

We are in our second week of a study in the book of Daniel. If you weren't with us last week, I encourage you to go back and listen to the message. We spent our time looking at four characters—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—who were taken captive from their homeland in Jerusalem and transported to Babylon to serve in the king's court. While they were there, the Babylonians put them through a process of assimilation and indoctrination, trying to strip them of their original identity and replace it with a Babylonian identity, trying to whitewash their devotion to the one true God and replace it with a devotion to the Babylonian deities. And as we saw last week, Daniel and his friends resolved, they made up their minds, they purposed in their hearts that they would be people of conviction and character, not compromise. They made the decision to honor God, and God honored them, making them 10 times better than all the other advisors in the whole kingdom.

That's where our story picks up in chapter 2. Daniel and his friends are among the king's advisors, and the king has a dream and wants his team to help him make sense of it:

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." (Daniel 2:1-3)

This is pretty straight-forward. You get the idea that this has happened many times before. In verse 4 we read, "Then the astrologers answered the king, 'May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.'" This is where the king does something he had never done before. He says, "'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.'" This is unlike any request that he had ever made of them before. He was used to telling them the dream and then them telling him what it meant. But you get the idea that the king was getting suspicious of their antics, that they didn't have any special insight into his dreams, that they were just making up the meaning. So how could the king be sure they were bona fide astrologers, that it wasn't all smoke and mirrors? He decided they must tell him the content of the dream as well as the interpretation. And the king clearly meant business, because it wasn't simply that they were going to be demoted or fired if they got it wrong; they were going to be cut into pieces and their houses were going to be burned to the ground.

Multiple times the astrologers begged the king to change his mind—tell us the dream and we'll tell you what it means, but the request you've made, it's impossible. In verses 10-11 we read, "The astrologers answered the king, 'There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.'" They've made it clear: they can't do what the king asks. Then verses 12-13 tell us, "This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death." Just as he promised, the king planned to kill them. Now look at the end of the verse: "...and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death." They were serving as advisors, so they were guilty by association.

When Daniel found out about the decree, he responded with wisdom and tact—he went to the king and he asked for more time. And when he was granted his request, this is what he did: "Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed

with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:17-18) He went to his friends, they got on their knees, and they prayed. They knew that lives were on the line and they pleaded with God to move. That night, God revealed both the content and the meaning of the dream to Daniel. So Daniel was brought before the king, and when the king asked him to tell him something that it was impossible for him to know, this is how Daniel replied in verses 27-28: “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,” (your request is so unreasonable, it’s impossible, there is no one on the entire planet who can do this) “but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.” And then he went on to explain to him in detail what he dreamt:

“Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.” (Daniel 2:31-35)

And then Daniel said, “Let me tell you the meaning of this dream.” Let’s look at this image to help. (Please view the video recording of this sermon to see the image.) Daniel says the gold head, that’s you, that is your empire, the most dominant empire to date in human history. But after you will come another empire, the Medo-Persian empire, and after them will come another empire, the Greek empire, and after them will come the Roman empire. For hundreds and hundreds of years after you, kingdoms are going to rise, and kingdoms are going to fall, but then there is going to be a rock—not a precious metal formed by human hands, but a rock that initially appears to be of no special value, and that rock is eventually going to topple all the kingdoms of the world. In fact, the greatest kingdoms in all the earth will become like dust and be blown away and forgotten, but that rock is going to become a mountain and fill the whole earth. The kingdoms of this world are ever-diminishing. The kingdom of God will grow and grow and grow until it is all-encompassing. And then Daniel said: “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future” (Daniel 2:45). This isn’t coming from me; this is coming from Him.

And then the response:

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.” Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court. (Daniel 2:46-49)

Now there are a lot of different aspects from this chapter that we could pull out to talk about, but I want to home in on Daniel’s cultural engagement philosophy, crisis management strategy, and Christ-centered prophecy. Let’s begin by talking about Daniel’s *cultural engagement philosophy*. When it comes to engaging culture, the two most frequented paths are either assimilation or separation.

Assimilation is where people are so immersed in a particular culture that they end up becoming like that culture; they are indistinguishable from it. That has sadly been the case for a lot of Christians in the last few decades when it comes to things like drug use, pornography use, eating disorders, self-harm,

alcoholism, crime, adultery—there is basically no difference between those who call themselves Christians and those who don't. To a great extent Christians have been assimilated into culture.

However, as you might guess, there is an enormous difference between those who are passionately following Christ and those who are just claiming the name of Christ. Let's take marriage as an example. The chance of getting divorced in our culture is basically one in two. The chance of getting divorced if you claim to be a Christian is one in two. The chance of getting a divorced if you show your Christian commitment in a significant way by praying together with your spouse daily is one in 1,152. The chance goes from 50% to less than 1%. And that's just one example. If people who follow Jesus live like the world around us, eventually they are assimilated into the culture, become an indistinguishable entity, and reject the gospel message as either irrelevant or powerless, or both.

To avoid assimilation, some religious people take the route of *separation*. This is where people are afraid of the pervasive unhealth of society and say, "In order to maintain purity, we have to get away." Let's buy a ranch in Wyoming, let's go to a convent or a monastery, or let's live like the Amish and create our own little subculture, removed from the impurities of the world around us. Interestingly, there was a false prophet during this time named Hananiah who told God's people this is what they should do during their exile in Babylon. He said don't move into the city of Babylon. It's a pagan city. It's a wicked place. If you go into that city, they'll contaminate you. Separate yourself from them. Live outside the town. And just wait for their destruction. But Jeremiah, the true prophet, said just the opposite:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

God doesn't want his people to buy into the false dichotomy of either assimilation or separation; he wants us to pursue *redemptive cultural engagement*. As I look throughout Scripture, I believe it's clear that God wants his people to be deeply involved in all aspects of society: in education, in healthcare, in law enforcement, in finance and banking, in the courtroom, in government, in media. And engaged in such a way that we both maintain our distinctively Christ-like character and also advance the cause of Christ. (Please view the video recording of this sermon to hear the story of Chad getting to brag on Liz, who was awarded the teacher of the year award at her university. That's how you engage!)

Take the example of movies. It's not as though we need either Hollywood movies (which are typically unwholesome but are produced with exceptional quality) or Christian movies (which typically have great messages but are filmed so poorly they are almost impossible to watch). What if instead of having typical Hollywood movies or typical Christian movies we had devout Christians in Hollywood telling epic stories, and doing so in an arrestingly beautiful way that brought glory to God? That's how Christians are supposed to live—not assimilated into culture and living like everyone else, not separated from culture and doing our own thing, but fully engaged in culture, marrying, raising our kids, working our jobs, and doing it all in such a way that we elevate culture, that we reflect the heart and love and character of God to everyone in our culture, so that our city, our region, and our nation are undeniably and unmistakably better because we were here.

That's the heart behind the Kingdom Leadership initiative that I shared with you a few weeks ago. This is a new ministry focus of ours at The Creek because we believe if we are going to reach our city for Christ and truly be for the 317, we must live on mission at work and be equipped and focused on representing

Jesus in the marketplace, doing great work from nine to five and advancing the cause of Christ. No matter what industry you are in, if you want to honor God by the way you work and advance the Kingdom through your work, this is for you. (Please view the video recording of this sermon to hear the story of Dan meeting Josh in the parking lot and him sharing his desire for mentorship from someone *who shares his values*).

Starting in January of next year we are going to be launching this initiative that will allow people in mostly industry-specific groups to meet together to honor God in the way they work. Can you imagine what it would look like if the dozens and dozens of educators and school administrators who attend this church put their hearts and heads together on a regular basis about ways they could honor Christ and more strategically serve the students and families in their schools? Or we could take a major employer in our city like Lilly. What if the dozens and dozens of partners here at The Creek who work there got together on occasion to pray for their company, to seek the good of their company, to talk about how they could bless their co-workers and represent Jesus throughout the organization? What if all the entrepreneurs or small business owners in our church were getting together to learn from one another, encourage one another, and challenge one another to lead their companies and their employees in a way that advances the Kingdom of God? What if younger men and women in their twenties and thirties had people a couple decades older than them giving them wisdom on things like balancing work and family, professional ambition, integrity in crisis situations? The opportunities for Kingdom advancement through the marketplace are endless. If you are interested and you haven't done this already, please go to thecreek.org/kingdomleadership; sign up and tell us a little about yourself. We will build out this initiative in a way that fits the needs of those interested.

That's Daniel's cultural engagement philosophy. Daniel was a fully engaged member of an idolatrous, secular culture, but he participated in such a way that he maintained pristine character and constantly pointed people to God. The king even declared that Daniel's God was more powerful than all the other gods because of his faithful witness.

Next, let's talk about Daniel's crisis management strategy. Daniel was told that the king had made an impossible request, and that he and his friends were going to die. Can you imagine being handed a death sentence like that? Sorry to be the bearer of bad news but pack up your things—you are going to die today. The king has ordered you and your friends and your coworkers to be cut into pieces and dismembered, and your homes are going to be burned to the ground, all because no one can tell him about the dream he had! Most people would have gone hysterical. But not Daniel. What did Daniel do? What was his strategy?

1. *Maintain composure.* Daniel 2:14 tells us that when the commander of the guard came to put him to death, "Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact." He didn't panic. He didn't scream and yell and stomp around. He stayed calm and kept his wits about him. When we hit hard situations it's really hard not to get elevated and overly emotional, but that's when we need wisdom and tact the most.
2. *Circle up with godly friends.* Daniel 2:17 tells us that Daniel explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He didn't try to go through this alone. He didn't lock himself in his room or go into a cocoon. He went to his godly community and told them everything that was going on. When we have crisis moments, we have to do the same thing: circle up our community and resolve—we are going to get through this together!
3. *Pray.* Daniel 2:18 says, "Daniel urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven." Before they went to the white board to brainstorm ideas, before they asked Siri or Alexa for suggestions, before they opened their books to see if they could find answers, they got on their knees and they

sought the Lord. More can happen in a moment of sincere prayer than in an entire lifetime of human effort.

4. *Give all the credit to God.* When the Lord answered his prayer and revealed the vision to him, “Daniel praised the God of heaven” (Daniel 2:19). And when he stood before the king Daniel said, “(No one) can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (Daniel 2:27-28). Then in verse 45, after telling the king the dream Daniel said: “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future.” Let me tell you something: when God comes through, when God does a great work, keep your hands off his glory. Don’t take credit, don’t draw attention to your hard work, to your brilliant insight, to your skill. Give credit to whom credit is due, draw attention to the goodness and grace of God, to the one who made it possible.

How helpful is this for us! We all go through seasons of trial and testing. We get fired from our jobs, we get bad news from the doctor, our kids are making heart-breaking decisions, you name it. What do you do when a crisis comes your way? What if we followed Daniel’s example: maintain composure, circle up with godly friends, pray, give all the credit to God. That sort of strategy makes all the difference in the world!

The last thing we are going to see is Daniel’s *Christ-centered prophecy*. When Daniel spoke to the king, he gave him a word of prophecy. As Daniel revealed the content and the meaning of the king’s dream to him, he showcased how Christ was at the center of all of human history, how Christ is the climax of all of human history, and how Christ will outlast every nation, every empire, every leader. His dominion will encompass all of creation and his reign will never end.

Daniel could have fabricated the meaning of the dream to make Nebuchadnezzar the center of the story and the hero of history, but Daniel looked at the most powerful man in the world at the time and told him one day, everything he built would basically be forgotten; it would be inherited by another, and then by another, and then by another, until it all blew away like dust in the wind. But there is a king whose kingdom instead of being ever-diminishing will actually be ever-increasing. And that king was not Nebuchadnezzar. That king is the one who comes from heaven.

So let me ask you to think about your life. When you think about your dreams, your hopes, your aspirations, who is at the center of them? Are your dreams, your hopes, your goals about you, about your family, about your success, about your accomplishments? Or have you allowed God to give you a Christ-centered view of your life, where He is the hero of the story, where His reputation, His honor, and His glory are what you are chasing after, not your own?

John the Baptist was a man who modeled this beautifully in the New Testament. He had a large following of thousands of people as he prepared the nation of Israel for the Messiah. But then the Messiah came, and all his followers started leaving him and going after Jesus. And some of his followers said, “People are leaving you and following after Jesus! Aren’t you worried?” John the Baptist responded, “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). That’s the heart God wants for all of us—this life is not about me; I just want to get out of the way because my greatest joy is when others see Jesus.

As we wrap up today, I want to look one more time at the beginning of Daniel 2, when all the astrologers from the kingdom were asked to tell the king the content of his dream, and they said, “What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.”

There are so many times in life where we say something similar: when it comes to restoring my marriage, it's just too difficult. No one could do that except the gods, and they don't live among humans.

When it comes to getting past this addiction, it's just too difficult. No one could do that except the gods, and they don't live among humans.

When it comes to getting my life back on the right track, I've made such a mess and it's just too difficult. No one could do that except the gods, and they don't live among humans.

When it comes to paying the price for all my sins and all my mistakes, it's just too difficult. No one could do that except the gods, and they don't live among humans.

The Christian hope is that there is one true God, and he did come to live among us, to do what we could never do on our own, to show us the way of truth and love, to overcome the power of darkness, to die in our place, shedding his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Because of Jesus, what is impossible with man is possible with God.