

How to Live Successfully in Babylon

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Strangers in a Strange Land

Daniel 1

Today I'm going to begin a series from the book of Daniel. Daniel is the story of four friends who were born in the little country of Judah in the Middle East over 2,600 years ago. It appears that as teenagers they were taken captive by the King Nebuchadnezzar and were transported to his capital city of Babylon along with many other Jews who lived in Judah and in its capital, Jerusalem.

Teenage Daniel and his three friends, along with thousands of other Jews, found themselves suddenly in exile in Babylon. They were strangers in a strange land. Babylon was a land filled with idolatry. Babylon was a land filled with violence and sexual practices that were abhorrent to Jews. The morals of the Babylonians were totally opposed to the morals of the Jews. But most importantly, the Babylonians did not worship the Lord God who was the center of Jewish life. Daniel and his friends must have felt very uncomfortable living in Babylon.

Christians always ought to feel uncomfortable in whatever culture they're living in, whether it's first century Rome or 12th century France or 20th century China or 21st century America, because we are citizens, not merely of our country, but we are citizens of another Kingdom as the Apostle Paul says. Followers of Christ always ought to feel uncomfortable with their surrounding environment – in their workplace, in politics, in school, at university. But there are times where the difference between the way that citizens of God's Kingdom approach life and the way citizens of this world approach life seem to be totally opposed.

To cite just one example, Nicholas Kristof wrote a column a few weeks ago in which he offered

“A confession of Liberal Intolerance”

He criticized his fellow progressives for promoting all kinds of diversity on university campuses – except ideological diversity. Kristof argued that universities risked becoming liberal echo-chambers and hostile environments for conservatives and especially for Evangelical Christians. He quoted George Yancey, for example, who is a brilliant Christian sociologist at the University of North Texas.

Yancey said,

“I have experienced way more bigotry for being a Christian at my university than I ever have being African American.”

Studies have indicated that university professors report that they would be way less likely to offer a tenure track position to someone who is an Evangelical Christian than to someone who had identical credentials, but was an atheist.

I have been told that despite the fact that 30% of all Americans have Evangelical beliefs. That includes 29% of whites, 44% of African Americans and 30% of Hispanics. Let me say that again. 30% of Americans subscribe to Evangelical Christian beliefs. There are only three professors of Anthropology who have Evangelical beliefs at research universities in the United States. Statistics in English Departments and Social Science Departments are similarly dismal. If you are a serious Christian, you are going to be related to as a complete oddity in many university classrooms and certainly on elite university faculties.

Now, what makes the story of Daniel so remarkable is that Daniel and his three friends did not simply maintain a private devotional life to God in which they were privately faithful to God in their own bedrooms or in their particular worship services. Instead, they had high profile positions and maintained a public witness in the marketplace in a society that was often highly antagonistic to people of faith. The extraordinary thing about the book of Daniel is that we find four people who actually succeeded in an antagonistic culture while they remained faithful both privately and publicly in their witness to God. How did they do that? How can you be both faithful and prosper in an antagonistic environment? That’s what the book of Daniel is about. That’s what we’re going to be exploring over the next couple of months.

I’ve called today’s message “How to Live Successfully in Babylon”. Let’s Pray.

Let me read to you from Daniel 1, verses 1 and 2.

Daniel 1:1-2

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

What we are taught by these verses is that People who live successfully in Babylon understand the hidden meaning of life

Verses 1-2 give us two views of history. The one view, in verse 1, we might call secular history. That is history without any reference to God. Here’s what it says,

Daniel 1:1

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Secular history. Here's what happened in 605 BC, the Babylonians in three successive invasions over the next 20 years progressively captured Judah and all of Jerusalem. They invaded the city of Jerusalem and knocked down the city walls. Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple. They carried off all the sacred items that were associated with the temple. This is going to prove to be very significant later – we're going to see this in Daniel 5. But to raid a temple of a god indicated in the ancient world superiority over that god. The Babylonians were saying, "Our god is stronger than the Lord God. We raided your temple. We took the sacred objects. Your god couldn't protect his own stuff." Secular history, here's what happened. Here's when it happened. Here's where it happened. There's no reference to God.

But verse 2 gives us a different view of history and a different view of life.

Daniel 1:2

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

A secular view of life is all about viewing life through the lens of economics or psychology or sociology, military power, philosophical movements. They view all of life horizontally. That's the view of life that we read in the newspaper. That's the view of life that we see constantly on TV. That's the view of life that all the experts hold. Life without reference to God.

But verse 2 brings us behind the scene and tells us the hidden meaning of life. Behind all of these things is God. The Lord delivered Jehoiakim into the hands of the Babylonians. As we move forward in the 21st century, you can insist on looking at life from an entirely secular perspective (verse 1) or you can choose to look at life from a sacred perspective (verse 2). From a secular perspective we can look at what's happening in the election. By the way, if you didn't know it, we're going to be electing a new president in November. I know there's not been a lot of coverage of that, but, trust me, it's just getting started.

You can view what's happening simply as a political battle. A battle between Republicans and Democrats. You can view the divide in America as that between cultural conservatives and cultural progressives. You can view it as culture wars with these little flare ups every once in a while around who gets to use what bathroom or whether a baker must bake a cake for a gay couple. We can look at life totally through

the lens of psychology or sociology or philosophy or you can look at life through Daniel 1:2.

God is involved in all of life. The book of Daniel is a prophetic book in which the prophet Daniel pulls back the curtain and shows us the hidden meaning behind world events. He says that what's constantly going on is a cosmic battle between Babylon and Jerusalem. The Babylonians understood this – they understood the spiritual battle that was at war. The great Saint Augustine, back in the 5th century, wrote what he called an interpretation of history in a book that he titled, *The City of God*. Augustine lived at a time when the city of Rome fell. It was attacked by Barbarian invaders. Many people believed that with the fall of Rome they would see the fall of Christianity. Christianity was so linked up with the success of Rome that many folks felt that the fall of the one would lead to the fall of the other. But Augustine in his *City of God* said: no, no, no! What is falling when we see the fall of Rome is simply the fall of the city of man but what is rising in its place, is the city of God. Augustine said that these two things are always in conflict: the city of man and the city of God.

And we might say parenthetically that many Christians in the United States are falling into the same trap that Christians in Augustine's day fell into. Many Christians today in the United States confuse the success of America with the success of Christianity and the decline of America with the decline of Christianity.

America is not a Christian nation. It never has been a Christian nation. America is in Augustine's words, "the city of man." It's not the city of God any more than England was in the 19th century or Spain was in the 16th century or Rome was in the 5th century.

You see this eternal conflict – Babylon and Jerusalem – the city of God and the city of man. What John Bunyan wrote about back in the 17th century in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, "Vanity Fair against the Heavenly City". Jesus constantly forces people to discern where our fundamental loyalty really is – is it with the city of God or with the city of man? Is it with the church or with the world?

Jesus talked about two gates. A gate that is wide that leads to destruction. And a gate that is narrow that leads to eternal life. He said that there are two ways, two roads. A road that is broad and easy that the mass of people are walking on that is headed for hell. And a hard way, a difficult way, that leads to eternal life. Jesus said that there are two Masters – money and God, and you can't love both. So what is it that you love?

Let me pause here and ask you a couple of questions. Are you aware of this conflict between the city of God and the city of man? Between Babylon and Jerusalem? Between the culture in America and the culture of the Kingdom of God? Do you see that there's a conflict? Are you aware of the conflict? And, friend, are you aware that your loyalty is constantly being competed over? Where is your loyalty? Where are you

giving your heart – the city of man or the city of God? To put it even more plainly, to drop this down a little bit. Friend, what road are you on? How are you doing life? Are you on a road that's leading to destruction? Just going along with the crowd. Just swimming with the current? Are you on a hard road or a more difficult road that leads to eternal life?

As the 21st century progresses, we're seeing in sharper relief, in a clearer way, what the Bible has said is the meaning of life. This ongoing conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem, between the church and the world. Folks are forced to choose sides. What will ultimately rule my life? Or who will ultimately rule my life? What standards do I want to live by? Who do I want to control my thinking? How I do marriage. How I live in my family. How I date. What I do. Personal decisions about sexuality, about how I spend my money.

And I want you to understand, friend, that God is not on the sideline in this battle. It says in verse 2,

Daniel 1:2

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

There's an ongoing conflict between the city of man and the city of God. Overruling all of it is the Lord. Any temporary defeats for the church, any setbacks, any ground that seems to be lost is a result of the sovereignty of God. God did not wind up the universe and let it go and say: I'm going to watch the battle that's going on in your life for your loyalty. The battle that's happening in your family. The battle that's happening in your workplace, in your school, in this city, in this country. The battle that's happening in this city, in this country – the battle that's happening in this world. God did not say that he was going to sit back and watch the battle from the stands.

Our God is involved. Our God is engaged. Our God answers prayers. Our God intervenes. Our God overrules. A tagline for the whole book of Daniel and the meaning of life is simply this: The Lord Reigns, let the earth rejoice.

In this next section of Daniel 1, we discover this principle of successful living in Babylon.

People who live successfully in Babylon understand the means of domination by Babylon

Here's what we read,

Daniel 1:3-4

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

The first means of cultural domination by Babylon is

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Identify

Identify the best and the brightest. That's what Nebuchadnezzar does. He identifies the cream of the crop. Young men without any physical defect, handsome, brilliant. The young people with the greatest potential for future leadership. Identify the best and the brightest. Select out those who have the highest ACT scores. Identify them by their SAT scores or their GRE scores or some test. Identify the most talented athletes and rate them as five star recruits or McDonald's All-Americans. Have the most artistic compete for a few open spots via their portfolios or their recitals. If you want to dominate a culture, first identify the future influencers, the best athletes, the brightest young minds, the future artists, the talented tenth.

And, second, isolate them

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Isolate

Isolate them from their families. Isolate them from their backgrounds, from their traditions. Cut them off from their roots. That's what Nebuchadnezzar did in verse 3.

Slide Daniel 1:3

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility

He cut off Daniel and his three friends from their culture. He separated them from their tradition and he transplanted them in the King's palace.

Let me bring this down to earth because I think there is an almost exact parallel between what is going on here in Daniel 1 and what happens when a young man or woman leaves home and their church and friends and traditions and the perspectives of their parents and heads off for college. They leave their Christian youth groups and they go to another city where they go to live in a dormitory of a secular university with a roommate whose values may be completely antagonistic to a Christian way of life. I think what is going on in terms of this isolation is precisely what happens when a young man or woman who is raised in the church joins a fraternity or sorority that has values

that are absolutely opposite to the values that young man or woman was raised with. Everyone in the frat or the sorority or the dormitory is getting high. Everyone is partying and having casual sex. And here is this young person, isolated away from the encouragement of their parents, isolated away from their church, their background and traditions. They are out in the spiritual desert.

I see parents ship their children off to universities, isolating them away, and I think to myself, “How many of you parents could survive that kind of isolation without being utterly taken over by Babylon?” Some of you parents have been Christians for decades, but I will bet you that if we isolated you for three months away from solid teaching and fellowship and your routines and your Christian connections, you would dry up and blow away in three months. And here we take our 18 or 19 or 20-year olds with all of the needs and all the identity issues and all of the insecurities and all of the growth pains of being an 18, 19 or 20-year old and we ship them off for four years. How is that we parents convince ourselves that our children will be alright in a place of great isolation? Without a huge strategy for spiritual protection?

And, third in this plan of cultural domination, Nebuchadnezzar not only identifies and isolates the best and the brightest, but he

Indoctrinates

Daniel 1:4

Select young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

What is going on in the lives of young adults in colleges? Day after day they are learning the language and literature of the Babylonians. On day one of the orientation process for my son at one of our best state universities here in Ohio, day one of orientation, a representative of the university stood up in front of the parents and said that she was so excited about having all of these new young students come to this particular state university because the purpose of college, in her opinion, was to challenge all of the student’s formerly held opinions and beliefs and to open their minds to a totally new way of thinking. How arrogant! How incredible!

Talk about Nebuchadnezzar’s battle plan. We are here to change every one of your opinions and beliefs, everything that you learned from your parents and church, to get you to think in a totally different way. Day one of orientation, the very first thing that they had the students do before classes even began, the first thing – what would you want to introduce to young adults on day one of orientation at a university. What would you say? We want this to enter your minds. Hold onto this because it will carry you through in the next four years. Might it be a talk on the pursuit of excellence? Perhaps

a talk on the pursuit of truth? Maybe a talk on hard work and study habits? The reason for universities? The history and tradition of the university? What would you talk about in your opening talk to students?

Do you know what the state university chose to do with my son? This was 15 years ago. They skits and role playing regarding sex and how young adults should relate sexually. Of course, there was no assumption that a young adult might abstain. There was no judgment or perspective that a young adult might want to wait to have sex. The first thing – indoctrinate. That, of course, is happening day after day. Our media-saturated, image-soaked culture – people are indoctrinated. Indoctrinated with the perspectives of Babylon. Indoctrinated with the view points of the city of man. The indoctrination is so total, so complete that it makes followers of a different kingdom, the Kingdom of God, feel like kingdom perspectives are irrelevant, on the margins, they're only for people who are really odd and don't want to succeed in this world.

Identify, Isolate, Indoctrinate and, fourth,

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Indulge

Daniel 1:5

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

Indulge them. Give people a taste of the good life. Help them to experience a taste of prosperity. Dangle prosperity and comfort in front of them. Let them sit in a leather chair and feel the difference between a buttery kind of leather than envelopes them and plastic or vinyl. Have them eat in the city's nicest restaurants. Wait on them hand and foot. You want to hollow out the people of God? Just put some serious dollar signs in front of their faces and wave it around for a while.

Then say to the person after they have tasted some comfort and have enjoyed a little bit of the good life or a lot of the good life, "Now, what do you want? Do you want to live in whole-hearted commitment to the standard of the city of God and eat at crummy restaurants and play on public golf courses and go on cheap vacations and sit on vinyl chairs or do you want to enjoy the good life—first rate hotel service, company cars, and buttery leather seating in your car? All it is going to take is just a little compromise, a little bowing of the knee, more half-heartedness. Make sure you're not too public about your Christianity! Just keep your head down and play the game!

And finally, we see

Identity confusion

Daniel 1:6-7

Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

You say, “Well, what is the big deal about the name change?”

Well, Jews at the time named their children names that incorporated a shortened form of the Hebrew word for God which was El or a shortened form of the Hebrew word for the Lord which was *iah or jah*. So we see

DaniEL

HananIAH

MishaEL

AzarIAH

The names contained in the ending of their names the Hebrew word for God or the Lord. Their parents named them so that they would be identified with the Lord God. But Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians changed their given names and incorporated in their names the names of Babylonian gods. So the Babylonians are creating identity confusion. Day after day these young men are called by different names. They are being addressed by the name of a different god. There is pressure on these young men concerning who they are fundamentally.

What is their identity? Are they just one of the guys in the frat house going along with the crowd? Is that who they fundamentally are? Is your fundamental identity that you are a lawyer? You say: I am a teacher. I am a builder or a plumber or a police officer or whatever. Is your occupation your fundamental identity? Or if you are a follower of Christ, do you say: No, that’s just where I work, but I know that I know my fundamental identity – I am a child of God. I may work at the State House, but I know that I am a citizen of God’s Kingdom. I may work at Nationwide, but I know that I am the temple of the Holy Spirit and that God lives in me. I may work in an area hospital, but I know that I am a new creation. I’m a saved person. I’m a member of the body of Christ. I’m not defined by my externals or my past or my income or my looks or my accomplishments. People who live successfully in Babylon know who they are. They know the methodology of Babylon’s domination.

People who live successfully in Babylon understand the marks of Babylon

You know there are so many things we could look at in 21st century America and say, “Oh, you know, that’s Babylon!” That’s not a characteristic of the Kingdom of God. That’s a characteristic of the city of man.

We might consider the relentless self-promotion where everyone everywhere is advertising themselves all the time. Here’s a selfie of me eating a taco. Here are my thoughts about the taco. Here’s my rating of that taco and my review of the taco stand. Here’s me on a mountain where the taco stand was, after I, of course, eliminated 27 other selfies because they made my face look too fat or too scrunched up as I was eating the taco.

We could talk about the culture of relentless self-promotion where everyone has become their own full-time PR firm marketing ourselves. That’s a feature of Babylon. We could talk about the sexualization of everything and everyone, from children to the elderly. That’s a feature of Babylon. Enough said.

We could talk about the culture of choice where my right to choose trumps every moral standard and every social obligation. Babylon makes an idol out of choice. I’m going to look at that in future weeks.

We could talk about the growing fragility of people. The truth is that many 21st century Americans can’t handle any pressure at all. We collapse easily. We quit easily. If there’s any stress or any opposition or anything that we disagree with, we’re out of there. We give up. We don’t want to work through hard relationships. We don’t want to wrestle and struggle, we give up. We quit.

Today because of the time, I want to talk about two marks of Babylon that I think are two mountain peaks of 21st century American Babylon. Perhaps more broadly, 21st century Western World Babylon. Two places where the kingdom of this world is most clearly at war with the Kingdom of God. Two places where we see profound erosion of Christian influence. Two places where serious Christians find themselves having to swim furiously upstream against the current of our culture.

The first is the

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The loss of the sacredness of life

There’s an enormous push in Western countries and here in the United States to legalize doctor assisted suicide. Canada recently legalized doctor assisted suicide. Five states, including California, just this last year legalized doctor assisted suicide. It’s seen as the triumph of choice. The triumph of people’s ability to control their own destinies. To

make a rational decision about when and how they are going to die. It's seen as a triumph of compassion. People shouldn't have to suffer.

Of course, the people that push the laws are often those with the most power and the most money and the greatest support system that enables them to choose their destinies. Doctor assisted suicides can have the most dire consequences for those who have no support system. For those who are utterly alone – elderly people, Alzheimer's patients, those warehoused in government nursing homes, cared for by non-family members who have no emotional connection with or sense of responsibility for whether the person they are pushing around lives or dies.

There's a huge move that's happening in Western culture right now which is a move towards the loss of the sacredness of life. Every human being is created in the image of God. Life is not measured by how much you can produce or how much you own or how much you know. I believe, dear friends, that our Supreme Court in the next five years will declare that the right to die, including doctor assisted suicide, is constitutionally guaranteed. Opponents of Life's Sacredness will celebrate this new freedom and darkness will cover our land because a right to die will quickly turn into a duty to die. "Come on, old fellow, it's time for you to step aside. Old woman, you know you're just a burden on your family." You don't want to cost your family so much money. You shouldn't have your kids take care of you. It's your duty to get out of the way.

Life is sacred. We are not self-generated. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 100, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and not we ourselves." Our parents did not make us live. God makes us live. Life is God's gift. The Lord is the giver of life. He is the fountain of life. He is the defender of life. He is, according to the book of Acts, the Prince of Life. He sent his son, Jesus Christ, to destroy the power of death. He abolished death for our sakes and to cause us to experience eternal life.

Stanley Hauerwas, a Christian theologian, once predicted that In 100 years, Christians may be known as those odd people who don't kill their children or their elderly.

I love that. Those odd people. Those strange people who don't kill their children or their elderly. Want to live successfully in Babylon? Resist the culture of death regarding the unborn and regarding the elderly and the dying.

I want to read to you a letter that was posted last week on the internet by an 11-year old girl who understands the marks of Babylon.

Here's what she wrote:

Dear Hollywood,

Why do you want me dead?

Please don't deny it. The movies you make tell me the truth about what you really think about me.

Me Before You comes out tomorrow. I've never read the book, but my mom told me about it and I read the reviews online. It's the story of a guy who gets in an accident and has a spinal cord injury, and has to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. A guy you think should want to die because he has to live a life that looks like mine.

Well, what's wrong with a life that looks like mine?

My mom says that this isn't the first movie where a handicapped person had to die for being paralyzed. There was one called *Million Dollar Baby* where a woman is a quad and bravely chooses death instead of an imperfect life.

So I'm asking you again, what's wrong with my life? Why do you think I should want to die?

My legs don't work. I am crippled. It's just a fact of my life, and you need to get over it. While you're sitting in your offices crying about the bravery of this guy who kills himself and leaves everyone else to mourn him, which seems pretty selfish to me, I'm going to be out living the amazing life that you didn't even bother to know was possible. I have friends, and go on sleepovers, and live a regular life. A life that doesn't make me want to die. It makes me happy that it's mine.

And if you really want to see what life with a wheelchair really looks like, you can come and hang with me in Venice Beach in July, while I'm defending my skating title out there. Because while you were thinking that living with a wheelchair would make you want to kill yourself, I was busy becoming a pro skater, and learning how to do drop-ins, wheelies, and ride the rail at the skate park. So, I ask you again, Hollywood, why do you want me to die?

That's written by an 11-year old. An 11-year old that understands the marks of Babylon.

Here's the second mark of Babylon in 21st century America. It's related to the first.

The loss of the meaning of suffering

People in Babylon believe that suffering is the worst thing possible. If we are suffering, our life is over. Our lives have no value. Our lives have no meaning.

You see, citizens of the City of God have or ought to have a totally different perspective regarding suffering than citizens of the City of Man.

Here's what the Apostle Peter wrote,

1 Peter 4:1

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

Peter says that arm yourselves with this attitude, arm yourself with this insight, arm yourself with this viewpoint – the viewpoint of the Kingdom of God. What does Christ’s suffering tell about what you’re going through. The physical pain you’re going through? The emotional pain? What does Christ’s suffering teach you and to me about suffering? Present suffering, future suffering, past suffering – Peter says that in light of Christ’s suffering we followers of Christ can be encouraged. Why?

Because when I think about Christ’s suffering I realize several things. I realize that God never minimizes our suffering or evil in the world. He never says that being betrayed or being abused is no big deal, get over it. Evil and injustice and abuse and betrayal is a big deal and I know it’s a big deal to God because it cost the life of the Son of God. He hung on a cross for all the evil and abuse and betrayal and injustice in the world.

There’s something else I learn as I look at Christ. Our suffering is not the end of the story. Peter says: have this viewpoint, citizens of the Kingdom, regarding suffering. When you think about Christ’s suffering, his betrayal, his loneliness, his struggle in the garden, his struggle to pray, his physical pain, his public humiliation – when you think about Christ’s suffering, his feeling of being abandoned by God, I realize that death is not the end of the story. I look at my own life and say whatever I’m going through or whatever someone else is going through, it’s not the end of the story. Jesus rose from the dead. Suffering has meaning when you look at it from the end. You can’t understand suffering in the middle of the story, it’s only as you turn the page – the meaning of suffering can only be understood at the end. The end of the story for the Christian is resurrection from the dead. The whole universe will be redeemed. God will work justice. Truth will prevail. And we will live in the presence of God together with God’s people forever.

Never think that God has abandoned you. Never think that what you’re going through means the end for you. Never think that God can’t work good in your life or good in the world through your suffering.

Kara Tippetts wrote a letter to Brittany Maynard, that beautiful 29-year old who was so articulate and who as a result of her terminal brain tumor spent the last months of her life fighting for the right for doctor assisted suicide to be extended to the state California – Brittany Maynard was all over the news. She pushed the California legislature to accept doctor assisted suicide. Kara Tippetts wrote her a letter before Brittany Maynard took the poison that ended her life.

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Picture of Kara Tippetts

Kara Tippetts also had stage 4 breast cancer and then the cancer spread to her brain. She was a mom with four kids. She wrote a book called *The Hardest Peace*. Before Kara

died she wrote a letter to Brittany begging Brittany to not take her own life. She begged her to know Jesus, to know the one who is walking alongside of her in dying.

Here's what Kara wrote:

Brittany, your life matters, your story matters, and your suffering matters. Brittany, when we trust Jesus to be the carrier, protector, redeemer of our hearts, death is no longer dying. My heart longs for you to know this truth, this love, this forever living. You have been told a lie. A horrible lie, that your dying will not be beautiful. That the suffering will be too great. Suffering is not the absence of goodness, it is not the absence of beauty, but perhaps it can be the place where true beauty can be known. In choosing your own death you are robbing those that love you the opportunity of being with you in your last moments and extending to you their love when you draw your last breath.

That last kiss, that last warm touch, that last breath matters – but it was never intended for us to decide when that last breath's breathed. Knowing Jesus, Knowing that he understands my hard goodbye, He walks with me in my dying. My heart longs for you to know Him in your dying. Because in his dying, he protected me in my living. My living beyond this place.

Much of the book of Daniel is about how to fight the pull of Babylon. How to discern its marks and how to resist its seduction. We're being tugged on by another kingdom,

The people who live successfully in Babylon understand the call to be different

Daniel 1:8

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Anyone who lives in Babylon has to draw a line. Daniel drew a line around food which had all kinds of implications in the ancient world. But if you, a citizen of the Kingdom of God, through your faith in Jesus Christ want to live successfully in the city of man. If you, a citizen of Jerusalem, want to live in Babylon you must resolve to be different than those who don't know the Lord – different in your place of work, different in your school, different in your neighborhood, different with your friends, different with your family.

You say, "Different how, Rich? Wear different clothes? Eat different food? Be different weird?" No – not different externally. Different internally.

Let me suggest one exercise to you in closing. Simply start with the Ten Commandments. You can find a list of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Earnestly ask God's help to live out the Ten Commandments in Babylon. What would it mean for you to obey the first commandment and put God first in your life? Above everything else.

What would it mean for you to obey the fourth commandment and keep the Sabbath day by having time set aside every week to worship God in the company of his people whatever the work demands were on your life? Or the sports demands. Or the family demands. Today is the day we set aside to worship the Lord.

What would it mean for you to obey the fifth commandment? To honor your father and your mother and to provide for them and protect them as they get older?

What would it mean for you to obey seventh commandment? To not only to not commit adultery, but in Jesus' interpretation to not lust; to not fill your heart and mind with sexual images.

What would it mean for you at your workplace or in your family or with your friends or in your marriage to always tell the truth and to be committed to do everything with complete integrity? To be known as a person who regularly and consistently tells the truth.

Daniel and his friends knew that they were citizens of another kingdom. They lived by the standard of that other kingdom. They lived in Babylon but the loyalty and their hearts were never given to Babylon. Ultimately, God had their hearts and their souls and their minds and their strength. And so they were able to live successfully in Babylon.

Let's pray.

How to Live Successfully in Babylon

Rich Nathan
June 11 & 12, 2016
Strangers in a Strange Land
Daniel 1

- I. People who live successfully in Babylon understand the hidden meaning of life

- II. People who live successfully in Babylon understand the means of domination by Babylon
 - A. Identify
 - B. Isolate
 - C. Indoctrinate
 - D. Indulge
 - E. Identity Confusion

- III. People who live successfully in Babylon understand the marks of Babylon
 - A. The Loss of the sacredness of life
 - B. The Loss of the meaning of suffering

- IV. People who live successfully in Babylon understand the call to be different