

## Non-Participation

Message #4 in the series “Daniel – More than a Lion’s Den”

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Good morning. Would you pray with me?

*Lord God, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Father, what you would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this, Father, I pray in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen.*



So maybe you're like me, I daresay that is true, but there are two topics that tend to be banned at all family gatherings. You know what they are? Yeah, clearly, I know some of you are already going where I'm going. Politics and religion. Right? Now, when we engage in conversations on these two topics, it seems that no matter what configuration of our family and friends are at the table, there's bound to be a heated discussion. Which is really a shame and at the same time, it's truly understandable. You see, the word politics is quite interesting. Religion, everybody gets. You've heard me say this multiple times. It seems that whenever two or three gather in the name of Jesus, there's bound to be a fight. But when it comes to politics, we are so polarized in society right now that it's really, truly amazing that we can get anything done. And to get any group of individuals in the same room, even around the same table, is to truly put your conversations on the line. What's a shame about this is that that's not what the original intent was.

If you track the word politics all the way back to its origin in Greek, it is the word “*politeia*”. That word is the word from which we get our word politics. And literally, “*politeia*” is translated as *to live as a citizen*. In particular this word and the essence of what politics was designed to be about it is to ask a very specific question, and that question is where are you going to place your loyalties? Where are you going to place your loyalties now? Hold on to that for just a brief moment as we engage this message.

All along this journey in the Book of Daniel, we have been learning very specific things. In fact, the big picture big idea of this series, in a nutshell, was that culture shifts when people act differently than the way they used to. And the premise that I have been building in this series is that we, as followers of Jesus, therefore have the capacity to shift culture as we have been learning exists because it's what we've made it. That's what culture is. It is the expression of what the people within that arena have made it, by our actions, by our choices, even by our passivity, we have allowed to exist what our culture now embodies. We can't stand on the sidelines anymore and blame what's going on on anyone because actively or passively, we, the people have allowed it to be that. The good news is that the church, that's the people of God, the people who define themselves as followers of Jesus have the capacity and the power to shift culture. God is calling us to be cultural agents, ambassadors of hope, love, forgiveness, and grace. And every time we do that, two things are going to happen. One, we are going to disturb the status quo. Which means there will be a reaction. And second, we will cause a shift in culture. We can be the change that we think has to occur. It has to start somewhere, right? So, culture shifts when people act differently than the way they used to.

In this series, what we have been learning in the book of Daniel is what I am calling the way of the exile. As you remember, a couple of weeks ago, we shared with you that from the Old Testament perspective, the people of Israel saw exile as a negative thing, and rightly so. When you look at it from their vantage point. In this particular context, the people of Israel were uprooted out of what they knew out of their homeland, out of what they thought was their promise from God. I uprooted from what they had identified as their source of identity, and they were thrown into exile, a foreign place that worshiped foreign gods. But in the New Testament, what we read from people like the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul in particular, and dare I say it, Jesus himself, followers of Jesus are to see themselves as exiles, aliens. Namely, that we are not to put our identity in the things that we see and the things that we have, our identity is rooted in being citizens of a kingdom that is both here and not yet. And what does that mean? Where will we place our loyalties? That's the question that is brought about by the way of the exile. And what we learned two weeks ago very important lesson that the Book of Daniel portrays in Daniel chapter one in particular, is that God will not share his glory with anyone or anything. What I had shared with you is the initial phases was that this was a book about Daniel and his three friends the names that we know Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But then I clarified the book of Daniel was not really about these four guys, even though it tells their story. The book, The Book of Daniel is all about God. It's a book about the sovereignty of God, and that's so critically important for us because for us, for us to miss that, for us to focus solely on the stories of the lion's den or the fiery furnace, we will miss the true message of what God is trying to communicate to his people and the people of the world. And it's a message that's really important to each of us today, and we began to delve into what that lesson is. In particular, in chapter one, we looked at a life of faithfulness is built one act of obedience at a time. A life of faithfulness is Bill one act of obedience at a time. And then last week, Pastor Mapp began to teach us a little bit more specific about the role that Daniel himself would play as an interpreter of dreams. In fact, King Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter two of Daniel had a dream, and it was a really strange dream. And he called all of his astrologers and mediums and magicians together, and he said, I demand that you tell me not only what my dream was, but an interpretation of that dream. And if you can't, I'm going to kill you. Wow. And so Daniel gathers his friends and he prays through all of this and he says to the King. I got this. And in a nutshell, what he shares with the king is that the king has a dream. And in the dream, there's this huge statue. The head is made of gold, the chest and arms are made a silver. The belly and the thighs are made of bronze, and the legs and the feet are made of iron mixed with clay. And in this dream, Daniel says, there's a rock that is chipped off of a mountain and it comes in. It smashes the legs and feet and then collapses the entire statue. And he interprets this for King Nebuchadnezzar as being, hey to the head. That's gold. Daniel says, That's you. That's the Babylonian empire. And what this dream is saying to you, King, is that following your empire, the empire of Babylon, you're going to be conquered by another invading army and empire, and that's represented by the silver chest and arms that is going to be the empire of the Medes and the Persians. And following that empire, they're going to be conquered by that, which is represented by the bronze. That's the Greek empire. And following the Greek empire, they're going to be conquered by the Romans, represented by the feet and the legs. But you need to know this, so King Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar, you know, in your dream where there's this rock that's hewn off of a mountain. It comes in. It smashes starting the feet and then collapsing the entire statue. That rock is God's kingdom, the kingdom of God. And it is coming, and it is coming in its time and it's going to obliterate everything that is not of God's making. And that little rock that smashes this statue is going to grow into a mountain and it's going to take over the entire world in this way. This this element of the Book of Daniel begins our understanding today that Daniel being prophetic is talking about the Kingdom of God that that's yet to come inaugurated by Jesus the Messiah. He certainly doesn't name Jesus yet, but that's what this is prophesying the Kingdom of God is going to come and it's going to supplant everything that you think is important. It's interesting by the

end of Chapter two and Daniel King, no, Kinzer is as purely amazed. He's amazed that Daniel could interpret and even identify what this dream is without being told. And so he's elevated into positions of authority and even more. King Nebuchadnezzar honors the God of Daniel. It's so good this is good writing, right? That's an important statement as we now move into Chapter three. Chapter three of the Book of Daniel. It's very interestingly, this is how it begins. I'm going to put this up on the screen, but feel free to open your Bible and join with me as we as we delve into a very important life lesson for us. The Church of Jesus Christ even today. Chapter three begins this way in verse one. Remember, remember the dream and remember Daniel's prophetic word and King Nebuchadnezzar was response. You're ready. Chapter three Verse one begins King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold six to Cuba, tie and six cubits wide and set it up on the plane of Dora and the province of Babylon. For those of us who don't know exactly what a qubit is, this is describing about 90 feet high and nine feet wide. So the humor of all of this, which this is so good. This is just so good and so funny that you can't make this stuff up right after Chapter two after hearing all of it, Daniel said prophetically. King Nebuchadnezzar goes and builds a statue to himself. A large statue. And guess what, it's made of gold. Just as Daniel had said would define the Babylonian empire. So just for kicks and giggles, some of you may not know exactly where Babylon is. So I found it for you. I know it's hard to see this, but this is in modern days. This is the nation of Iraq. And just roughly about 50 or so miles south of modern-day Baghdad is historically where Babylon, the city center was. Babylonia was a large empire that expanded quite a large degree of territory in that day. But the city itself, Babylon, is right below where Baghdad is today. Just saying. Right. When you think about all of the stuff through history that has taken shape in the Middle East, you need to understand that this has been going on for millennia. Millennia. OK, so King Nebuchadnezzar establishes his icon. He sets up a statue. Really very important. This guy as a leader. In our terms. It's pretty narcissistic. Very egocentric. It's like he's not playing with a full deck. But the story continues. First to. Nebuchadnezzar then summoned the satraps prefix, governor's advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So, he's inviting. He's creating a party, a dedication party, he's fighting all of those who are people in authority, and they have to come. Verse three, so the satraps prefix governor's advisor, by the way, this repeats multiple times, there's several things that repeat. The author is making a humorous point and he's they didn't have the term narcissism back then. But but can't you hear those, those leaders saying to one another? He's at it again. Did you see what he set up and in the city square? And did you get the memo? I'll get the email to see you. But we're going to be asked to do. Right? So the satraps, prefects, governor's advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all of the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And look at this and they stood before it. Verse four, then the Herald loudly proclaimed nations and peoples of every language. This is what you are. Notice the word commanded to do as soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music that repeats itself again. You must fall down and worship the image of God of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down, and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. So take note. Just in case anything like this happens from a leadership perspective in the future if you have to use fear. To motivate your followers to worship you. There's something wrong with you. I remember from a couple of weeks ago when I shared with you, it is possible to change a person's behavior without ever changing that person's heart, but you unless you change the person's heart, you cannot. You cannot guarantee their true loyalty. So, Nebuchadnezzar. Has gathered all of his leaders. He's announced publicly to the nation's. This is what you need to do. Then we have verse seven. Therefore. As soon as they heard the sound of the horn flutes at her lyre harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Was it true worship? We don't know. What we know is that they were probably afraid of being thrown into the fiery furnace.

And by doing that, it actually creates a psychodynamic dynamic principle. Called the mob mindset. When you get a whole nation of people. Bowing before an individual leader and doing things that you would not normally do. As a human being. Even to the point of atrocities. It makes us wonder about the character. Not only of the receiver. But the giver of the command. Not that that has ever happened. Yes, that was sarcasm, verse eight. At this time. Some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. That's a really important statement. And you know, the Jewish people are now part of the culture of Babylon. They've been captured. They've been forced to live within this culture. And now the astrologers, the people who used to be in charge having the full attention of the king. And having been supplanted now several times by Daniel himself. These astrologers feeling threatened and also probably noticing that the Jews are not worshiping this idol and feeling a little jealous going, how come we have to do it and they don't? Right. They begin to denounce the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, may the king live forever. Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn flutes at their lyre, harp pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into blazing fiery furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have said over the affairs of the province of Babylon. Notice the jealousy here. That's the point. Namely, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of God. You have set up verse 13 furious with rage, by the way, any time you challenge a leader who is narcissistic and the response is rage. It further clarifies that you're dealing with a narcissistic personality. Further clarifies that whenever you set boundaries with boundary lists, individuals, you're going to get a reaction and the reaction is a reaction that looks controlling. And every time you see a high controller, think. High end security. OK. So setting the stage furious with rage, Nybakken as her summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, so these men were brought before the king and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold? I have set up? Is it true? Now, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, sit there, lyre, heart pipe and all kinds of music. If you are ready to fall down and worship the image, I made very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand? Interesting. Verse 16, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, King Nebuchadnezzar. We do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. I love this. This is so good for all of us. Normally what happens in these exchanges of conflict when people challenge us is we get defensive and we start fighting back. And as soon as we fight back, we are telling our opponent that they have control over our emotions. That defensive loop is a power play. The notice, these three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they don't get defensive at all. In fact, they tell the King. We don't need to defend ourselves, and this is what he says. They say. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's Hand versity. But even if he does not, we want you to know Your Majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. Let me just keep that there for just a brief second. Read through that verse to yourself very quickly. Let it resonate with you for a moment. Verse 19, then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach Meshach in a Bendigo and throw them into the blazing furnace. That that verse there of getting the strong bouncers to deal with these three guys, that's reflecting how insecure Nebuchadnezzar is feeling, even though it looks on the surface as being an act of rage and control. He's not used to having anybody be so self to find. Stand up to him. Wow. Verse 21, so these men wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes. Notice that little that little statement there is very important. The writer of these words is trying to create a picture for for those of us who are reading it that that these three guys are fully clothed if they're going into a fiery

furnace. Their clothes are going to go up like that and they're going to be consumed pretty darn quickly. So they're all dressed and they were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And these three men firmly tied fell into the blazing furnace verse 24. Then Kagan never. Kinzer leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, Weren't there three men that were tied up and threw into the fire? They replied, Certainly Your Majesty verse. Twenty five, he said. Look, I see four men walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed. And the fourth looks like a son of the gods. Notice the phrases that are used walking around. When's the last time you walked around in a fiery furnace? To see that the image that's being created here. In the midst of the chaos in the midst of this situation. God's protection is around them. Want a pause there and share this on a larger scale. What this chapter is trying to teach us. Is there God reveals his power in many places? But you'll know his presence best. And the fire. This is a word of encouragement for all of us. No matter what it is that we are facing, no matter what struggles that we are going through. God can reveal himself in many different ways, in many different places. But it's most often in the times of our deepest despair and our deepest fear, our deepest need that God reveals his presence most profoundly. Verse 26, Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, get this servants of the most high god. Come out, come here. Servants of the most high God never can measure knows. That these three young men and all of the Jewish people worship the most high god. He's now. Identify connecting the dots. So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They were amazed. They crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads, singed their robes who are not scorched and get this. There was not even a smell of fire on them. God's Ambarella Protection was so profound in that moment that they didn't even have the Senate. Of Burning Embers. Verse twenty eight, then Nebuchadnezzar said praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants. They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any God except their own God. Therefore. I decree Nebuchadnezzar said that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble for no other God can save in this way. Oh, bless his heart. Right? This narcissistic guy admits defeat, and he's so overcome that he still has to have the last word. And so he declares that anybody who says anything against the God of these three guys who will be cut up into pieces. Oh, my gosh. But then that statement. For no other God can save in this way. Verse 30, the chapter ends, then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province. A Babylon. Three guys got promoted. Increasing influence. Why? It's relook look at first to. Nebuchadnezzar says. They trusted in God. And defied the king's command. And they were willing to give up their lives rather than server worship any God except their own God. This is so important. But Daniel, Chapter three teaches us. Is that no matter what goes on around us, no matter what situation we are put in, no matter what challenge may come at our faith or our lives. We will always. Always have a choice. We will always have a choice. We may not like personally on a human level, our options. But we will always have a choice. There are certain things that cannot be taken from us. Paula, to you, oh my. Asks. Where are you going to place your loyalties? It's the question of politics. Ironically, it's also the question of religion, and ultimately what Daniel Chapter three teaches us is that while it's about politics and religion. Those topics can be objectified. And what it comes down to is. Worship. Who are you going to worship? For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They drew a line. No matter what. For us to live in Babylon. We need to remember we always have a choice. Where are we going to place our loyalties? Who are we going to worship?

As you know, in this series, we are ending each message with an invitation for you to participate in what we're calling our Prayer Wall. The Prayer Wall is a fishnet outside the West Sanctuary. Today, I want to invite you to choose, for example, one of three statements or questions. It's an invitation for you to put onto your card. Number 1 is: in a word or phrase, what's one obstacle that challenges your loyalty to Jesus? Maybe for you, it's gossip, either being on the receiving end of gossip or needing to gossip. Maybe it's grief, a feeling of loss that that makes you doubt. Maybe it's an addiction, maybe it's anxiety. Maybe it's feeling insecure with your circumstances. Whatever it is, a word, a phrase. This is anonymous. You don't have to put your name onto it. Or perhaps you would want to answer number 2. Number 2 is: do you confess, Jesus Christ as your savior, put your whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as your lord? Hopefully, that sounds familiar. That's coming right out of the liturgy that we have for the vows of baptism. Baptism, it's a reminder of who we are and that we're connected to someone and something the body of Christ that is bigger than us. Maybe if you so choose, you can simply write on your card, "yes." Or maybe number 3: maybe you would want to write a word or phrase that expresses your prayer regarding your commitment to Jesus. Maybe you're struggling with doubt, maybe you're struggling with fear, maybe you're struggling with taking a step, or maybe you're making a commitment to take a step.

Feel free to write any of those or any anything that the Holy Spirit places on your heart. And when you write it, it's all anonymous. We will be praying for the mosaic as it begins to emerge. They that we all can remember who we are and why we're here as we lived together in Babylon. No matter what, we need to always remember that we have choice. We have the power to choose. No one can take that away from us even at the risk of our own death. You can e-mail your responses to any of those statements or questions to us and we will receive your email and write it on a card anonymously and put it on to that prayer wall as well. You are part of this body of Christ and we love you and want to pray for you as well. God has called us to represent the good news of Jesus Christ and the world desperately needs the church to be ambassadors of hope today.

Will you join with me in prayer?

*Gracious, Lord, we give You thanks for the powerful word of Daniel Chapter 3. Thank You for the ability to choose even in the midst of difficult circumstances. The power to choose whose God we will actually worship. Lord, we choose You, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of Ruth and Esther. The God of Mary and Joseph. The God that we know personally as Jesus. The God of the Apostle Paul and Peter. The God of Eric Liddell. Our God. We trust You, Lord, and we love You. And we thank You for loving us first. We pray all of this in Your precious name. Amen.*