

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story: Chapter 18 – Daniel in Exile
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 5, 2012

A little history lesson

In this timeline of The Story that we have been looking at, there is much happening throughout the world of the near east. Maybe you remember the term Fertile Crescent referring to the crescent shaped piece of geography formed in the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers that now flow in modern day Iraq and down into the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.



Each of these kings had a profound impact on the exile of the nation of Israel:

- ♣ Neo-Assyrians – Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17): Took Israel into exile in 722 BC
- ♣ Neo-Babylonians – Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar (2 Kings 25); Judah in 605/586 BC
- ♣ Persians/Medes – Cyrus the Great, Darius the Great (Daniel 6); Released in 520 BC

Two kinds of exile

Those who are exiled away on their own free will:

- ♣ Abraham
- ♣ And there are those who are exiled into a foreign land by political powers like the Apostle John and the nation of Israel in Babylon

Christians have a long history being referred to as foreigners or sojourners or strangers or in exile. You see, we who have given ourselves over to the Kingdom of Heaven and to King Jesus who rules that Kingdom, just like our King, we are not of this world. Remember how Jesus put it to Pilate?

John 18:34-37a

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered

over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?”

We are just visiting a strange land, sojourners just passing through. The older you get the more you know it is true. This world is not our home. We long to be in heaven with Christ.

1 Peter 2:11-12

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

As a Christian, you are a stranger in this world of unbelievers. You may be the same on the outside as everyone else, but on the inside you are different. You don't think like them. You don't act like them. You have different values and aspirations. You don't have the same customs as they do. You don't have the same goals and desires. You are not like them. They glorify themselves. You glorify God. Some glorify false gods. You glorify the true God. You are different inside. You have a different home and serve a different King. And it shows. At least it should show.

Because we are so different, our ways will come into conflict with the world's ways and we may anger others or be taunted and jeered, perhaps persecuted for our faith. You may find that your life is not all that different from the lives of the Jewish people exiled in Babylon. You can read about this part of the story in the archives of the prophet Daniel in a book of the Bible called Daniel.

A brief look at this important little book:

- ♣ Written by Daniel, a teenage young man of noble Jewish blood who was given an unusual faith and unusual gifts of interpreting dreams, it is filled with accounts of heroism and prophecy.
- ♣ It is divided into two sections or genre; the first six chapters are stories of faith to the God of Israel in a land of pagan gods.
- ♣ Some of the prophecy is often referring to the end times and as a result it is the subject of much controversy. I think we can find plenty of application for our lives in this account and we will look at the apocryphal writings another time.

In Daniel 3 and Daniel 6 are two of the more famous stories of amazing faith and even more amazing protection by God. If you attended Sunday school as a child most likely you heard these stories of faith.

Daniel 3: the Fiery Furnace – Summary of the trial with Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3:13-18

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Daniel 6: Daniel in the lion's den – Summary of the trial with Darius

Daniel 6:19-22

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

Surviving a fiery furnace or a lion's den

You cannot be ready for the fiery furnace and the lion's den unless you have practiced facing the smaller trials and temptations and disciplined your body and spirit for the trial. First you will not be ready for the fiery furnace or the lion's den unless you practice the heat of low simmer and face bite size trials with discipline and courage.

Jesus taught His disciples that in the end times there will be a terrible temptation to compromise our faith... *make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.* (Luke 21:14-15)

There are some very obvious lessons from Daniel's life we need to consider:

Disciplined in prayer**Daniel 2:20-21 After he had received a vision of the king's dream**

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons;
he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

Daniel 6:10 After he heard that none must pray to their god for a month

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Daniel 9:1-4 When considering the release of the people

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed

...

Now what are we to make of all this?

1. Prayer is a legitimate public testimony and we should seek to use it as God leads us.

Jesus said, "When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6).

This verse can be confusing when we think of what we just learned about Daniel and his friends. Does this indict Daniel's public demonstration of prayer? I don't think so. Jesus was warning against our showing off through public prayer, not our willingness to suffer for prayer. He was not saying that it is wrong to be seen in prayer. He was saying it is wrong to want to be seen so as to

be praised for your piety. Frankly, I would love it if we were known as a church that is not afraid to pray at the drop of a hat!

2. Daniel's prayer was a testimony, not only to the glory of God over the glory of Darius, but also, to the fact that his life was built on prayer.

Daniel was making a statement, not just about God but about his relation to God. He was known as a man who lived by prayer—whose life was built on prayer—who consulted his God in all things and who sought the action of his God before he took action himself. Daniel would not surrender that testimony. That is why his adversaries knew to entrap him. And leads me to my next thought:

3. Daniel's prayer was disciplined and regular.

When the time came for a demonstration, Daniel did not have to change anything. He already was praying three times a day in a stated place. There was pattern and routine and discipline. Does it strike you as strange that in America today almost no Christians pray this way? I'm sure that there are some who would celebrate this absence of order and design and habit and pattern as a sign of freedom from legalism. I might believe it if I saw anything like the freedom and power of Daniel where disciplines in prayer like his is absent. But I don't see it. Maybe it is time for a return to discipline and regular prayer.

Could it be that Daniel's discipline in prayer was the secret of his unexpected, unplanned, spontaneous encounters with God? Could it be that discipline is not the boring substitute for spontaneity and power but the garden where it grows? You till the garden with patient discipline and suddenly God makes a plant grow with supernatural power. I think this is so.

4. Finally, prayer is more precious than life.

Just think of it. Daniel knew that the penalty for praying would be the lion's den. I don't think Daniel knew that he would be delivered any more than Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew it as they stood before the fiery furnace and said, "If God does not deliver us, be it known to you, we will not serve your gods."

This must mean that prayer is more important than life. Daniel would rather pray than save his life. Not praying was a worse prospect to Daniel than being eaten by lions. That is a radical commitment to prayer. Just think of it. Can you say with Daniel: "*You will have to take my life before you take my prayer*"?

Obedient in suffering

"But even if He does not . . . we will not serve your gods . . ."

Daniel 10:1-3

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

Daniel and his associates did not believe that faithfulness to God guarantees freedom from suffering and tribulation. We know from the Scriptures that those who would live godly lives should expect suffering and tribulation.

1 Peter 2:18-21, 23

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good

and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

In our suffering we gain and we grow. We experience a deeper level of fellowship with Christ (Philippians 3:10). We find Him present with us in the fires of our tribulations in a way we may not have previously known. From our text, we know that God was with Daniel and his three friends at all times. But in the fiery furnace, God was with these three in a very special way. How often we pray God would keep us from suffering, rather than keep us through suffering. Often God reveals Himself in our suffering in a much more personal and glorious way. So it was with these three. God was present with them in the furnace.

Fearful of the True King

Nebuchadnezzar sought to inaugurate the worship of a new god on the basis of fear. The citizens of Babylon, with the golden idol and the fiery furnace before them, had to choose one or the other. Nebuchadnezzar's anger was fierce, his countenance frightening, and his furnace intensely hot. Nevertheless, Daniel's three friends feared the wrath of God more than that of the king. They knew that the fires of hell were more devastating than the fire of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. These Hebrews feared God more than men, and thus they obeyed God rather than men.

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

The three men could have compromised with the king and defended their disobedience by arguing, "Everybody else is doing it," or "Our office demands that we obey," or "We'll bow our knees but we won't bow our hearts." They might have said, "We can do our people more good by being officers in the king's service than by being ashes in the king's furnace." But true faith doesn't look for loopholes; it simply obeys God and knows that He will do what is best. Faith rests on commands and promises, not on arguments and explanations. Warren Wiersbe

Luke 12:4-5

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Sure of your future

What these three young men did was incredible! They stood up against the most powerful nation and king of their time. Standing virtually alone, they stood up by faith, a faith which qualified them to be listed in the "hall of faith" of Hebrews.

This chapter is really about deliverance. The king expected all of Babylon, including the Jews, to fall down before his idol, because he was the one who could deliver or destroy them. "What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" he asked them. To this he later replied, "there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

The three Hebrews did not make any defense to this king because they knew he was not their deliverer. Their Deliverer was the God who delivered them from bondage in Egypt, who forbade His people to worship idols, and who promised to deliver them from Babylonian captivity. Their Deliverer was God.

Theirs was a complete deliverance, because God accomplished it. They were not merely delivered from the fire; they were delivered through the fire. They were delivered through the fire which brought death to their executioners and in a way that destroyed only their bonds. They were delivered from sizzling, singeing, and even the scent of smoke. That is complete deliverance.

The deliverance which God has accomplished for us is like that described in Daniel 3. It is, first and foremost, God's deliverance. It is not a deliverance from all suffering and trials, but one which exists because God Himself experienced the fire. As the fourth person was present with the Hebrews in the furnace, Christ has endured the wrath of God, in our place. We are delivered from God's eternal wrath because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered for us, in our place. Deliverance, all deliverance, has been accomplished on the cross of Calvary.

I doubt that you and I fully grasp the extent of the deliverance we have in Christ. We say we believe that God has delivered us from Satan, sin, hell and death, but do we really believe it? We do not fathom or experience the totality of the deliverance which God has for us now, let alone in eternity. God's deliverance is complete deliverance.

Daniel 6:26-27

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.

He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

Communion – the Table of Deliverance