

Knowing Who is on the Throne

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Daniel chapter 1. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, 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 vessel in the treasury of his God.

Then the king commanded Aspenaz, 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 those were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names.

[1 : 48] Daniel he called Balthasar, 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 you 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 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 : 08] So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. 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 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.

[4 : 26] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. This is the word of God. Great.

Thank you, Angie, for reading that long passage. And good morning, everybody. Again, great to see you. And welcome. Lovely to have you with us. If you are new to Watermark and I haven't met you, my name's Kevin.

And it's great to have you with us today. Now, we are diving into this book of Daniel, this Old Testament book. And the book of Daniel is about so much more than lions' dens and fiery furnaces and children's stories.

The book of Daniel really is about two things. It's about sovereignty and it's about faithfulness. And again and again, in the book of Daniel, as we go through it over the next six or seven weeks, we're going to see that what God's going to tell us is that He alone is sovereign.

If you're new to church, the word sovereign is a kind of technical word. It means that God is on the throne. He rules and He reigns. And Daniel's going to tell us again and again that God is the one who's on the throne, not any other power or political power or economic power.

[5 : 35] But the book of Daniel is also about faithfulness. It's about God's faithfulness and how God calls His people to be faithful to Him even in the midst of living in this world, this city, which at the time was not a very God-honoring city.

And so in many ways, even while our world looks very different to the ancient city of Babylon, in many of the ways, the underlying belief system and the underlying values, even of a city like Hong Kong, 21st century Hong Kong, is actually similar to many of the underlying belief systems and values of an ancient city like Babylon.

Babylon was a city that ran on power. It was a city that ran on wealth. It was a very performance-orientated city. It was a city where there was huge economic inequalities between the wealthy and the poor.

And so in many ways, the values and the belief systems are quite similar. And so the question we're going to look at in this book again and again is, what does it mean, what does it look like to be the people of God in the midst of the cities in which we live and for us, in the midst of 21st century Hong Kong?

Now, today we're going to dive into Daniel chapter 1. And the book of Daniel, the first chapter kind of sets up the rest of the book. In fact, actually, in the original writing, chapter 1 is written in the Hebrew language and then in chapter 2, it changes to Aramaic.

[6 : 57] And part of the reason for that, it changes back again later on, but part of the reason for that is because Daniel chapter 1 is like a prologue. It's setting up the themes that we're going to see throughout the book again and again.

And so what we're going to see today is that if, for those of us that are followers of Jesus, if we're going to be faithful to God in the midst of the world that we live in, in the midst of this city and the other big cities to which maybe you move or live, we've got to remember four things.

There's four things that I think God wants to show us in chapter 1 today. So let's dive in. The first thing is this. If you're going to be faithful to God, if you're going to become the person that God, the sovereign God, wants to call you to be, you've got to remember who's on the throne.

Who's on the throne. Now, when we read Daniel chapter 1, look who's on the throne. It's fairly obvious. It's this guy called Nebuchadnezzar, okay, Nebuchadnezzar II.

And what happened is this setting is in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's father had just recently, two or three years before this, demolished the Assyrian empire.

[8 : 03] The Assyrians were the world superpower. He had crushed them. He came on down to Egypt and there was a battle called the Battle of Carshemesh, I think it was. He crushed the Egyptians. He then dies and his son, Nebuchadnezzar, gets on the throne.

And Nebuchadnezzar wants to prove to the world that he is no slouch. He has every bit of authority and ruthlessness as his dad did. And so Nebuchadnezzar's on the throne.

He comes to Jerusalem, 605 BC. He lays siege to the city of Jerusalem. He wipes out the king and he destroys it. Now, at this stage, he just does that in the first step of that.

Later on, he's going to come back and wipe it out fully. But in this instance, what he does is he takes the king, the royal family, high-ranking members of society, the political, the cultural elites, and he takes them back to Babylon and he enters them into this three-year re-education program that Angie read about.

They go to this Ivy League Babylonian university. They learn all about Babylonian culture and literature and the arts and the astrology and the values of Babylonian culture.

[9 : 12] In a few years' time, Nebuchadnezzar's going to go back to Jerusalem and he's going to really wipe it out thoroughly. He's going to pull down the temple, burn all the buildings, rip down the city walls, and march everyone back into Babylon in the exiles.

But at this stage, what he does is he just takes the political and the cultural and the economic elites with him back to Babylon. So look at verse 2 of what Angie read to us. Nebuchadnezzar takes the holy things from the temple and it says here, he brought them into the land of Shinar to the house of his God and he placed the vessels in the treasury of his God.

So Nebuchadnezzar goes to the temple in Jerusalem and he takes all the holy and sacred things, he marches them back to Babylon and he sets them up in the temple to his false god. It's kind of like somebody coming and taking down a cross in our church and then setting it up in a Buddhist temple as a stand from which to burn incense.

So you take like a cross, the thing that's most sacred to us and say, oh, let's use this to burn incense to our gods, right? It's absolutely sacrilege. And so what are the Israelites thinking?

At this stage, they're thinking, where is God? How can God allow this to happen? It seems like God has become impotent. I mean, God is completely weak. How can God allow this to happen?

[10 : 36] To everyone in Jerusalem, it seems like God has fallen off the throne and is just allowing Nebuchadnezzar to run rampant. But what God wants us to see here is actually over and above the work of Nebuchadnezzar and the plans of the earthly kings stands the sovereign God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Bible who rules over all the affairs of mankind.

Look at what happens in verse 1 and 2. If you've got your bulletin, read it with me. It says, 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 into his hands. So who came and besieged Jerusalem? Nebuchadnezzar, right? Who gave him, Jehoiakim, into his hands?

The sovereign Lord. That's right. And actually, the passage we looked at last week, Jeremiah 29, says the exact same thing. We didn't look, we didn't pick it up. But in verse 1, it says, Nebuchadnezzar came and took the exiles with him back to Babylon.

Verse 4 reads, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to the exiles, those that I, the Lord, have sent into Babylon. Now, what God is saying is that over and above the affairs of politicians and kings and rulers, God sits on the throne.

[12:02] Now, we may think, oh, that's easy to say retrospectively, right? History happens and then you just write in your Bible, oh, well, God was involved in all of it.

You're just rewriting history, okay? But actually, in the Bible, God often foretells that this is going to happen. For instance, about 120 years before this happened, the prophet Isaiah goes to Hezekiah and he says this to Hezekiah in Isaiah 39.

He says, Hear the word of the Lord, Hezekiah. The days are coming when all that is in your house, in other words, your royal palace, and that which your fathers, the kings have stored up to this day, will be carried off into Babylon.

Nothing will be left in Jerusalem and some of your own descendants, in other words, members of the royal family, will be taken away and will serve in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Now, what's amazing is when Isaiah writes this, Babylon is like nothing. They're not a world superpower. They're not very strong. Assyria is the world power. Babylon is just some city in the far east.

[13:10] But Isaiah writes and says, The time is coming because you are not obeying God when everything in Jerusalem is going to be carried off and taken to Babylon and some of your descendants are going to serve the king of Babylon in his palace 120 years before it actually happened.

Friends, you see what God is saying here? What God is trying to tell us is that no matter in every city, in every age, in every generation, there will be things that happen that cause us to wonder and fear and think, where is God?

God has fallen off his throne. Is God really in control? And what Daniel wants to show us is that over and above the rule and the authority and the reign of kings and queens, presidents and empires, stands the sovereign God, that God alone is on the throne.

God's people end up in Babylon not because of Nebuchadnezzar but because God sent him there. The sovereign God is on the throne. Later on in the book of Daniel, this is like one of my favorite scriptures in all of the Bible, okay?

Daniel chapter 5, Daniel speaks to a man called Belshazzar who's a king who follows Nebuchadnezzar. So Nebuchadnezzar dies and this guy Belshazzar becomes king.

[14:20] And listen to what Daniel says to him. He says, So talk about supreme authority, right?

Nebuchadnezzar's like the most powerful man of the most powerful nation of all the world. If he wants you dead, you're dead. He wants you alive, you're alive. Supreme authority, right?

But then look at the next verse. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened, said he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne and his glory was taken from him until Nebuchadnezzar knew that it's the most high God who rules the kingdoms of mankind and sets over them whom he wills.

Proverbs says, The heart of a king is like a stream of water in the hands of the living God. He directs it where he wants. And what we see in Daniel chapter 1, it's not only macro events like kingdoms and empires, it's micro events as well.

Look at verse 9 with me. It says, God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. Verse 17, And as for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all the literature and the understanding of Babylon.

[15:56] Do you see what God's saying here? God is saying that despite how things appear, God is the one who's on the throne. Sometimes we look around us and we say, God, where are you? How could this be possible?

And the story of Daniel is that over and over again, God wants us to have confidence that he's on the throne. Now, why do we need to know this? Who cares, right? That's great for the theology classroom, but how does that actually help you in your Monday to Friday?

Friends, all of us are going to go through times in life when the storms of life comes and the fire comes and all of us are going to need a robust theology of the bigness of God.

If your view of God is small and minuscule, you'll be tossed by the wind and the waves and you'll be thrown. But if you're able to see the bigness and the majesty of God, it'll be like putting roots down into the foundation that will hold you strong in the midst of the storms and the fires of life.

Tim Keller wrote this incredible book 10 years ago called *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*. And one of the things he says in that book, amazing insights, he says, every one of us are going to face trauma and trials in our life.

[17:07] It's just a matter of time before we encounter something that just challenges you no end. And he says, when you face the storms and the trials of life, there are three kinds of people.

Some people who are, let's say, atheists or agnostics. You don't have any belief in God. Okay? Take one person. Second person, someone who's a Christian but they've got a small view of the sovereignty of God.

They know God is kind of, sort of in control. Maybe God wants us to be a good person. But they don't really have conviction that God is on the throne. And the third person is somebody who knows that God rules and reigns.

And Tim Keller says this, when the storms of life come, when the fires come, the first person will say, oh well, there's no meaning in life anyway. Stuff happens. That's just the way it is.

The second person will be the most broken by it. The second person will say, God, where are you? You've abandoned me. How can you let this happen? I thought you were meant to be good.

[18:06] But the third person, the person who has a robust theology of God's sovereignty will be able to say, God, I don't know why you're lying to this. I don't know what's going on but I know one thing. I know you're good and I know you're on the throne.

Do you see what this means? It means for those of us that are followers of Jesus, if you're a follower of Jesus but you haven't wrestled and come to understand that God is the one who's on the throne, when the storms of life comes, when the fire comes, it will throw your faith.

You'll feel abandoned and let down. But if you know that God rules and reigns, you might not understand why he allows what he allows but you'll have the confidence to know that God is in control.

He hasn't abandoned me. Does that make sense? Okay, I hope that makes sense. Okay, are you still awake? Okay, great. This is the point of Daniel chapter one.

That even though it looks like Nebuchadnezzar's on the throne, actually God is on the throne. He rules and he reigns. And Daniel's point here is that if we, who are followers of Jesus, are going to be faithful to Christ in the midst of our city, in the midst of what's going on, you have to learn the lesson of Daniel.

- [19 : 13] You have to know that Nebuchadnezzar's not on the throne, Caesar Augusta's not on the throne, Jesus is on the throne. Okay, second thing is this. Character trumps gifting.
- Now, Daniel is obviously a very gifted man, right? You read the book of Daniel and he's super smart. He's very clever. He's a genius. He's got profound wisdom.
- I mean, just look at what he says here, right? The way he negotiates with the chief of staff of Nebuchadnezzar. God gives him supernatural gifts and talents. He's obviously a very wise and incredibly gifted man.
- And this is, of course, exactly what Nebuchadnezzar's looking for. Look at what Nebuchadnezzar says to his chief of staff when he sends this guy on a recce trip to Jerusalem.
- He says, listen, I want you to go. Look at what he says in verse three and four. Bring some of the people of Israel, members of the royal family and nobility, youths without blemish, people of good appearance, skillful in wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding and learning, and competent to stand before the king.
- [20 : 22] So Nebuchadnezzar is looking for all the kinds of things that we look for in potential spouses and in future employees, right? Someone from a good family background, someone with good looks, okay, that helps, someone that's got intellectual smarts, and someone that has good social EQ, okay?
- All the things that we look for in society. And, but what God is showing us here is that actually what God wants us to see that those things, though Daniel has them, those are not the standout quality for Daniel.
- In God's kingdom, what sets you apart is not your family background, your intellectual credibility, your social EQ, your good looks. What sets you apart in God's kingdom is actually character.
- It's actually character. At the time that Daniel and his friends go to Babylon, they're teenagers, they're 16 year olds, and they are seduced and wine and dined by the king.
- The king pays for the Ivy League education. The king is bankrolling their board and lodging. The king is setting them up, feeding them with stuff from his table, his food, and all that.
- [21 : 33] And amazingly, Daniel and his friends fully engage in the culture and the city that they're part of. They absolutely do what Jeremiah tells them to. They put down roots, they settle, they are loving the city in which they're part of.
- But there comes a point where there's a line in the sand that Daniel knows for him to cross that line in the sand is going to go against who God is calling him to be.
- And so look at what happens in verse 8. It says, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank, and therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.
- The word resolve here talks about setting your face determined on something. It's actually the word that's sometimes used in the Bible for like a cast that you put over your arm.
- Someone breaks their arm, you put a cast on them, the hard cast that's going to keep that arm firm and fixed. Daniel resolves, he's got this resolution that he says, I know where I stand.
- [22 : 39] He's got the strength of character to know where his convictions lie and where not to cross that line. Remember how in, earlier on in the Bible, Samuel goes to this man called Jesse, and God tells Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the new king of Israel, the first king of Israel.

And so Jesse brings out all the sons and Jesse does exactly what Nebuchadnezzar does. He brings out his sons that are good looking, intellectually smart, social EQ, good background, right?

And he says, here's my eldest son. He's strong, he's fit, this man will make a good king. And he goes through all the sons and God says, I haven't chosen any of them. And God says, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

In the language of the New Testament, Paul says the same thing. Paul says, it's not your spiritual gifts that God looks for, things like speaking in tongues or leadership or prophecy or words of knowledge.

It's not spiritual gifts that make you great in God's kingdom. It's spiritual fruit. It's the fruit of the Spirit. It's things like patience. It's things like kindness. It's things like gentleness. It's things like having grace for those that have hurt you.

[23 : 54] It's things like being merciful to those that society looks down upon. Those are the things that God actually looks for. The gifts of the Spirit are just the things that God gives us by his sovereign will.

God anoints you, that's wonderful. But it's the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of walking with Jesus that actually God is looking for. And friends, in our city, we love to invest in our skill sets, in our abilities, right?

How many of us are parents? We are always sending our kids to extracurricular activities, right? Extra Chinese, extra maths, extra tennis lessons, extra piano lessons, extra whatever lessons.

Think about in the marketplace. We're always trying to build our resume, our CV. But what God is looking for, he says those things are not bad, but actually the kind of people that are going to make a difference in the city, if you want to be faithful to Jesus, it's not just our resume, it's actually our character.

God wants to build our character. How do we build our character? What does it take to build our character? Well, let me just run through a couple of things quickly.

[24 : 58] The first thing is actually it takes deep reflection of God. Have you ever spent time with someone that is really outstanding, someone who's brilliant, and you go away from being with that person and you just want to become better yourself?

Do you know what I mean? You spend time with someone who's so compassionate, so kind, and you feel like you want to be kinder yourself. The more time we spend with God and reflect on his nature and his character actually develops within us a longing to become more like him.

Deep reflection on who God is. How do we become people of character? Well, you go through trials and tribulations. We mentioned this earlier, but nothing will shape your character like the fire and the storm.

But as Keller reminded us, when you go through the fire and the storm, the difference between growing you and destroying you is whether you can hold on to God in the midst of it. There's nothing like the fire and the storms of life that's going to grow your character and make you to become a person of substance.

And that's actually one of the things I find hardest about being a parent. On the one hand, I want to deliver my children from the difficulties of life because my heart goes out to them. But I also know the difficulties of life is actually what's going to grow them and mature them, right?

[26 : 08] And God is the same. He allows us to go through challenges to grow us. But you know the other way that you develop character is through cultivating a life of repentance and confession.

As Christians, one of the things that we do as Christians is we are called to examine our hearts, to constantly reflect, where am I being defensive? Where am I being proud? Where am I blaming others?

Where am I pointing my fingers to other people? Where am I living for my own glory rather than God? And God says as we cultivate a habit of reflection and repentance and confession, actually we shape the character.

We become the kind of people that God's calling us to. And so while Nebuchadnezzar is pleased that he scored these young guys with the perfect resume, what sets them apart in Babylon is not just their resume but actually their character.

The kind of people that God's called them to be. And friends, if we're ever going to serve our city by remaining faithful to Jesus, we've got to become the kind of people that are growing our character as well.

[27 : 12] Okay? So that's the second thing. Third thing is this. I'm going to run through this really quickly. Is if we're going to become the kind of people that love and serve our city, we've got to know what it means to worship.

What it means to worship. Look at Daniel and his friends here. They go to Babylon and amazingly, they say yes to all sorts of things in the city. They say yes to new names.

So Nebuchadnezzar gives these guys Babylonian names. They say yes to that. They say yes to Babylonian education. They say yes to Babylonian culture.

They say yes to all these things. But there's one thing that Daniel and his friends say no to. What is it that they say no to? It's the food and the wine. Right? Now, why does Daniel do that?

Well, the point that Daniel's making is not that we should all become vegetarians. Okay? That's not Daniel's main point here. And he's not saying that alcohol is bad and we shouldn't drink wine.

[28 : 11] Okay? And this is not also some secret code for Christian dieting techniques. Okay? Sometimes, I don't know if you've ever heard this, when I was growing up people used to talk about the Daniel diet.

Okay? We should all do the Daniel diet and eat more vegetables. And that's probably good for us. Dr. Graham, you can tell us vegetables is probably a good thing, right? But that's not the point of Daniel chapter 1.

What's going on here? Well, remember in the Bible, having a meal with someone is always a sign, it's always symbolic of saying, I welcome you, I accept you.

Remember, Jesus is always getting in trouble because he's always eating and having meals with the people that the Pharisees don't want to accept and welcome. And so he's having a meal with the tax collectors and the sinners and the Pharisees are saying, how can you welcome them?

How can you love those people? You should be rebuking them. Jesus is having meals with them and he's always getting in trouble because it's Jesus' way of saying, I'm not just opening my home to you, I'm opening my heart.

[29 : 13] I'm welcoming you. And friends, that's why actually having communion when our hearts are bitter with other members of the church family is actually a very hypocritical thing to do because when we take communion together, it's a way of saying, I recognize you, I welcome you, I accept you.

But if there's unforgiveness in my heart, that's actually not a good thing to do. And so having a meal is always a way of welcoming someone, of accepting them. Now look at what's going on here in verse 8.

Verse 8 says, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food. The word defile is in the Old Testament a word that has to do with worship.

Remember, God's people were not allowed to go to the temple if they were defiled, if they were unclean. And the issue for Daniel here is not the food, what tastes good or doesn't taste good.

The issue for Daniel is there's something going on here that Daniel knows that if he crosses this line, for him, that in his heart would mean I'm moving into Babylonian worship.

[30 : 21] Okay? There's something going on here for Daniel that he's saying, at this point, if I say yes to this, I'm selling my soul. Daniel knows that for whatever reason, for him to say yes to Nebuchadnezzar at this point meant that he couldn't come before God with a clear conscience in worship and say, you are my God, I live for you.

Now, friends, for all of us, that's going to be a different thing. The Bible doesn't actually say, there's some things the Bible's clear on, right? Like, don't have sex before marriage. That's just, it's just clear.

It's pretty hard to say yes to that and come to God before worship and say, God, I live for you, right? The Bible's pretty clear on those kinds of things. But there's a whole bunch of things that actually the Bible's not clear on and we've got to know in our heart what is our conscience?

What is the line in the sand for me that if I say yes to this, it's going to be really hard for me to come before God and worship and say, Christ, I live for you, I give you my all. For some of us, maybe it's what we do with our money.

For some of us, maybe it's what we do with our time. For some of us, friends, it's going to mean maybe even saying no to a certain job or a pay rise or a certain promotion because saying yes to that is going to be, in a way, selling our soul.

[31 : 38] It's going to be engaging in the act of worship. It's when work becomes more than work, work becomes worship to our culture. Friends, though the pressure is great, will you dare to be like Daniel and resolve in your heart that while God has called us to love and serve the city, he hasn't called us to love the things of the city primarily but to love him and thereby to serve the city.

And Daniel knows that for him there's a line in the sand that moving beyond that goes from just serving the city to worshiping the city. And Christ calls us and says, the best way that we can serve our city is to make sure that our love for Christ is preeminent.

Okay, maybe I'll just leave that point there. I hope that makes some kind of sense. Okay, fourth thing is this. Last one is this. In order for us to really love and serve our city, for us to be faithful to God in the midst of Hong Kong, we've got to understand God's redeeming grace.

God's redeeming grace. Look at Nebuchadnezzar's strategy here. Now, Nebuchadnezzar's is a smart guy. Look at what he does here in chapter one.

Nebuchadnezzar is pillaging Jerusalem. Okay, and he's getting all these exiles to leave Jerusalem and to come and work as slaves in his Babylonian empire.

[33 : 03] But Nebuchadnezzar doesn't want a refugee crisis on his hands and he doesn't want a rebellion on his hands. And so, what he does is he's going to come and decimate Jerusalem, but the first thing he does is he gets the cultural and the political elites to leave Jerusalem and he comes and inculcates them, indoctrinates them in Babylonian culture 15, 20 years before the rest.

Okay, does that make sense? So, he gets the noble families, the king and the queen, the nobility, the royal members of the family, et cetera, the political and cultural elites.

he brings them to Babylon and he indoctrinates them in Babylonian customs and culture so that when the rest of Jerusalem comes there 15 years later, they see their leaders and they say, oh, I guess life here is not so bad.

We should just follow those guys. We should do what they do. So, Nebuchadnezzar wants to get the leaders and get them on his side first before he brings the rest of the nation.

Okay, does that make sense? Very smart. But friends, what the Bible says is that what man intends for evil, God intends for good.

[34 : 19] Because look at what God does here. God does the exact same thing. God sends 15 years before the rest of Israel going to Babylon, God sends a bunch of faithful, character-filled men that have got resolve and character ahead so that when the rest of Israel come 15 years later, they see Daniel and these other guys that have been put in positions of prominence serving Babylon and yet faithful to God and the rest of Israel can go and say, let's follow those guys.

God does what Nebuchadnezzar was hoping to do, God does for his kingdom. And what that means is that as Israel gets to Babylon and they see Daniel and his friends serving faithfully, they can remain faithful to God and 70 years later they will go back to Israel and rebuild the temple, rebuild Jerusalem, re-engage God and become faithful to God's people once again.

But notice here, it's not just that God is being good to them because he's a nice guy. Remember, why is Israel in Babylon in the first place?

Remember what we said last week? The reason God's people are in Babylon is because of their constant rebellion and their rejection of God. For hundreds of years God has been saying, turn to me, turn to me, don't reject me and they constantly reject God.

So eventually, God brings the Babylonians as his instrument of discipline, his instrument of punishment, his instrument of judgment. God takes Israel into Babylon as an act of discipline.

[36 : 04] Okay? Does that make sense? But as my friend Stephen Rain points out, before God has even instituted the discipline, he's already working on their redemption.

Before God has even brought about their punishment, he's already working the plan to bring about their restoration. Before God has even finished the correction, he's already putting in place a plan to bring about their renewal.

Israel hasn't even gone to Babylon yet, they're still on their way there and God is already putting in a place to send the leaders ahead so that they can restore Israel and save them and redeem them.

It's kind of like this, okay? This is my friend Stephen Rain, this is his analogy. He says, it's like imagine your child does something really, really naughty, okay? Really bad and you send them to their room and you say, you go to your bedroom and I'm going to come in there and I'm going to deal with you, right?

And they go to the bedroom and on the way to the bedroom you see this flyer, this amazing holiday to Disneyland, Europe. And you're like, oh, that's a good idea. And you go online and you book this amazing holiday to Disneyland.

[37 : 16] On the way to dealing with your child you're already thinking of the restoration plan. That's what God is doing here. As he sends his people into Babylon to deal with them and to punish them, to discipline them, he's already instituting the plan for their correction, their restoration, their renewal, and their redemption.

And that's actually what the last verse of chapter 1 is all about. Look at the very last verse. It says here, Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. Well, who is King Cyrus?

Well, King Cyrus is the leader of the Persian Empire who overthrew the Babylonians who turned to the Israelites and said, I don't need you in my kingdom.

Why don't you go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, rebuild the city, rebuild your walls? Why don't you go back and worship your God back in your nation? At the very end of the very first chapter, God is putting a little hint in store here.

He's saying, yes, I'm going to send these guys to Babylon. Yes, I'm dealing with them. But this isn't the end of the story. This is a temporary arrangement. Actually, what I've got in plan is their redemption and their restoration and their renewal.

[38 : 32] Even before God's people have come to Babylon, God is already putting in place their renewal. And friends, it's the same thing we see in the book of Ruth. Naomi is convinced that God has abandoned her, he's rejected her, he's done away with her, things are going wrong in her life, and the very last verse of the first chapter is a promise of hope.

God is not done with her, but God is going to redeem her, heal her, and restore her. And so right at the outset of the book of Daniel, God wants his people to know though their sin is great, his redeeming grace and his mercy is greater still.

You see that? Though their sin is great, his redeeming grace and his mercy way outstrips even their worst sins and failures. God wants his people to see that though their rebellion calls for judgment, his mercy and his heart of compassion calls for their restoration and their renewal.

If only they'll humble themselves. If only they'll come to him with faith and repentance. Friends, isn't the redeeming, restoring, renewing grace of God simply incredible?

Isn't it amazing that when we're at our worst, God is already orchestrating a plan to redeem and renew us? Friends, you know, the Bible says that actually the story of Israel and Babylon is the story of every single human being.

[40 : 00] The Bible says that when we were at our worst, God was already putting in place plans to redeem us and to renew us. The Bible says that while we were still enemies of God, while we were shaking our fists at God and saying, we don't want your way, we want to be our own king, while we were still sinners, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross.

And do you remember the words of Jesus while he's on the cross? While he's being nailed to the cross by his enemies, Jesus prays his prayer and he says, Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do.

Friends, when you were at your very worst, when you had abandoned God and when you had wanted to be on the throne of your own life, when your life was wrecked with sin and guilt, Jesus went to the cross for you.

Jesus had not abandoned you. Jesus had not given up on you. Friends, when you didn't know Jesus, Jesus knew you and he went to the cross for you. How astounding, how awesome, how unbelievably incredible is God's redeeming grace.

Friends, you know what the secret is? God's renewal, God's restoration, God's great redemption isn't automatic. It's free, but it's not cheap.

[41 : 21] It requires our humility. It requires our submission. It requires that we come to him in faith and repentance. It requires that we come to him and say, Jesus, have your way.

Friends, the story of Daniel is that God wants to show us that he is on the throne, that no matter what's going on in our world, God rules and reigns, and we can trust him, even in the midst of the storms and the trials of life.

Daniel 1 wants to tell us and show us that character trumps gifting every single day. And God wants to show us that if we're going to be faithful people of God in the city, we need to know what it means to worship him.

We need to know what does it mean to put Christ first, even in the midst of the most trying and difficult circumstances of our life. But ultimately God wants to know that there will be days when we fail. There will be days when it doesn't work out.

There will be times when serving God in the city, we mess up and we fail. And God wants us to know that even on our very worst day, God is not withdrawing from us, he's moving towards us in unbelievable grace and mercy.

[42 : 22] This is the God we serve. This is the God we love. This is the God that has called us to love and serve our city. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning and we need you, God.

God, we want to become the people that you've called us to be. As a church, Lord, we want to love and serve our city. We want to bring salt and light to our city.

God, as a church, we want to be those that bring the good news of Jesus to our city. But Father God, first and foremost, we need to be those that have been touched and transformed by the redeeming grace of God.

And so, Christ, we pray, come and work in our hearts. God, I pray for those of us this morning that are feeling like we desperately need your grace this morning, God.

God, those of us that need redemption in some way, maybe our marriage needs redemption. Maybe our relationship with our children is healing. God, maybe some of us have sinned in some great and grievous way and it feels like we are beyond forgiveness.

[43 : 43] Oh, God, won't you wash us with your grace? Won't you flood us with your mercy? Won't you, Jesus, remind us that of your redeeming, incredible redeeming grace, God?

Jesus, I pray, also won't you help us to, like Daniel and his friends, to have deep resolve, to know that no matter what the cost, we will serve you and worship you, God, that you will be first and foremost in our hearts and our lives.

Christ, come and lead us in your mercy, we pray. Amen. In your awesome name, Amen.