

Point to Your Power
Daniel 2:26-30

In Greek mythology there is the story of Narcissus. Narcissus was a beautiful young man, a burly hunter, renowned for his good looks. He was so proud of his looks that he hated anyone who felt differently. One day while out hunting he came across a very still, very clear pool of water where his eyes fell upon his reflection. The reflection was so beautiful that he could not take his eyes off it, unable to pull away, paralyzed by the beauty—Narcissus eventually died.

Our society feels stuck, paralyzed. Some are still stuck at home in the quarantine. We are stuck in perpetual cycle of conflict and judgment. We are stuck in fear that something may happen to us or our kids. We are stuck wondering about the quality of our leaders.

Why are we stuck? Is it because we spend so much time looking at ourselves and no one else? Is it because we have been building our lives to our own glory rather than the glory of God—building the city of man rather than the city of God?

A book called *The Narcissism Epidemic* points out:

On a reality TV show, a girl planning her sixteenth birthday party wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet. A book called “My Beautiful Mommy” explains plastic surgery to young children whose mothers are going under the knife for the trendy “Mommy Makeover.” It is now possible to hire fake paparazzi to follow you around snapping your photograph when you go out at night... Ads for financial services proclaim that retirement helps you return to childhood and pursue your dreams. High school students pummel classmates and then seek attention for their violence by posting YouTube videos of the beatings.¹

We have been pointing to ourselves for so long, it feels natural—even in the Church. Christian books tell us how to have *Your Best Life Now*. Most churches are aligned to serve their members rather than asking their members to serve the world. Not long ago if a Church member failed to live up to the demands of the Gospel, the Church asked them to change their life. Today if a Church fails a member's demands, they simply change churches. Instead the Church usually asks, “What did we do wrong?”

What would happen if we learned to celebrate Jesus rather than ourselves?

Even the architect of the city of man, the most stuck and stubborn sinner, would confess that Jesus is Lord.

This is a lesson Daniel knew well.

The story goes that King Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, the most powerful man in all the world, worshipped across the Babylonian Empire as a god, had a bad dream, nightmares, and the dreams troubled him so much that he could not sleep. When you or I have bad dreams we go on a midnight walk with the dog or take a Benadryl or roll over and wake up our spouse so they can share in all the fun. When you are the most powerful man in the world you put out an all-points bulletin for help. If you can't sleep no one else should be able to either.

The king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the

¹ Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010) p.1

king.

Daniel 2:2

All these men came in and stood before Nebuchadnezzar, supremely confident that they would be able to tell the King the meaning of his dream **“O King live forever! Tell your servants the dream and we will show the interpretation.” (Daniel 2:3)** And why not? Interpreting dreams is a pretty simple thing for men like these. I always have an interpretation for Jen’s dreams and the meaning always serves my purposes: “I think your dream means I need to get that new suit and tie I’ve been looking at.”

Anyone from Sigmund Freud to Sally Field can interpret a dream.

You don’t get to be a bloodthirsty, maniacal, power hungry emperor if you make it easy on people. Nebuchadnezzar said that they had to interpret the dream without him telling them the contents of the dream. So not only must they tell him what the dream meant, they had to tell him what he dreamed in the first place.

And, of course, he promised that if they could tell him the dream, he would make them more rich and powerful than they could ever imagine. They would eat gold-plated frosted flakes in diamond studded cereal bowls and swim in Olympic sized pools filled with French champagne. Their servants’ servants would have servants.

But if they failed, He promised:

If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.

By the way, the Hebrew word interpreted as house is intended to mean household—so he threatened to kill their families, if they failed.

Nebuchadnezzar made Stalin look like a sympathetic boss!

“Now tell me about that dream,” Nebuchadnezzar said, rubbing his hands together.

All the magicians, enchanters and the sorcerers turned, looked at each other and asked “Uhhh....can you repeat the question?”

The magicians and enchanters, of course, complained:

There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods...

Daniel 2:10-11

Nebuchadnezzar, even for a tyrant, was dangerously unstable. He didn’t handle disappointment well and commanded that all the magicians, enchanters and sorcerers who refused to tell him about his dream were to be killed. And that included Daniel and his three friends—Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

The iron law of history is that every civilization, every empire, every human institution has a half-life. Within every human invention, every human construction lie the seeds of its own destruction. It doesn’t matter how great, how noble, ingenious, or well-intentioned. Everything built with human hands will wither and fade like the grass. It will eventually eat itself. It doesn’t matter if it is the Babylonian Empire or the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, British Empire or even this country that we love when love of self outpaces the love of God nothing can long

endure.

At some point the city of man, built to the glory of man, will crumble and fade.

What happens when the citizens of the city of man realize that pointing to ourselves only points out our poverty? When the foundations of Babylon crumble, citizens of Heaven, the people of God must be ready. There will come a day, there will come a time, without fail when the citizens of the city of man, when they realize Babylon is failing, their human constructions are fatally flawed and that our very best human efforts are not enough—that they will cry out to someone, anyone, “Save us!”

Jesus Himself pointed to that kind of day for Jerusalem:

For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Luke 23:29-31

For that hour the people of God must be ready. We must be prepared. And we might be in that hour now—when this world, this society, this culture fails and threatens to dismantle their hopes and dreams.

Are we ready?

Is this our Daniel moment?

Daniel was an exile from Jerusalem living in Babylon—a citizen of the city Heaven captured and drug across the desert in chains 1700 miles as a prisoner of war. The Babylonians took everything from Daniel—his family, his heritage, his culture, his home, his land and they even tried to strip him of his individuality and turn him into a Babylonian. They likely took away Daniel’s chance to have a family because Daniel lived among the eunuchs—men who served the king who had an operation that made them not at threat to the king and his heirs.

When all the enchanters, magicians and sorcerers of Babylon cried ran and hid, fearing for their lives, Daniel, said to the captain of Nebuchadnezzar’s guard, the man who came there to kill him as he held a sword against his throat: “Can you get me five minutes alone with Nebuchadnezzar?”

He declared to Arioch, the king’s captain, “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

Daniel 2:15-16

Did Daniel not realize who he was dealing with? Did Daniel have a death wish? Did he just have nothing to lose?

No. Daniel was an exile in a foreign land. An exile sees things differently. An exile does not operate according to the same playbook as everyone else because an exile serves another King. While other people are running scared, the exile has the capacity to stand in the breach because they answer to a Higher Power, they are a child of the King of Kings.

That is why Daniel said, “Put me right next to the man who wants to kill me.”

Daniel had a plan, a plan that we can learn from because Daniel knew our God, trusted our God and lived like a citizen of heaven rather than the city of man.

First, **Daniel prayed.**

Immediately after Daniel sought to go in front of Nebuchadnezzar, he prayed. And not only did he pray, he pulled Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael from their home so that they could pray also.

Daniel told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel 2:18

Is prayer our first impulse or our last resort?

Daniel prayed immediately. There are two kinds of pray-ers. There are those for whom prayer is the first reaction, like Daniel. When we have an obstacle, when we have a struggle, when we face a challenge it is our first instinct, our initial impulse to drop to our knees in prayer and not only drop to our knees but to pull some friends aside and ask them to join us?

There are others for whom prayer is the last resort. More than once I have spoken with someone struggling and I ask them can I pray for you and they have respond “Well, it certainly couldn’t hurt. I’ve tried everything else.”

Forgive the expression but prayer, properly conceived, is not a Hail Mary. It is not an act of desperation—as it usually appears in the media when someone says, in a somber tone, “All we can do now...is pray.” For the exile living in a foreign land, prayer is like oxygen, prayer is like water. Prayer for the exile is life.

Dallas Willard describes the life of a man for whom prayer was the first response rather than a last resort, Frank Laubach, a missionary in the jungle of the Philippines who founded the most successful literacy program in the world---teaching more than 60 million people how to read in their own language.

In January of 1930 he began to cultivate the habit of turning his mind to Christ for one second out of every minute. After only four weeks he reported, “I feel simply carried along each hour, doing my part in a plan which is far beyond myself. This sense of cooperation with God in little things is what so astonishes me, for I never have felt it this way before. I need something, and turn round to find it waiting for me. I must work, to be sure, but there is God working along with me.”

From a lonely missionary post in the Philippines, God raised Frank Laubach to the status of Christian world statesman and spokesman for Christ. He founded the World Literacy Crusade, still in operation today, and without any political appointment he was influential on United States foreign policy in the post-World War II years. But he was forever and foremost Christ’s man, and always knew that his brilliant ideas and incredible energy and effectiveness derived from his practice of constant conscious interface with God.²

Prayer. Is our first response? Or last resort? In a world where our Father is the King, listening to Him, making our requests, telling Him thanks, connecting only makes sense.

Second, Daniel **loved his neighbor.**

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1998) p.24

Daniel's prayer was remarkable because Daniel and his three other exile friends asked for mercy not only for themselves but for the rest of the wise men of Babylon, for the other magicians, enchanters and sorcerers.

These others were idolaters. They bowed down to false gods. They engaged in ritual, pagan sacrifice. They were even their captors and rivals. They took away everything Daniel had—including, probably, his ability to have a family. Later we see that some of them even plotted against Daniel. Still Daniel loved them, prayed for them, and risked his life to save them.

The prophet Jeremiah warned the exiles from Jerusalem not be outcasts, not to hate their Babylonian captors or even want anything but their very best. Instead he said:

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. Jeremiah 29:7

There is difference between an exile and an outcast. We're not supposed to be outcasts. But the two are easy to confuse.

The outcast is hopeless. The outcast has hatred in their heart for the land and the people where they live. The outcast just doesn't reject what they do, the outcast rejects the people around them. Outcasts fear the world rather than love the world. An outcast's heart is filled with judgment.

The exile loves the people around them, even if they can't love what they do. The exile doesn't fear because when we abide in Jesus love, there is no fear. The exile doesn't deal

Anyone can be an outcast. It takes faith, hope and love to be an exile.

Of course, who was the best at being an exile? Someone you may have heard of, a fellow by the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus' love was never in question. But neither were His standards. Jesus' grounding in this world was never in doubt. But neither could anyone doubt that He had His eye on the next world. Jesus commanded us and modeled for us, what Daniel did. Jesus prayed for His enemies and for those who persecuted Him.

There is amazing power in praying for our enemies. There is no quicker, surer way to minimize their impact in our life than to pray for those who persecute us.

There have been people in my life, including people in Church, who have made my life difficult. And I am convinced the only way I have been sustained through persecution, hatred, and whispers is by praying for the very people causing me distress. Prayer is an act of self-preservation. Without prayer we lose our soul. With prayer we gain the world.

Next, Daniel **pointed to his power.**

That same evening God answered Daniel's prayer. The mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare was revealed. Not only did God show the dream to Daniel, He showed him what it meant. We'll get to that in a second.

Daniel walked into the palace chamber of Nebuchadnezzar and the King asked: **"Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and the interpretation?" (Daniel 2:26)**

And Daniel did that very thing—the thing that thousands of highly-trained, experienced citizens of the city of man could not do. One citizen of Jerusalem, the city of God proved more than their equal. Even with the opportunity to prop up his own potency and prominence, Daniel did not forget to point to His power.

It was Harry Truman who first said “There is no limit to what you can accomplish as long as you don’t care who gets the credit.” That’s a great sentiment but I would like to amend it a little bit. “There is no limit to what Jesus will do through you if you give Him the credit.”

Daniel stood in the court of the most powerful man in the world, a man worshipped as a god, a man with the ability to give him anything in this world he wanted or take away all that he would ever have and called his shot.

No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.

Daniel 2:27-28

For that dream, for that vision, Daniel could have taken credit. Daniel could have made himself indispensable to Nebuchadnezzar. He could have set himself up to be the right hand man to the most powerful man in the world. Daniel could have had everything this world has to offer in the palm of his hand.

But that’s how we think when we live for our own glory. That’s how we think when we build the city of man rather than the city of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. And how does it serve us to gain the world but lose our soul?

Instead of pointing to himself, Daniel pointed to His power. Daniel gave credit where credit is due for revealing Nebuchadnezzar’s dream:

To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king’s matter.

Daniel 2:23

Finally, **Jesus wins.**

This is what makes the rest possible—praying, loving our neighbor, pointing to our power. We can do this only because Jesus wins and He shares that victory with us, only because His Kingdom endures forever and He includes us in it, only because He has placed within us a deposit of the life with Him that is to come—the Holy Spirit.

Because Jesus wins we can live victors rather than victims.

Daniel went on to tell Nebuchadnezzar, his dream exactly, in living color, High Definition, 3-D and then Daniel went on to tell the world’s most powerful and egotistical man that his days as king were numbered. Daniel described five kingdoms that would rise and supplant Babylon. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that everything he built would be blown away like sand. It is generally believed that those kingdoms are: the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire and then the Roman Empire. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a vision of 1000 years of history laid out before him—with each kingdom overtaking and supplanting the next.

The fifth Kingdom, however, was different than all the rest. God gave an amazing vision.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream he saw a great image and each part of the image represented a

kingdom that was to come. Suddenly hurtling from nowhere came a stone that was not cut by a human hand and it smashed the image to pieces the pieces blew away like chaff blown by the summer wind—not a trace was left. And then the stone that struck the image became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

And Daniel said that stone was a fifth kingdom that would come and smash all the others.

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring t h e m to an end, and it shall stand forever...

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar Babylon was falling and an eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is rising. And how did the volatile, intolerant, violent Nebuchadnezzar react to this bad news? Was Dabiel drawn and quartered? Was he cut up into little pieces and fed to the palace crocodile? Made into a poster and hung on the wall?

No. Nebuchadnezzar gave him a promotion. He made him second in command over the whole of Babylon and made his friends and fellow exiles Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael governors.

But perhaps most satisfying of all to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar himself, the architect and contractor of the city of man, pointed to God, **“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings.”**

For at least few minutes Nebuchadnezzar was unstuck on himself; God used a citizen of Heaven to change the heart of the king of Babylon.

And He will use you too. We can live victoriously. We can be more than conquerors in this broken world, in this world at times filled with selfishness and fear, condemnation and sin, because Jesus wins. He will smash and blow away like chaff every king and kingdom, every empire and institution, every power and principality not surrendered to Him.

In the end its quite simple. We can choose to lose by pointing to ourselves, our life, our achievements, our glory and remain stuck in defeat or we can be set free to live victoriously by pointing to Jesus and do everything to His glory.

If you are stuck, then raise your gaze, change your view and look to Jesus.