Daniel's Message of Hope in Exile (Old Testament Figures)

The main character is not who you think

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 29, 2022
PASSAGES	Daniel 7:9-27; Daniel 3:15-28; Daniel 6:19-27; Daniel 2:27-47; Daniel 1:3-20; Daniel 9:17-19; 2 Kings 24:12-14
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:41 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The stories of Daniel are not lessons in how to be excellent, eat right or survive lions. In every one, God himself is making a name for himself – before Nebuchadnezzar, before Darius – through a few exiles who had lost everything. He never needed Judah's temple, armies or good circumstances. Our concern is to stay loyal and to pray, "for your own sake, O Lord."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Daniel speaks to people who feel exiled, not at home. It is a profound encouragement, and it is not mainly about decoding beasts and timelines.
- God is not a deity who feeds on his people's success. He was glorious before the temple and the monarchy, and remained so after both were gone.
- The vegetables, the furnace and the lions are not formulas or reciprocity – "if you scratch God's back he'll scratch yours." Each time, God makes a name for himself from the lips of a pagan king.
- "But if not": Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were loyal whether or not God delivered them.
- The son of man receives the dominion that the golden statue demanded from "all peoples, nations and languages" – and his saints share his kingdom.

- Daniel prays not because of Israel's righteousness but for God's great mercy and his own name's sake.
- If we believe in a living God, our concern is loyalty, not impressing people or playing the numbers game. He won; he will win.

▶ 1:10:41

It was the Sunday after the Uvalde school shooting, and the worship had been given over to fixing our eyes on Jesus and praying over the families. Matt thanked John Patrick Cogdell for leading harp-and-bowl worship – a reminder that the whole congregation can offer prayer – and bragged on Lisette and the women's ministry: a Catholic neighbour Mandy invited to the women's Bible study took the model back to her own parish, where the women experienced what they called a revival.

A people in exile

▶ 1:13:35

The series has moved from Adam through a united monarchy that was "a blip on the radar," the split under Rehoboam, Hosea warning the north and Isaiah and Jeremiah warning Judah. Now the story is in exile, not going in and out of the temple – and that matters to us, because Daniel speaks to people who are not in their true home. The book gets attention for its beasts and its "time, times and half a time," but its encouragement is deeper, and "the main character may not be who you think it is."

▶ 1:15:21

> "And Jehoiachin the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon… and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made… None remained, except the poorest people of the land."
>
> 2 KINGS 24:12–14 ↗

▶ 1:16:29

That deserves a moment. It was devastating and embarrassing on the world stage: God's own things carried out of his own house by pagans after Judah's king surrendered without a chance. What about God's fame now? But before there was a temple, was God not glorious? Before there was a monarchy, did he need help? "God is not an odd, leech, vampiric deity in the shadows that sucks the life energy

out of his own people's success." He is and always has been the source of their strength and "the brains behind the whole operation."

1. Ten times better – because of God

▶ 1:17:48

Nebuchadnezzar orders the best of Judah's young nobility trained for three years in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, fed from the king's table. Among them are Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, renamed Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1:3–7). Daniel did not choose any of it. What he does choose is to show his loyalty to God by not defiling himself with the king's food. After a ten-day test on vegetables, they look healthier.

▶ 1:20:40

"Is this an ancient blog on foodie diet stuff?" No – you can look sickly on a kosher diet or fit on a non-kosher one. Nor is it "if you scratch God's back, he'll scratch yours." Look at what follows:

▶ 1:21:10

> "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… 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."
>
> DANIEL 1:17–20 ↗

Who gave them that? "This isn't a story about if you just are excellent, excellent things will happen to you." It is God using exiled, disempowered men to make a name for himself in a court of great power.

2. "But if not"

▶ 1:22:47

Nebuchadnezzar has a golden image made – a subtheme of human hubris against God's glory – and the herald commands "peoples, nations and languages" to fall down at the sound of the music or be thrown into a burning fiery furnace (Daniel 3:4–6). Hold onto that phrase, Matt said. The three refuse. The furious king repeats the threat, and asks the question the story is about: "Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15).

▶ 1:25:43

> "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
>
> DANIEL 3:16–18 ↗

"Either God delivers us and we don't worship it, or he doesn't deliver us and we don't worship it. In other words, it's not happening." The king, his pride wounded in front of his court, has the furnace heated so hot it kills the men who throw them in – and then sees four men walking unbound in the fire, the fourth "like a son of the gods" (Daniel 3:24–25).

▶ 1:27:29

Again, not a promise that faithful people never burn, nor a law of reciprocity. God is answering the king's question. "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him" (Daniel 3:28) – "from the lips of the very man" who thought no god could take them from him. "Scary kinds of evangelism is happening."

3. The lions

▶ 1:29:18

Under Darius, advisers who "hate his guts" trap Daniel with a thirty-day law against praying to anyone but the king. Daniel prays anyway, facing what looks like certain death, with no more guarantee than his friends had. Darius, who likes him, fasts and lies awake all night, and at dawn cries out in anguish at the den: "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God… been able to deliver you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:19–22). "I wonder if Daniel just paused to mess with him." My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths.

▶ 1:31:56

Not the mechanics of surviving a lions' den, nor a promise you will always be saved from lions – "a kind of weird thing to say to Polycarp." God is making a name for himself:

> "I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth."
>
> DANIEL 6:26–27 ↗

▶ 1:33:17

Judah had failed to be a light to the nations; visitors saw Solomon's gold and Baal's idols side by side. "That's really confusing." Now God shows he can be light to the world "all by his lonesome," from the lips of a foreign ruler.

4. A stone and a kingdom

▶ 1:33:46

Nebuchadnezzar demands that his wise men tell him his dream without being told it, on pain of death. They are right that it is impossible, and Daniel agrees: no wise man can show this, "but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Daniel 2:27–28). The dream: a statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay, struck by "a stone cut out by no human hand" that shatters it into chaff and becomes a mountain filling the whole earth (Daniel 2:31–35).

▶ 1:36:48

Not a lesson in interpreting dreams – Daniel just said you can't. God is making a name for himself about who truly sits on the throne: "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries" (Daniel 2:47). "In all of these stories the main character and the main mover and shaker is God himself. That would be quite a comfort to people in exile who feel disempowered."

5. One like a son of man

▶ 1:37:20

Then Daniel's own dream: terrible beasts rising from a churning sea to make war on God's people, and then thrones set in place, the Ancient of Days with clothing white as snow and a throne of fiery flame, the court seated and the books opened (Daniel 7:9–10). The terrible beast is destroyed and the others lose their dominion.

▶ 1:38:36

> "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."
>
> DANIEL 7:13–14 ↗

▶ 1:39:16

"All peoples, nations and languages" – the very crowd once ordered to bow to the golden statue. There is a competition for their devotion, and it belongs not to Nebuchadnezzar or Darius but to this son of man. And let "shall not pass away" echo against the fresh pain of Judah's kingdom actually passing away. Compare Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and the Persians – terrifying in their cruelty – with the kingdom of heaven, and they do not compare. "Because the strength of God's people failed has no indication of whether God's strength has failed."

▶ 1:41:42

The beasts are four kings, "but the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever" (Daniel 7:17–18). The judgment goes in favour of the son of man, which means his people rule with him: the greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven "shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High" (Daniel 7:27). Chapters 4 and 5, where Nebuchadnezzar is driven mad and Belshazzar falls, show what becomes of royal arrogance.

"For your own sake, O Lord"

▶ 1:42:45

Matt closed with Daniel's prayer. Reading Jeremiah's scroll, Daniel realises the exile should be ending, and knows his people have always been at God's mercy, golden shields or not. So he appeals not to Egypt or Babylon or generals, but to the Lord of heaven:

▶ 1:43:58

> "Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate... For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."
>
> DANIEL 9:17–19 ↗

▶ 1:45:42

Why the name? How will the nations love a God they only know as the patron of a people who worship every other god too? He wants an unambiguous, city-on-a-hill message, and Israel could not give it – "as you probably feel like we are as well unable to do that." Matt said again what he says often: survey the power of the church in the USA and you find it wanting. We are tempted to devise schemes and social-media campaigns. Instead we appeal to God for his own name's sake, because he never needed a

kingdom or armies; when Israel were powerless slaves, he made a name for himself all around the world. Like the exiles, we need a new exodus and a leader like Moses – the son of David, the servant, the branch from Jesse's stump.

▶ 1:48:59

This world is not our true home, and we do not control our circumstances. "We get really bent out of shape about circumstances, but God never needed circumstances." Daniel and his friends were not concerned with impressing anyone or manipulating circumstances in God's favour; they simply would not be defiled, even if it looked crazy, even to death – and God did the evangelism.

▶ 1:50:42

Matt confessed he has drunk from the opposite cup: an obsession with numbers, influence and prestige that tempts us to compromise to impress. At its core, he suspects, it is a belief issue. If this is just our tribe, a movement or a vibe that needs us to keep it going, of course we will wheel and deal. But if we truly believe in a living God who can lead people out of exile "all day if he wants to," our only concern is loyalty.

▶ 1:53:28

> *"If your greatest concern is winning – he won. He already won. He will win."*

Our concern, then, is to remain steadfastly loyal to him and to love him, "which is what he wanted to begin with." He prayed that God would fill the frame of our vision, so that we long for him, his presence and the fulfilment of his kingdom.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 2 Kings 24:12–14
- Daniel 1:3–7
- Daniel 1:17–20
- Daniel 3:4–6
- Daniel 3:15
- Daniel 3:16–18
- Daniel 3:24–25
- Daniel 3:28
- Daniel 6:19–22
- Daniel 6:26–27
- Daniel 2:27–28
- Daniel 2:31–35
- Daniel 2:47
- Daniel 7:9–10
- Daniel 7:13–14
- Daniel 7:17–18
- Daniel 7:27
- Daniel 9:17–19

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where in your life do you feel “in exile” – not at home – and how does Daniel speak to that?
2. Matt kept saying these stories are not formulas or reciprocity. Why is it tempting to read them that way, and what do we miss when we do?
3. “But if not.” What would it look like for you to be loyal to God whether or not he delivers you from a particular fire?
4. How does the son of man receiving dominion over “all peoples, nations and languages” change the way you look at the powers of our own day?
5. What would it mean this week to pray “for your own sake, O Lord” instead of trying to impress or manage outcomes?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXNro0l6w2o&t=4241s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.