

This morning, I am in the third week of a new sermon series through the Old Testament book of Daniel that will take us up until the summer. I've entitled the series "Faithfulness in exile," a title that may at first glance seem to be about something that happened a long time ago in a kingdom far, far away, but I believe you will find it very relevant to your life today. Last week we looked at chapter 1 and how Daniel and the other Israelites are taken into exile in Babylon, where King Nebuchadnezzar attempts to reprogram them out of their faithfulness to their God and into loyal Babylonian servants. The chapter ends with this in verse 17: *To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.* As we're about to find out, that is a gift that is going to come in very useful. Let's read Daniel 2:

Daniel 2:1–49 - In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." ⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." ⁷ Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁸ Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." ¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." ¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

So the king has a troublesome dream and decides that unless one of his wise men or magicians can tell him the dream and interpret it for him, they will all be put to death, including Daniel.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. ¹⁷ Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what

lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. ²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

He gathers his friends to pray and seek God, and God answers him, revealing the mystery to Daniel in a vision. He responds by praising God.

²⁴ Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.” ²⁵ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king **what his dream means.**” ²⁶ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?” ²⁷ Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were **lying in bed are these:** ²⁹ “As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Daniel is quick to deflect any ability or insight to God.

³¹ “Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. ³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. ³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and **clay and smashed them.** ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. ³⁶ “This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. ³⁷ Your Majesty, **you are the king of kings.** The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. ³⁹ “After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, **will rule over the whole earth.** ⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. ⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be **partly strong and partly brittle.** ⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. ⁴⁴ “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but **not by human hands**—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze,

the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to **reveal this mystery.**”⁴⁸ Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.⁴⁹ Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Daniel interprets the dream, and the king honors Daniel. I want to focus on three phrases from this long chapter to highlight three things we learn from this chapter for our lives today.

1) God has given you...

Look at v. 37 and what Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar:

³⁷ Your Majesty, **you are the king of kings.** The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;³⁸ in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

It’s interesting – he calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of kings, acknowledging that of all the kingdoms on earth, Babylon is the greatest, and so he is the king above all kings. But in the next breath, he tells Nebuchadnezzar that any power and might and glory he has have been given to him by the God of heaven. Yes, you are great and glorious, but you would not have any greatness or glory if it were not given to you by the true King of Kings, the God of heaven who is over even the greatest of earthly kings. Think of Jesus before Pilate:

John 19:10-11 - *"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"* ¹¹ *Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.*

I don’t know what in your life you would say is yours as you look around. But make no mistake, “God has given you...” Or, as Paul put it:

1 Corinthians 4:7 - For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

O great King Nebuchadnezzar, God has given you all the dominion and power and might and glory that you enjoy. And you, sitting out here today, God has given you whatever money or possessions or talent or relationships or power or prestige that you are enjoying. Or, as James put it:

James 1:16–17 - Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God has given. And if God has given, God can also take away. God gave the Israelites the promised land. And God took it away due to their sin, their injustice, and their idolatry. In fact, God warned them not to forget Him when they came into the promised land:

Deuteronomy 6:10–12 - When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

God has given you... look at Daniel in this passage. He pleads to God to give Him insight into the king's dream, and God answers his prayer. And in response, Daniel prays:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; **wisdom and power are his.** ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. ²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Notice – he changes times and seasons, he deposes and raises up kings, he gives wisdom and knowledge, he reveals deep and hidden things. Any wisdom and insight he has are gifts from God. And when Nebuchadnezzar attempts to give glory to Daniel, Daniel does not hesitate to deflect any praise to God.

²⁷ Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries... ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Anything good that you have is a gift from the God of heaven. Do not forget this. Do not boast as if it is yours. We do not praise the quill that Shakespeare used to write Romeo and Juliet, and we do not praise the one that God has used for His glory.

God has given. Give him the glory and honor He is due. And know that when you are in need, God can give you!

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; **wisdom and power are his.** ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light

dwells with him. ²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

James 1:5–7 - If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

James 4:2 – You do not have because you do not ask God.

Ask, seek, and knock. Wisdom and power are His, and they are available to you.

Matthew 7:7–11 - “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

2) After you...

³⁷ Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. ³⁹ “After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.

You are the king of kings! You have dominion and power and might and glory! And after you will come another kingdom. And then another, and then another.

Good news? You are the king of kings. Bad news? You are not eternal. You will be replaced. And that king will also be replaced, and so on until the eternal king, the rock that destroys every earthly kingdom, arises.

After you... That little phrase is a simple reminder to the king and to us that we are not the center of the universe, that the world does not revolve around you. With regards to the king’s dreams, people have pontificated about the identity of these kingdoms and whether they represent Babylon, the Medo-Persian empire, the Greeks, and then the Roman Empire. But figuring out those details is secondary to the main point – kingdoms come and kingdoms go. Emperors will rise and fall. And most of us, within a century, will be completely forgotten. The world does not revolve around us.

Remember that the Israelites during Daniel's day were focused on Babylon. They believed God would raise up a Messiah to rescue them from Babylon and bring them back to their land and restore the kingdom of Israel to glory. But here was a dream, interpreted by Daniel, to let them know that Babylon would eventually be defeated, but after them would come another empire, and then another, and then another. There will always be human empires and kingdoms until the day God establishes His everlasting kingdom on earth.

And you may not be a king, but the same laws of mortality apply to you. No matter what role or position or power or possessions you have, you can not keep them. They will be given to someone else.

James 4:13–14 - Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

3) A kingdom that will never be destroyed...

⁴⁴ "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but **not by human hands**—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

Kingdoms will rise and fall, kings will come and go, but there will be a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and a king who will reign forever, the eternal king promised to David.

Luke 20:17–18 - Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

Everything in this world is transient. It rises and falls, comes and goes. But God is eternal, and His kingdom will reign forever, so put your hope in the everlasting King Jesus.

Revelation 11:15 - ¹⁵ The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The kingdoms have feet of clay, which is an expression that has come to mean a weakness or flaw in a great person. Nebuchadnezzar is one of the most powerful men in the world, **but his dreams haunt him, and he can not sleep. He is filled with anxiety.** Even though he is so powerful, he does not feel safe and secure. His reaction is so over the top, wanting to kill the wise men. Even the most powerful kingdom in this world is built on a shaky foundation that can not last.

Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 7:24–29 - "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain

came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

There is only one sure foundation – Jesus, the rock, and His Word.

Isaiah 28:16 - So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.

Remember the ironic statement of the wise men and astrologers earlier in the passage:

¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do **not live among humans.**”

There was a God who indeed lived among humans.

John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel when he interpreted the dream, but he should have repented and submitted himself to the true King of Kings, the God of heaven. Do not live for the kingdoms of this world, and do not fear the kings and rulers of this world, but put your hope in Jesus and live for Him.

Matthew 6:33 - **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

We even see echoes of the gospel in this passage. The wise men and astrologers are all facing death, but they are saved by God’s gift of wisdom to Daniel, even though they had done nothing to deserve their salvation. And we are no different. Although our sin has separated us from a holy God and we are under his just condemnation, in Jesus, the wisdom of God, we are offered a salvation that we do not deserve. We don’t know how the wise men responded. How will we respond?

This passage is truly about humility. The humility that comes from recognizing that everything good we have is a gift from God in heaven. The humility that comes from recognizing “after us...”, that this world does not revolve around us, but that we are here today and gone tomorrow. And the humility that comes from knowing that the eternal King has given His life for us and invited us into His eternal life, to enjoy His love and joy forever.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 17:3 - Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Enter His kingdom:

John 3:1-6 - Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

You enter the kingdom not because you are born a Christian or born to Christian parents, but because you have come to faith in Jesus through repentance and forgiveness of sins. Then you are born again from above by His Spirit, as a member of His family.

And part of living for His kingdom will mean living as faithful exiles in the land in which He has placed us. Being subversively submissive, seeking the peace and prosperity of our country while maintaining our primary allegiance to God.

Jeremiah 29:7 – “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”