

See the Vision

June 28, 2020

Daniel 5:13-16

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king said to Daniel, "So you are Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that enlightenment, understanding, and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and tell me its interpretation, but they were not able to give the interpretation of the matter. 16 But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you are able to read the writing and tell me its interpretation, you shall be clothed in purple, have a chain of gold around your neck, and rank third in the kingdom."

One problem with contemporary Christians when it comes to understanding the book of Daniel is that we know the famous stories, but we don't easily remember the setting. The stories are exciting, climatic, and full of drama: the lions' den, the fiery furnace, the writing on the wall. In vacation Bible school and Sunday school we learn the exciting lessons and remember them. But we don't know that much about the Exile. The Scripture takes place during the Exile, in Babylon, some 540 miles away from Jerusalem. When asked "Where is Babylon?" Many of us don't know and we don't know the role Babylon played in Israel's historic and biblical setting. So, we grow up knowing the Bible stories but not knowing the background and understanding how and why these stories take place. It is very important to know about the Exile because it is the greatest crisis in Israel's history. According to the Bible, the Exile happened due to a failure of the people to keep covenant with God.

When I was doing some research in preparation for this sermon, I read something that I preach and teach many times. I like the way the author phrased these words "I have found over time that culture has a way of creeping into our faith slowly and undetected. As a result, we often don't question it because we're not even aware that such a blending is taking place. Given enough time unnoticed, such practices become firm traditions where questioning such traditions is no longer permitted without being ostracized by the group at large." Those words portray problems that exist in the realm of modern society, the history of Christian church, the period of the New Testament Bible, and the times of the Old Testament Bible. The Exile is a result of the people of God that allowed culture and human preferences to become a wedge that separated them from God to the point where God used force to get them back into relationship. The catalyst of the Exile is people that refused to listen to the prophets and refuse to obey, repent, and change. The problems became ingrained, deep rooted, and so complex that secular traditions were not only permitted but expected and defended. I see in churches today where people want God to support their way of doing things instead of being the people that God calls them to be. They prefer to worship in a manner that is pleasing to them - their way instead of Yahweh. The right relationship with God is a relationship of the covenant and that covenant has minimum requirements which are based on a foundation of God being first.

In order to understand what is really going on in the Scripture we have to go back to the beginning of the covenant. Every culture known - every society that is known in the world - has some form of religion, some form of a god, or gods. The God of Abraham is different from all of the other world religions. Or God, the one true God, reaches through the cosmos to humanity and engages in a covenant, a reciprocal relationship with

Abraham and his descendants. Both parties have committed to each other in this covenant. The people have a responsibility to be obedient and remain loyal and devoted. God's people failed to keep their promise because cultural preferences diluted and misguided their faith. God tells the people through the prophets to come back. The people don't obey the prophets because they don't recognize the problem. The result is the Exile; it is a consequence of their action and inaction. The kingdom divides, Israel in the north is slaughtered by Assyria. Over the next century the Assyrian empire falls to Babylon and then the southern kingdom Judea is conquered by Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar takes all of the vessels out of the temple and captures most of the people and takes them in captivity to Babylon. Daniel is captured and serves the king. Daniel has a special gift, like Joseph, he has great wisdom and the ability interpret dreams. Years later Belshazzar is the acting king and he has a big feast for his supporters. During this feast he decided to bring in the vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem so that the people participating in the party can drink from them. When they drank from them they praised false gods. Then fingers of a human hand began writing on the wall. This obviously terrified Belshazzar. So, he called in all of the wise men but they cannot interpret the writing. The queen tells him that she remembers that there is one that has the gift of interpretation.

This brings us to today's Scripture. Daniel is brought in before the king and asked to interpret the writing on the wall. The main point of the interpretation is that God has brought your kingdom to an end. The lesson is that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the one true God. As other world religions worship false gods, the one true God reaches through the cosmos and intervenes on special occasions such as when the sacred vessels are violated.

See the vision. You are to be the kind of person that God wants you to be. Christians today live as both baptized people of God and citizens of a nation. Living as both has its challenges as both influence your life. See the vision. We are to be the church that God wants us to be. It's Yahweh not your way. This means that we live in a secular society but we worship in spirit and in truth. It means that we are conscientious Christians that guard faith from secular influences and stay true to the word of God. We are the New Testament church that Jesus built as best as we can be within a secular society.