

God Gave

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[0 : 0 0] With that, we're going to jump right in. We are starting our series in the book of Daniel this morning. And the book of Daniel tells the story of a man named Daniel who lived as an exile in Babylon.

So he's a faithful Israelite, but he's living in a foreign land. And this book takes place near the very end of the 7th century BC and then during the majority of the 6th century BC.

And it's going to teach us many things, but there's going to be two primary themes that I want you guys to see. As we come to this book, it is going to both remind us and it's going to instruct us. It's going to remind us that no matter how bad circumstances may seem around us, God is in control. God rules and reigns over the nations.

It's not just going to remind us, however, it's also going to instruct us. It's going to give us Daniel as a model and instruct us how we live faithful lives in a foreign land.

[0 : 5 7] In other words, how do we live faithfully as God's people surrounded by a culture and a world and a nation that does not honor God? And so it's with that that we are going to begin with Daniel chapter 1.

I should also mention that Daniel provides its own summary of the book in chapter 11, verse 32. And it tells us the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

And it's our hope and our prayer that as we go through the book of Daniel, we would grow in knowing our God and we would also be able to stand firm and take action. We're also continuing what I've been working on since 2018, which is establishing for us a strong theology of suffering. We started that in the book of Ruth in the summer of 2018 in July. And then you'll remember in fall of 2019, we went through the book of 1 Peter, finishing that in the spring of 2020.

That also had a heavy focus on suffering. And now we're in the book of Daniel. It's going to complement those themes. And so we're going to jump into Daniel chapter 1.

[2 : 0 2] I invite you to open up your Bible with me. Of course, you can also find it maybe on your phone or on the Internet. And we're going to be asking this question. Where is God in the midst of suffering?

Where is God when it feels like the world is pressing in on us from every side? And there's a complementary question to that. For many of you, it might be a little bit more exciting than that first one.

And it's this. When do we disobey the government? And if we disobey the government, how do we do it? When do we disobey the government? How do we do it?

And so it's with that, we're going to jump right in. I invite you again to turn with me. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Which means that he has not left us to stumble alone in the dark. But instead, he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so it's with that that we read now. Starting in Daniel chapter 1, verse 1.

[3 : 0 3] 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 placed the vessels in the treasury of his God. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the

Chaldeans.

Verse 5. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

Verse 6. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

[4 : 27] And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord the king who assigned your food and your drink. For why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who were of your own age?

So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Test your servants for ten days.

Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you and deal with your servants according to what you see.

So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. Verse 15. At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

So the steward took away their food and wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. Verse 17. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

[5 : 36] At the end of the time when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Therefore they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word that can go forward, whether there's snow or there's sun.

And we thank you that you've allowed us to gather together virtually this morning to look at Daniel chapter 1. We ask that you would help us. You'd help us if we experienced technical glitches. You'd give us patience. Father, we ask that you would help our minds, that we'd be able to pay attention with all the distractions around us. And most of all, that you would speak clearly through your word to us, that we would be able to see Jesus Christ.

[6 : 46] And we ask these things, knowing that we haven't earned them, but instead we ask them in his name. Amen. For those of you who are kids, or maybe those of you who have been kids at some point in time, I want you to imagine with me for a second that your parents have given you clear instructions about what you should and should not do.

And not only have they given you these clear instructions, they've also outlined for you what's going to happen if you disobey. They've told you in advance what the punishments are going to be. And so you have a lot of clarity.

You can choose one way or the other. This is similar to the way God often works with his people, especially in the Old Testament. He gives them blessings and cursings based on whether they obey or disobey.

And this is what we find ourselves in the middle of in Daniel chapter 1. The prophet Jeremiah has been prophesying for some time to Israel, warning them about their sins. He's been telling them about the fact that they've been worshiping other gods.

In fact, it's gotten so bad in Israel that they're in some places practicing child sacrifice in the same way that the pagans are. They're breaking God's Ten Commandments, not just one or two of them, but many of them.

[7 : 54] And so Jeremiah predicts what's going to happen. He predicts the fall of Jerusalem. And so we see at the beginning of this book the fulfillment of what God has been telling his people through his prophets for years.

We're told, verse 1, this is the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim's one of the kings that Jeremiah has been coming and prophesying to. In fact, in Jeremiah chapter 25, in Jeremiah chapter 29, he tells them that there is going to be this exile, that they're going to be taken by Babylon. And so that's what we see here in this passage. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, comes as God's agent in some ways and does what God has promised for years. We're seeing the very beginning of the exile of God's people from Israel to Babylon.

And this is an exile that happens in multiple stages, so it doesn't happen all at once. If you're someone who does dates, you probably remember the exile is beginning in 586. What we're looking at here is actually 605 BC.

So a number of years before the exile is finalized, we see the very first step. And the very first step is this, and it's devastating. Nebuchadnezzar comes and he takes a variety of things.

[9 : 02] We see verses 1 and 2, he takes Jerusalem, the city. Verse 2, he takes an affront to God himself by taking away the vessels of the house of God.

This is a way of showing his God's dominance over Yahweh. And then in verses 3 and 4, we see, and this sets us up really for the rest of this book, especially chapters 1 through 6, that he takes Israel's best and their brightest.

He takes the royal family, the end of verse 3, and the nobility used without blemish. So these are the cream of the crop here. They look good, they're handsome, and they're really smart. There's skill in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace.

He does sort of a brain drain here on Jerusalem. He steals their smartest and their best to be trained, not as Israelites, but to become good Babylonians.

And so kids, I want you to do another thought experiment with me. Not that you have disobeyed your parents this time, but in fact that you're a faithful son or a faithful daughter. You've done the best you can, but suddenly you're taken away.

[10 : 09] You no longer live with your parents. You've been put in a boarding school, which is a place where you live and eat and sleep at your school, not your home. And in addition to that, not only are you at a boarding school, you're at a boarding school in a different country.

So you've been taken from the United States. Maybe you're in a boarding school in France or Germany. It's a place where they speak a language that you don't speak. And so there's a variety of ways in which you are a fish out of water here.

That's what's happening for Daniel and his friends. And I mentioned you kids because Daniel at this time is a youth. We're told the very beginning of verse four, these are youths without blemish. Many people think that they were young teenagers at this point. So we're talking maybe someone who's in eighth or ninth or 10th grade being taken away, separated from their support structures and put into an entirely different education system.

And it's with that that the king of Babylon begins his indoctrination plan for them. He has a multifaceted plan here. First of all, verse four, he's going to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

[11 : 11] Now, this would have not been innocent. This would have included him teaching about the gods of Babylon. He would have been teaching them potentially about divination and astrology. And so they're going to be educated, not in the way of the Israelites, but the way of the Babylonians, not in the way of their God, but in the way of pagan gods.

He doesn't leave it just at education, though. He's going to allure them with the good life. Verse five, they're going to have wonderful food. They're going to have this daily portion of the meat and wine that the king eats.

They are going to eat well. They are going to have the good things in life. They are going to see how wonderful it's going to be to be a part of Babylon. This education program, verse five, again, it's going to last for three years.

It's going to be long enough to change them and indoctrinate them. And then we see something equally insidious in verse seven. He's going to change their names. Now, of course, we know how important and fundamental our names are to our identity, how we think about ourselves as people.

And what's going on here is not just a name change, but a fundamental identity change. The names that these youths have when they show up, their Hebrew names, are all names that say something about God, about Yahweh and their trust in him.

[12 : 20] Now, we don't know the meanings of all the new names, but the ones that we do point not to Yahweh, but they point to the gods of the Babylonians. And so they are being given here pagan names, names that point not to trust in the God of Israel, but trust in the God of Babylon.

And so the point is this, their attempt by Nebuchadnezzar here to brainwash them. He wants them to forget Israel. He wants them to forget the land they've come from.

He wants to give them this new identity. He wants to make them into wonderful, good Babylonians, people who value what they value, people who no longer love and value what the God of Israel loves and values.

It is a full frontal assault here on these youths from Israel. And so it's at this that we see part of the reason we're studying this book, which is it's not that foreign from us today.

We also live in a culture that looks to shape and educate and transform us. We have a culture that looks to see our identity as something other than people who love and worship God.

[13 : 25] It wants to take us, our hearts captive with a good life. While we may not all be young people who are transferring countries and schools, we are people who live in a place where we feel the pressure of the world around us to conform us to its ways, its ways of thinking, its narratives, what it loves and what it values.

We see this in a variety of ways. We see this in the way the culture speaks to us from shows and media. Last week, I used the illustration of *The Queen's Gambit*, which is a Netflix show.

So obviously, I think there are good things on Netflix. There are also things on Netflix that are an absolute abomination. There are things that celebrate and delight in what God hates and despises. There are things that are meant to take our hearts and cause them to value and to love what God warns us about. There's all sorts of stories being told that tell us things that are different than the story God wants to tell us.

There are all sorts of values that we're supposed to adopt that are different than the values that God wants us to adopt. And so while we may not be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans, we are constantly being taught the language and the literature of Western secularism.

[14 : 36] We, like Daniel and his friends, are under pressure. And we don't just see this in our movies, in our media. We also have it in our education system as well. We have, on the one hand, some schools that hold up a high value of morality and ethics.

And yet that's all it is. It ends up being this dead morality. It's moralism where we're meant to be good people for the sake of ourselves. And then there's schools, on the other hand, that teach something equally dangerous.

Maybe they teach us to value scientism above everything else. They want us to forget the fact that even that has certain types of faith commitments. Even that involves unexamined assumptions and operating principles.

And so we feel the conflict just as Daniel feels the conflict. We also live in this kind of pressured world. And so just like Daniel, we're also going to come in to places of conflict.

If we are living in a world where there's tension, there's ultimately going to be conflict and opposition. And so that's what we see next in this story. We've been set up in verses 1 through 7 for the problems of this world that Daniel finds himself in.

[15 : 47] And now he gets into direct conflict with what he's being asked to do. Verse 8, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

And so in the midst of this pagan world, Daniel wants to retain his distinctive faith, his identity. And we're not told in this passage exactly why it is that this meat and this wine would defile him.

That's not spelled out for us. And so it's actually become a matter of great debate what exactly is objectionable about this. There are probably two general camps. I won't drag us down into a bunny trail here, but I'll give you a broad overview.

Some people are convinced that Daniel's being asked to do something that would break the law of God, whether it's violating kosher laws, whether this food has been sacrificed to idols. There's something about it that would cause him to sin.

So that's one camp. There's another camp that argues, no, there's not anything sinful about this meat and this wine, but we see that it's associated so closely with the king that Daniel wants to

make a statement to himself that he relies on God.

[16:50] He doesn't rely on Nebuchadnezzar. Between those two, I'll just simply say, I lean to believing that Daniel here is being asked to violate the law of God. And I believe that for two reasons.

First, in verse eight, we see the word defile twice. Remember that repetition is very important in the Bible and defile here is a strong word. It's hard for me to believe that Daniel would believe he's defiling himself unless it was something that was very sinful.

So that's one reason I believe that's the way this passage is leaning. The second reason I believe it is this, Daniel's taking an incredible risk. Many people believe Daniel's risking his life by doing this. And so it would seem a strange thing for him to pick this of all the things to risk his life over unless he believed he had to do this to honor God. And so it's with that we're going to head into this tension.

Daniel's being asked to do something that would violate his conscience and he puts together a strategy. First of all, he goes to the chief of the eunuchs. Remember we met this man in verse three.

[17:53] His name is Ashpenaz. And he goes to him first asking if he can avoid this food. Now we find out verse nine that God has given Daniel favor in the eyes of this man.

But even that is not enough. Verse 10, the chief of the eunuchs says to Daniel, I fear the Lord my king. I fear Nebuchadnezzar. I don't want anything bad to happen to me.

And it could be dangerous, right? Verse 10, why should he see that you are in worse condition? So you would endanger my head with the king. In other words, I could get killed if I do what you ask.

Which underscores also the threat for Daniel. Of course, we think he could get killed as well for asking this. If the king finds out that he's not willing to eat his food. So the stakes are very high. Daniel doesn't have success here though. Although his favor does help him. Verse nine, he has that favor. And so this eunuch does not go and tell on Daniel. He doesn't help him. He also doesn't hurt him.

[18:50] Daniel, however, continues to be persistent. Also note, by the way, verse 10, there's this emphasis on the eunuch fearing Nebuchadnezzar. The implication is the eunuch fears the king of Babylon.

Daniel fears Yahweh. Daniel fears his king. Daniel fears God. Daniel's not going to give up though. He keeps pushing. Verse 11, he moves down the pole here of authority.

He moves down the chain of command. The eunuchs told him no. Okay, we're going to go ask the steward. Verse 11, he goes to the steward and asks him for this test. Give us these vegetables to eat so we don't violate our consciences.

And the steward here agrees to the test. He allows them to be tested for 10, for 10 days. And I wanted to stop here and I want you to notice for a second, this is something we're going to come back to again in the book of Daniel, that when it comes to navigating these difficult situations, Daniel has a wide repertoire of approaches.

He has different strategies for different situations. Not everything has to be handled in the same way. And so there are some Christians today when they talk about our conflict with the culture, they make it sound like there's only one way to deal with conflict.

[20:05] It's to be very loud and aggressive about it. We've got to stamp our flag in the ground and let everyone know what we're doing and why we're doing it. We'll talk more about that in a little bit, but I just want to note that here.

Daniel actually chooses sort of an under-the-radar approach. He chooses an approach where not everyone knows what he's up to. He follows this principle that I'm going to return to again in the book of Daniel from Matthew 10, verse 16 that Jesus gives us.

He tells us, I'm sending you out in the world and so I want you to be wise as serpents but innocent as doves. And that's what Daniel does here. He's innocent as a dove. He doesn't break God's law. He's wise as a servant or as wise as a serpent. He's smart about how he goes about avoiding this meat and this wine. Daniel's faithful. He doesn't compromise.

He's also wise and strategic. And so that's the opposition that Daniel finds himself in. There's this tension that leads to conflict. We've named our tension. We are also going to face conflict.

[21:05] Sorry, I saw a connection problem there with the Facebook. So Daniel's in tension. We're in tension. Daniel faces conflict. If we live in this world, we expect we're going to face conflict as

well.

We're going to talk more about this when we get to chapter 3 of Daniel. But there's a category here that we need to know as Christians and that's the category of civil disobedience. That's part of what Daniel's participating in here.

And we find this principle well articulated in Acts chapter 5. Peter and the disciples are preaching. They're brought before the council here to answer for what they're doing.

And the high priest tells them, verse 28, this is again Acts 5, we strictly charge you not to teach in this name. That's Jesus' name. Yet here you have filled up Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

And here's the money verse, Acts chapter 5, verse 29, Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men. Daniel chooses to obey God rather than men.

[22 : 05] We also will be put in situations where we have to choose to obey God rather than men. We'll be put in situations where we're in conflict with our government. And so I'll give you a few examples.

Disobeying the government when it commands us to participate in evil. We have some legislation going on right now in our country. We have a couple ones. One's called the Equality Act. One is called the Do Not Harm Act.

And these of course sound like wonderful things, right? Who's against equality? Who wants to harm someone? The Equality Act's made its way through Congress. It's now going towards the Senate.

And it can be used for a variety of things.

Of people who've studied it, some people believe that it could be used to compel doctors who don't want to participate in abortions to participate in them anyway if they want to continue to be doctors. And so it would do away with a lot of the religious freedom protections that people have right now. It could be used potentially to compel Christian businesses to participate in ceremonies that they believe celebrate things that are evil.

[23 : 04] That they would call good what God calls evil. It could narrow, just in general, our abilities to have religious liberty exemptions. And it could be used to impose upon some of our freedoms as a church.

Now I tell you this not to be alarmist. We don't know exactly what's going to happen in the future. Of course this could be defeated. But it's an example of the sorts of things that we need to be prepared for as Christians.

When it comes to suffering, when it comes to persecution, I want us to have thought about it beforehand. We want to have meditated on God's word so that we're prepared when the challenge comes.

This we can assume is what Daniel has been doing, right? How is he able to stand so firm as a 13 and 14 year old? Well, most likely he's been meditating on God's word.

He's been taught God's ways and God's law. And so this pressure, he's not going to cave under it. Now we'll see later in the book of Daniel, we'll have plenty of opportunity to also talk about Daniel's prayer life and the ways that that fortifies him.

[24 : 03] Regardless to say, there are challenges for Daniel. There are also challenges for us. There are times and places when we're going to have to say no to our government in the same way that Daniel has because of our allegiance and our loyalty and our faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

And so that's one of the major questions of Daniel. When do we do that and how do we do that? How do we survive in the midst of this culture with pressure on us?

I'm going to pause here for a second. So we're asking these heavy questions. We've seen the general challenge and the specific challenge, both for Daniel and for us. And I asked the question at the very beginning, where is God in the midst of suffering?

And so before we talk about what we need to do, I want to talk about what God is doing and has done in this passage. In the midst of all these problems, the vessels of the temple, remember verse 2, have been taken to Babylon.

It looks like God and his people have been defeated. It looks like the gods of Babylon are more powerful than the God of Israel and yet, nothing could be farther from the truth. In the midst of this passage, throughout, from beginning to end, we see that God is in control.

[25 : 14] So I invite you to look with me in detail at these verses. We see in verse 2, verse 9, and verse 17, that it says either God or the Lord gave something. Verse 2, the Lord gave Jehoiakim,

king of Judah, into his hand.

Why was Babylon able to defeat Israel? Because God allowed them to. Verse 9, God gives something else. God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. Why was Daniel not killed simply for his request not to eat meat and wine? Because God was at work protecting and preserving him. God continues to be active in this passage.

And then verse 17, we see God gives something else. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Why were they so smart? Why were they so skilled? Why were they the ones taken from Israel? Because God blessed them. God was at work giving them the skills they needed to survive in this foreign land.

[26 : 24] And so before we talk about anything else, before we move forward in knowing how it is that we respond and stand firm. Remember, the people who know their God will stand firm and take action. The first part is that we know our God.

Our God is at work no matter the circumstances. No matter what is going on around us, God still rules and reigns over the nations.

He rules and reigns over Babylon in this passage and he rules and reigns over every nation today. God is still in control. Now, it's not just those three verses.

It's not just 2, 9, and 17, but we see God at work in other ways here. You'll notice verse 6, Daniel is not sent in alone. God sends him with friends.

Daniel doesn't have to figure it all out by himself. He has Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah to help him and be with him. And so that's God's help in the general situation, right?

[27 : 26] He's giving favor. He's giving Israel over into the hands of Babylon. He's giving them skill and wisdom and understanding. God also is at work and very powerful in this specific challenge and specific situation.

We're going to look again at this 10-day test because what they're asking is, in a sense, something reckless. There is a reason in verse 10, the chief of the eunuch says he believes they're going to be in worse condition if they follow this diet.

Okay? There's a reason Daniel sets the test for only 12 days and the reason is this. Vegetables won't make you strong. Vegetables are not going to make you fat, as controversial as it may sound. Now, there are many Christians who take this passage and they say, oh, we can see from this passage this is dictating our diet to us. If we can just eat vegetables like Daniel, we will be honoring God.

Now, that does a couple things. First of all, it ignores Daniel chapter 10, verse 2, where we find out later in Daniel's life, he did have a diet of meat and wine. It also does something else. It forgets some of the historical background of this passage.

[28 : 36] There are scholars who've looked at art from Mesopotamia and they see men depicted in two ways. It's from this book here, How to Read Daniel. And he tells us about the two different ways that men are depicted in art.

One of them, the warrior class, are bristling with muscles. That's what he tells us. On the other hand, wise men, like Daniel and his colleagues, are pictured as bald, big-eyed, a symbol of intelligence, so they have these huge eyes, and chubby.

That is the look that Nebuchadnezzar was going for. In other words, Daniel and his friends, after eating vegetables for 10 days and water, are fat.

God has performed a miracle. He has made people fat from eating only vegetables and drinking only water. God is at work in this situation doing the impossible.

He is showing his power and protection and control even in the small element of Daniel's diet. And so, all throughout this passage, explicitly in what we're told God gives, implicitly in the miracle we see him perform, God is at work protecting, providing for his people, even in the midst of a challenging and hostile world.

[29 : 54] And so, first and foremost, what we want to underscore is God's work on behalf of his people in Daniel chapter 1. Remember I told you at the beginning we're going to be reminded and instructed.

And first of all, we're reminded that God rules and reigns. Second then, after we understand that, we can move on to the instruction.

How we live as foreigners, how we live faithfully in a foreign land. And so, that's where we turn now. Of course, God preserves his people here.

In this passage, God is preserving you. And with that knowledge, then we ask, how do we dare to be a Daniel? Remember I mentioned near the end of our series in 2 Peter we were going to talk about this, whether we can follow Daniel as an example.

This is also a controversial subject and I'm going to tell you, yes, we follow Daniel as an example but we don't just follow him. We follow him as he has trust and faith in God.

[30 : 54] It's his faith and his trust that we're following him in. And so, the highlight, the emphasis, the accent mark is still on God and what he is doing.

And so, how do we live faithfully like Daniel trusting in God and his care? We've already talked about one of our principles, the principle of civil disobedience. I'll remind you again, Acts 5 29 says this, we must obey God rather than men.

Just like Daniel, we choose to obey God rather than men. So, remember our question, when do we disobey the government? When the government tells us to do something that God tells us not to do. When the government tells us not to do something that God tells us to do. And it's only those two situations. So, we need to be careful. If you're going to claim civil disobedience, you need to back it up from the Bible.

There's plenty of people who run around claiming that they're exercising civil disobedience as Christians and what they're doing they can't support from Scripture. So, there's a narrow list of things. There's a limited list of things that we look to when we're honoring God rather than men.

[31 : 56] Second, we're going to draw some principles from this passage. Daniel gives us some practical strategies here for how to be wise. I mentioned earlier that he's very subtle. He doesn't stamp a flag in the ground.

Instead, he works behind the scenes. And in fact, he shows us the power here of what we might call the lesser magistrate or local government. Daniel, in other words, doesn't go to Nebuchadnezzar. He goes to someone lower down the chain of command and he handles it at that level.

Now, we know this, especially after this last year during COVID. A lot of what mattered when it came to restrictions, now I'm not saying those things were a religious liberty issue. I'm just giving you an example of how government operates at different levels.

So, don't hear what I'm not saying. What we saw was that local government mattered a lot. No matter what governors might be saying, no matter what presidents might be saying, what really mattered was what, I should say, mayors were saying, what governors of towns were saying. That's what really mattered. What local police departments were saying, that's what really mattered. And Daniel recognizes that principle. He picks, now he goes high first, but he goes down to the lowest level to negotiate.

[33 : 06] The same is true for us. There's times when we're going to need to take a stand. Sometimes wisdom means taking the stand at the lowest level possible with the lowest person possible. We don't always have to have a big public display of our stand.

Daniel makes that clear for us. And so we're wise. We're wise about understanding who has power, who has real authority in a practical situation. Daniel handles this with a steward.

No one else really knows about it. As far as we know, Daniel, the steward, and his friends know about it. No one else. It never reaches up the chain of command. Daniel handles it at a low level. And so that's just a wise principle for us to think about as we go into situations where we might be called to disobey the authorities above us. How can we be wise? How can we keep it small rather than making it big?

At one point, by the way, I'll mention, during COVID, when we had restrictions, there was one point when El Paso County actually gave preferential treatment to churches. Most places across the nation bundled churches with movie theaters and sporting events.

[34 : 11] They kind of consider them all in the same category. El Paso County actually considered churches to be in a separate county, in a separate category, and they gave us looser restrictions than some of those other venues.

You might ask the question, why? There's probably a variety of reasons. I can't 100% prove it, but I believe part of the reason churches got preferential treatment in El Paso County is because for years now, our local churches have been working to establish good relationships with our local government.

Don't take that for granted. That is a wise move. That's a Daniel-like move to have a strong relationship with the lesser magistrate. Low on the chain of command where the decisions are actually made.

Nebuchadnezzar's given his command that these people have the king's meat, the king's wine, but it's actually the steward who controls what happens on the ground.

Okay, so we keep that principle in mind when we think about civil disobedience. I also want to give you another principle, which is this. Negotiation is a legitimate technique. I reminded you before, Daniel has a wide repertoire that he uses when he approaches these situations.

[35 : 20] In fact, if you want to dig into this more, there's a wonderful book called Free to Believe, and I believe it's chapter 12. It gives a wonderful overview of all the different strategies God's people have used throughout the Bible when it comes to civil disobedience.

Negotiation is one of those strategies, and that's the label he gives to what Daniel does here in this passage. So you notice what Daniel doesn't do. He doesn't go to the eunuch and say, you know what?

I worship Yahweh, and God is not dead, so I want to let you know that I'm here to take a stand.

Daniel doesn't say anything like that. He just tells him, you know, well, he does say allow him not to defile himself, but he has some wisdom about it, right?

He's not making a big stink. He doesn't go to Nebuchadnezzar. He's not posting on social media about what it is that he's doing, letting everyone know where he stands. He's going one-on-one in a back room behind closed doors, and he's negotiating.

He does the same thing with the steward. Test your servant for 10 days, verse 12. And he actually appeals in some ways to this man's self-interest, right?

[36 : 28] Why is it that this man is so pleased? Well, it turns out that they look better than everyone else. So the steward actually ends up looking really good. Again, we have our principle of being wise as a serpent, innocent as a dove.

We need to think of having a variety of repertoire, a repertoire of a variety of approaches when we're pursuing civil disobedience. So someone who's innocent as a dove, they don't violate God's law.

Someone who's wise as a serpent, they figure out the right approach for the right situation. They have a variety of tools. Remember that old cliché, if all you have is a hammer, everything's a nail.

The wise person has more than just a hammer. They know how to navigate a variety of situations.

Okay? I had a mentor who told me one time, we pick our battles, we also pick our battlefields.

Daniel here, he's picked his battle and he chooses his battlefield. He decides his battlefield is going to be a backroom negotiation. So he makes sort of a backroom deal here.

[37 : 28] The same may be true for us, by the way. If we end up in a situation where there are things our government mandates that we cannot do without violating our conscience, maybe you're a doctor, right, and you're told you have to do certain things.

Well, maybe you're able to negotiate a backroom deal. Maybe you're able to figure out in your practice or your hospital, there's an understanding among everyone that you don't do certain things and no one forces the point because you're such a good doctor.

They don't want to lose you. Maybe you're in the military and there comes down a mandate that you need to do something that violates your conscience. Maybe you negotiate a deal with the next person up in the chain of command and maybe no one else knows about it.

Be like Daniel. Be wise in picking your battles and your battlefields. I'm going to give you one more application here in terms of tactics for being wise in our civil disobedience and it's this.

We see this principle in verse 9. Remember, God's giving certain things. He gives Daniel favor.

Now, I'm not going to go deep into this but there's various echoes in Daniel chapter 1 of the Joseph story from the end of the book of Genesis.

[38 : 34] Joseph is also given the same word favor by God which helps him in his situation. And so, part of the reason that Daniel's successful is that God supernaturally intervenes, works in the hearts of the secular pagan people around him that they view him in a good light.

Now, there's some ways that Daniel's done this just by his skill and his excellence. I'm going to suggest one thing for us is that we can also pray about this. It is good and right and legitimate to pray that God would give us favor in our workplaces.

And so, this is something that you can do as an individual. It's something you can do as a family. Maybe when you gather as a family and you pray at a meal, one of the things that you can pray is that God would give mom or dad favor at their job.

That God would give them favor in the eyes of their boss. God would give them favor in the eyes of the company they work for. God would give them favor in the eyes of the people who work for them. And when that time comes, when you have to say no, that favor will be what makes the difference. And so, we're people who understand not just that we are doing certain things but we're trusting and relying on God. One of the ways that we trust and rely on God as we'll see later in this book is in prayer.

[39 : 51] Daniel, we'll see, has a diligent prayer life. And one of the ways we can pray specifically is that as we walk in this world God would give us favor in the eyes of those around us.

Even those who disagree with our religious beliefs and commitments. Because as we see for Daniel that is actually what makes here the difference for him between life and death.

Finally, when we talk about the Acts 5 29 principle that we obey God rather than men we're reminded that we do it because of our trust in God. We obey God because we trust in God.

We see that dynamic in this passage. Daniel's learned about the God of Israel and Daniel exercises that knowledge and we see the God of Israel delivering. He shows up. He's the one giving favor. He's the one giving learning and skill. He's the one performing a miracle so that Daniel can get fat on vegetables. The same, brothers and sisters, is true for us and even more.

[40 : 51] We also see God's provision and his intervention in our lives. We see it even more in Jesus. We are told in the New Testament that it's not just that God rules and reigns over the nations but Jesus, because of his victory by his resurrection, also rules and reigns over the nations.

We're told this in Ephesians chapter 1 that God, by the working of his great might, this is Ephesians 1 19, that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come, and he put all things under his feet.

In other words, Jesus has all authority and control in heaven and on earth. He sits over the nations just like we see God, even as he hands his people into exile, having all authority and control over the nations.

We're also told in Colossians chapter 2, God, Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. That's God then disarming the rulers and authorities.

And then Jesus also shows us God's presence and his care. John chapter 16, I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace, in the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

[42 : 19] If you've been with us some time, you know that I emphasize bookends and we have bookends in this passage. We're told a date on the first verse and a date in the last verse. In the first verse, we see this is the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim.

And we see in the last verse, Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. That is, he was all the way there until 539. In other words, God preserves Daniel from beginning to end.

He sees him all the way through. He outlasts Nebuchadnezzar. He is able to make it all the way.

Daniel serves God faithfully. God protects and preserves Daniel. So it is for us. We serve God faithfully. God preserves and protects us no matter the culture that we find ourselves in, no matter the challenges that present themselves.

in the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' last words, the last words of the last verse of the last chapter, he says this, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

[43 : 28] Brothers and sisters, because God is with us, because he controls everything, we can serve and follow him faithfully no matter the circumstances.

because he tells us, behold, I am with you even to the end of the age. I invite you to pray with me. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for this encouragement from your word.

We ask that you would give us both the strength to stand strong and be faithful no matter the circumstances that face us, and you'd also give us this trust and confidence in you. You'd remind us that you're at work and you are the one who reigns and rules over the nations.

