

# “Daniel: Living in Babylon” series

Week 5: The right to be heard

April 12, 2026

*Daniel 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! 2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. . . 34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done? . . . 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”*

## Introduction

- You have probably all seen pictures of something called the “Salmon Run”
- Usually, it’s a picture of bears catching fish as they leap up against waterfalls.
- But that’s just one part of an arduous journey. Salmon are born in freshwater, in streams and rivers inland.
- As they mature, they swim downstream to the ocean, to live in a saltwater environment. Then, when it comes time to reproduce, they begin a swim that can be from hundreds to even a thousand miles, upstream, against the current, to get back to fresh water to lay the eggs that begin another generation of salmon.
- What’s amazing is that 90% of salmon return to the exact tributary where they were born.
- There is something about this that has generated a term for those that are different – we call it “swimming upstream”, “swimming against the current” or “going against the flow.” These fish do what is totally different than almost every other species, but is it that difference that ensures the survival of the species.
- We are in a teaching series based on the book of Daniel. We are calling it “Living in Babylon.”
- It is an account of how Daniel and some friends lived for God and made a difference in their world while living in a country that had a value system and moral center that was not only different from theirs, but in many ways, completely contrary.
- It is a picture of what is true today in many ways, that we are living in a Babylon, a culture that can be hostile to followers of Jesus. The values of our wider culture often run contrary to what we believe, and a majority of people do not acknowledge Jesus as king.
- What we have seen so far is that you are exactly where God wants you. He put you where you are – it was no accident.
- In order to make a difference in the situation where God has put us, we need to be different. Not weird different, but living by different values, different beliefs.
- When we live by those different values, putting Jesus first, it comes out particularly visibly when we face difficult situations.
- We can do these things, because of where our allegiance lays.
- Today we begin to see at a daily level what it looks like to live this out. What does it look like for a follower of Jesus to be different, to swim upstream, against the current. It is both more simple and at the same time more difficult than we might expect. What we’ll see is that **HOW we do what we do will give us opportunities in God’s kingdom.**

## Main Sermon Text

- Chapter 3 ended with Nebuchadnezzar giving praise to God because he had saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from death in the fiery furnace. He even went so far to make a proclamation that people throughout the kingdom were not allowed to persecute those who followed Yahweh because of his power.
- It is nice, but it seems to be more of an external recognition of something he saw to be true rather than something he had personalized.
- But when we turn the page over to chapter 4, it seems like the king had truly had a change of heart.

*4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! 2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

- Something has changed. Something is different. The whole tone from Nebuchadnezzar is more personal. Like he has experienced something. And he certainly has!
- The author writes this part of Daniel a little differently, by beginning at the end of the story and then rewinding to see how we got to this place.
- Movie makers often do this, giving you a glimpse of an ending, and then rewinding to show how you got there. And like in chapter 1, it all begins with a dream.
- Nebuchadnezzar had another troubling dream. It was particularly troubling because, as he writes, he was “contented and prosperous.” In other words, everything was coming up roses for this most powerful king.
- But he had a dream that terrified him. He couldn’t shake the dread and fear. He called his entire court of magicians and advisers and unlike last time, he told them the dream, and did not ask them to tell him his own dream first, but none of them could make heads or tails of his dream.

• Eventually he got to Daniel (not sure why he didn’t begin here, because he said:

*8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)*

- Essentially, he saw a huge tree. It was visible everywhere it was so amazing. Then he heard a voice saying the tree should be cut down, the stump left in the ground bound with chains. The messenger in the dream then said that this person, represented by the stump, be given a mind like an animal for a set period of time.
- And that the last thing the messenger in the dream said, and probably what scared Nebuchadnezzar the most, was this statement.

*17 “The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.”*

- He waited for Daniel to interpret the dream, and Daniel was puzzled for a while. As he got the interpretation from God, Daniel was greatly troubled. He even told Nebuchadnezzar he wished the dream was about another ruler, but it was about him.

*25 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. 26 The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. 27 Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and*

*your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”*

- Daniel not only is able to interpret the dream, but give advice to the king on what he might be able to do to change the results of what the dream said.
- There are two main characters in this chapter, and both bring us back to how we are to live “in Babylon” where we are, where God has put us.
- The first is a principle that weaves its way throughout the entire book of Daniel.

## **I. God sovereignly appoints our influence.**

- Nebuchadnezzar is this amazingly powerful king.
- The capital city of Babylon is reputed to have had two of the ancient wonders of the world. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon brought people from all over the world to see it and the walls of the city were supposed to be so thick and amazing that a team of horses pulling a chariot could make a U-turn on top of it.
- He commands armies. He was known as a builder and creator. His word could change the destiny of millions.
- And yet God is the one in control. Do you remember what God said in the dream?  
*17 “The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.”*
- Don’t go too quickly past this. In all his power, Nebuchadnezzar is Yahweh’s tool. God decides who gets what. This chapter is a deliberate contrast.
- God took the most powerful man, Nebuchadnezzar, and humbled him.
- God also took a young, captive person who was a nobody and elevated him to speak in front of kings.
- Your abundance of talents, gifts or position does not define you or the difference you can make in this world.
- God does. Everything you have and are is a gift. Your abilities. Your family history. The advantages of your ethnicity or position. Your job.
- God can elevate anyone and make a difference through anyone. He can humble you just as easily as he can elevate another.
- Remember, we said that best ability is our availability.
- Similarly, your lack of talents, gifts or position does not define you or the difference you can make in this world.
- God does. He is the one who puts every single person in place. You might feel that you “can’t.” God picked you to be where you are.
- God can elevate anyone and make a difference through anyone. He actually particularly likes to use the ones the world overlooks to do this.
- As much as God is opposed to the proud, he delights in using the unexpected person to make a difference.

*1 Corinthians 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

- God is in control. We have no room for pride to claim it is about me nor do we have license to check out because we have “nothing to offer.”
- God humbled Nebuchadnezzar and what’s interesting is the role Daniel had to play in all this. Although any timeline dating is imprecise, by the time he stood in front of the king to interpret his dream, many years have passed since he had been captured and deported. Anywhere from 20-40 years later. Daniel is middle-aged and approaching old age.
- Recall what Nebuchadnezzar said about Daniel?

8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

- Daniel has a reputation. He has this amazing opportunity to speak into the life of the king. To implore him to change his mind. To influence him. It wasn't the first nor was it the last. But why did he get this chance? Because he earned the right to be heard.
- If we want to make a difference in God's kingdom in the midst of the world's kingdom that we live in, then know:

## II. We earn the right to be heard.

- We talked in week two of this series that to make a difference, we have to be different. We talked about having different values, about putting Jesus' reputation first. But what does that actually look like in daily practice? Because let's be honest, you can be different in a way that makes it so that no one wants to hear what you have to say.
- Daniel did several things throughout his life that gave him the right and the opportunity to be heard.

### A. He had a God-centered approach to work

- The king's description of Daniel is fascinating. He says that the spirit of the holy gods is in him. This is more than a statement about Daniel's religious activities. It was part of his identity.
- As Daniel went about his life and his work, year after year, it was clearly known who he was. We will see this again in subsequent chapters, where both those who supported him and those who opposed him knew him as a person of faith.
- This seeped into everything he did. There is a telling part of Daniel's conversation with the king when he is about to interpret the dream.

19b Belteshazzar [Daniel] answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!"

- Think about it. Daniel had sympathy for the king. He was respectful and even kind towards the man who had ripped him away from his home country and uprooted his life.
- He could have easily thought, "It's going to be good to see the king get his comeuppance." Not only that, but he advised the king how he might be able to avoid God's judgment.
- In your job, your school, your retirement or your home, you are to live with a God-centered approach to how you do each of those things.
- "Being a full-time servant of Jesus Christ is not something we do after we pay the bills; it's what we do as we pay the bills." (JD Greear, Everyday Revolutionary, page 120)
- We live, study and work with a God-centered approach by doing several things. Daniel did these things.

### B. He worked with excellence

- Daniel worked by putting out good work. He did so again and again. His reputation was one of a person who did his work well.
- We read in the two chapters that follow this that Daniel was known for his keen mind, his intellect, his instinct that helped him solve difficult problems.
- If you are God-centered in your approach to life and work, you will work with excellence.
- What kind of work you are doing is utterly irrelevant. How you do your work is very important.
- This is not about being the best at something. It is about doing your best at something. If your job is creating plans and systems that will impact hundreds of people, then do it

everything in you. If your job is folding the laundry or cleaning a toilet, then don't do it half-heartedly.

- Are you known for excellence or cutting corners? Do people know you as hard working or lazy? Do you do the minimum acceptable things or do you go above and beyond?
- If you really want to get the world's attention, do a GREAT job for an earthly boss who is a jerk and doesn't give you the first word of recognition.
- Few things damage the reputation of Christ in our community like a poor work ethic.
- As someone said, "Excellence is not self-promotion, it's testimony."
- Daniel did one other thing to earn the right to be heard.

### **C. He worked with integrity**

- Our work should not just God's excellence, but his holiness as well.
- You see, we live in a culture that prioritizes power and profit above everything, and if compromising or bending the rules is required to achieve those things, we will be pressured to do just that.
- "That's just how the game is played." "Everyone does it." "If you don't, you'll get left behind."
- To live and work with integrity is to have every action and decision be consistent with what we say we believe.
- We're going to see this even more clearly in the next few chapters, but Daniel worked and lived with such integrity, that when people wanted to take him down, they could not find anything about how he did his work that they could leverage.
- Could someone who opposed you say that about you?
- **HOW we do what we do can give us opportunities in God's kingdom.**
- Daniel did regular work. He served the kingdom of Babylon. He dealt with all kinds of people. He did these things with God at the center, with excellence and integrity.
- So let me make two last observations.
- **1) These are not one-time activities.** They are doing small things, repeatedly, over time, that makes us different. People notice when we are consistent in our integrity, when our work is regularly excellent, when we seek the good of those around us because God is at the center of our work.
- You earn the right to be heard, one decision, one action at a time. So don't be overwhelmed, just focus on what's in front of you today.
- **2) Excellence and integrity are rarely convenient.** In fact, excellence and integrity usually cost us. They cost us energy. Time. Money. They can even cost you relationships in the short term. Or advancement. BUT, when we do these things because God is the center, people will notice. We will be different. And you will have opportunities to advance the kingdom.
- But that's OK, we do hard things.

## **Conclusion**

- **HOW we do what we do can give us opportunities in God's kingdom.**
- It will allow you to make a difference that goes beyond this life.
- Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar did not listen to Daniel, or at least, he eventually forgot or disregarded the interpretation of his dream

*29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"*

- Immediately, he heard a voice from heaven stated that his authority was being stripped away. We don't know exactly what happened, but he lost his mind, his ability to live normally. He was more like an animal than a person.
- God humbled Nebuchadnezzar dramatically. But at the same time, he used Daniel to lead him towards the realization of who God was.
- God's judgment was fulfilled until the king acknowledged that God ruled and was sovereign, not himself.

*34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" 36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

- God is sovereign. He is in control and he can elevate or humble who he chooses.
- He has placed you where he wants you, and he calls you to work in that place, putting God at the center, doing what you do with excellence and integrity.
- Perhaps you need to acknowledge this morning that this has not been characterizing your life and work. Perhaps cutting corners and complaining has been a pattern for you. Repent.
- Perhaps you question as to whether what you do matters. It does. Trust God with your work and serve him in it.
- When you do, you will have opportunities to make a difference, and it might just be that God will use you to change the course of someone's life and eternal destiny. There is no higher calling than this.