

STRANGERS + EXILES: SLEEPING WITH LIONS

June 4, 2017 | Pastor Keith Jenkins

We will resume our journey through the book of Daniel by taking a look at Daniel Chapter 6. This narrative is one of the more famous ones of the bible. Those of us that grew up in Sunday school know this story very well. As we study in our groups, let's allow this familiar passage to speak to us in a fresh way. We realize very quickly that the chapter title describes the powerful deliverance of Daniel as he was thrown into a pit for refusing to compromise his faith. **What's intriguing the most is not the lions or the pit, but the LIFE that Daniel lived in exile.**

An important key question for our study is **what does it mean to be in "exile"**? It is to be banished from a native land, to be away from one's home (city, state, or country) unable to return, under threat of imprisonment or death upon return...it was a form of punishment.

- We are exiles in the sense that for those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ...we are immediately placed in His kingdom. So, our ultimate citizenship is in heaven...where Jesus has gone to prepare a place.

John 14:2 "...in my Father's house are many mansions if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Like Abraham: "...we wait for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10)

- In the meantime: WE ARE AMBASSADORS (official representatives of a foreign country/Kingdom of God) ...While living and working in this world, we represent His Kingdom and are tasked with the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5)
- Pastor Keith tells of growing up and always hearing Rev. Fitts of 1st Baptist say "...we are called to be in the world, but not of the world". He meant that we are to live among them but live separate & distinctive lives. Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount said... we are to be light and salt.

In all honesty, we struggle because we don't want to be separate/isolated or cut off from the culture at large. In fact, most of us are doing all we can to BELONG with someone, or some group.

Note: **There is an innate longing for love, acceptance, and approval in all of us.** If there has been some neglect, abuse or rejection this can be even more pronounced. Likewise also for those who have immigrated here and feel the cultural separation and struggle with English not being their first language and the longing to feel connected. **If we have been deprived of a sense of healthy love, acceptance and approve then we can head down some self-destructive paths in search of it.** Any conversation about being Strangers, Exiles, Salt, Light, In and not of...has to take this into account. (WE WANT TO BELONG)

- One of the gifts the Lord has given us to help us while we are STRANGERS & EXILES is one another. Obviously, we are not alone...The Holy Spirit (helps, comforts) but we are gifts of encouragement/edification to one another as we SOJOURN here until the return of Jesus. We must continue to press in toward genuine community with other believers. In those relationships, we will find a refuge, the sense of belonging we have been in search of, encouragement and strength to endure. In these relationships, we are also PROVOKED to live even more radically for Jesus. We are SHARPENED (not dull) as we engage in these relationships.
- We can be tempted to compromise & ignore God's law as we grow weary from resisting the culture...what's the use. Outside pressure can weaken our resolve...we must be built up on the INSIDE (INNER MAN) FINISHING WELL... enduring until the end!

1. DANIEL'S REPUTATION

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm". (Daniel 6:1-3)

- In the midst of very trying circumstance from a young age he demonstrated exemplary character, worth ethic and faithfulness to God as he lives in the Babylonian captivity of Israel.

"He RESOLVES to not defile himself & REFUSES to compromise his Faith... and not only survives but thrives.

- Daniel excels (God at work)

(vs.3b)) the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.

(vs. 4) Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy.

Martin Luther (the 15th century theologian) was speaking about different vocations where we work in the secular world. He made this astute observation about how God disguises himself in our vocation; **"These are the masks of our Lord God, behind which he wants to be hidden and to do all things."**

The other governors became jealous and desired to find some accusation against him and could NOT according to his work ethic/professional life.

(Most scholars believe he was a teenager when he was taken captive 13-15yrs old. He would have been 80yrs old by this time. He lived an uncompromising life before God in a pagan and perverse culture for 6 decades...)

"It is not about imposing your faith on others, but exposing your faith in front of others"

Principle: We must remain blameless and above reproach in all that we do no matter the circumstances. Daniel's testimony was that he was excellent in all that he did.

"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people". (Colossians 3:23)

2. DANIEL'S STANCE & GOD'S FAVOR BROUGHT PERSECUTION - "EXPECT IT, EMBRACE IT, ENDURE IT"

"indeed all who desire to live godly will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12)

"Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you". (John 15:20)

We must arm ourselves with an imminent expectation that persecution could/should arise. **If we are truly living as citizens of another kingdom, those kingdoms will in fact come into conflict...** Maybe not physical abuse or death... although it is becoming more likely. Surely you will not be thought of well, or ostracized...rejected, minimized and marginalized....

"Following Jesus will offend..." "Being light in a dark world, who has rejected the son of God and the light of the gospel, will put us at odds with those who reject our king"; without you even trying to be offensive!

We follow the one who said... Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

3. "...AS WAS HIS CUSTOM SINCE EARLY DAYS"

(vs.10) "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days".

- Daniel was built up & ready for the moment
- He RESPONDED, this wasn't a panicked REACTION
- Daniel had carved out a LIFESTYLE of righteous living

"We first make our habits, and then our habits make us"

Note: This was not the first time Daniel prayed 3x per day. **Not the first time he trusted in the Lord to preserve and protect him....**

He started out this way in Daniel 1 as a youth and continued throughout his life IN CAPTIVITY!

... His hope was ALWAYS in the Lord, as was evidenced by opening the window and praying toward Jerusalem as Solomon had prayed ...

"When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, (1 Kings 8:46-51)

- Darius, after observing the faith of Daniel, made another decree; he spoke to power through his convictions.

4. WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS A WEAKNESS IS OUR GREATEST STRENGTH!

(vs.4-5) "This made the other presidents and governors very jealous, and they began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs so that they could complain to the king about him. But they couldn't find anything to criticize! He was faithful and honest and made no mistakes. 5 So they concluded, "Our only chance is his religion!"

5. "WE MUST NOT PRIVATIZE OUR FAITH"

- Daniel's unwillingness to compromise, and to trust in God.... moved Darius to issue a decree to release & return the Israelites to their land. It literally brought an end to their captivity.
- Conversely, the way we live, serve God and trust Him, may communicate something to those who observe your life that nudges them toward the God you serve, who delivers, sustains, provides, protects...etc. HE IS THE LIVING GOD...not like any other gods (lower case g)

6. DANIEL WAS PRESERVED & PROTECTED IN THE PIT...

(God DELIVERS...the pit of persecution, the pit of financial despair, the pit of discouragement over a failed relationship... TRUST GOD)

God's faithfulness runs side by side with Daniel's faithfulness, yet the blessings of the Lord come when we least deserve it.

"Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." (Daniel 6:19-22)

Deliverance...You need God to bring you out and to show himself strong on your behalf.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. 2 Chronicles 16:9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Take another look at Pastor Keith's introduction and discuss, "what does it mean to be in exile"?
2. On the bottom of page one and into page two of your notes, discuss what it means to you that we are "ambassadors"? Also Keith pointed out that we all yearn for love, acceptance and approval...we want to belong. But thankfully God has given us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to always be with us as well as each other. How has both or either of these gifts played in your exile walk?
3. Look again at our first point about "Daniel's Reputation", what can we learn from this section and how do you apply it to your life and circumstances?
4. Point two is "Daniel's stance and God's favor brings persecution". After considering how this happened in Daniel's life, what has been your experience? What do you think about Pastor Keith's suggestion; "expect it, embrace it, endure it"?
5. Point three really touched me and challenged me, Daniel was "under the gun", they were coming after him. We're told he prayed; "as was his custom since early days". Maybe you're like me, I want to represent my king and his kingdom in this place that's not my home, no matter what I'm facing. What does Daniel's life teach us and how do; "We first make our habits, and then our habits make us"?
6. Point five challenged us not to "privatize our faith". Our current culture will pressure us to not speak about our faith anywhere except at church and at home. Pastor Keith gave us a balanced approach to this. For example, having the courage to share our story with neighbors and co-workers, living out our faith in front of people and yet not evangelizing when we're being paid to work a job. Do you feel the pressure to keep your faith quiet in our culture and is the Holy Spirit challenging you to be bolder or?
7. The last challenging discussion question, comes from the end of our Sunday teaching. "Are we too at home in this broken world and have ceased to contend for HIS KINGDOM TO COME? Is the desire to 'BELONG' causing us to neglect our duty as our King's Ambassadors? Are we looking for another city ...who's builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10) ...or are we content in this world...our great hope is getting a piece of the American dream"?