

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Far From Home

PART

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TITLE

Far From Home

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1:1-4; Jeremiah 28:1-4



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Well, Providence family it's good to see you this morning. And if you are new with us, our guest, we're thrilled that you joined us. I hope this time will be really good for you. If you have in your hand a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Daniel chapter one, and as you turn there, I want to just take a few minutes and speak to the people who call Providence their home. I want to say thank you. Over the last several months, there's been a number of things that we have asked you to do in order to serve people. At the end of the year, we put in I guess your mind, the idea of a few places that if you wanted to give that you could. And then in the new year, we have asked a lot of you to park a little further away, and you have.

We've asked life groups to take a month at a time and to not come into this room, but instead to actually meet over the screen in a room right over to the side here, which you're doing that this morning and so just want to say thank you. And then last week, Easter, we asked a lot of you or all who could to either come on Saturday night or Monday at eight o'clock and 1,000 of you and the folks who were at the service at 9:30 chose to change the hours that you came in order to make room for what proved to be almost 1,000 guests last week and I just want to say thank you. Yeah, absolutely. Your kindness, generosity, I know those things aren't the mission, right? Our mission, what I hope you're all most excited about is introducing people to Jesus Christ and to grow them up to love and worship him, right?

It's worship, it's to grow, it's to witness and to help other people grow. That's what we all care about, but sometimes in a family this large it takes sometimes to make sacrifices for the good of others and I just want to say thank you for doing that. So let me pray. Father in heaven as we open your word now we pray that you would be gracious to us to help us to see the glory of Jesus Christ. God would you be pleased not only with the words in my mouth, but with the meditations of our heart. And I pray Father that as we consider what is so incredibly pertinent to our age, and our day, and our culture, I pray God that you would use this book of Daniel that's been around a long time to be able to see and to be reminded of your sovereignty, your kindness, your goodness, and your plan. What you permit, what you allow in order to bring about a better day.

And so we look to you in faith, would you speak and help us? I pray in Christ's name. Amen. So Providence there was a time, and it wasn't that long ago when our culture and its many institutions respected biblical virtues. And not only was there respect, there was a desire to reward those who gave their life in that direction. So you think about the day, and it wasn't all that long ago when schools and classrooms had bibles and schools actually planned their calendar of what happens in the week with sporting events and things of this kind of around Wednesday and Sunday because it wasn't simply to show respect to the church, it was to show respect to the people who went to school who were going to be there on Wednesday and Sunday. And not only that, but media and all of entertainment, at least a lot of it sought to depict values that you find in the Bible such as faithfulness, fidelity, honesty, purity, marriage, family, respect for authority as honorable things.

And the laws of our government sought, at least many of them were passed to reinforce and reward these kinds of virtues. Now, let me be very clear America was not pure and America was not godly, but Christians enjoyed a tailwind of living in a place that was agreeable to the worldview that we had found within the Bible.

What that means is that we could talk about these values and virtues that flow out of the scripture and we would find agreeability within culture even when culture didn't know that's where we were speaking from. It was just part of the DNA a little bit more so, but you know that these winds have changed. And as a result, there's a lot of Christians today, there's a lot of people who still hold fast to this worldview that flows from the scriptures that leads to a question. And the question that many people that I hear and sometimes I ask is how do we live and thrive in a culture where it's many institutions are increasingly hostile to our faith?

How do we live in a place to where we lost our cultural influence? What do we do? Well, thousands of years ago, thousands of people from Israel, including a young man named Daniel was exiled to Babylon. He was pulled away from his homeland where everything, all of the institutions within Israel affirmed the God of the Bible, affirmed a worldview that flowed out of the Old Testament portion, and they went into Babylon and they began asking the same question. How are we supposed to live and thrive in a place, in a culture where the institutions are antithetical to our worldview? Or what we celebrate, what we know, what we love, what we trust it's not rewarded, it's punished. And so today we begin a series in Daniel. It's going to take us about four months, and if you happen to be somebody who has read Daniel and you're wondering, are we really going to get past chapter six?

Are we're going to get into the chapter seven and beyond? The answer is yes. If you've never read Daniel, if you read into chapter seven, you're like, now I know what he means. It's a little different writing the first six chapters and the rest, but we are going to go through the whole thing. What we're going to find is not only instruction, but also an example of how do you live when you're facing a headwind to your faith? And so Daniel 1:1, "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 he placed the vessels into the treasury of his god.

Then the king told Ashpenaz, the chief of his eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobles, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding and learning and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans." Now, what we're going to do today is really set the stage for the book. We're going to learn some lessons that Daniel and his friends will be showing us their example of how do you lean on these truths? Now, one of the things that I like to do in the sermon is very similar to how I do my own time in the word, how I'm just learning for myself, how I'm reading. And so sometimes it's good perhaps if you're just wondering like, okay, I have a Bible in my hand. If you don't have a Bible, by the way at home, there's bibles in the chairs near you. If you don't have one at home, take that home as a gift. Okay?

So now you have one. And so there's this Bible, it's the word of God, and there's a lot of people who look at it, it's big and daunting and so you think, how do I take that and create these truths for living that I can build my life upon? What's the connection between that? And so I try to use these sermons not just to teach the

Bible, but to show you how I choose to do that. And what I do is I read, and then what I do is I just write down statements first and foremost. They are not necessarily true about what I'm supposed to do, but they're simply true about God. What does this say about God? What does it say about His nature? His character? I want to learn who He is, right? God tells us that we become conformed to His nature, to His character only when we begin to admire it. So until you see it, you can't admire it. If you don't admire it, you can't be like it. So you can't be a godly person unless you see it. And so constantly opening the Bible first and foremost on lookout for God.

Who is He? What does He like? What does he do? What has He said? And then what we do, and so my sermons, these sermons is you just look back over a bunch of them and the main points are always just truths about God. And then we normally end with some applications of things that if this is true, then how should we live in response to it? So I'm going to do that this morning. And the first thing I want you to see from these four verses that we read is that God permits the ruin of important things to accomplish His plan. He permits the ruin or destruction of important things to accomplish His plan. And I know some of you there's things that may be really, really important to you and maybe those things even in God's heart they're important to Him. It may be a relationship, a home, a child, it may be something of significance to you and Him, but I want you to know that history tells us, including Daniel, is that God Almighty permits the ruin of important things to accomplish his plan.

So Daniel, this book, it begins at a time in history when there was the rise of the Babylonian empire. Nebuchadnezzar was its king, and they began to spread far and wide. And so they conquered the Assyrian empire and they will eventually be conquered by a man named Cyrus who is Persian. And so what you find in these big empires, you have this guy and he's so powerful and he's literally marching through the world and he's conquering, and Daniel zooms in on his conquest of Jerusalem. We're told in history that three times in 20 years, the king of Babylon invaded Jerusalem. The first time was in 605 BC and that's what we find in Daniel 1:1, "The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." Well, something happened that he wasn't expecting, and that is his dad died. And when his dad died, he ran back to Babylon in order to secure his throne, and so he lifted his siege for a period of time. Nine years later in 597 BC he invaded again, and then he came off of it again.

And then 10 years later, in 587 BC he invaded Jerusalem for the very last time and he literally leveled the city, its buildings, its walls, including the temple and exiled the people. Three invasions in 20 years. And you have to understand, if you understand what I just said, and he exiled all but the poorest people, he took them out of their homeland and brought them to Babylon. Now, we're all sitting in these seats and we're comfortable and we're like, oh, this is a nice little history lesson. Now we're going to leave, we're going to get in our car, we're going to go back to our same home, same culture, our same language and so we're like, oh, too bad for them. But if you can try to internalize what this would've meant for these people, that they were literally pulled out of their home, out of their place of language, out of their cultural influence, out from their families, many of their family members died.

They were brought to a place there was a new language, they had no cultural influence. Every institution was antithetical to their worldview. They did not believe the Bible. They did not believe in God, the God that we find in the Old Testament, the one who created the heavens and the earth. And all of a sudden they're looking around and they're looking at Nebuchadnezzar as the tip of the spear. This is the source of our pain. This is the one right here. This is Nebuchadnezzar that all the loss and all the world fragility, all the unsettledness, they looked at Nebuchadnezzar and said, "It's that man's fault. It's his bloodthirsty ambition." And he was ambitious. But this event is such a significant event in history of the Bible that Ezekiel and Jeremiah, they all come at the same thing from a different angle. And what you find in Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah is they speak of this and they say it is true that King Nebuchadnezzar was the tip of the spear, but make no mistake, it was God who was holding it and wielding him.

And sometimes that makes us really uncomfortable, and yet that is precisely what we find in verse two, "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God." The Lord gave. He was the principle mover. He was the principle doer of this and God appointed this. You have to understand, in spite of the temporary shame that it brought to His name. You see, you have to remember that it was God who attached His glory and honor to Jerusalem. The walls protected His people. The temple was actually designed, constructed to point people's attention to His coming Savior. And the vessels that were the holy things, the instruments that were used in worship, they were all there for His honor. And yet He wielded Nebuchadnezzar to come and do this and the king of Babylon, notice what it says in the second part of verse two is that he brought them, that is the vessels, these holy things that were in the temple to the house of his god and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

God knew Nebuchadnezzar was going to do this. He knew that these vessels, these holy things will be brought into his temple, his temple to his idols as trophies in order to make a statement that his gods, the idols of Babylon were more powerful and mighty than the gods of all the other places. You see, one of the things history tells us is that every place that he would go, there was houses of worship. And they weren't always necessarily worshiping necessarily the same God or the same idol, and so what he would do is he would take a relic from each place that he conquered from their religious community, bring it back into his temple in order to prove to himself and to all the people that the gods of Babylon are stronger and mightier than all other gods. And God permitted the holy things in his temple in order to be taken. Why would he do this? Why would he permit such devastation and ruin to such important things?

What's really interesting, you have to understand the heart of God and the mission of God that the Bible speaks about holistically and it's this, is that driven by His unbelievable love for humanity God is on a mission to display His glory and the glory of His son to all the peoples of the world. He desires for the knowledge of his glory to literally fill the earth just as the waters cover the sea. And so God Almighty after mankind's sinned against Him became utterly unimpressed with who He was, unresponsive to His providence and unyielding to His word, God comes to a man who's literally bowing down to rocks. His name is Abram, and he says, Abram, well I'm going to call you Abraham. He does that just a little bit later. And he goes, but this

is the deal you do not deserve this. You're worshipping rocks, you're distorted in your understanding of who you should be worshipping, and yet I love you and I have a plan and this is what I'm going to do, I choose you. I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you into a nation.

I'm going to give you a special land on the earth. And not only that, but the promised rescuer who's going to come is going to come through your line. I'm going to bless you in spite of your idolatry, in spite of your sin, in spite of your ignorance of who I am. Well, Abraham became just as God promised a nation, the nation of Israel, and as Israel grew larger, they needed instruction as to why they were created. And so we find in Exodus 19:6 God says this to the people of Israel, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." I want you to notice these two things because they're really important because 1 Peter tells us the same thing about the church. That we are to be a holy people and a kingdom of priests. What does that mean? A holy people simply means set apart. It means different. And so this is what God did. He said, I'm going to raise up this people. I'm going to give them a law that accords with my truthfulness, my goodness, and my justice that brings glory to me, but it also brings good to the world and to their relationships.

And what's going to happen is as they yield to my instructions, it is going to bring betterment to their homes, to their families, to their children, to their financial outlook, to their prosperity, to their wisdom, to their understanding in the world, to their reality if they all have to face death. And so he gives His word to His people, and the Bible says that so long as the people walk in accord with his word what happens is our emotional life and our mental life and our financial life is there is wisdom that has been given from the divine, from God himself. And as a result of that, it doesn't mean we're all rich and we're all healthy. It means this, is that there's something about our life that when other people who don't have that they look and they go, even in your pain, there's joy. It just looks like a trade up to do what you're doing. Why are you like that? And once there's this holiness to be set apart from the people, and people are asking the question that the 1 Peter says, one day people are going to ask you for the hope that you have.

It just seems like that you operate in life with a different level of hope. Where does that come from? He says, then you're going to be set up to be a kingdom of priests. What's a priest? A priest is somebody who waits for people to come, and then once they come he says, "Come, let me bring you to the Lord." And this is the job description of Israel, it's also the job description of Providence. It's to live holy lives, set apart lives, distinct lives, so that people look at our homes, our marriages, our families, our work ethic, our respectability, our honor, our integrity and they say that's a trade up and not a trade down. What gives? Where do you get all that? And now we get to be a priest and we bring people and say, "Let me introduce you to Jesus Christ." This was their job description as a people. This was His plan, and yet the people of Israel said, no, we don't want to be a holy people. We don't want to be a kingdom of a priest. And so God kept pleading with them over and over.

And so before this invasion of Babylon, God Almighty promised this was going to happen. God said in Jer-

emiah chapter 25, he says, look, “I have spoken persistently to you. You have not listened and therefore this land shall become a ruin.” God permits important things including His own land to experience devastation to accomplish His plan. And then He says, “And these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.” Friends listen to me, God will endure the temporary shame that comes from the ruin of important things for the sake of our holiness. He will allow a church to close its doors if it will make that church humble and dependent and repentant. He cares even in the pain. And so God permits the ruin of important things to accomplish his plan. The second thing is like it’s just more personal, is that God permits the pain of beloved people to accomplish His plan. I want you to notice what’s about to happen. So king Nebuchadnezzar, as I said, he invaded Jerusalem three times in 20 years and every invasion led to a deportation.

An exiling of different peoples, but they went out in waves. So in 605 when he came in the first invasion, he brought some people, he started the wave of deportation, he started with the ruling class which included Daniel. Versus three and four, “Bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and the nobility.” So he starts with the royal people of tremendous influence. “Youth without blemish, good appearance, skillful in all wisdom endowed with knowledge.” And he goes on, “In understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.” And so what’s happening here, these young people who were cultural influencers, or I should say they were the next generation’s cultural influencers. They were brought to Babylon and put through a pluralistic liberal arts program that was designed to reprogram their worldview. They taught them the literature and the language.

That’s the worldview, that’s the religious teachings of these false gods. This is what they did. And it’s really interesting if you think about what’s happening here is that when they put them through this program, you have to understand that everybody was moving. Everyone came to Babylon from Israel and even if they were rebellious, they had a worldview where certain things were affirmed. Everyone had some regard for God and what King Nebuchadnezzar did, he played a long game and it was very strategic, is he said, if we can begin with the cultural influencers, the people with the greatest amount of power, and we can reprogram their heart and their mind, what happens is this, is that more of these people that are represented by these arrows, they’re going to turn around and we’ll be able to assimilate them into our worldview, into our culture as contributors instead of people who are constantly violating it because they’re unhappy to be here.

Now friends, let me tell you something. What they did in Babylon, the American education system and its universities is doing today. They’re bringing people into beautiful places and they’re reprogramming their mind with a liberal arts education that is pluralistic. That is precisely what is happening today. Well, the second wave that came nine years later after the second invasion wasn’t the royal class, it was the professional class. It was the religious leaders, it was the marketplace leaders, it was the educators, it was engineers, it was doctors and lawyers. And this included a man named Ezekiel. And so what he’s doing, this king is he’s playing the long game to reprogram the cultural influencers of tomorrow in the hope of assimilating the massive middle class who would come in the third wave when Jerusalem was finally decimated. Again, even though

Nebuchadnezzar appeared to be the very tip of this spear, it was God who was at work, and I want to show you how.

It was God who was acting. You see, God was the one who was promising that our sin and unrepentant sin would lead to ruin. And yet the people of Israel, they simply would not turn away from their sin. Instead, what they did was they turned away from a number of things. I want to show you three. First thing they turned away is God himself and they turned to idols. They turned to idols. In Jeremiah 7:31, we see the extent of their idolatry when it says, "And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters in the fire." Now there was an idol, his name was Moloch and Moloch was the statue that had arms. It stood like this. And in the arms there was the big cast iron skillet and they would put a fire underneath the skillet, huge thing. And then to worship Moloch, people would place their infants that were just born in and burn them to death in the fire. And this is the people who were supposed to be who and set apart and order for people to go that's a trade up.

This is totally real. In fact, you see the Valley of the son of Hinnom, Hinnom is a word in Hebrew, the word in Greek is Gehenna. Now, if you know the word Gehenna, it's the word that oftentimes the English Bible translates into the word hell in the New Testament. So how are those connected? Well, this is how it's connected. What God's going to do through this exile is to teach the people not to be idolators and it's going to be successful after 70 years of saying, you trust your idols and stop talking to me and let's see how powerful your idols actually are. Well, after this moment in time, idolatry and this form of idolatry became so repulsive in Israel that this place called the Valley of Hinnom, which was just a couple miles outside of Jerusalem, they didn't know what to do with it, but they were so repulsed by it they said, we can't live there. Let's make it the city dump. And Jerusalem, as it grew, they needed to burn their trash and as a result of that, there was always smoke coming up from Gehenna.

So when Jesus was walking on the earth and he was describing the realities of life and death and he was asked to describe what about heaven and hell, he says, "Let me tell you about hell." And he looked for a cultural metaphor to describe just how horrible it actually was. And he says, "You know what it's like? It's like living forever in Gehenna where the war never stops, nor does the smoke and flame." They had disregard for God himself and walked away from Him. Not only God, but also his word. The people became so repulsed by God's instructions, they had no regard for them that they just turned away, and king Jehoiakim modeled the disregard for God's word in a pretty vivid way. See, the Old Testament at the time was in a book like this, it was in a scroll and we're told in Jeremiah chapter 36 that somebody came up to the king Jehoiakim and he was simply reading the scriptures to him. And it says that it was written, so it was on a scroll and it was in columns. And it says that when he had read a column or two, Jehoiakim would take out his knife or sword and he would cut those columns off of the Bible and take them and put them into the fire.

Disregard for God's word. And then all this third sin that I want to highlight isn't going to feel the most repul-

sive to you, it's going to explain why 70 years, okay? One of the things that God told his people was that every seventh year, a portion of the land needs its rest. So you don't just keep farming every year, all year, all year, all year. No, what you do is you have a land, you divide it in seven sections and you give a portion of it rest one year out of seven. 490 years, they refused to yield to God's instructions, which meant that they needed how many years of rest? 70 years. And so in Jeremiah 25, we already read, He says, "You're going to serve the king of Babylon For 70 years." He's saying, "Look, you give the land its rest or I am going to give the land its rest by removing you." It's interesting that Isaiah 57:13, when they began crying out to God during these 70 years, he said to them something just awful. In Isaiah 57, this is what he says. He says, "When you cry out, let the collection of your idols, let them deliver you."

He says, "You've been crying out to them in your prosperity and now you'll need to cry to them in your devastation and see if they can help." And I know that sounds just so cruel, but what God was doing He has a plan. His plan is still to save people. He wants people to know of His love. And so what he had to do with his holy people was not only rest the land and give discipline to their sin, but He had to wean them off of their idolatry to show them that it was a functional savior that can't save. It's interesting when Israel left these 70 years, even to this day, they have been a monotheistic, a one God culture. God taught them very, very, very clearly and effectively that worshiping rocks is futile. And that brings to the last point, and that is that God instructs his people how to live far from home. He instructs His people how to live far from home. Now we're out of verses in the first four of Daniel and so I want to turn to Jeremiah 29 because what that does is it shows a different person who is involved in this very moment and he's going to teach us some really critical life lessons.

You see, most of the exiles, when they were exiled and they went into Babylon, they didn't live in Babylon at first, they settled outside of Babylon at a place called the Kebar Canal. And they were looking for answers, and anytime humanity is looking for answers there's plenty of people from God and not from God who are willing to speak. And so one person who claimed to speak from God, who was a false teacher, his name was Hananiah. Now when I put these words up here, sometimes when you hear the words or see the words thus says the Lord, you're like, oh, I'm supposed to obey this. But don't forget the context, okay? It's outside of this screen, and that is that He's saying this is what a false prophet was teaching that God was saying to the people, okay? He was saying that God was saying, "I have broken the yolk of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, the king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah." In other words, what he was saying was this, don't move into the city. Stay here at the canal, pray against the city, curse the city.

If you have to go into the city, litter in the city because in two years, just two years, God has told me that he's going to break the yolk and we're going to get to go back to the good old days when we have cultural influence and all the institutions they're all in our favor. And Jeremiah comes to him and he says in verse 15, "The Lord has not sent you and you have made this people trust in a lie." Jeremiah then sat down and he wrote a letter.

He was one of the persons who wasn't exiled. He was still in Jerusalem. And in chapter 29, notice what it says, verse one. Unfortunately this is not on the screen. It says, "These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles and to the priest, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." So while we are studying Daniel all these years, there's other prophets speaking into the people. So all these people, when they first got, they're like, what do we do? And so Jeremiah wrote and says, "This is what God would tell you to do."

Verse four, "Thus says, the Lord of host, the God of Israel to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and do not decrease, but 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. For thus says the Lord of host, the God of Israel. Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you and do not listen to the dreams that they dream for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name. I did not send them, declares the Lord. For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for welfare, not for evil. To give you a future and a hope."

The instructions came with truths, and the truths of what we're going to find Daniel absorbing and living in agreeing with, which is going to motivate distinction in his life, which is going to become so honorable for these. We learn here that God is working in the chaos. Verses four through seven He says, "I have sent into exile. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile." You see what God is saying? He's saying, "I am the principle mover. I sent you here. Your sin contributed, but it was my hand that sent you here. That your loss of cultural influence is part of my plan to reveal who is sincere in their faith and who merely found religion to be economically and socially advantageous. Turning your heart to see the futility of your idols is part of my plan. Settling you in Babylon and teaching you to settle in my strong hands is part of my plan. Placing you in the darkness of the darkest of cities in order that you might be the light that shines after you have repented of your sin is part of my plan."

And it's still part of his plan, Providence. So what has happened in America is not a surprise to our sovereign, perfect, holy God. One of the things that He's doing is simply purifying His own people by making it more difficult to hold fast to a biblical worldview. Who believes in my son and who finds Him socially advantageous? We also learned that God's plan is neither conformity nor separation. The false prophet said, "Don't go into the city. You have to separate because if you go into the city, you're going to lose your distinction, your holiness. You're going to just become like them." And God says, "Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens, eat their produce. Bear sons and daughters, multiply there, don't decrease. Seek the welfare of the city." In other words, live in the city, but don't become like the city. Be different than your city and a blessing to your city. Build and plant and marry and multiply. Know your numbers. Don't decrease. Know who's in

the covenant community with you.

Don't assimilate morally into everything. You're different and yet you're within. And we will find Daniel doing that in the most striking ways. And last, God's delays don't indicate lack of care. For those of you who have Jeremiah 29:11 cross stitched into your pillow at home or on your favorite coffee mug, let me just remind you, there's a lot of people who hear that verse and they just think, oh, this is what I want. And then all of a sudden they get a diagnosis of cancer or they lose their job and they're like, man, what gives? You cannot divorce verse 11 from verse 10. "When 70 years are complete for Babylon, I will visit you for I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord." Now, a lot of us in this room if God came and He says, now this is not what He says, and it's not what He did with them, but if He did and He said, I'll tell you what, I'm going to start showing my favor to you in 70 years, would you keep worshiping Him? I mean, most of us will be dead in 70 years.

This is what He said, in 70 years. Just imagine how hard that was in that moment to imagine the goodness of God, and yet it was for the everlasting goodness of humanity that He did so. So how do we live in our culture? Let me just close with a few applications here. First, let me urge us as a church family to repent of our sin that contributes to the chaos. It's only natural when you look at the world to blame our leaders and our laws and our schools and our education and to never point at our own heart. One of the things you're going to find Daniel doing almost every day of his life is he's going to say, "God, I get on my knees again and I'm asking you to fix this thing right here to help me to want different things, holy things, good things and not sinful things." Anything the Lord reveals in our life that's sinful He would simply tell us to repent. A second thing, let me encourage us to sow in tears. I know that makes no sense, but if you happen to take notes, you need to write that down. Sow in tears.

And what does that mean? Well, when the exiles returned from Jerusalem after 70 years, you know what they did a whole lot of? They did a whole lot of singing and part of their songs, they said, we should teach some really important things that we learned over those 70 years. And so there's one of their songs that they sang that turned into a psalm at Psalm 126. And at the end of Psalm 126, after they talk about God's kindness and bringing us back and things are good again, and this is fantastic, they're like, "Let's not let people forget this lesson. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. And he who goes out weeping, burying the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bringing sheaves with him." This is what He's saying, each one of us emotionally we can be happy or hurting, right? Like we all woke up today and some of us are really sad and some of us are really happy. While our emotional state is going on, there's another thing, and it's simply called the law of the harvest, right?

So if you're a planter or a farmer, there's a time you're supposed to put seed in the ground and if you don't, there's no harvest. But if you do and hope and it rains and good things happen, all of a sudden there's a harvest that comes later. But here's the thing, sometimes the day when we're supposed to put seed in the ground

is the day that we're really sad and we say, I'm battling depression. I'm in anxiety. I've just lost my job, my marriage, my kids, all this is bad. All I can do is wake up and sit on the edge of my bed paralyzed. I just can't do anything today. This is what He's saying. He goes, "If you live your life that you only plant seeds on happy days, you have no sheaves come harvest." Now He's not talking about farming, He's talking about relationships. I don't feel like it today, but I need to invest in my children, I need to invest in my wife. I don't feel like it today, but I need to go to work. I don't feel like it today, but I need to tell that person I forgive you.

To sow when you don't feel like it is so critically important for us to learn if we're going to model for our city that God's way is a better way. Where do we sow? Third application, seek the welfare of the city, find a place within the city to serve. We come here and we gather to be strengthened and then all of a sudden we scatter to reach and He tells us that we're supposed to pursue our city's safety and beauty and prosperity. We're supposed to serve at schools and parks and neighborhoods and businesses. God's saying, "I'm at work and so get to work in your city." And so let me urge every single one of us to find a place within the city, whether it's your HOA or your PTA, or your local school, or to pick up trash in the parks, or to pray for your leaders, every one of us can find something. There's orphans and widows and refugees and people that are poor. There's something for every one of us. There's trash all over the place. Someone can pick it up for the good of the city, find a place.

I just don't know where to start. You go back to the welcome desk today, just right on the lobby, and there's a lot of places that we partner with who are just constantly needing volunteers to come once a week, sometimes even for 15, 20 minutes, 30 minutes a week or every other week just to serve the good of the city. And finally, let me urge all of us to keep our eyes on Jesus, to look to Him as our only hope. This is going to sound a little bit like January and February, but listen, when cracks appear on our societal structures as they are, it is critically important that the people of God remember that fixing the symptoms without fixing the source only leads to more pain. Our culture is simply the compilation of the spiritual temperature of the hearts that fill that culture. The only way to change the culture is to change the spiritual temperature of the hearts and only Jesus can change the spiritual condition of a heart. Only He can change the temperature within the heart because of His spirit.

How did He do this? He came to the earth and when he got here, He did not assimilate and He didn't separate. He lived a holy life, a distinct life. He didn't isolate. He walked our streets, ate with sinners, prayed for our cities, fed the hungry, helped the poor, reconciled the races, yet He never sinned. And He saw every step of his life, even the boring ones and even the painful ones as being appointed and ordained by God the Father who was accomplishing His ultimate plan of salvation. And then Jesus, without any sin of His own, went to the cross and there He died for our sin. He was buried on a grave and on the third day, He rose from the dead, and He rose with an invitation in His mouth. And He says, "All you who are weary and heavy laid, and you come to me, you repent of your sin and I will forgive you, and I will give you my righteousness and I will put my spirit in your heart." And He will help you live far from home as He leads you home. Jesus Christ

is our only hope.

So let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for sending Christ to us. And Jesus, thank you for modeling perfectly these principles. You're working in chaos, that your plan wasn't to conform morally, nor is it to separate from the people. Jesus, thank you for modeling that your trust, that your father's delays that it didn't indicate a lack of care. And so as a church family, would you help us through repent of our sin? Would you help us to keep sowing in tears? God, would you help us to seek the welfare of our city? And God, would you help us to look to Christ alone as our one and only hope? We thank you for your faithfulness and we sing about it now. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.



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