

Exile

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[0 : 00] All right, so let's start by looking at this verse at the top of the page from 1 Peter.

Peter writes to his Christian readers, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

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

A question that Christians have been thinking about for a long time is, how is the church, how are Christians to interact with the rest of the non-Christian world?

And in a letter to his Christian readers, Peter describes how Christians are to interact with the world around them.

[1 : 09] And he repeatedly describes Christians as exiles in that letter in 1 Peter. He does that in the bit that we just read, I urge you as sojourners and exiles.

And he uses that word repeatedly. In exiles, people who are separated from their homeland and are wandering about in a foreign land, in using that word to describe Christians, Peter is bringing to mind Judah's time in exile.

You'll remember, if you were with us last week, we were talking about the kingdom of Judah, where God's people were living.

And after repeatedly disobeying God's direction by the prophets, God says, all right, I'm sending you into exile.

I'm going to send Babylon, this big empire, to come and drag you off into a foreign land where you're going to be exiled for decades. And in calling Christians exiles, that is what Peter is bringing to mind.

[2 : 24] He's bringing to mind this period in the history of God's people, which is our topic of the morning. So as we look at this period in Israel's history, in the history of God's people, we can keep this question in mind, of how are we as Christians to interact with the, and be part of the non-Christian world around us?

Now, Daniel, who has a book in the Bible named after him, is one of the really notable figures in this time period in the history of God's people.

And he models for us how we are to interact with the non-Christian world around us. So let's open up to the book of Daniel.

If you don't have a Bible, I can grab one real quick. Anyone need a Bible?

Yeah. One, two, three. Okay. Thanks, good job. Thank you. Three, two, three. Thank you.

[3 : 59] So, Pedro, can you find what page in the Pew Bible Daniel begins on? Actually, I don't know. 737. 737. Thanks.

All right, so let's read from the beginning of the book of Daniel.

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.

And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his God, the Babylonian 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, that is, the Babylonians.

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.

[5 : 48] 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 were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward, whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, 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 we listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days.

[7 : 03] At the end of ten days, it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar, and the king spoke with them, and among all of them, none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, 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.

I don't know how you would measure that, but ten times better. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. So, Daniel, a Jew, is brought into exile in Babylon, this foreign adversary, the big bully on the block, so to speak.

All right? And Daniel is brought very close to the political powers. Daniel is sort of the cream of the crop of the people of Judah.

[8 : 27] And the Babylonian king says, okay, so take some of these cream of the crop people in Judah and educate them in the ways of Babylon.

Educate them in our literature, in our culture. Educate them in this foreign pagan culture. All right? And so Daniel is brought very close to power, and he's even given food from the king's table to eat, which is a great honor.

Because the king, of course, eats the best food, right? And yet, Daniel resolves that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

And yet, Daniel also devotes himself to learning the language and literature and wisdom of these pagan Babylonians. This presents us with a kind of a challenging tension.

You know, does Daniel reject the Babylonian world and distinguish himself, make himself completely set apart from the Babylonians?

[9 : 33] Or does Daniel participate in this Babylonian world that he's brought into in exile? And I think the answer is both, and that's what makes it really tricky.

Daniel says, Daniel resolves not to eat the food from the king's table, but then also, Daniel learns all this, you know, pagan literature.

Even though it's, there's probably a lot that Daniel finds wrong with it because these are, this is, you know, foreign pagan culture.

Nevertheless, he devotes himself to it and apparently is ten times better than all the other Babylonians at it. So, if Daniel is a model for us in how to live in, in a kind of a foreign land, so to speak, and if Peter, as we began looking at, if Peter, the apostle, calls Christians exiles, then, then Daniel is a model for us in our exile, so to speak.

Yeah? Yeah. What's the, um, Daniel a eunuch? I, I don't know. Daniel a eunuch, yeah.

[11 : 00] We're not going to do it. How was this of the chief eunuch? Yeah, uh, it was, uh, a custom in the ancient world that people who serve kings were eunuchs.

Uh, but we're not told that that's Daniel's situation. Um, yeah, so all this about the chief eunuch, uh, that's just like the chief sort of servant of the Babylonian king, uh, because, uh, in the, in the twisted world of the ancient world, you, uh, people who served the kings were, were typically eunuchs. Um, yeah. I don't think they would castrate a foreigner to serve the king. Um, perhaps not. Probably very rare or not. Yeah.

Um, perhaps not. Yeah. At, at any rate, I think that is beside the point of what, uh, Daniel's trying to, to get at and model for us, but I don't know.

Is that, because if it's a unit, you want to focus on other planets? Uh, perhaps, uh, honestly, I, I'm not sure this isn't a matter of, I've studied a great deal.

[12:11] Um, yeah. Yeah, Dorothy. You know, one thing that impresses me about Daniel in contrast to the king, some of the kings of Judah that we looked at last week, last week there were some of these leaders of God's people that when things went against their expectations, they gave up on God.

Hmm. Here you have Daniel not just defeated, but pulled out of his, I mean, he truly is a refugee. Yeah. Um, and pulled out of his country and yet he pursues God. Um, God has certainly not been what they would have hoped for and yet he is still able to trust God when things aren't going right. Amen. Yeah. Amen. Amen. Yeah. Yeah. And in that way, uh, totally different than some of these, than some of these figures we looked at last week.

yeah. Um, now, uh, where were we?

[13:38] So, um, historically, we have not done, uh, a very good job of, of navigating this tension presented to us in Daniel and elsewhere in the Bible of, uh, the, the, the phrase that I often hear, uh, use is being in the world but not of the world.

Uh, I don't know if you've heard that phrase before. But, um, that's, that's the kind of tension that, that we see in Daniel's life. He's in Babylon and he's really involved in Babylon learning their literature, learning their language, learning their wisdom, but he's not, he hasn't totally identify himself with Babylon.

Um, uh, in that phrase, in the world but not of the world is great as far as it goes but it, it isn't very specific. Uh, and, um, historically, we've, I think, been very confused about how to, how to apply this well.

Uh, at times, we have, uh, not really, as a church, distinguished ourself from the rest of the world very well. Um, you know, back in the, the, so very early on, Christianity was, was not really a legal religion.

Uh, but, in the fourth century, the Roman emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity, he legalized Christianity, uh, later on, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire and, uh, uh, the church started to become more and more enmeshed in the political and, and social order of the empire.

[15:20] And, at that point, uh, the, the church is not really distinguished from the world, the church is part of the power structures of the world. Um, um, you know, Constantine, this Roman emperor, insisted that the church get together and figure out the, this theological question of whether Jesus is God or not.

The emperor decided that the church needed to figure that out. Uh, that's, that's a little, I thought, to make us a little uneasy, um, the fact that the emperor was so involved. Um, you know, Christians moved out of the periphery into the center of public life in the Roman, in the Roman world after the emperor converted.

Uh, and, and over the centuries, uh, Christian bishops accumulated more and more political power. Uh, and, if we bear in mind Daniel, uh, Daniel's resolution not to defile himself with the king's food, um, and, and God's command for, for his people to be distinct from the rest of the world, from all the other nations, uh, this history ought to make us a little uneasy.

And, and I, I think we can think of more contemporary examples as well. But I, I bring up, uh, an old, old example to, to make the point this is not a new problem for us. We've often been, uh, confused at how to, how to navigate this.

Uh, and at other times we have sort of overreacted in the opposite direction, uh, and said actually we're going to be completely disengaged from the world and not in the world at all.

[16:50] Um, in response to this, uh, development in the Roman Empire, uh, when the church became more and more enmeshed in the power structures of the world, uh, some, you know, very faithful holy men and women, uh, were disturbed by, by this development and wandered out into the

desert and formed these alternative communities, uh, that were really disconnected from the rest of the, the workings in the Roman Empire.

Um, one, one of these figures, uh, wrote that, uh, the highest form of Christian life requires that we, quote, uh, detach our soul from all present and visible things and contemplate only things to come. Uh, well, at that point, I think, uh, there's something, there's something really faithful there, but I think at that point you've become so heavenly minded that you have no earthly good.

Um, that seems, uh, like an overreaction. Um, you know, Christian monasticism has been a great gift to the church in many ways. Uh, but, uh, bearing in mind Daniel's example of, you know, he learns the language and the literature and the wisdom of these Babylonians even though they're, the Babylonians are, they don't worship God.

They're a bunch of pagans and they're the big bully on the block in, in the ancient world. Uh, and yet Daniel is, is, is, uh, he studies this stuff and devotes himself to it.

[18 : 21] Um, if we bear that in mind along with, uh, Jeremiah's command to exiles to seek the welfare of the city where I, the Lord, have sent you into exile, then this, this approach of complete disengagement from the world ought to also make us uneasy.

Um, the, uh, it has been said before, this is one of those quotes that gets attributed to, to all sorts of people, um, that, that the church is, is the only, uh, institution in the history of the world that exists primarily for the benefit of its non-members.

Uh, I, I think there's something, I think there's something right about that. Uh, and so complete disengagement from the world seems to be missing the mark a little bit, seems to be, um, in, in overreaction.

So, we've had a history as God's people of not, uh, of being confused about how we would figure out this tension of being in the world, uh, but not of it, to use, to use that phrase.

Um, but despite our many missteps historically for many, many, many, many centuries and today, uh, I think there are some guardrails that, that Daniel's example helps to set up for us.

[19 : 40] Um, and I, and I want to look at some, uh, some way, some implications I, I, I think I see from Daniel's example, um, in the rest of our time.

But, uh, I want to say this is not going to be at all exhaustive, not even close. Uh, and because there's such a history of, of trying to navigate this, uh, there's a lot of room for discussion and, you know, reasonable faithful Christians can disagree about some of this stuff.

Um, so I don't mean to be giving, like, the definitive word, but maybe some areas to think about.

Um, and I might be giving my opinion, but, uh, but there's room for, for thinking about it some more.

Um, but before, before we dive in, uh, any, any thoughts or questions so far? what, what's wrong with the king's food that Daniel like to eat of it would be to the final?

Yeah, um, I think there's a, uh, so Daniel eats vegetables. What he rejects is meat and wine. Uh, it, it seems, we're, we're not told explicitly, but it seems likely to me that meat and wine would have been offered as sacrifice to Babylonian gods.

[21 : 03] Um, and Daniel says, I want no part in that. I want no part in the worship of gods that are not the God of Israel. Yeah, that's a, that's a really good question. Yeah.

Yeah. Do you think he's also trying to just maintain a level of self-discipline in a culture that is seeking to, um, attract him?

Mm. So, so, the Babylonians are trying to actually convert him. Right. And he's just kind of, I don't know, to me, laying down a line in the sand and just saying, I'm, you know, I'm staying on the side of the line.

Yeah. Yeah, that's a, that's a really good way of putting it. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, lays down a line in the sand. I resolve, I will not, I will not participate in all this that I see around me.

Yeah. Yeah. Um, so, distinction from the culture, distinction from the world.

[22 : 09] Uh, you know, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank. Uh, and then Peter, um, writing, writes in a similar vein to Christians whom he describes as exiles.

Uh, the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, the Gentiles, the rest of the world. Uh, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to these things, they are surprised when you do not join them with the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. Um, my goodness, that's, that's amped up rhetoric.

But, but he really wants to make this point. There ought to be a distinction. Um, so, some, some areas that I, I was, as I was meditating on this and reading what, what other people have thought about this, uh, some areas, but not exhaustive, uh, that, that I think we really need to work at distinguishing ourselves from the rest of our, our culture around us.

Um, one is in, in entertainment, uh, and media. Uh, Paul writes to, to Christians, uh, in, in Philippians, finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[23 : 39] there is a lot of stuff out there that does not meet these criteria. Uh, you know, there is, movies, TV shows, songs, books, uh, probably a lot more that, that I'm ignorant of, um, that, that, that doesn't meet these criteria.

Uh, do we really want to be consuming this stuff? I might be preaching to the choir. I, I don't know. Um, but, but our habits and stories and songs uh, shape us in ways that we often don't realize. Even, even when it is, you know, not really objectionable necessarily, the, the stuff shapes us. Uh, I was, about a month ago, uh, I was really startled.

So, about six months ago, I discovered music from the 1970s and I have fallen in love with Pink Floyd. I think they are musically brilliant. Uh, but I realized about a month ago that I've been listening to so much of this music and I don't listen to words.

I, I don't actually know what any other songs are about. Um, but, uh, that I realized I've actually forgotten the words to a lot of hymns that I like to sing as I'm doing chores or as I'm in the shower.

[24 : 53] A lot. I sing hymns in the shower a lot. But then I realized I've forgotten the words to a lot of these hymns I like. And I'm thinking, wow, you know, uh, I still think Pink Floyd is, is musically, they're geniuses.

And yet, uh, it has, listening to this has shaped me in ways that I didn't even realize. Um, this might sound like a small thing, but, uh, well, singing hymns around my house has been, uh, such a, uh, an important part of my own spiritual life that it actually isn't a little thing for me.

Um, I bring that up just as a, as an example of something. We can be startled and not even realize the ways that, that our stories and our songs and our habits can, can shape us.

Um, each one of us is going to give an account of ourselves to God. Uh, and do we really want to tell Jesus, you know, yes, I know you said it's better to pull out my eye than to look at someone in lust, but you need to understand, Jesus, that this movie or this TV show, it's a modern classic.

It's really well written. It's artistically brilliant. Like, it's, it's comical to imagine saying that to Jesus.

Uh, and I think there's a lot of us in the church who say that to Jesus by our actions.

[26 : 13] Um, I, I think in our, in the kind of, of, uh, entertainment that we consume, uh, we need to resolve, like Daniel, not to defile ourselves.

Um, but then not just in the kinds of things that we consume, but the sheer quantity of media that Americans consume is really alarming. Um, I, I was looking up some studies about this and, uh, one estimate said that the average American spends over 10 hours a day on electronic media.

Uh, that seems, uh, an inconceivably large number, uh, to me. But, but then as, as I was reading the study, it looks like they're, they're including, uh, that number is so large in part because of our attempts to multitask.

You know, you'll have something on in the background as, as you're doing something else. Um, you know, is this, is this making the best use of the time because the days are evil, as Paul puts it in Ephesians?

Uh, I don't, I don't think it is. Um, I think, I think it's John Piper who said once that, uh, one of the, one of the, the values of, of Twitter, uh, will be to show, to demonstrate on the last day that we do in fact have enough time to pray.

[27 : 40] Uh, but we're just, but we're just not praying. Um, yeah, yeah, American entertainment habits are exceedingly dangerous.

Um, and like Daniel, we need to resolve not to defile ourselves in that way. Yeah. There are two categories that I think are helpful. One is recreation.

Mm-hmm. One is recreation. And one is amusement. Literally no thinking. Mm-hmm. And there are many things that we can do that we create us to repair us, to strengthen our nuance which we can be choosing instead of the amusement that we should be avoiding.

Yeah. Just for its negative, not to mention its positive effect in the negative direction. Yeah. No, those are, those are great categories. Yeah.

Yeah. uh, like, in, in your down time, do you end up finding yourself at, uh, disengaged and, and not, not thinking, uh, and just completely drained, uh, which is what I think like TV, Netflix, and YouTube, that kind of stuff does to us.

[29 : 11] Or do we feel, you know, ready to re-engage with the, the work that God has called us to do as, as his people? Uh, that's great. Thanks, John. Yeah. I'll just say that maybe, um, one of the ways to resolve, like, those negative influences is to, like, be a little more vigilant about what you do read and watch.

Because there are ways to find out, I mean, everything's got a guide that's gonna tell you what it's about if you're on a network. on, on, on, on the internet and find out almost what everything is about before you read it, before you watch it, before, you know, you consume it or listen to it, you know? And, not only that, but you can also, once you decide what you're gonna watch or read, what you're gonna consume as media, try to look at it from a Christian perspective.

Yeah. And just take it in as, you know, you know, the secular entertainment, you can see how, maybe take a look at how that relates to what your beliefs are.

Because I know I watch stuff on TV that just, is against what I believe in. It's just particularly offensive, you know, deliberately particularly offensive to what I believe in.

[30 : 26] But, not had it affect me because I just, you know, pushed that aside. You know, you can push aside something that's bad where you can take it, you know, a perspective that's maybe wise, you know?

Because sometimes it's mixed in. Sometimes wisdom in the garbage is mixed in together. You know? So it's just a matter of being, you know, more vigilant about what you do while you're like dissecting it a little more, you know, subtly.

Yeah. Yeah, that's, that's a wise word. You're, you're actually anticipating something I was going to say later. So, no, that's great. That's great. Um, yeah.

Great. Okay. So, another, another area, but again, there's so much more, uh, is the, the church's relationship with, with power. Uh, again, I, I'm not going to say everything that could be said here. Uh, people who are way smarter than I have, uh, than I am, could give like an hour-long lecture on this. But, uh, the psalmist writes, put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation.

[31 : 33] When his breath departs, he returns to the earth. On that very day, his plans perish. Uh, Daniel, later on, at the end of chapter two, is promoted to a high office with, with great honor.

Um, he, he's promoted, uh, to, uh, the ruler of the whole province of Babylon, Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

Uh, but Daniel doesn't begin by pursuing that power and influence. Um, in fact, if Daniel were pursuing power and influence in Babylon, he, he makes, his first move that he makes is the exact wrong one to make.

He, he, he dishonors the king. That's the first thing he does. Actually, I don't, I, I, I, I'm observing that the king is honoring me by giving me his food. I'm going to say, no, I actually don't want that. Uh, and in fact, to eat your food would be to defile myself. You don't dishonor the king if you want to pursue power and influence. Uh, Daniel seeks fidelity to God, not power and influence, but that sometimes does result in the power and influence, but sometimes it results in suffering.

[32 : 41] Like, in chapter six, Daniel is thrown into the lion's den in that oft-told story. Um, and he's thrown into the lion's den for doing the same thing he's always been doing. Seeking fidelity to God.

Seeking to be faithful to God. Um, uh, the New Haven chief of police, uh, Anthony Campbell, uh, is a, is, is he still the chief?

He, he, yeah, okay. I've been out of the city, um, for the past year, but he, he's a brother in the Lord. Um, and, uh, I heard him say once, uh, in his career so far, he's been ambitious to serve, uh, ambitious to serve others.

Uh, and then that happened to be, he, he wasn't, he wasn't seeking to be ambitious so that he could get to this position of influence so that then he can start living like a Christian in, in this position of influence.

But, you know, from, from the beginning of his, of his time as a police officer, he's been ambitious to serve, not, not ambitious for his career. Um, I, I, I think that's, that is, I, I think really, uh, a wise and

faithful way to put it.

[33 : 57] Um, and then in, in a, in a slightly different vein, uh, a lot of, maybe this is just the circles I run in, uh, but I think a lot of Americans today put far too much hope in political figures.

Uh, a lot of us put our trust in princes, so to speak. Uh, for those who support him, Trump is an almost messianic figure. Uh, during, during his campaign, he described a lot of problems that he saw in America and said, I alone can fix it.

That, that's, that's disturbingly messianic. Uh, for people who supported him, Obama was an almost messianic figure. Uh, I was in high school at the time, but I, I remember these posters of his face and then hope.

That, that's almost messianic. That ought to disturb us a little bit. Um, so notice, I, I point out both sides of a political spectrum here.

This is not a problem. I'm not trying to be overtly political and one party is bad and the others. No, no matter who you are, uh, a lot of us put way too much trust in princes, so to speak.

[35 : 03] Um, our, our allegiance needs to be to a different messiah. Uh, and in fact, if we put trust in princes, we are worshiping in our hearts the spirit of Antichrist.

Antichrist literally means instead of Christ. Uh, and, and to view political figures in an almost messianic way. That, that's, uh, worshiping Antichrist in a sense.

Um, one self-diagnostic here. Uh, when, when you read political news or hear political news, uh, if you're one of those sorry souls like myself who, who still reads political news, um, are you filled with exceeding adulation or contempt or, or hope or dread, I mean, really strong emotions, right?

Uh, are you brought to tears by political speeches? I say that because I, I was recently. And then I had to check myself. Am I putting hope in princes? You know, I, if, if we check our emotional state as, as we're, as we're reading and consuming this stuff, that, you know, this could be a sign that we're, that we're putting our hope in the wrong place.

Um, again, I, I actually might be preaching to the choir here. I, I'm actually not sure. Um, but for a lot of Americans, this is, I think, a big, a big problem. And we, we need to distinguish ourselves, I think, because we, we follow a different Messiah.

[36 : 26] Um, and then, uh, this, this third area, and then, and then we'll, we'll pause a moment.

Um, it is often observed that there is, that our culture is really polarized.

In fact, I've, I've been using culture in the singular a lot so far. That, I might, I might be wrong there.

Maybe I should be using it in the plural. Um, nearly half of those who identify with a political party have a very unfavorable opinion of the other, and most have very few or no friends of the other.

Uh, we are likely to describe our political opponents as lazy, immoral, dishonest, unintelligent, or close-minded. Roughly half of Democratic and Republican-leaning individuals said that the other party makes them feel not only frustrated, but angry, and even afraid.

This is a startlingly loveless picture. You know, it's awfully hard to love this nameless other, uh, with whom you are not friends, whom you consider lazy, immoral, or dishonest, at whom you're angry, and of whom you're afraid.

You, all of those things push out love. Uh, they exclude love. Um, and, and yet, we are to be people of love. Uh, we, we follow the one who said, love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

[37 : 52] Uh, we, we need, we need to distinguish ourselves from, from this pattern in our culture of polarization. Now, those different things that I mentioned have to do with political party, but it's, uh, it ends up, political affiliation, it seems to me, is almost this totalizing, like, it encompasses, encompasses so many other things, too.

Uh, it's not just politics, it's, uh, broader culture. Um, so I don't just mean in politics, I, I mean, uh, I have a buddy at, at the seminary I study at, um, who is from rural Alabama, uh, and I'm this, uh, New Englander from a city, and, uh, there is a, humanly speaking, really no reason we should be friends.

Um, you know, if you, if you look at what the sociologists say, humanly speaking, there's no reason we should be friends. Uh, but we have Christ, right? That, that, that's the bond, right?

Um, the church ought to be a place where, where, we have Christ, and everything else is completely secondary. Um, you know, all the things that divide the rest of America, completely secondary.

Um, okay, so let, let's pause there. Are, uh, any, any, um, thoughts or questions on, on this, on this bit?

[39 : 18] Yeah. I guess it's just the tension between what you said about the blood of, um, entertainment and knowing our world.

Yeah. it's so complex to negotiate that. Mm-hmm. To allow ourselves to be open to learning about what is repugnant to us.

Uh, turning on the news is not as simple as it was. Yeah. Um, now it's embedded with entertainment. It was so, it's just a lot more complex than we can describe it.

Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah. And like I said, you know, uh, yeah, this stuff is really complex and there's a lot of, these are more areas to think about, uh, a non-exhaustive, you know, set of areas to think about rather than the definitive word.

Yeah. Um, yeah, Pedro. Just that, this conversation got me to think about, uh, the way I pray for people in power. Mm-hmm. Um, because, you know, when I, I have, I have an image of specific people that I pray for because naturally they're in a position to be very influential in this country.

[40 : 34] Um, but I also had realized, um, that I was in letting people pray for other people, um, that are either in power or have, like, significant political influence.

Uh, they just didn't come to mind. But because they're from a different side, uh, as I am. Oh. And I think, actually, I should be praying a lot more as well for those people than for the, in addition to the people that I'm already praying for in power.

Mm-hmm. Yeah. It hadn't, it hadn't kind of hit me, but in my prayer habits that that was happening.

Yeah. And then even, like, when we pray, that shapes us too.

Mm-hmm. You know, uh, when, when I pray for people, I am moved to love them. Uh, yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry.

[41 : 31] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Amen. We're all equal at the foot of the cross.

Yeah. Yeah. Alright. I want to get to this last section because it's an important part of this tension.

So far we've been talking about this distinction from the rest of the culture. You know, Daniel resolving not to defile himself with the king's food.

But then there's this element of participation in the culture, being in the world, even if we're not of it. Jeremiah wrote a letter to exiles in Babylon.

[42 : 41] And in it he says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and live in them.

Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage. That they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and do not decrease.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. And pray to the Lord on its behalf. For in its welfare you will find your welfare. God is instructing Judah to identify with their Babylonian surroundings in some sense.

Their welfare is Judah's welfare. By learning the Babylonian culture and serving the Babylonian king, this is what Daniel does.

You know, he's ten times, he works so hard at it, and God blesses him that he's ten times better at his job than all the Babylonians. Well, how can we follow this side of this tension of being in the world but not of it?

[43 : 49] One, which has already been alluded to in some of what you folks have been saying, is knowing our world. Peter instructs his exiled readers to always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason, for the hope that is in you.

Well, how can we do that unless we know what people are saying and thinking and what's going on out there? Making a defense of our hope requires that we understand the people to whom we're making a defense.

There's this great theologian in the 20th century named Barth, who's often quoted as saying that pastors ought to preach with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

The idea being, in order to communicate Christ well, we need to know not only who Christ is from Scripture, but we also need to understand the culture that we're communicating Christ to.

So, just a couple of ways that we can do this. Is reading and praying through the news. This is, as was said, this can be complicated, because there's news that's wrapped up in entertainment, and that's a ball of hairball that I can't really untangle.

[45 : 17] A hairball. A hairball. Yeah, I was with my grandfather for about a month in May, and he watches TV news every evening. And I was stunned by, he spans the political spectrum in what he watches, but it's like everyone just shouting at each other.

I don't think that's actually very helpful. When you watch PBS NewsHour, that's great, but it's C-SPAN, I'm big into that. But I digress. But, yeah, I say, this is a tricky thing.

But finding news that goes beyond just like the latest Trump tweets, which isn't really informative, and it's really just entertainment, and praying through it.

You know, what does God have to say about what's going on in the world, and how can I pray for my fellow human beings? Or when you are reading a book or listening to a song or watching a movie or whatever, think about what it's saying about humanity or the world or our place in the world.

You know, what is it communicating? And then how would God respond to it? That's a really helpful exercise. Because a lot of our entertainment, I would say all of it really, says something, is making a claim about the world.

[46 : 45] Marvel movies, it's sort of like lowbrow culture, I guess, right? But it says something about humanity. You know, there are these exceptional individuals, and they're going out there and changing the world.

And then what about everyone else? Right? Nameless, faceless, nobodies. Well, what does that say? That's a kind of excessive, you know, triumphant individualism.

The individual great human being, typically male, is out there changing the world. And then what about the fabric of community?

What about the great mass of, like, most human beings whom God loves? Well, they seem almost irrelevant.

Right? So see what I'm, even something that's just, you know, like a popcorn movie, like Marvel, Marvel superhero movie, says something. And God says something in response.

[47 : 46] I think thinking about that can be a really helpful exercise. And in seeking our world's welfare, there are, Pastor Matt recently preached a sermon, where he was just enumerating a bunch of different ways that people at Trinity are already working to serve and seek the welfare of the poor and marginalized, of the least of these.

Considering how much Jesus talks about it, this is an essential calling of the church. Right? And it's one way to seek the welfare of the city that we're in.

But there's so much more that could be said, and we're short on time. But as complicated as this is, we can, as tricky as some of this can be to navigate, we can have hope in our model exile, who left his homeland, so to speak.

He left the glory of the right hand of the Father, became a human being, came into the dirt and the mud and the mess of our world and the challenges and the messiness of it, and is with us always to the end of the age, and instructs us to follow in his footsteps.

Just as the Father sent him, so Jesus sends us. We can be reassured that Jesus is with us and helping us to navigate a lot of this trickiness.

[49 : 29] We can take heart. But any last thoughts? And I mean really last thoughts. Because... Okay.

Then let us pray. Father, you loved the world in such a way and to such an extent that you sent your very own son to be a stranger and a foreigner and an exile in this foreign land, our world.

And he has told us that he will be with us always. Thank you, Father, for that great grace. Help us to love the world of the people you've created, even as you love them.

Help us to, like our great shepherd, Jesus, help us to keep ourselves distinct in the ways that we need to be distinct.

Help us, like Daniel, to resolve, not to defile ourselves in the ways that we need to resolve. But help us to love and seek the welfare of our city and our world.

[51 : 05] Lord, as we go upstairs, open our hearts to worship you and to be receptive to your preached word. Through Christ our Lord, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Glory.