

TALKING ABOUT JESUS PT 4.

If you had to choose one word to describe mainstream NZ culture, what word would you use?

Complicated
Accelerated everything is fast and changing rapidly
Complex
Pleasure seeking and self-serving.
Spiritual but godless
Powerful but immoral
Confused about right and wrong

The world we live in seems to be getting more and more complex, and this is especially so for those who are Christians. As we turn to the Bible to find images to help us, some have suggested the imagery of living in exile, living in Babylon.

Babylon was the empire that overwhelmed other cultures through commercial power and military power. They were the world super power of the day. They actively to seek to obliterate other cultures.

The way they did this was to take key people from the places they captured and send them to the empires capital, Babylon, for indoctrination. This was human trafficking and enforced political and social indoctrination. They used brainwashing to remove all traces of the culture, and make them conform to the values of Babylon. The city of Babylon was this melting pot of people, ripped out of their own cultures, where they had lived for centuries. All that was familiar that they held dear had been brutally removed leaving people traumatized.

Daniel and these friends would have felt outnumbered, dislocated, and culturally out of step. That is how many Christians are feeling today. Christianity has gone from an accepted part of society to being irrelevant and extreme.

This imagery might seem quite depressing. However, as leaders it is important that we define the reality that we are living in. We need to understand the times that we find ourselves in. The good news of the Old Testament is that God uses exile to purify his people and teach them to trust in God.

We have been exploring this idea of good faith. Good faith is when we loves others, belief the Bible, and live differently. The danger we find ourselves in as we are surrounded by a hostile culture is that we begin to compromise what we believe in, in order to fit in. Therefore, we begin to water down what God says it is critical to good faith that we hang on to our core beliefs.

God is sovereign creator and working out his plans
The only way to come into relationship with God is through Jesus Christ, death on the cross
True fulfilment and life is found in following Jesus in obedience
God is going to return and bring about his kingdom.

Daniel is the most famous exile. This is what he says to King Nebuchadnezzar. "The **highest rules over the kingdoms often world. He gives them to anyone he chooses.**" That is a statement of faith for someone in exile. It says "I still believe God is in control God knows the world we live in He is still working out his purposes. He knows where it is all going to end.

Learn lessons from Daniel

Respectfully modelled an alternative lifestyle

Ch. 1. When Daniel and his friends were selected for special training by the king, they were bought into the palace and given the food of the king. This food did not meet the Jewish regulations. Therefore, they asked for a trial of a vegetarian diet. They didn't demand that everyone follow their diet - Just that they could do so. Therefore, while all the other interns were feasting on roast pork, and lobster, they were eating potato and spinach. I am sure they were ridiculed for it.

We read in Chapter 6 that when Daniel's enemies were out to get him they could find no fault. But they knew that he prayed 3 times a day. IT says that that this what he had always done. Therefore, they used that against him to try to get him killed by being thrown into the lion's den. The point is that he had modelled an alternative lifestyle consistently.

Respectfully spoke truth to power

In the 2nd chapter of Daniel we read that king Nebuchadnezzar had a nightmare. He asked all the wise men to tell him what the dream was, and what it meant, or he would kill them. They said, "well tell us the dream." He said, "Tell me what I dreamt." They said that is impossible. I suspect he said this because he knew they would not tell him the truth. Therefore, king goes to kill them all. When they get to Daniel and his three friends. Daniel handled the situation it says with wisdom and discretion. He went to the king and asked for an extension of time. Then he and his three friends went home to pray. God revealed the dream and its amazing meaning. Therefore, Daniel goes and tells the king that his kingdom will fail. That is a Risky strategy but he speaks with utter respect. He is not afraid to speak truth to power.

Respectfully stood up to power.

Ch. 3 Nebuchadnezzar issues this decree that every subject was to worship this huge idol of himself. If they did not they would be thrown in to the fiery furnace. Shadrach Meshach and Abednego again respectfully said they would not do this. They said the famous lines. The God whom we serve will save us. However, even if he does not we will



not worship this idol. In addition, God honoured their faithfulness by supernaturally intervening.

Served the greater good.

In Ch. 9, we read that Daniel had been studying the book of Jeremiah. I am sure he would have read the remarkable words of the prophet. In exile, you are to bless the place where I have put you. You are to build community. You are to work for the prosperity of Babylon. You are to pray for it. These four men learnt their profession well, and ended up key political leaders to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel served three kings as secretary of state in one of the most hostile pagan kingdoms ever. How did he manage that? By serving faithfully for the betterment of Babylon.

They lived counter cultural lives. They loved well, stuck to their beliefs, and they lived differently. This is the formula for good faith. All three need to line up and be consistent. How we live in exile? We can love well, and believe but unless our lives are different in some way, there is no consistency. Actions speak louder than words. How should our lives look different to others?

Five ways our lives should be different.

1. Seeking God's will first, as we submit to the Bible and the Spirit. This is what marks us as children of God. We are seeking God's will instead of our personal fulfilment and happiness. This is a marked contrast to our culture.
2. We have a commitment to our family and church family. We build faithful marriages; strong family has and build strong church communities of faith. The reality is that there will be divorce and broken marriages because we are sinful and broken people. However, as Christians we need to put a high priority on building our marriages and families. We should be known as people who are faithful and committed to great marriages. And equally we should be known as people who take priority in building great church communities.
3. We have different rhythms. When we take a day of rest, when we make a day different from other days, we are showing that our value is not based on what we do. We are slowing our pace of life in a world that is full of noise and busyness. We are declaring God's sovereignty - that he is in control of our lives, and not our efforts.
4. We love others well by
 - # being the best at turning our phones off and being present when we meet people.
 - # being respectful of different views and lifestyles. We are known to be judgemental and preachy.
 - # Building relationships with no agenda other than to love well. There will be seasons when we can

share.. Often they come in times of death, trauma, when a person has moved, or any significant life event.

proclaiming good wherever we see it
seeing people as loved by God and made in his image and no other filter of race, sexuality etc.
modelling racial reconciliation by deliberately calling out racism, building cross-cultural relationships.
Practising hospitality be welcoming the stranger, the visitor, the neighbour, the disabled, the poor. In our busyness, we have lost the art of hospitality
Speaking positively; not complaining, gossiping, seeing the worst in people, or using foul language, crude humour

5. Our resources; money, talents, time ability, our work are used as gifts from God to serve others. That is our budgets should look different, our attitude to work should look different, how we use our abilities should look different because we primarily see them as gifts from God to be stewarded for his purposes.

If our lives don't look different then no amount of talking about Jesus is going to make any difference. People will see there is a gap between what we say we believe and what we do. We are living in a foreign land. A Babylon. Paul says We are to be in the world and yet not of the world Peter says. WE are strangers in this world Heb. Bless those who curse you. Work at living a holy life. As exiles we are not called to worry about the outcome. We might be labelled extreme at times or irrelevant. Christians throughout the centuries have lived with this. The Christian community has repeatedly faced pressure even persecution and it has survived. In addition, even flourished.

We are to lead with love; we are to hang on faithfully to the word of God. We are live counter cultural lives for the good of the world around us. We don't worry about the outcome. God has that under control. Our calling is to be faithful and live a good faith. And God will build his kingdom.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Discuss the four ways we can relate to the culture around us? Which is most prevalent in the NZ church? Can you think of examples of each?
- Why do we find it easier to see what is wrong in our society than call out what is good? What is our fear if we call out good that is not "Christian"?
- Why is freedom of religion and belief a key Christian value?
- Discuss the new version of tolerance that is such a high value today. How do we model true tolerance? Why do we find this really difficult?
- How can we learn to truly see people, beyond the superficial?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS

- The Good Samaritan story was presented in a different way to try to get to its original shock value. What was your reaction?
- Why is our posture towards people and culture just as important as the words we say?



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