

Uncompromising Faith

Daniel 1:1-8

Go ahead and turn to Daniel 1 in your Bibles. As you're turning, I want to briefly mention the Chronological Bible Reading Plan.



It's a Bible in a year reading plan that we've started doing in groups here at Mount Pleasant. The next one will be STARTING TOMORROW. You may be thinking, "I did that last year," and if you want to take a break, we get that. However, you're invited to jump back in and continue pouring God's Word through you. You may have started last year and fell behind or fell off; jump in again this year and GO ALL THE WAY! There are CARDS available in foyers with QR CODES that you can scan and join a group and even find handy resources. Nathan and Amy Duncan will be HOSTING the men's and women's reading groups respectively, and I'll be hosting a new FAMILY GROUP. So, if you'd like to be in the same group as your spouse, or parents, or children, feel free to join the FAMILY GROUP. Of course, ladies who join the Family Group are still invited to the Dwell Richly class and meetings, and Nathan will still be reaching out with information about times of fellowship and service opportunities for the guys. Another announcement I need to mention to you this morning...



...is our need for teachers and assistants in our Kidz Sunday School. I think you all understand our heart to give everyone here at Mount Pleasant a firm foundation in God's Word. From the way we expost the Scriptures from this platform every Sunday and Wednesday to our excitement over programs like the Chronological Bible Reading Plan, I think you get that. Sunday School, and especially our Kidz Sunday School, is PART OF THAT VISION. You may be hearing this and thinking, *"I've never thought about teaching. I'm not sure I can do that."* While we have expectations of our teachers, we will equip you to do it!

HEY! Can I shoot straight with you? The same dozen or so people can't keep doing this forever! At some point NEW people have to step up! YOU have to step up! The whole "someone else will do it" mentality isn't going to cut it. FOLLOWERS of Christ SERVE. Perhaps you're already serving elsewhere; make sure you're not HIDING on that volunteer team and avoiding a ministry position like this that you think is going to push you. It will push you, but it's worth it, and we'll come alongside you. I WILL come alongside you and support you. Maybe you're a married couple who could serve as a teaching team for one of these classes, or perhaps you and a friend could team teach together. We have multiple classes just like that already! Where do we need the help? Here it is...

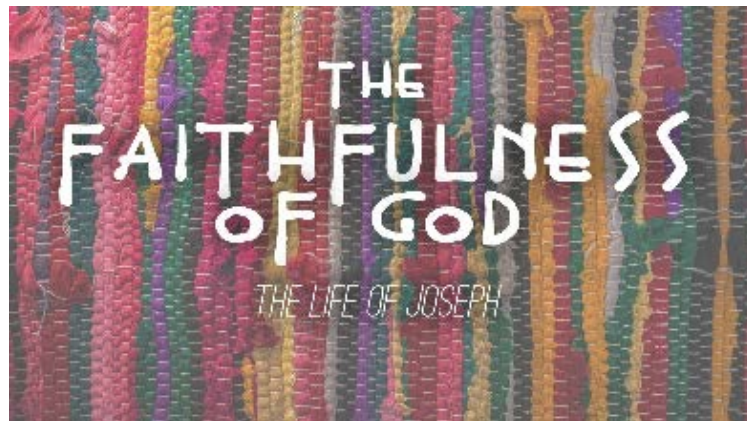


We need a preschool teacher, a teacher and assistant for the 3rd grade class, and a teacher and assistant for the 5th & 6th grade combination class. We could use a few more nursery workers too, but I'm focusing on teachers and assistants this morning. If you're interested in partnering with us in training kids in the Word, sign up on the Mount Pleasant GET INVOLVED page, and I'll reach out to you. We'll talk and find the position for you.

WELL, IT SEEMS WE'RE GOING INTO EXILE... What do I mean by that? Those of you who have participated in our Wednesday night series in 1 Peter...



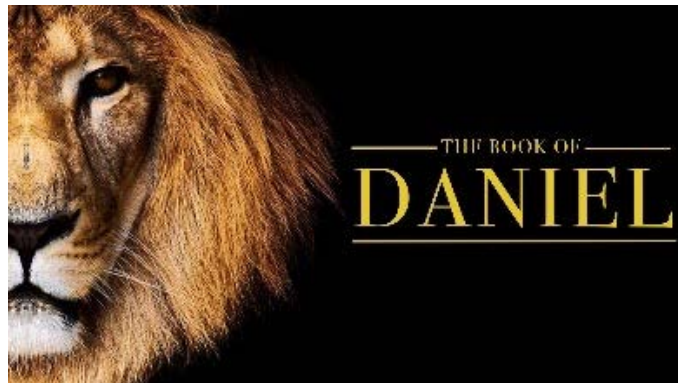
...will recall how the Apostle wrote to the "elect EXILES of the dispersion." This designation describes Jewish Christians living in exile outside of Jerusalem after the great persecution that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen, but it also describes us as SOJOURNERS as we travel through this world on our way to our heavenly home. In a couple of weeks, we'll finish that study and return to Genesis...



...and wrap up our study there in a series about the life of Joseph, Jacob's son who was sold into slavery, essentially exiled to Egypt by his own brothers. I look around at the Christmas decorations that still adorn the Reach Center and recall the wondrous season we just celebrated...



...I'm reminded that even our Savior lived through a season of EXILE when his parents were forced to flee with Him by night to Egypt a couple years after He was born in order to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod! This morning we begin a NEW SERIES in the Book of Daniel...



...and we will once again be confronted with the topic of EXILE. EXILE. EXILE. EXILE. EXILE!!! As always, we seek the Lord here for what portions of Scripture He would have us teach. These are the studies He's directed us to, and in each instance, we see FOLLOWERS of God suddenly pinned down under the boot of godless, worldly authority, YET STILL REMAINING FAITHFUL TO GOD.

It's apparent to me, and perhaps it is to you, that the Lord has something to teach us about living as exiles in this world. Does the thought of going into exile alarm you? I believe the opening passage of Daniel, today's passage—that lays the foundation for the events of the book that follow—lays the foundation for thriving in exile as followers of God. If you've found your place in your Bibles, Daniel begins...

Daniel 1:1-7

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 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 vessels in the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 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. 5 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. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

The year is 605 BC. This is the first of three Babylonian sieges on Jerusalem between 605 and 586 BC. Those with the qualifications mentioned above were taken captive after the first siege, then the majority of Jerusalem and Judea was taken into exile after the second siege...



...and after the third siege, the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, and only the very poorest were left behind to be vinedressers in the Land. The rest were taken into exile.

What is EXILE? Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines it as a *"state or a period of forced [or voluntary] absence from one's country or home."* The Hebrew word translated "exile" means "exile" (how about that?), but there are several other INSIGHTFUL ASSOCIATED DEFINITIONS for this word, including "to reveal, remove, (shamelessly) uncover, or denude. In short, it carries the meaning of being STRIPPED. This is exactly what happened with Daniel and his countrymen. THEY WERE STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING. They were STRIPPED from their home, STRIPPED of their family, and any hope of a future family. They were STRIPPED of their former royal standing, destined to exist as nothing more than glorified servants. As captives of a conquering king, they were likely STRIPPED of their traditional Jewish garments, and thereby STRIPPED of dignity. They were even STRIPPED of their names, STRIPPED of their language, and almost completely STRIPPED of their way of life.

The world attempts to STRIP us of everything good and godly in our lives too, doesn't it? WE ARE EXILES. Our home is NOWHERE in this world! We haven't fled our homeland for political or humanitarian reasons; there's NO PLACE to go back to! We're like Abraham and those of faith listed in Hebrews 11 who acknowledged that they were **"strangers and exiles on earth."**

Hebrews 11:13-16

14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

No matter how strange and difficult things become in this world, we're just passing through on our way to that heavenly country where God has prepared for us a CITY. In the same chapter, the writer of Hebrews would praise the faith of those who **"stopped the mouths of lions"** and **"quenched the power of fire."** We know who he was talking about, young men of UNCOMPROMISING FAITH who were still caught up in the judgment on their wayward nation, and in spite of it all, remained faithful. Why did it happen? What can we learn from these to endure and even thrive in exile as followers of Christ? Let's look at it. Daniel wrote...

Daniel 1:1-2

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 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 vessels in the treasury of his god.

Jehoiakim was one of the sons of King Josiah, the king who ascended the throne at age eight and turned to God with all his heart unlike any other king before or after him. However, Jehoiakim didn't immediately succeed his father. King Josiah died in battle attempting to stop Pharaoh Neco from extending his influence over the region that included Judea. After his death, the people enthroned his son Jehoahaz, who was anti-Egyptian like his father, but Pharaoh Neco deposed him after only three months and replaced him with his brother who was much more agreeable to paying tribute to Pharaoh. Jehoiakim was a puppet ruler, and the Bible says that he did evil in the sight of the Lord, **"according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kings 23:37)**, namely speaking of his grandfather King Amon and his great-grandfather King Manasseh. Now, Manasseh did a number on Judah. King Manasseh rebuilt all the pagan worship sites his father, King Hezekiah, had destroyed, he filled the Temple with altars for worshipping all the hosts of heaven, burned his son as a sacrifice, practiced divination and dealt with mediums (like the witch of Endor) for fortune-telling and omen reading. He led Judah to sin more than any king ever had, and though he would later repent and call upon the Lord, his idolatrous ROT had penetrated deeply into the people and their wickedness became terminal. The Bible says...

2 Kings 23:26-27

26 Still the Lord did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. 27 And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

Judah, the southern kingdom, didn't learn the lesson when the northern kingdom, Israel, was taken captive by the Assyrians. They profaned the Temple of God by bringing idols and pagan altars into it, so He allowed the vessels taken from the Temple to be profaned by being taken into the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's false god, likely the temple of Marduk. Conquering kings would put on such a show essentially saying, "My god can beat up your god." He believed his god or gods had prevailed, but the truth is that his god didn't exist. Judah had played the harlot, chasing after the gods of the nations, so God used the nations as His instrument of judgment to bring her back. That's the KEY. GOD, not Nebuchadnezzar, was behind this, and though it was terrible, clearly "terrible" is what was necessary to get His People's attention, and when Judah came out of exile 70 years later, THEY NEVER WORSHIPED THE GODS OR IDOLS OF THE NATIONS AGAIN.

The situation for Jerusalem and Judea was rough, and Daniel and his friends weren't spared from it, but God was behind it. He had a redeeming purpose for the trial, and He would sustain His godly ones through it, including the protocol for captives of conquered nations. In verse three, we read...

Daniel 1:3-6

3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 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. 5 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. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

Taking choice captives like Daniel and his friends worked like an insurance policy for conquering kings, but in a mobster sense. It helped keep mom and dad (and other loved ones) IN LINE back in Jerusalem. *"Your kids are in good health. If you want them to stay that way, do what we say."* Besides the LEVERAGE it provided, ASSIMILATING conquered peoples into the kingdom also ENRICHED the empire. Nebuchadnezzar had already tapped the best and brightest of his own kingdom, and now he would benefit from the best that other nations had to offer.

So, given these qualifications, we can surmise several things about Daniel and his friends. We know they were YOUTHS because of (1) the qualification itself, and (2) the fact that Daniel was still serving kings in Babylon 70 YEARS LATER! These guys were likely young teens, and they prove that a 13, 14, 15 year old is capable of STANDING STRONG for God under any circumstance. The young men were of nobility, or

more likely royalty; Isaiah's prophecy (GIVEN 100 YEARS EARLIER!) to King Hezekiah about his descendants being taken to Babylon and made EUNUCHS confirms this as well. They were good-looking. Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to be staring at ugly people in his court all day, and he wasn't going to torture himself by surrounding himself with a bunch of morons. The boys were "well-versed in all kinds of wisdom," as well as "knowers of knowledge" (in the Hebrew; that means they were well-educated), and "understanders of knowledge," meaning they had KEEN INSIGHT. The king also required that they were competent or had STRENGTH to stand in his court, which I take that to mean that they had to have some wits about them, some GUMPTION.

YES, THESE FELLAS WERE BEING ASSIMILATED INTO BABYLONIAN CULTURE, which was a major and intentional assault on their worldview, but just as much as the king was attempting to reshape their beliefs and identity, he was looking for men to serve as brilliant advisors and even as governors (satraps) ideally suited for overseeing possibly the very region from which they hailed. They had to be able to DIPLOMATICALLY challenge ideas and articulately argue for what they believed to be the best course of action in a given situation.

Moms and dads, YOUNG PEOPLE, are you seeing a MODEL for SUCCESS as an uncompromising follower of Jesus in a pagan world? Daniel and his friends DID IT, and SO CAN YOU! From the examples of Daniel and his friends in Babylon to brilliant apologists of our own day, we see that the STRONGEST followers of God KNOW THINGS THAT MATTER, they have PONDERED THEM to the point that THEIR CONVICTIONS ARE PART OF THEM, and they CONFIDENTLY AND PASSIONATELY ARTICULATE what they believe. They aren't lazy or addicted to entertainment. They aren't deadheads, nor are they disrespectful, supplementing their LACK OF ARGUMENT with VOLUME and INSULTS like the world. They KNOW and UNDERSTAND TRUTH, STAND FIRM, and still SERVE! Everything that made them ideal for serving the king of Babylon is what made them great SERVANTS TO THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Don't think for a moment that your faith disqualifies you in any way for success and promotion in this world. Oh, the world will rail against you for your faith. You'll be insulted and looked down upon for it, but when it counts, you'll be found to be like Daniel and his friends, TEN TIMES BETTER than your unbelieving peers because your faith costs you, you still stand firm, and that stance forces you to be MORE. Whether they admit it or not, the people of this world still want people they can trust to deal and speak honestly with them and not take advantage of them, and through your uncompromising walk with the Lord, they'll recognize those qualities in you.

Now, all that said, Nebuchadnezzar absolutely set out to brainwash these Jewish young men and turn them into Babylonians. They would be taught A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING. Our MIND is where sin starts, but it's also where repentance happens and where faith begins to take root. It's the personal spiritual battlefield, and therefore, the target on which the cosmos is laser focused. For THREE YEARS, Daniel and his friends would be taught not only the Babylonian language (Aramaic), but they'd also receive a primer in the Babylonian view of God and man and right and wrong and redemption. They were likely even taught detestable practices of divination and reading omens from inspecting sheep livers. Repeated sayings from influential people like these Babylonian teachers usually take hold and become embraced by the hearers, but it's clear that Daniel and his friends resisted their influence.

Today, we've become learners under the influence of REMOTE brainwashing. Yes, the influence of rockstar college professors and in-person pressure exerted upon us from our peers in the classroom and workplace can be strong, but the brainwashing of our day is so much more insidious. It rushes into our lives through our SCREENS. It comes through the plot of our TV shows and movies, and from interviews and social media posts from actors, music artists, and professional athletes who presume to state their opinions as authoritative truth for our lives because they've been on camera, or sang a song, or did something with a ball. It comes through the beautifully filmed entertainment documentaries that preach MILLIONS OF YEARS on the Discovery Channel, and regard Jesus as just some Jewish guy on the History Channel. So many of the kids shows on streaming services have the TOKEN kid with TWO MOMMIES or TWO DADDIES, or a little boy who likes wearing tutus, or some VICTIM fighting "the power." Even commercials play their part in the indoctrination process, and major internet SEARCH ENGINES bury the FACTUAL, STATISTICAL INFORMATION that validates conservative values. Gatekeepers and algorithms push the approved progressive narrative to the top, and conservative, and especially biblical, values are quashed. To keep from morphing into one of the unquestioning, thoughtless masses, you'll have to be like Daniel and let God's Word be what trains your powers of discernment to distinguish good from evil, truth from lie.

The Jewish-to-Babylonian REEDUCATION process set out to destroy the former, God-centered IDENTITY of these young men and replace it with a new one, and Ashpenaz, the chief of the eunuchs jumpstarted the process by literally striping the young men of their NAMES. Notice the change...

Daniel 1:6-7

6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names:

Daniel = "God is my judge"

Beltshazzar = "May Bel protect his life"

Daniel ("God is my judge") he called Beltshazzar ("May Bel protect his life"),

Hananiah = "Yah is gracious"

Shadrach = "the command of Aku," the Babylonian god of the moon

Hananiah ("Yah is gracious") he called Shadrach ("the command of Aku," the Babylonian god of the moon),

Mishael = "Who is what God is?"

Meshach = "Who is what Aku is?"

Mishael ("Who is what God is?") he called Meshach ("Who is what Aku is?"),

Azariah = "Yah is my helper"

Abednego = "Servant of Nebo," the Babylonian god of wisdom and writing

and Azariah ("Yah is my helper") he called Abednego ("Servant of Nebo," the Babylonian god of wisdom and writing).

WHAT AN ATTACK! Can you imagine someone changing your name to something that honored Allah, or Zeus, or another made-up god? DEMORALIZING ANGUISH probably doesn't come close. You know, earlier we were able to infer several things about these young men based on the qualifications for shanghaiing them and bringing them back to serve Nebuchadnezzar but there's something else we can infer just from their names...

LEAVE THESE NAMES UP (ALL ON ONE SLIDE) UNTIL THE NEXT SLIDE...

Daniel = "Elohim is my judge"

Hananiah = "Yah is gracious"

Mishael = "Who is what Elohim is?"

Azariah = "Yah is my helper"

Who gave them those names? Yep, it was mom and dad. We can infer that they had GODLY PARENTS and a GODLY UPBRINGING. Every time they heard their name, it was a reminder of the One they followed, and given the strong stand they would each take for the Lord, their training in the Lord didn't end when they were named. The devil knew that this strengthening reminder had to be REMOVED...

REPLACE THE LAST SET OF NAMES WITH THESE (LEAVE THEM UP FOR A MOMENT)...

Beltshazzar = "May Bel protect his life"

Shadrach = "Aku," the Babylonian god of the moon, "is exalted"

Meshach = "Who is what Aku is?"

Abednego = "The servant of Nebo," the Babylonian god of wisdom and writing

...and REPLACED with names that would direct them to worship the Babylonian pantheon of gods. As followers of the One True God, you and I will be called all sorts of things to make us bend and break and fit into the ungodly mold of the cosmos. "Homophobe, transphobe, racist, bigot, ignorant, superstitious, hater." You'll be told "YOU AREN'T ENOUGH," and enticed to find your IDENTITY and VALUE in your STUFF, in your LOOKS, in your WORK, in your HOBBIES, in your RELATIONSHIPS, but those things are NOT who you are. This world doesn't GET to define that. As we sang earlier, "I AM WHO YOU SAY I AM," and if you aren't grounded in that identity, "CHILD OF GOD," then you'll dance for the devil and jump through every hoop that promises to "make you more," and it'll always involve compromise. Remember, the labels that the cosmos attempts to attach to you are meant to change you. Don't let them. Instead, cry out as the psalmist did, recognizing...

Psalm 22:9-11

9 Yet you [GOD] are he who took me from the womb;

**you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
10 On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
11 Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.**

I'm sure, Daniel and his friends were excellent students and learned the ways of the Babylonians, even responding to their abhorrent new names, but they were merely learning ABOUT something, a bunch of garbage. The CHALLENGE TO COMPROMISE didn't come until suppertime. We read...

Daniel 1:5a

The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank.

This was the first real attempt to force the guys to adopt a new way of life. What was the BIG DEAL? Why did Daniel and his friends seemingly undergo their Babylonian reeducation without objection, but put their foot down at the menu? Well, their training apparently hadn't forced them to do something that violated the Law of God; again, they just LEARNED the garbage (just like students at college). Food and drink, however, was practical. The Mosaic Law had a lot to say about what to eat and not eat, and the Gentile menu would've included things that were "unclean" and therefore forbidden. Furthermore, pagan cultures like Babylon would offer their food and drink to idols before consuming it, which was tantamount to worshiping them for a Jew.

As I was preparing this message, it hit me just how practical and effective this would be in getting these Jewish captives to compromise. One common practice with captives that I didn't mention earlier is that they would be CASTRATED. Remember, Isaiah told King Hezekiah that his descendants would be EUNUCHS who served the king of Babylon, and Ashpenaz, the one put in charge of them, was **"the chief of the eunuchs."** We know that sexual sin is the tip of the spear when it comes to getting people to sin. It's how the culture attempts to call out the Church, and why the Church MUST be so vocal in response. As C.S. Lewis aptly stated in [The Screwtape Letters](#), people are "amphibious creatures," neither purely physical like the animals, nor purely spirit like the angels, and as such, what we do with our bodies has an effect on our spirit. It's why "worship" means to prostrate yourself before the Lord, and why Paul told the Corinthians that the immoral person sins against his own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). Such emasculation was its own powerful tool of subjection and transformation, but since these guys would no longer be enticed by sexual temptation, the other physical temptation would be employed: food and drink. In the identical first century context, food offered to idols forced followers of Christ to wrestle with this same issue and resolve, like Daniel, that **"whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31)**. Daniel and his friends refused to allow their APPETITES to carve out a stronghold for sin in their lives.

Daniel 1:8

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.

GOD allowed this time of exile to happen, and He's just as in control today as He was then. We'll see His faithfulness even more next week. God sustained other followers of God through the trial, terrible things we can't even begin to imagine, and now they're examples for us to follow, and part of their example was that **THEY WERE PREPARED FOR EXILE**, and **WE CAN PREPARE OURSELVES FOR EXILE NOW**. The passage says that Daniel **RESOLVED** not to defile himself, and it means so much more than any "New Year's resolution." In the literal Hebrew, that phrase says that **"Daniel PLACED IT ON HIS HEART that he would not defile himself..."** That wording brings to mind the words of the psalmist who said...

Psalm 119:11

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

It's God's Word that anchors us to His will. This is why we're excited about things like the **CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLE READING PLAN!** The writer of Hebrews wrote that constant use of the Word trains our powers of discernment to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14), and it's evident that these fellas were committed to obeying Word, which you can only do if you know it. I believe much of their training came from a godly upbringing. As Deuteronomy 6 teaches, I believe their parents taught the Word **DILIGENTLY** to their children. They took Solomon seriously when he said to **"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old,"** OR THREATENED WITH BEING BURNED ALIVE OR FED TO LIONS, **"he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6)**. Moms and dads, as we started out this morning, **WE'RE GOING INTO EXILE**. It isn't a matter of **IF**, but **WHEN**. The parents of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah **PREPARED THEIR CHILDREN FOR EXILE**, and we can prepare your children too. By the way we spend our time and money, we can **MODEL THE IMPORANCE OF SPIRITUAL THINGS** to them. We can teach them the Word. **DADS! YOU CAN READ THE WORD FOR YOURSELF AND TALK TO YOUR FAMILIES ABOUT IT!** As the pastors have said, it'll mean planning out your week and setting aside three or four evenings to talk about the Word, and if preparing our children to follow the Lord the rest of their days **MATTERS**, we will. **WE** may not see the terrible persecution and exile that's coming, but our children almost certainly will, and we want them to be ready, right? **YOU** can do this. **WE ALL** can do this **NOW!**

What's **IMPERATIVE** is that **WE PLACE IT ON OUR HEARTS** not to defile ourselves, but **HONOR THE LORD** in every area of our lives **NOW**. We know that **LIFE-CHANGING RESOLVE** is rarely born in the heat of the moment. If God's working in your heart this morning to live more faithfully for Him, that's great! That's a **START!** **TELL SOMEONE!** Tell our Decision Team, and draw strength and encouragement from them as you **CULTIVATE** that desire over time. Daniel and his **YOUNG** friends were **ALREADY SO COMMITTED** to the Lord, and when the trial came, they never wavered.

God was behind the exile then, using Daniel in it as He uses us in ours. God brought them through the trial, and He'll bring us through ours. Daniel and his friends were **RESOLVED**, and we too can commit ourselves **RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW** to obeying the Lord no matter the temptation, no matter the trial, no matter the **COST**. I'm reminded of the old Hymn "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus." **I HAVE DECIDED.**

No turning back. Though NONE go with me, I STILL WILL FOLLOW. THE WORLD BEHIND ME; it isn't my home anyway. THE CROSS BEFORE ME; Christ is all that matters. NO TURNING BACK. No turning back.