

Distinct In Exile

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[0 : 00] Please open up your Bibles this morning to the book of Daniel. And we're beginning a new series this morning in the book of Daniel. And I've been excited about opening up this book with you.

But I also got to admit, I'm a little intimidated by this book. Daniel is not an easy book. It's not an easy book to understand. It's not an easy book to interpret.

And I'm finding out it's not an easy book to preach. And so I appreciate your prayers for me. And as we begin, I would just like to give this qualification. You know, if you're not used to hearing a pastor or a preacher say things like, Hey, I'm not really sure what this means.

Get used to it. We're about to hear that a lot as we walk through this book together. But all scripture is God-breathed. And is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

And so I am excited to open this book up together and hear from the word of the Lord. And grow together as we walk through the book of Daniel. So if you found it in your Bibles, Daniel is right there after the book of Ezekiel.

[1 : 08] Right before the book of Hosea. I do want you to have your Bibles open so we can lay eyes on it there together. And our passage this morning is going to be all of chapter 1. And so let's stand together in honor of the reading of God's word.

Daniel chapter 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

And the Lord 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 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.

[2 : 27] 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.

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.

[3 : 42] So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. And at the end of the 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 that 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, 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 enchanterers that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

[4 : 43] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Lord, we praise you for your word. And again, as we open up a new book this morning, we pray you would speak powerfully to us through your word.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. When I was a college student, I was proud to be the only American member of the International Students Club.

I saw that there was an opportunity there for ministry. The nations had come to my backyard there in Milledgeville, Georgia. And I wanted to influence as many of them as I possibly could with the good news of the gospel before they finished their studies and went back to their home countries. And so I made friends with the international students. I made friends from Kenya, friends from Pakistan. But eventually I got to know several of the Chinese students.

In fact, Amanda and I, in our first apartment complex that we lived in, there in our college town after we got married, it was surrounded, all of our neighbors were Chinese.

[5 : 53] And a couple of times a month, sometimes more than that, we would be sitting in our living room, hanging out, watching television, whatever it might be, and we would begin to smell this incredible aroma wafting through the walls, the paper-thin walls of our apartment complex, coming in from the apartment next door.

And after a while, we caught on. We knew what it was. It must be Dumpling Night. Soon enough, we would start to hear the voices gather. We would hear the footsteps up the stairs.

We would hear the people coming together in the apartment next door, sometimes 10, sometimes 15, sometimes 20 Chinese students, gathering together to get a little taste of home while they were living in a foreign land.

You see, something that we learned very quickly about these Chinese students was that while they were interested in learning about American culture, they wanted to be here, they came here intentionally, even so, they were eager to maintain their own distinct identity while they were living on foreign soil.

they knew that their identity, they were Chinese men and women on temporary assignment here in America. Well, this morning, as we begin the book of Daniel, what we find is that Daniel is living in foreign territory.

[7 : 20] He's in exile. He's not just a foreign exchange student. He hasn't come here willingly. He's been taken captive out of his homeland. He's not excited about learning the culture of Babylon.

But by God's sovereign appointment, he's here in Babylon. And by God's grace, he shows us what it looks like for us to maintain our distinct identity as citizens of God's kingdom even while living here in foreign enemy territory.

The book of Daniel communicates key theological truths for exiles. And so, we'll begin the book of Daniel this morning with two key truths for exiles this morning.

Two key truths for exiles to remember this morning. This will be our outline if you're taking notes this morning. Two key truths to remember in time of exile.

First, the first truth for exiles to remember is that God is king. God is king.

[8 : 29] And we'll get to Daniel in a moment. But even though the book of Daniel bears his name, what I want us to understand here in this first point is that the book of Daniel ultimately is not primarily about Daniel.

It's about Daniel's God. The book of Daniel is about the Lord. And we learn from Daniel and we learn from his story, but the primary lesson that runs throughout the book of Daniel is that there is a God who reigns and rules over all of human history.

That there is a God and that he is king. Look there to verse 1. So the book of Daniel, it begins with a grim picture of the state of God's people.

It says, In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. King Jehoiakim, he ruled from 609 B.C.

to 598 B.C. over Judah. And as you read through the biblical historical books, they give you a pretty clear sense of, hey, this king was a good king.

[9 : 35] He led his people well. He honored the Lord. This king was an evil king. He led the people astray into idolatry. King Jehoiakim, I'm not going to get this right, y'all.

King Jehoiakim was an evil king. Say that 10 times fast. And in the third year of his reign, Babylon comes in and takes over.

This was a three-part takeover. 605 B.C. was the first wave, and that's when Daniel and his friends are taken away. There's a second wave in 597, and then again in 587 B.C., and by this point there's not much left of the city at all.

This is a dark moment in the history of God's people, men and women. children are brutally murdered. The city is destroyed.

The temple is destroyed. The city itself by 587 is burned to the ground. The city, this nation that was meant to be the central place of God's presence, the central place of God's glory in the midst of all the earth, was now totally taken over and destroyed by a pagan nation.

[10 : 49] From a purely human vantage point, from a purely human perspective, this looks like defeat, doesn't it? Everything is falling apart.

Verse 2, it tells us that Nebuchadnezzar, he took some of the vessels out of the house of God and brought them into the house of his God and placed the vessels in the treasury of his God.

This is an apparent triumph of the gods of Babylon over the God of Jerusalem. It's an apparent triumph of a sinful nation over and against God's people.

How can this be? Why in the world is this happening? If you know your Old Testament, this shouldn't come as a surprise at all, should it?

Deuteronomy chapter 28, in the law of Moses, the Lord had told them, if they kept covenant with the Lord. All these blessings would come upon them.

[11 : 49] Blessed would be the fruit of their womb. Blessed would be their land. Blessed would be their cattle, their basket, their kneading bowl. Their enemies would be defeated. They would be established. All of these blessings would come upon the people of God if they kept covenant with the Lord.

But it also says, if they were faithless, if they broke covenant with the Lord. He says, the Lord will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known.

They shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout all your land. What I want us to understand is that this dark moment in the history of God's people was exactly what God had warned them would happen if they rebelled against the Lord.

And he didn't just warn them once. This wasn't just a one-time thing. This is what the prophets warned the people of God about time and time and time and time again. Jeremiah warned them this was coming.

Chapter 21, chapter 25. Isaiah prophesied this moment. Isaiah 39, verse 6. It's like when you get pulled over by a police officer for speeding. Now you're going to have to imagine, because I know all of you drive the speed limits, right?

[13 : 10] You get pulled over by a police officer. You knew the law. You knew you were driving too fast. You knew you should have buckled up and followed the rules, but you get pulled over and just imagine he says, I will let you off with a warning this time.

And then he walks back to his car. The wise response for us would be buckle up, drive away very slowly, obey the law from now on, do exactly as he said.

But instead of doing that, we slam our foot on the gas and we speed away 89 miles an hour down the road. And then another police officer comes and he warns us the same thing.

You better not go over the speed limit. I'll give you a warning this time. Same thing, we speed off down the road another police officer time and time and time and time and time again. These officers are far more merciful and patient than any I've come in contact with, right?

But at some point, your lawlessness is going to catch up with you. Justice demands that your lawlessness be punished.

[14:18] And for Israel, that time has come right now. This dark moment in history is God's judgment on their rebellion. But you know, one of the beautiful parts of reading biblical history is that we don't only get the view from the ground, so to speak, from a human vantage point.

We get the view from the air. We get the Lord's vantage point. Now again, from the ground, from a sheerly human point of view, all of this looks hopeless.

Now all of this looks like the world itself is caving in and everything is falling apart. The bad guys have come in. The city is destroyed. It looks like evil has won. But Daniel gives us another perspective.

Look to verse 2. He says, The Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand. The Lord gave. These three words completely change the lens through which we look out and interpret all the affairs of human history.

[15:30] Now I realize we haven't made much progress in Daniel chapter 1, right? Yeah, I think we will. I'm going to try to. But I want to make this point first because this is a theme that runs throughout the entire book of Daniel.

God is the king of human history. God is the king of all the nations of the earth. God is the sovereign ruler of all the affairs of man.

everything that happens in human history, all the events of human history, big and small, significant and seemingly meaningless. All of them from beginning to end are in the hands of a good and sovereign God.

Whatever happens here, God is king. Who is responsible for this exile? From a human vantage point, Nebuchadnezzar saw and Nebuchadnezzar came, he saw and Nebuchadnezzar conquered, right?

But from the divine perspective, Daniel says the Lord gave. I'm hammering this point because Daniel, he repeats this for us.

[16:40] I feel like this is an emphasis for him. In fact, three times in this chapter, you see that phrase over and over and over again, the Lord gave. The Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, verse 2.

The Lord gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, verse 9. The Lord gave Daniel and his friends learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, verse 17.

That repetition is intentional. Daniel, he wants to comfort exiles with the truth of the sovereignty of God.

So that we no longer see history or current events just from an on-the-ground perspective, but rather we learn to see things from the divine perspective.

That whatever may come to pass, God is king. Nothing happens apart from his sovereign decree.

[17:47] Nothing is given to you but by his sovereign hand. God is king. Now, that's bad news for a faithless people.

That's bad news for those who are still in rebellion against the Lord. He is patient with you. He is slow to anger, but he is just. And the time will come when justice will demand pain for lawlessness. His kindness and patience is meant to lead you to repentance. It's bad news for those who rebel against the Lord, but for those who do trust in the Lord, church, his kingship is a glorious comfort, is it not?

And when the world around us seems to have lost its ever loving mind, and when the place where we live seems like it's crumbling to the ground, when everything looks dark, and from our perspective it looks hopeless, we remember and we take comfort in the fact that God is king.

Here at the beginning of the book of Daniel, I want us to see that we, Christian, we have far more in common with Daniel than we might tend to think.

[19:05] Church, we, like Daniel, are exiles. The book of 1 Peter, what we read this morning, it calls us, it calls Christians sojourners and exiles.

You realize we, you and I, we as Christians are citizens of another kingdom. Scott reminded me of an old song a couple weeks ago in the men's Bible study.

I wish he was here because he would love that I quoted it. This world is not my home. I'm just a passing through. Y'all know this one.

My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore. Y'all know that one.

Is that true of you? See, Christian, we are exiles. Make no mistake, America, as many blessings as we have here, as wonderful as this place may be.

[20 : 03] America is not a lasting home for us. It wasn't so 10 years ago or 30 years ago or 50 years ago or 100 years ago and it will not be so 100 years in the future unless the Lord returns.

America is not the promised land. Church, we need to understand where we live, America is just our little corner of Babylon. And if that's true, then we shouldn't be surprised by any evil that surrounds us here.

We shouldn't be surprised when leaders fail us. We shouldn't be surprised when wars break out. We shouldn't be surprised when people hate each other, when there's lawlessness and godlessness all around us.

We should not be surprised. Why? Because this place is Babylon. We're exiles here. It shouldn't surprise us.

But it also shouldn't shake us. Why? Because we know that no matter what happens here and now, God is king.

[21 : 16] You know, sometimes the way Christians react to current events and the way that we talk or post on social media, we kind of sound like Chicken Little, don't we? The sky is falling.

The sky is falling. Everything's crumbling to the ground. The church, there's chaos all around us. Make no mistake. But we of all people ought to rest in the sovereign rule of God, no matter what happens here and now.

Amen? Amen? Instead of panicking over the question, what has this world come to? I think the church ought to spend more time asking the question, how can we, Christian, how can we, Siwe Bay, remain distinct during our time of exile?

How can we remain distinct as God's people living here in foreign territory? Which is why the second truth we must remember. Number one, God is king.

And number two, praise God, you are his. You are his. Now let's see Daniel's story.

[22 : 27] Verse three, it says that not only did Nebuchadnezzar bring the vessels of God out of the house of God and put them into the house of his God, but he also sent Ashpenaz to bring out some of the best people out of Israel, out of the royal family and of the nobility.

It says youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom. They're endowed with knowledge and understanding and learning and they're competent to stand in the king's palace.

These teenagers at this point, these men were the cream of the crop. They're young, they're intelligent, they're influential, they're nobility and most importantly, or at least as Nebuchadnezzar thought, they were impressionable.

It says in verse four that he was going to teach them the literature and the language of the Chaldeans and he assigns them a daily portion of food that the king himself ate. This was good food.

And a portion of wine that the king himself drank. This is good wine. And it's going to go on like this for three years. Now at the end of this period of three years, these men would stand before the king.

[23 : 36] That was the plan. His plan was cultural indoctrination. And this is a strategy.

To take the best and the brightest of Israel, of Judah, to take the best and the brightest and to make them now good, educated, successful Babylonians.

See, his strategy was he didn't just want to conquer them. He wanted to absorb them. They would learn the literature of Babylon. They would learn the language of Babylon.

Not only this, they would even be given new Babylonian names. I remember growing up, multiple times my mom correcting anybody and everybody who would call me anything besides Jonathan. Right? That was the name my mama gave me. Nobody was allowed to shorten it. If they called me John, I remember her correcting them, no, his name is Jonathan. There was meaning behind that name.

[24 : 40] My dad's name is David. And biblically in the Bible, you know the Old Testament, David and Jonathan were best friends. And it had meaning to that name. She didn't want anybody changing that name.

Well, names in the ancient Near East culture were significant. They carried meaning. They meant something. And so what Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do here is he's stripping away any reference

to Israel's God and he's replacing them.

He's redefining them in terms of the false Babylonian gods. This is an attempt to redefine who they are. So Daniel, which meant God is judge, is now Belt-Shazzar, which is a reference to the false god Bel.

Hananiah, which meant Yahweh is gracious, is now Shadrach at the command of Aku. That's a reference to the moon god. Mishael, which meant who is what God is, is now Mishak, who is what Aku is.

Azariah, which meant Yahweh helps, is now Abednego, servant of Nego, the god of wisdom. You see what's going on here? Nebuchadnezzar is trying to take the people of the Lord and convince them from the inside out that no, now you belong to me, you belong to my people, you belong to my culture, you belong to my gods.

[26 : 13] This was a plan of cultural indoctrination. Well, Daniel knew what was up, didn't he? He could see the plan.

And so, for this reason, verse 8 says, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food. You know, a lot has been made of Daniel's decision here.

This is where, I guess, I guess this is where people get the Daniel diet, right? And the diet may be just fine. It would probably be good for some of us to eat a little bit more veggies.

Amen? Right? But may I suggest that that is missing the point just a little bit. This is not a divinely inspired meal plan for us to follow.

The point isn't the food or the diet. Don't get hung up on the food. The point is that Daniel and his friends, they're resisting at whatever level they can, becoming a Babylonian, even while they're living stuck here in Babylon.

[27 : 20] He knows that God is king. He knows that he belongs to him wherever he may be, Jerusalem or Babylon. And because of this, he knows that he and the rest of God's people are called to be distinct from the nations around them.

And he knows that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is trying everything he can to turn Daniel and his friends into good Babylonians.

And so he resists. Now notice here how Daniel resists. Just really quickly here because I think this is appropriate for us by way of application.

He's not loud. He's not obnoxious. He doesn't pitch a fit. He doesn't protest or post a social media rant or cause a scene about how unfair everything is here in Babylon for him and his Jewish friends. He doesn't dig in his heels and say, Jehoiakim's my king, not Nebuchadnezzar. I know very humbly, very respectfully, and certainly prayerfully, knowing what we know about Daniel, he asks the chief eunuchs to allow him to not defile himself.

[28 : 33] And we see that God the king gave Daniel favor and compassion. And so verse 11, it tells us that they came to a deal. Ten days.

You got ten days. Give us some veggies and water. See for yourself. Test us in ten days. See what we look like. And at the end of the ten days, verse 15, it says that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

And so the steward took away their food and wine that they were supposed to drink and instead gave them vegetables. What we see here is that the Lord honored their faithfulness to him.

The Lord honored their desire to be distinct in exile. And what was the result? Look to verse 17. God gave them learning and skill and wisdom.

And he gave Daniel understanding and visions and dreams. And after three years of faithfulness, after three years of resisting the pressures to become good Babylonians, three years of clinging to their identity as the people of God, the time has come that came before the king.

[29 : 44] And verse 20 says he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. He was vindicated in his resolve to remain distinct in exile.

You know, this is the beginning of a theme, again, that we're going to see over and over and over again in this book of Daniel. God's people are here. They're exiles in Babylon. They're pressured and they're threatened, yet they remain distinct in exile.

And at the end, they are honored and vindicated. And we'll see this theme again and again and again. And we need to understand, Christian, that this is our pattern as well.

We are here in exile. We are going to be pressured to succumb to the pressures in the culture of Babylon. And those who remain distinct at the end when we stand before the King of Kings, we will

be honored and vindicated.

We have to remember, church, the time will come, whether in this life and certainly in the one to come, when all of God's people who remain faithful in their time of exile will be vindicated.

[30 : 57] vindicated. The world may look at us funny right now as we make efforts to be distinct. We may be strange now, but the time will come when we will all stand before the true King and all who remain distinct will be vindicated.

But until that day comes, friend, we must do as Daniel does in this passage. We must remember that God is King and that we are His. I had a seminary professor who used to say often, you know, the most important thing about you is not who you are, it's whose you are.

The most important thing about you is not who you are, it's not where you happen to grow up, it's not where you live, it's not what college sports team you root for, it's not what hobbies you have, it's not what your interests are.

If you've put your faith in Jesus Christ by the grace of God, the most important thing about you is that you belong to Him. That you are a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Wherever He may have you here on this earth, that's your identity. And if we are citizens of His kingdom, then just like Daniel, we need to be aware that the ruler of this present phase of Babylon is going to do anything and everything He can to make you a good Babylonian.

[32 : 34] Church, we need to be aware that the tactics against God's people have not changed one single bit. Think with me here about Nebuchadnezzar's strategy just for a moment, really it's threefold.

Think about it. How did He seek to conquer God's people? How did He seek to make them Babylonians? It's a three-part strategy. It really is brilliant. Separation, satisfaction, satisfaction, satisfaction.

It's a three-part strategy of Babylon. Separation, saturation, satisfaction, and nothing has changed. Tactic number one was separation.

He took these men away. He took them away from God's people, took them away from corporate worship, took them away from instruction in the Word of God.

He took them away from their place, away from their people, away from their practices. Tactic number one was that He separated them. Don't you think the enemy wants to do that with you, Christian?

[33 : 38] The enemy would love nothing more than to separate you from the people of God. He would love nothing more than to separate you from the gift of corporate worship, from the gift of instruction in the Word of God.

Do not take gatherings like this with God's people for granted. You know that this, of all the places of the world, this is the closest that we will get to heaven on this side of eternity.

You know the local church is an embassy of the kingdom of God here on earth? Don't take this gathering for granted. There are Christians all over the world who long for what we have here.

Do not let the enemy separate you. Tactic number two was saturation. He not only took them from their religious culture, he also saturated them with his pagan culture.

Do you see this? He taught them all the books. He taught them the language. He gave them new names. He poured this cultural system right down their throats.

[34 : 52] And again, don't you realize, the playbook hasn't changed a bit. The television shows that we watch are not neutral. The news that we consume is not neutral.

The books that we read are not neutral. The music that we listen to is not neutral. The culture that we live in is not neutral. Our neighbors that we talk to are not neutral.

Everywhere we turn, the enemy is seeking to saturate you with lies. The church needs to develop discernment.

We need to watch what we eat. Our call as exiles here in Babylon is as Paul calls us in Romans 12, do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but instead be what?

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. We're called to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Are we careful what we're saturating our minds with, church?

[35 : 58] Are we careful what we're saturating our hearts with? If we're not actively clinging to the truth of God's word, we will passively drift into the lies of the culture.

Separation, saturation, and tactic number three, satisfaction. He saturated them with pagan culture and he wanted them to like it.

And notice this, he didn't feed them with scraps, did he? And what did he want to feed them with? What did he want them to eat? He wanted them to have the king's best food, the food that the king himself ate, the wine that the king himself drank.

He wanted them to have the best, the richest, the fattest, the most delicious meat that he possibly could. He wanted them to drink the king's own supply of wine. He wanted to seduce and satisfy them into thinking, well, maybe this place isn't so bad after all.

Maybe this king is nicer than we thought. Maybe Jerusalem wasn't so great after all. And again, the playbook has not changed.

[37 : 11] Church, the devil's favorite tool is not pain. It's pleasure. He wants you to love sin.

The devil wants to wine and dine you with the pleasures of Babylon, but he always hides the price and he never pays the bill. It's like when you go to one of these fancy restaurants that doesn't have prices on the menu and you eat yourself full, whatever you want.

You buy an appetizer and main course and three desserts and then the bill comes due. And you realize the cost of satisfying your appetites.

Friend, we would be wise to count the cost now before the bill comes due. If you haven't figured this out yet, the enemy's tactics have not changed a single bit.

The tactic of Babylon in every age is to separate you from the ways of God, to saturate you with the ways of this world and to make sure you like it. our call as God's people, our call as exiles living here in foreign territory is to say wherever God has placed me, whatever evil I face, I will be set apart from the ways of the world, I will be saturated with the word of God, I will satisfy my heart and the Lord above all else.

[38 : 44] Are you committed to this? if you are His, your call is to live your life here in exile faithfully to the King of Kings.

Your call is to be distinct in exile. Why? Because despite whatever the apparent appearance of defeat may be, we know the truth, church.

We know the truth of the gospel that God has done for you in much more powerful, much more eternal and effective ways what Nebuchadnezzar only attempted and failed to do with Daniel and his friends.

Church, the good news of the gospel is that God has sent His own Son to live and to die and to rise in our place in order to bring us out of our state of lawlessness and into His marvelous grace.

The good news of the gospel is that the Son of God Himself bore the punishment that we deserve for our sin so that He might call us out of belonging to this present darkness and make us citizens of the kingdom of God.

[39 : 59] The good news of the gospel is that God has separated you from belonging to this place and given you a new identity as His Son and His daughter.

The good news of the gospel is that by faith in Christ God has saturated you. He has filled you with His own Holy Spirit. The good news of the gospel is that God has worked a miracle in us by giving us a new heart that hates sin and loves the Lord.

He has satisfied you with the goodness of God and the glory of Jesus Christ. That's the gospel. church. This is what God has done for you in Christ.

And although it looks dark now, our certain hope of the gospel is that when He comes, Babylon will be judged and we as God's people will be vindicated.

Revelation 2 verse 17 tells us we will be given a new name. Given to us by our King. Do you believe this?

[41 : 09] Is this your hope? Friend, if you have not put your faith in King Jesus, the time is now.

What keeps you from saying right now that I see that Babylon is a sinking ship, I want no part of it, I want to belong to the King of Kings, I put my faith in King Jesus right now.

What prevents you? And for us, church, as we live here in exile, our call is to help one another to remain distinct while we're on temporary assignment here in America.

You know, I didn't tell you the full story about my Chinese neighbors. the friends who came were gathering to have a Chinese cultural experience, but the host who gathered her friends there for dumpling night, she was a Christian.

And she wasn't just having a Chinese cultural experience, although that was part of it. She was using these gatherings as an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with her Chinese brothers and sisters.

[42 : 26] You see, she understood that wherever the Lord had her, be it China, be it Milledgeville, Georgia, wherever the Lord had her, the most important thing about her was not who she was, but who she was.

She knew that God is king and that she belonged to him. Now, her call was to remain distinct here in exile and to call as many as she possibly could to come with her out of Babylon.

And church, that's our call as well. Are you prepared to resist the influence around us? To resist the urge to primarily identify ourselves with anything other than the call of God and Christ Jesus for you?

God is king and we are his. Let's pray. Lord, we need your grace. We need your help.

We know even as we've already prayed, we are prone to wonder, each one of us. And Lord, it's so easy to be deceived and lured astray by the pleasures and the enticements of the world around us.

[43 : 37] But God, we know that, Father, in your presence there is fullness of joy. And at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. There is no pleasure that you would withhold from us.

It's all found in Christ. And so we pray, Lord, that we would look forward to the kingdom to come.

That we would long for the return of Christ.

That we would live as distinct exiles here in Babylon. We love you, Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.