to us. Let's now conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 90.

Psalm number 90, that's in the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 90, singing the final three verses, verses 13 to 17. Return, O Lord, how long will you delay?
Have mercy on your servants, Lord, we pray. O satisfy us with your love always, that we may sing rejoicing all our days. Verses 13 to 17 of Psalm 90 on page 120.

[65 : 01] Amen. Amen. Lord, not away, suficiente p Ajax maken mgreenide ed ■■■■ Have mercy on you, serenity, Lord, we pray.

O satisfy us with pure love always, That we may sing rejoicing on our day.
When place of love, affliction with us, God, In joy for all the years you may not die.
Till all your strength and the earth is we shown, And to their children make their glory known.
Now may the favor of Almighty Lord, How by God of rich blessings, O our Lord, Establish every work of us of God, Yes, Lord, for us, Establish every one.
[67 : 25] I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Moses, ■■■■ils so that there may talk, And the grace of God, As ■■eni, Ashopabhin scripture, In extra balance of love, In the past fall in the past, While desire to God, As you may become means bigger, In the future.

I will be able to emphasize everything. In the whole world with power to a the Lord,