

Influence

Message #3 in the series “Daniel – More than a Lion’s Den”

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Seconds. Minutes. Hours. Days. Time, as it has been said, waits for no one. As the German military machine systematically occupied new territories in Europe, one family, the ten Boom family, understood time was running short for everyone in their hometown of Haarlem in the Netherlands.



The ten Booms were watch makers, in effect, they were timekeepers, and Corrie ten Boom, along with her father Casper, created a small hidden room in their home where six Jews and members of the occupational resistance could hide. In January of 1944 Nazi soldiers raided the ten Boom’s house. Nearly 30 people were arrested in the raid, but the six people in hiding were never captured.

The ten Booms were members of the Dutch Reformed church, and a central tenant of their faith was “the equality of all human beings before God.” Driven to pursue this foundational understanding of their faith, the ten Booms used what resources they had to protect those who would be in grave danger during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

Corrie would spend the better part of the next year in captivity, including several months in a concentration camp. When she was released, and the war was ultimately over, Corrie ten Boom used her experience and influence to tell audiences all over the world about her time in the concentration camp. She also used her platform to preach a message of reconciliation, with the hope the world would heal from the scars left by the Nazis.

In this message series we are calling “Daniel: More Than a Lion’s Den” we are looking to God’s word to examine the story of Daniel, an important character in the Biblical story and foundational character in Hebrew history, who lived and led in a time of Israel’s exile in Babylon.

The book of Daniel is an accessible story that gives us insight on how the Hebrews—God’s chosen people, lived in exile. This is such an informative book of the Bible because the best demographical research we have available tells us that for the first time in the history of our country, those who identify as Christian no longer represents the majority. This being the case, there is a present reality before us. We are living in exile. In the context of everything that we are living in, near and afar, we are an exiled people. This message series presents an opportunity to equip ourselves through God’s word so that we may better understand what it means to live in exile under God’s lordship over our lives.

The theme of today’s message is *influence*. And as we begin, I’d like to share a key thought that we will revisit throughout the next few minutes together.

What may seem at first as insignificant or small, can be big for the kingdom of God. What we may see as big and disruptive in our lives will ultimately be small and insignificant.

The key text for today's message will come from Daniel 2. I invite you to turn your Bibles to Daniel 2 in the Old Testament, and as you are navigating your Bible to Daniel 2, I'd like to start by setting a little perspective for us, and this perspective comes from another part of the Bible. It comes from Psalm 39, a psalm of David, where he says,

“Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath even those who seem secure.” [Psalm 39:4-5 NIV]

These two verses in the Bible provide a great perspective about the life we have and how we can live it. If we are not careful, we can be lulled to sleep by the comfort of thinking there is always going to be more time. More time for relationships to develop, more time to try the new restaurant in town, more time to make that important phone call. More time to help those in need. What David's psalm reminds us of is that in the great landscape of time, within the context of eternity and our eternal God, our lives are but the width of a hand. That's it. The length of our life is about as long as the width of a hand. In the context to the rest of creation, that isn't very large at all. Now I don't think David is trying to send us to a doom and gloomy place at the thought of how short our lives are in the context of eternity; it might give us a new way to look at things—a new perspective.

I think the ways we try to measure time are interesting. **One of the ways my family measures time is through this measuring post we have on our wall in our home.** Maybe if you have children, or had children, your home you did something similar. With each new year a new mark is made on the measuring post to show growth over time. We keep calendars and set alarms, we wind watches and clocks to capture the amount of time it takes for the planet to spin and revolve. But all of these efforts are mere attempts at keeping track of time. The ten Booms would have been well aware of the challenges one faces when fashioning mechanical pieces, gears and springs, and piecing them together in order to keep record of time—to capture a small piece of the great universe God created. Our methods, though precise at times, are imperfect. Case and point, we periodically have to set our clocks forward or backward to catch up to the sunrise and sunset. We are living through one such moment today.

When we catch a glimpse of this perspective that David is outlining here in these two short verses of text, it should change the way we look at things. Maybe, just maybe, we see with fresh eyes how small and insignificant the things in our lives are that we have made big. The big deal we make out of conflict and disagreement all of the sudden seems strangely small. Likewise, we might also see how the small things we do in the places where we have even the smallest amount of influence, can make a really big difference for the Kingdom of God.

Let's keep that perspective in mind as we dive now into Daniel's story.

As you will recall from last week, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were taken in by King Nebuchadnezzar. They were to be educated, that is to say re-educated, in the history, language and culture of Babylon. Daniel and his friends represented the elite of the Hebrews who were delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar by God himself and were now living in exile from everything they ever knew as familiar and safe.



Chapter 2 of the book of Daniel picks up sometime after Daniel and his friends have been living in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar, as the opening lines of this chapter say, **“...had dreams; his mind was troubled, and he could not sleep.”** Which on the surface doesn't seem like a big deal, but the king was so troubled by a particular dream that he had seen on a recurring basis that he called for all of the wise men in the kingdom, the magicians, sorcerers and astrologers to his throne room. The wise men appear and appeal to the king to tell them what he dreamed so they would tell him what the dream means.

You can probably imagine this isn't the first time the wise men of Babylon have been called to interpret the king's dreams. The wise men have seen this before. The troubled king shares what he sees in a dream, the wise men cook up some explanation (an explanation that may in fact ultimately benefit them in some way) and the king's mind is put to rest. But on this day, the king flips the script. This dream was so powerful and impacted him so deeply he says as noted in verse 5:

“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. 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.” [Daniel 2:5-6 NIV]

You can imagine how the wise men took this news. They probably became immediately interested in their feet, possibly hoping they would be singled out to be the first to try and guess what the king had dreamt. Again, a representative of the wise men said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.” In this way, the wise men are testing, very carefully in the presence of the king, their control and influence over this specific situation. Reasserting his control, the king doubles down and calls out the wise men, accusing them of stalling because they are conspiring to mislead the king. The king orders the wise men to tell him what he dreamed and the dream's interpretation, to which the wise men say,

“There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks.” [Daniel 2:10 NIV]

“No one on earth.”

Furious with the response he receives from the magicians, sorcerers and astrologers, Nebuchadnezzar orders the execution of every wise man in Babylon, and this is where our four Hebrew teenagers, Daniel and his friends, enter the story, because, you see, this decree from the king would mean that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would also be executed for they were members of this group of wise men.

To call back to our theme for today, the king was making a very big deal of one specific dream. He was tormented every day by the thought of this dream, and it kept him awake at night. He was making a small thing, one dream, very big. He allowed it to grow wildly out of control as the dream, and its lack of meaning, haunts him and he is unable to see past it. It has occupied every available empty space in his life. Have you ever been in a situation where you could do nothing but fixate on something that was seemingly out of your control? I know I have. In those moments, the mental exhaustion that is described in the opening lines of this text is often followed by physiological exhaustion too. If you are like me, when I am captured by this kind of fixation, I feel lethargic, and it is as if a heavy weight is on my chest. This small thing has become a big thing for the king, and he is desperate for relief.

The story continues by introducing something of a minor character, Arioch, the commander of the king's guard. His job was to go out and kill the wise men of Babylon. And the Bible says, very briefly, that Daniel spoke to him with **"wisdom and tact."** Though he was marked for execution, you'll notice that Daniel didn't speak to Arioch with anxiety and fear, with hatred and anger. No, he spoke with wisdom and tact. In doing so, leveraged what familiarity and personal capital he had built with Arioch and inquired why all of the wise men were to be executed and Arioch told him. At this, the Bible says Daniel went to the king himself and asked for time to interpret the king's dream and according to the account in the Bible his request was granted.

What happens next is creates something of a contrast between Daniel and the sorcerers of Babylon. Instead of gathering his friends to scheme up an interpretation of the king's dream that would benefit them or potentially harm the king, Daniel does three things:

First, he gathers his friends.

Second, he urges his friends to plead for mercy from God concerning this mysterious dream so they would not be executed.

Third, when Daniel receives a vision of the king's dream and its meaning, he praises God saying:

**20 "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." [Daniel 2:20-23 NIV]**

Just as we come to know that our lives are so small in God's great eternity, it is equally important to remember that every opportunity we have to serve others, to use our influence to help another person, to do something big, is authored by God himself. He has called each of us to a specific moment in time, this one, right here, today, to speak with wisdom, to share our space, to listen carefully and to love fully. Friends, whatever it is God has called us to do, everything involved, every detail, comes from Him.

With this mystery now revealed to him Daniel goes back to Arioch, the man appointed to kill all the wise men of Babylon, and requests to be brought before the king.

In the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel explains the dream to the king, and it is a doozy. Starting in verse 31 Daniel explains the king saw a statue made of five different elements: gold, silver, bronze, steel and clay. In the dream a small boulder smashes the statue to pieces and the pieces blow away in the wind. The boulder then grows into a huge mountain the covers the whole earth. Dreams are already kind of weird to begin with, but it should be noted that Daniel, through was able to convey this dream word-for-word because the details were given to him by God. And as it is revealed in the text, I

hear an echo of the words from the sorcerer earlier when he said, “No one on earth...” could do what Daniel has just done.

The interpretation of the dream is also important: The different materials: Gold, Silver, Bronze, Steel and Clay represent the different kingdoms that will rule the earth. Nebuchadnezzar’s is the head of gold, the kingdom after his will be inferior to his (silver arms and torso), the next kingdom to rule the earth will be the bronze legs, and the fourth will be a divided kingdom (steel and clay). All of this, however, will happen under the lordship of God. He rules all and his kingdom, the whole-earth mountain, shall reign overall.

The passage of time in this interpretation is salient. Kings are driven by their legacy. And I wonder if the dream, as interpreted by Daniel, gave King Nebuchadnezzar a glimpse of what David saw when he appealed to God to be reminded of how short his life was in the vast canopy of eternity. By seeing the future and knowing without a doubt what the dream now meant, Nebuchadnezzar sees in full view the power of God and how small he suddenly looked—mere dust in the wind compared to the large mountain that is God.

In the text it says that Nebuchadnezzar responds to Daniel’s interpretation by saying,

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.” Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 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.” [Daniel 2:45-47 NIV]

In honor of Daniel, the King elevates him and all of his friends into prominent positions of power and influence. As God had delivered the Israelites into 70 years of exile, their best and brightest had been promoted as overseers and administrators over the entire province of Babylon. You see, even in this time of great peril, this big, violent disruption in the lives of the Hebrews now living in exile in Babylon, God reveals his supreme prominence, his lordship, over the king overseeing the exile of His chosen people.

What may seem at first as insignificant or small, can be big for the kingdom of God. What we may see as big and disruptive in our lives will ultimately be small and less insignificant than we first thought.

What is one small thing that YOU have made big in YOUR life?

What is ONE small act of kindness YOU can do for someone else this week?

In what way might you be able to use your influence to help someone in a positive way?

~Amen