



As you know, one of the main reasons for going through this series is because of the events over the last 1½ years in particular. From a presidential election, a pandemic, and COVID restrictions, people in general (and, Christians in particular) have responded and reacted in a slew of different ways. And, the question comes to us, how does God actually call his children to live in this world? Of course, there are a lot of opinions that float around the internet – from preacher to preacher. And, we too can be bent on favoring certain biblical texts to the exclusion of others. So, this can be a difficult question to answer. However, I think what we’re doing (looking at the exiles) is the primary place to start. As the apostle Peter starts his letter, calling God’s children “exiles,” his entire letter reveals to us that living as an exile is to be a pattern for us.

As I say this, you may be encouraged that there is a pattern to follow. But this could also be annoying because living as an exile means that there’s no guaranteed stability for us *in this world*. Our anchor is that we have a home, but it’s not *here*. Which means the here-and-now can waffle and change on a whim. I can’t help but wonder if this is particularly annoying for Christians in the Western world. The reality is that Christians in America are an aberration from the norm in history. Persecution, exclusion, intimidation has been the experience of myriads upon myriads of Christians throughout history – yet in America, Christians have largely been either honored, accepted, or tolerated. And while that’s an amazing blessing, I can’t help but wonder how many Christians have taken that to mean that we can just nestle into this country and treat it as home. We look at other countries, and Christians suffering, and we are amazed at how they pray and reach out to their persecutors. We recognize their country isn’t home, but if that were to happen to us here. . .well, what would we do? Do we fight back to defend ourselves? I think there’s a principle to keep in mind that Jesus speaks soon before his own death. He says the following: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”<sup>1</sup> Since his Kingdom is not of this world, there’s a different ways that his disciples are to respond. But doesn’t this almost sound crazy to people’s modern senses?

Yet, I think about the very small percentage of Christians in Afghanistan now who are hurting and scared. I read a letter of a pastor who was in contact with Christians stuck in Afghanistan. They’re trying to figure out how they can flee, but at the same time, this pastor said they know their hope is in God no matter what. For these Christians, while Afghanistan has always had tensions, their lives changed in a moment. What if that were to happen to us? This is where the rubber meets the road, and this is where I think that knowing and believing and embracing the fact that we’re exiles helps us tremendously. Circumstances change, but our identity doesn’t. If you are a follower of Jesus, your citizenship is in Heaven. Volatility defines this world, and the cultures of this earth. But God’s Kingdom will never be destroyed – and even in the chaos of this broken world, the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. These

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 18:36.

realities can calm our hearts in the midst of the storms, and we see this in particular as we look at Daniel's life again in Daniel 5. Please turn there as we will read from various parts this morning.

The main idea of the sermon today is the following: **Exiles (i.e. – Christians) can trust God's sovereign justice and grace in changing circumstances.** And, before going further with this sermon, I do want to thank a friend of mine who used to be a pastor. His notes on this text were immensely helpful to me in formulating this sermon today. So, if he ever listens to this sermon, thank you, Matthew Hoskinson! With this, let's get into the background that leads us into the scenario we're studying today.

**Background:** At the end of chapter 4, we read of a miraculous account of Nebuchadnezzar repenting and coming to faith in the One True God. He praises, extols, and honors God as the One who can do whatever he wants. All of this is written by Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages. Nebuchadnezzar becomes an evangelist to the world! As I say all of this, I want us to understand something that we may not easily see in reading Daniel. One of the things we may forget is the number of years that have passed between chapter 1 to chapter 5. We could probably read these four chapters in about 20 minutes. As a result, we can just naturally tend to think that this happens over a short timeframe. Don't say anything out loud, but how many years would you guess have passed from chapter 1 to the beginning of chapter 5? Some of you might say 10 years. Others might guess 30. If you guessed anything from 1-30 years, you're still way off. At a minimum, Daniel has been in exile in Babylon for 55 years by the time Belshazzar becomes a ruler. Fifty-five years! How old must Daniel be by now? I don't know for sure, but his exile is essentially his entire life. And whereas Daniel has been elevated on multiple occasions by Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar is a new ruler in Babylon. And, with a new ruler comes changes. And we'll even see in this chapter there were changes in the treatment of Daniel, but even though circumstances have changed for Daniel, you see how Daniel's trust in the Lord's justice and grace is resolute. He's an exile, and God is the faithful King.

Now, as we enter into chapter 5, I also want us to see something beautifully intriguing. Nebuchadnezzar's final words in 4:37 not only speak of Nebuchadnezzar, but these words also foreshadow what's going to happen in chapter 5. Listen to these words as I read them: **Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**<sup>2</sup> Now we have a little backdrop. Let's get into the scenario of chapter 5.

**The Scenario (vv. 1-4).** Let's read verses 1-4 together: King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. <sup>2</sup>Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup>Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup>They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. <sup>3</sup>

Belshazzar was actually a co-regent in Babylon. Meaning, he reigned with another. When verse 2 says "Nebuchadnezzar, his father," the word for father doesn't have to literally be understood as a father. Instead, the word can be translated as predecessor or ancestor. This is actually the correct understanding of the word because more recent historical discoveries reveal that Belshazzar was the

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:37.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:1-4.

son of the ruler, Nabonidus. Nabonidus and Belshazzar ruled together for 11 years, until Cyrus, the Persian, took over the Babylonian kingdom.

We're told here that Belshazzar has a great feast, with much royalty. Then, he commands that the vessels that were taken from the Jerusalem temple be used for this celebration. Up to this point, we haven't heard anything about these utensils that were used in Israel's temple worship. For whatever reason, Nebuchadnezzar didn't use them. The way things are written here, it seems the author is emphasizing Belshazzar's brazenness and pride. His seems to be even more than Nebuchadnezzar because even Nebuchadnezzar didn't do such a thing. But Belshazzar had no concern for the God of the Jews, who were under his rule. They were slaves! Might as well use the wealth they acquired. (And, by the way, it was a lot of wealth. Some of you may have read the story of Solomon's temple, and the tremendous amounts of gold and silver that was brought in. These are those utensils that were used for hundreds of years. And now these utensils are being used at a feast paying homage and worship to the Babylonian "gods.")

At this point, I simply want to ask, "Why is this so bad?" If you go back to God's command in creating the tabernacle and creating these utensils, you begin to realize why this matters. The tabernacle, and later on the Temple, represented God's hospitality. He was welcoming people back into his presence to be able to feast with him again. You see, in Eden, Adam and Eve (our human representatives) chose to eat from a tree that God commanded them not to eat from. This wasn't simply an act of Adam and Eve missing out and God being stingy. No. God had given them all the trees in the Garden. But the real question is whether or not they would trust God, and whether or not they wanted fellowship and communion with God. We're told that Eve felt she was missing out with God, and so she chose to eat the fruit in order to become wise (not trusting God would give her this), and she also wanted to be at the level of God. Thus, not wanting to *need* God. But the reality is that we all need God because he is Life. And because he is Life, he is Truth and Wisdom. At this point, God could have been done with humanity, but he comes to speak words of grace to Man and Woman. He speaks of One to come who will bring humans back to him. So, as we move on in the Old Testament, it's filled with anticipation for this one. Even in the Temple, we have images and pictures of this future restoration of humans. This brings us back to the utensils being used here. When we think of the Temple, the major offerings, when put together, made a meal. The utensils were used to create the meal and picture the reality of being able to feast with God again. Because of the intention of these utensils, God calls these items "holy," which means "set apart." They are set apart for this specific purpose, and they weren't to be defiled and used for common means. Yet, Belshazzar, takes these utensils which were once used in the presence of the Holy God, and uses them in the presence of human-made gods of wood, silver and gold. Belshazzar has desecrated the items.

Truly, times have changed in Daniel's lifetime. Nebuchadnezzar, who turned from hardened to humbled – and raised up Daniel – was gone. Now, he lives under a man who's just as, if not more, hardened than Nebuchadnezzar. But this changing circumstance doesn't change Daniel's trust. God is still the same. Just as God was just and gracious in Nebuchadnezzar's time, God is still just and gracious in Belshazzar's time. So, let's discover these two realities in the remaining portion of chapter 5.

### **1. God is just (vv. 5-28; 30-31).**

The last couple of weeks, I've stated that God sets out to save the oppressed and also oppressors. But I want to make something known. There could be people listening to these sermons, and you're an oppressive type of person. You hear this, and maybe you experience immediate relief. Or, you could just

presume on God's kindnesses, and you're thinking, "Yes! God does save me. So, I'm good." But I don't want you to think that too quickly. God saves through repentant faith. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged, agreed with God, turned from, admitted his sinfulness. Have you? Do you own your own wickedness? If so, there is hope for you! Turn to God and find grace and help. But if you quickly cover-up and try to "move on" without acknowledging your sin, you're like Belshazzar – who we find does not experience the grace of forgiveness. He doesn't repent, and God is just in punishing him.

Christians, we must keep these realities in our minds. God hasn't called us to judge or avenge people in this world. Instead, we trust that God is our King. And, since our trust is that God is King and that he is just, he will judge – and we point people to the Judge – longing for their repentance. As Paul writes in Romans 12:19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."<sup>4</sup> God judges, so we don't avenge. Why? In the prayer that people would see there is a greater King to whom they ought to submit and love – a King who loves them. But if they continue in rebellion and choose death over Life, they will experience death because you can't deny Life and get life. Oh, how this should burden us. While at the same time, this should relieve us. We don't need to take on unjust hatred. God is just. He'll make all things right. He's bringing perfection someday.

But how do we see this in this chapter? Read verses 5-7 with me first: <sup>5</sup>Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. <sup>6</sup>Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.<sup>5</sup> God is making himself clear to Belshazzar, and Belshazzar is overtaken with fear. His hips and legs have lost all strength and he's about ready to pass out. This is the scenario. God is showing Belshazzar who he's really dealing with. God isn't some tamed idol of wood or gold that you can fashion into your preferred mold. Let's put this in modern terms. If God agrees with you about everything you do, then you aren't worshipping God. You're worshipping a god of your own making. The One True God rules over all and summons us to come to his Light. But whereas Nebuchadnezzar was eventually humbled and then rejoiced in God, Belshazzar continues in fear, but remains distant from the Lord.

The story goes on that this finger of the Lord writes these words on the wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. These Aramaic words were probably understood, but Belshazzar didn't understand the meaning. All of a sudden, his immediate desire was to figure out the meaning. He was going to award the third highest status in the kingdom to the one who could interpret this. He goes to all of his diviners, but none know the interpretation. Then we're told the queen, which probably means the Queen Mother, reminds him of Daniel, who interpreted correctly for Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar heeds the advice and calls Daniel. Look at verse 13 to read Belshazzar's welcome to Daniel: <sup>13</sup>Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, "You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah."<sup>6</sup> There's something interesting here. He doesn't refer to Daniel by his Babylonian name, and he emphasizes Daniel's status as a slave. While he offers Daniel an even higher position in Babylon, he puts Daniel in his place right on the outset. He disrespects Daniel. But Daniel's response is one of humility and pointing to the Lord. Read verse 17: <sup>17</sup>Then Daniel answered and said

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 12:19.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:5–6.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:13.

before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.”<sup>7</sup>

Daniel doesn’t care if he gets honor in society. He essentially says, “Keep your gifts.” This doesn’t mean that Daniel is against being elevated by the rulers. He was elevated by Nebuchadnezzar. But this reveals Daniel’s heart. Godliness and Political Power are not the same thing. Oh, Ventura, how I hope and wish that all Christians would understand this. I’ve spent so many hours studying church history, I’ve seen (too many times) the draw of Christians through the ages to align godliness with political powerful – and that draw always led to a fracturing and bondage of the church. This doesn’t mean Christians shouldn’t be involved in politics. What this does mean is that we do not associate political power with godliness – nor do we *fight* to climb the ladder of political success. As exiles, we trust the Lord to place us where he wills. We trust our God who is sovereign and places people where he wills.

In addition, Daniel still shows honor to the ruler. Belshazzar mocks Daniel and tries to put him in his place. But Daniel doesn’t fight back. Oh, how many times I’ve seen Christians even in this past year fight back to try to get back their reputation. Christians, we don’t fight for the world to give us a good reputation. No. Let God take care of our reputations. And, the character God calls exiles to what the apostle Peter commands: Fear God. Honor the emperor.<sup>8</sup> This is how exiles live.

“But,” you may say, “this is going to lead to my reputation being torn to shreds, and those people are going to get away with it.” Yes, your reputation may be torn. The apostle Paul says that Christians can be treated like the refuse of the world. But, no, people will not get away with injustice. God is just. They will not get away with it. Plus, the greatest concern should be for their soul. Yours is at peace with God. What about their soul? Do they know there’s a Ruler who calls them to repent and trust him? Will you trust God with your reputation? Will you trust God’s ways are best? Will you reveal the glory of God in the midst of whatever changes you face? He is just.

As the story goes on, Daniel reveals the interpretation. All the words are mathematical terms. It’s like God is giving an accounting. “Mene” relates to the word “number.” Then “Tekel” to weighed. “Parsin” sounds like the words divided and Persia. So, Daniel states that God is taking Belshazzar to account and numbering his days. The dual repetition of “mene” probably means this accounting is going to happen soon. God has put Belshazzar in the balances and weighed him, and he’s going to divide the Kingdom up and give it to Persia. Then, in verses 30-31, we read, “That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.<sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.”<sup>9</sup> God is just. Belshazzar’s soul was required of him that very night. Again, if you haven’t repented and turned from your sins, will you today? And, if you have trusted Christ for salvation, why not also trust him with your life and the oppression you have (or, are) experiencing today. God is just. This should give you hope. And then we also see in this chapter that

## 2. God is gracious towards his people (v. 29).

Read verse 29 with me: Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:17.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 2:17.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:30–31.

ruler in the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> God kept Daniel alive, and Belshazzar still raised Daniel up even higher in the Kingdom. Over and over, in the Scriptures, we have stories like these. People are raised from the ashes to great heights of glory. But, let me ask you something, is the point of the story that God simply wants to raise you to great heights in this life? Should you walk away from this story simply thinking, “I’m going through hardships now, but I’m sure my life is going to turn around and I’ll be riding high on the hog?” Absolutely not. As Christians who follow Jesus, we’re told that we’re exiles until we die – and exiles have no guarantees on what’s next in this life. But we do have guarantees for the life to come. And, this is what all the stories are pointing to. God will lift us up in due time, when we see him face to face! This is what Daniel’s elevation points to. This is beyond-our-comprehension grace.

But there’s even more grace that this story points to. I want to remind you of the utensils. Cyrus becomes the next ruler. And, in Ezra 1:7, we read this of the items in the tabernacle: <sup>7</sup> Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.<sup>11</sup> God is restoring his Temple. Which means, God still plans on reconciling people to himself. Remember when I said that the tabernacle and temple pointed to the need for the One to come who was going to bring reconciliation with God? I want you to see this even more clearly. What we see in this story is that the **Holy Things Were: taken away, treated as ordinary, desecrated, restored.** But, our ultimate hope isn’t in the utensils. Our ultimate hope is in who these things point to: Jesus himself. When Jesus speaks of himself, he says: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** <sup>20</sup> **The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”** <sup>21</sup> **But he was speaking about the temple of his body.**<sup>12</sup> Now, look at Jesus. He followed the same path as the Temple and its vessels. **Jesus was taken away.** Isaiah 53:8 says, “By oppression and judgment he was taken away. . .” **Jesus was also treated as ordinary** (not holy). Isaiah 53:2 declares, “. . . he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” **He was also desecrated,** “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.”<sup>13</sup> Do you see this? The vessels of the temple were pictures of restoration. But Jesus, in his life and death, he actually took the punishment our sins deserved. He loved people to the utmost and his soul endured an eternity’s worth of Hell for myriads of people. God, in the flesh, did this! He chose to be treated this way by humanity, and now he calls all people – every tribe, nation, and tongue – to turn to him for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Will you turn to him? Because, the reality is that **Jesus was also restored.** Isaiah 53 goes on to say in verses 10-12 that this One who died will prolong his days. He’ll divide the spoil of his victory over sin and death! This is the King who Daniel and the vessels point forward to. We’re pointed to Grace Himself, Jesus!

And, because of this King, we can trust our God in the midst of our exile. Whether pain or prosperity, the apostle Paul says he can do all things through Christ. The context is being content no matter the circumstances. **Jesus died and rose again to give us contentment and to empower us to trust our God in the changing circumstances.** Our Savior has led the way. Now, we are called the temple of God, too. **We, as exiles will also be treated as ordinary, maybe even desecrated. But ultimately, we’ll be restored because our Savior rose from the dead. Will you follow him?** Now, let’s move into celebrating communion together.

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 5:29.

<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ezr 1:7.

<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 2:19–21.

<sup>13</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 53:8, 2, 4.