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Daniel's Answer to Fear

Daniel, Part 17

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for your grace. I thank you for the everlasting arms that we can lean on, and we are just so grateful for those arms. Father again, I just again see part of the reflection of those arms is the word you give us to lean on as well. And Father, today as we open up your word, we once again want to pray that your Holy Spirit would be here, that you'd be guiding our eyes, our ears, our ability to take in and again by your Holy Spirit's power enable us to make it of permanent value. We pray this Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well last week we were down in North Carolina attending my nephew's wedding, and at the rehearsal dinner there was all kinds of speeches as they normally are at those kind of things, and one of the speeches, my nephew and his older brother were recounting their days as children. And when the younger brother was just -- just starting to learn how to read and he was struggling to put the sounds of the letters together when his older brother solemnly warned him, he said, "Just remember," he said, "if you learn to

read, you're going to have to read every single word you see for the rest of your life." You know, that's one way to look at it. And again I wonder if we are not looking at this upcoming election with the same type of perspective. Unless we get a certain result, it's going to be an absolute disaster and nothing good is going to be able to come from it. And there's one part of that perspective that I think we're leaving out and that's the God part. We're in the book of Daniel who had life circumstances that were very, very similar to the ones that we're living in right now. He was a stranger in a corrupt society, and as Christians, we too are strangers watching the corruption of our society unfold right before our eyes.

What I want to address this morning is the sense I get from many, many believers, not here, just in general, in conversation that the sky is falling and that life as we know it is going to come to an end on November 9th. What I want to convey to you this morning is that regardless the outcome of the election, God is still sovereign. He is still in charge and history is still marching precisely as he guided and directed it since the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Now if you were living in Daniel's day and you saw light only from a street level perspective, you would have to conclude that somehow

or other, God's plan, it just failed and failed disastrously. Now you'd be completely mistaken but you only would have learned that by seeing these events from God's perspective. And the only way to do that is to read about them in God's book as Daniel did. And we are in a very similar situation. We're thinking the sky might fall on November 9th and that perspective is just as mistaken, and the solution is exactly the same. We need to be reading God's book. I don't want to look at these events from street level. I want to look at these events from God's perspective and again, the only way to do that is to put them in context with God's word.

Now last time out we looked at three of the bizarre dreams that Daniel was involved in. One was the one that he interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar, the other two were ones that he had himself. And understand, every one of these dreams was about the politics of the day that Daniel was living in. I want to go back for a minute to the dream that Daniel first interpreted for King Nebuchadnezzar, this is at the very beginning of the book of Daniel, to see these events not from street level but from God's perspective, 'cause God's perspective is the only one that really counts. Daniel describes this first dream in *Daniel 2:31*, he says: *"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest*

and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."

There's a good description of this text in a passage captioned by Tony Reinke who was writing for *Desiring God*, he said this, he said: "The statute was a stack of nations, said Daniel. The metal man was capped with Babylon, (represented in the gold head), placed atop Medo-Persia (the silver torso and arms), placed atop Greece (the bronze belly and thighs), and placed atop Rome at the bottom (the legs of iron and feet of clay). This layered statue represented a succession of the world's four great superpowers from Daniel's day into the future, all stacked vertically and cemented together. Then it toppled."

And Daniel continues in verse 34, he says: "*As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*"

Again Reinke goes on to describe this passage this way, he says

this: "The statute was targeted by a stone, which flew into the dream like a comet, smashed into the statute's feet, and, on impact, shattered the entire statute like safety glass. With one blow, the statute exploded into a pile of rubble, pulverized into a heap of human superpower dust, barely hitting the ground before the wind blew it all away into oblivion. The small meteoric stone, now on the ground, began to grow and expand into a mountain that covered the entire earth -- the image of a new and unshakable kingdom now spread out over every continent, displacing all the world's superpowers in history."

And Daniel goes on to describe a kingdom like no other. He says in verse 34: *"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people."* Well, Daniel's telling Nebuchadnezzar that God's going to set up an eternal kingdom, it will never be turned over to another. Not only will it have no end but it will completely and utterly overwhelm and destroy all the kingdoms of earth. Verse 44 continues, it says: *"It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is*

certain, and its interpretation sure."

Now what Daniel is saying to Nebuchadnezzar, something I speak of over and over again, and what Daniel is saying is he's pointing out that there are always two kingdoms in operation here, there is the visible kingdom that Daniel is a part of and that Nebuchadnezzar is temporarily the head of, very impressive, it's the entire world that we know of that we see horizontally. But there's also the invisible kingdom, and it's one that sits high and above all things including all earthly kingdoms that God has dominion over. Now Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of gold will be replaced by Persia which will be replaced by Greece which would be replaced by Rome and during Rome's rule the king of this universe is going to arrive on earth in a town in Bethlehem in a cave or a barn, we don't know which, when a peasant woman named Mary and her husband Joseph would oversee the entry of God himself into the world of flesh and blood.

Now we have to look at Nebuchadnezzar's dream as something unique. It is God's invitation to view history from his perspective. And from God's perspective, history is simply -- you've heard it many, many times -- history is his story. It's really the unfolding of his plan. And God uses the dream to lay out his plan hundreds of years before it actually took place. Daniel rattles off the details of this dream that includes Jesus's birth even though

Daniel lived 500 years before Jesus was born. And again, you have to remember the context that Daniel is operating in here. I mean, he is standing before Nebuchadnezzar. This man is at the peak of his power. He reigns over the entire world. And here's Daniel telling Nebuchadnezzar that not only is his kingdom going to come to an end but that it's going to be replaced by three subsequently different kingdoms, each of a lesser quality, that it's going to go from gold to silver to bronze and then to iron. And that during that reign of iron, power is going to be splintered and divided but then the king of the universe is going to arrive. And I pointed out the last time the reason why critics of the book of Daniel claim that it's a fraud, that it's been written ahead of time and then designed to look as if it's prophetic is because what Daniel predicted to the last detail is exactly what took place. Now the reason why these predictions are so threatening is not because they are so pinpoint accurate. It's because of what it is they are predicting. Again, verse 44, Daniel's dream says: *"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever."*

Like I said, we're just talking about two different kingdoms here. There's the kingdom of heaven which rules over all of space and

time and the kingdom of earth which is temporary, which is locked into a timetable that will end with its complete and utter destruction. And if you're wondering why people have a viscerally negative reaction towards Christianity, you'll find the reason right here in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Again: *"As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."* Well, that stone that Daniel was talking about is Jesus Christ. He is the conquering lion who will grind all of the kingdoms of this world literally into powder that is blown away by the wind. See, God says there's not going to be a ceasefire here. There's not going to be a truce. There's not going to be some negotiated settlement. Instead there's going to be complete and total victory for one kingdom and utter annihilation for the other. See, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world will never, never make nice with one another. And Jesus is its worst nightmare. That's why the people of this world have a gut-level hatred of the gospel that most of them don't even recognize. Jesus understood this and he made it crystal clear as he was explaining the way this world works to his

disciples. He said in *John 15*, he said: *"If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of this world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* See, according to Daniel, Jesus is the stone that after crushing the kingdoms of the world is going to become this mountain that encompasses the entire earth. So you say, is it any wonder that he will be hated by this world? And Jesus himself acknowledged that in the conversation he was having with the religious leaders who had soundly rejected him as Messiah, because he didn't fit their image of what he was supposed to be. I mean the very ones who were supposed to be welcoming the Messiah with open arms were those who were already pre committed to his destruction. And to them Jesus referred to himself as a stone who would break them into pieces. In *Matthew 21* it says: *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

Jesus Christ poses an existential threat to the kingdoms of this

world. There's no truce, there's no cease-fire that is ever going to take place between these two kingdoms. They are both devoted to the other's destruction. One represents truth and light and the other represents destruction, deception and lies. And the king who Daniel says will be born during the rule of iron will be the one responsible for the utter destruction of the kingdoms of the world. And again, Daniel's describing this king as a stone. Verse 45:

"Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Here's where Daniel's word is speaking directly to us. See, all of us, every one in this room has been born into that kingdom that is headed for absolute destruction. God says *"the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."* But, but if you are a child of God, that is if you by faith have asked Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, if he who is God in the flesh, if he is willing to stand in your place before God, then things are going to be different.

God's justice has no choice but to condemn sin, and we all like sheep have gone astray, we are sinners, every single one of us, but as the prophet Isaiah said: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned -- every one -- to his own way; and the LORD has laid*

on him the iniquity of us all. And because God laid on Jesus Christ our iniquity, we can now stand spotless and clean before God as his children. And so the bottom line is this, if you are a child of God, you are a citizen of planet earth and of the kingdom of God. That means you hold dual citizenship. And you hold dual citizenship in two opposing kingdoms. That's why God calls us to be in the world but not of the world. And we all know that it's very easy to get caught up in the kingdom that has the immediacy that earth does, and easier still to get caught up in its politics. You know, we begin to think that if we don't get the right political results then the wheels are going to fall off and we're just going to go right off a cliff. What if I tell you that regardless the outcome of November 9th, we are still blessed to be part of an eternal kingdom that God has shepherded from eternity past through the present and one that he will shepherd right through to the future return of Christ no longer as the gentle shepherd but then as the roaring lion. The best way to gain a perspective on God's way through our politics is to see how he operated in Daniel's circumstances because they so closely mirror ours. You know, if you could see God's hand guiding the past, shepherding the present, and proclaiming the future, it could change the way you see your own present circumstances, particularly when it comes to elections such as the one that we are facing. You see, these political upheavals, they are not random, they are not

by chance or by power or by political posturing or even by a diabolical press. They are all subject to the sovereign hand of God who rules over everything, including politics. And I understand how people can look at the news every single day and throw up their hands and just give in to fear, but here's where God's word strengthens us. You see, we have only to go back in time in this case to Daniel's time to see clearly God's hand at work. And when we understand how thoroughly and completely God is in charge, we will be able to face November 9th, regardless the outcome.

I want you to consider the street level perspective if you were Daniel living in Daniel's day. Now when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jehoiakim, he not only captured and kidnapped Israel's finest, remember what he did, he also assaulted the temple and stole the sacred vessels that were within it. Now I have no doubt on the street level, the victims of this assault saw this as a collapse of God's power. But anyone with a right perspective would have seen, they would have known that it was God who was behind it all. And today anyone with a Bible can figure out that God's perspective went years back to the reign of King Hezekiah who preceded Jehoiakim, and that God had warned the kings of Israel many years before that if they continued to disobey, there would be dire consequences. And he even prophesied through the prophet Isaiah

years in advance exactly what those consequences would be. Listen to what he said in *Isaiah 39:5*. This is God speaking through Isaiah. He says: *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "there will be peace and security in my days."* And he was right, there was peace and security during Hezekiah's days but that ended with Jehoiakim. And precisely as God had indicated, men had come from a far country and had begun the process of taking from Jerusalem every single thing that Israel had, everything that meant anything to them. And for the next 70 years, Daniel and the people of Israel would be under the thumb of Babylon. Things couldn't have looked bleaker, I mean, how in the world could Israel allow itself to be put in so awful a circumstance? How could Israel's God allow himself to be so humiliated? Well, we understand God by understanding his word. And his word is very clear that God is willing to undergo humiliation and seeming defeat in order to put his plan, his story, into action.

Now a street level assessment of Daniel's day was that God was utterly humiliated and defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. A God's level perspective of the very same events was that everything is working out exactly according to plan. In fact we know as we look at scripture that the plan was leaked to the prophet Isaiah many years before it was actually executed so that when it was executed, we would know this was God's doing. This wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's. And God punctuates his seeming humiliation and defeat by stating in his word exactly how this is coming about. He says in *Daniel 1:2: And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his -- that's Nebuchadnezzar's -- hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.* Nebuchadnezzar didn't do that; God did that.

And so we fast forward and we fast forward thousands of years. Now today we find many, many Christians asking themselves the very same kinds of questions. How can our God allow himself to be humiliated? How can he allow himself to be apparently defeated? You know, instead of Nebuchadnezzar we now have ISIS in the very place that birthed Christianity raping, pillaging, and mocking the kingdom of God with seeming impunity. And here at home we face a bewildering array of attacks against the very foundations of the faith and that we've always accepted as being rock solid. And we have perversion, we have fornication, we have child sacrifice that have now become normal accepted parts of our culture. And woe to

you if you stand against it. And so is it any wonder that many Christians today seem to either be captured by the culture or bewildered by a God who seems to do nothing to stop its slide. You know, we sing "Our God Is Greater," but I wonder if we secretly doubt that to be the case.

So how can an all-powerful God allow himself to be put in this kind of a situation? Well, let me counter that thinking by stating that God knows precisely and exactly what he's doing, that what is unfolding on the other side of the world and right here, right now in our own backyard is no surprise whatsoever to God, and one that is still part of his sovereign plan for us. You might say, well, how can you say that with any confidence? Well, the first thing we have to do is look at all of these circumstances that we see around us, look at them not from the street level perspective but from God's perspective. And the view from street level at Daniel's day is certainly, the beginning of the book of Daniel is absolute catastrophe. And it's only when we go back to the book of Isaiah to see his prophecy laying out precisely what was going to happen ahead of time that we're able to fast forward to the actual events and see them not as some disaster taking God by surprise but as the unfolding of his plan that he knew centuries ahead of time. Well, the very same perspective is what needs to guide us as we look at the second dream that Daniel is speaking of here.

Daniel's second dream deals with political turmoil in the form of four strange beasts. Daniel has this dream and in it there's this lion eagle hybrid-like creature, there's a bear, there's a leopard, and there's this creature that seems to defy description. It had iron teeth, great iron teeth and ten horns and it was terrifyingly evil and seemingly all-powerful. *Daniel 7:7* says this: "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast -- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully." Now again, how in the world are you going to figure -- what in the world is this? But in this dream we are given the blessing of an interpretation and we're told these are political entities. *Daniel 7:16* says: "I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth." Okay. So God tells us that he's in charge of this horned creature who is reeking all of this street level havoc on earth and then in the dream we're taken to the very throne room of

God himself and we learn the fate of this terrifying beast. This is Daniel 7:11. Daniel says: *"Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)"* Okay. In this dream we see as Daniel is looking on, basically God is telling this terrifying creature, your time is up, your judgment is nigh. And so Daniel's describing God summarily executing him on the spot, destroying his body and throwing him into a blazing fire, and the other four are stripped of their authority but allowed to live for a time. Now this is a God's eye view of what appears on ground level street level to be utter chaos. This creature is killing Christians. This creature is mocking God with impunity and he's doing so under the watchful eye of a God who could instantly destroy him. And we know that because when this creature's time is up, God dispatches him like an insect. You know, the beast was slain, its body destroyed, and thrown into the blazing fire. And then after God disposes of the creature we are introduced in this dream to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this, this is Daniel 7:13. Daniel says: *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all*

nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." Well, here in this vision that Daniel's given us, we see Jesus and he's coming with the clouds of heaven with all of the authority, glory and power that belongs to him. And here in this dream lies the power to understand what is going on today around the world and how Jesus would have us respond to what appears to be God's humiliation and defeat. You see, Daniel's description of Jesus, it's one of the most glorious in all of the scripture. It's a vision of the entire world recognizing and glorifying King Jesus. That's reality. That's reality from God's perspective. But street level is very, very different.

We fast forward from this heavenly dream hundreds of years to a back room where the Sanhedrin has gathered around the Jesus that they've sensed they've finally captured. And he's already been arrested, he's been mocked, he's been slapped, he's been beaten around. This is the very same Christ who the whole universe in Daniel's dream is bowing down to worship as someone coming with all authority in the clouds of heaven. This same Jesus is now in a sham trial conducted by the Sanhedrin and he's accused in *Matthew 26:61: "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and*

said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the son of God." "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

See, Jesus is the very one, the only one who can speak from experience as the Mighty One coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus is giving the high priest the God's eye view of reality. And the high priest responds with the street level view accompanied with violence. Verse 65: *And the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look now, you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"* We all know where the story goes from there. We know the slapping goes to beating and then flogging and then crucifixion and then death. And once again street level evidence is that God has been utterly humiliated and defeated. If you're one of Jesus's disciples and you're watching him breathe his last as his body is utterly beaten and pierced and he's finally giving up his Spirit, you will hardly think that this

is a sovereign God who is in control of all things, at street level. But then we go to God's word for his perspective on the very same event and we read in *Colossians 2:13*, God says: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* See, the authorities thought they were nailing Jesus to the cross. That's the street level view. The God's eye view, the view that really counts is that Jesus was nailing our sin to the cross. And that by offering up his flawlessly perfect life, he was disarming the powers and authorities that rule over us because of our sin. And so the religious authorities mocked Jesus and they delighted in making a public spectacle of him in his torment, little realizing that a watching universe consisting of creatures we know nothing about was watching Jesus make a public spectacle of them and that Jesus was triumphing over them by the cross. And so it should be self-evident by now that Jesus doesn't fight and Jesus doesn't win the way we perceive fighting and winning. Street-level evidence of God's triumph is oftentimes in very short supply. Can I tell you something? God couldn't care less. God sees the big picture, the long picture, the eternal picture, the picture that stretches for

eternity.

So how do we put that into perspective concerning the United States and this upcoming election? Well, you can make either of two choices. You can employ either of two different perspectives. You can choose the street level perspective and be wracked with fear and certain that the sky is absolutely falling, or you can choose the God's eye perspective and see things in an altogether different way. I have to tell you what is dangerous about God's perspective is that what matters to God is often times not what matters to us. What matters to God is the glory of his Son and the growth of his church. I heard people say the events of this election could usher in the beginning of persecution for the church, and from a street-level view that's bad and maybe it's very bad; but from a God's eye view, it may be the best thing that has ever happened to the church. I've been a Christian 40 years. And for most of those 40 years I've been a witness to a steady decline in the glory, in the honor, in the witness that the church has been charged with bearing. I've seen the commitment level of the average Christian drop precipitously as their enslavement to a thousand other little mini commitments to what end amounts to nothing grows. I've seen interest in growing and learning about the most important person you and I will ever encounter, the Lord Jesus Christ, get pushed way back to the back burner while things not even remotely

comparable rise to the top, and I wonder if persecution isn't exactly what we need. And I should also point out that persecution that I'm talking about, the persecution that we are going to -- quote -- "potentially get" is a pin prick compared to what our brothers and sisters right now are already enduring.

Just two days ago I read this account from Christian Aid Mission about indigenous missionaries, the ones who refused to leave Aleppo. Let me just read you this account:

"I asked them to leave but I gave them the freedom to choose," said the ministry director, his voice tremulous as he recalled their horrific deaths. "As their leader, I should have insisted that they leave." They stayed because they believed they were called to share Christ with those caught in the crossfire," he said. "Every time we talked to them," the director said, "they were always saying, 'We want to stay here -- this is what God has told us to do. This is what we want to do.' They wanted to stay and share the gospel." Those who chose to stay could have scattered and hid in other areas, as their surviving family members did. On a visit to the surviving relatives in hiding, the ministry director learned of the cruel executions. The relatives said ISIS militants on August 7 captured the Christian workers in a village whose name is withheld for security reasons. On August 28th, the militants asked

if they had renounced Islam for Christianity. When the Christians said that they had, the rebels asked if they wanted to return to Islam. The Christians said they would never renounce Christ. The 41-year-old team leader, his young son and two ministry members in their 20s were questioned at one village site where the ISIS militants had summoned a crowd. The team leader presided over nine house churches he had helped to establish. His son was two months away from his 13th birthday. In front of the team leader and relatives in the crowd, the Islamic extremists cut off the fingertips of the boy, severely beat him, telling his father they would stop the torture only if he, the father, returned to Islam. When the team leader refused, relatives said, the ISIS militants also tortured and beat him and two other ministry workers. The three men and the boy then met their deaths in crucifixion. "All were badly brutalized and then crucified," the ministry leader said. "They were left on their crosses for two days. No one was allowed to remove them." The martyrs died beside signs the ISIS militants had put identifying them as "infidels."

That's persecution. That's the real stuff. Now the question that I ask myself when I read this is would I have stayed to share the gospel with others when I know I could have left? None of us can answer that question. But I can tell you a church that has grown fat and indolent and selfish because it has no stress and no strife

other than an occasional tussle over nativity scenes in public parks is not a church that is prepared to go to war for the gospel. I'm not asking for the horrors of ISIS to descend on our country, believe me, but as a pastor, I have to be completely honest. I wonder if an absence of any persecution has made us perhaps in such a way that God sees persecution coming to us as a blessing, by making our choices to serve him more costly, our hearts to worship him more willing to sacrifice, and our minds to study him more willing to see his word the perspective it gives us as precious.

People say well, what about pro-life? What about all the cultural rot? What about this political party shaking its fist at God and seeming to get away with it? I know this year the gloves are off. And both party platforms are clear and unequivocal and they call for a response. I was recently talking to my sister and everybody knows the struggles that everybody has with the election this year, but my sister's response to both candidates is to say, she said this year I'm not voting for presidents, I'm voting for platforms. And I wanted to just -- because I don't think you've even seen this. I just wanted to give you this. This is in one area alone in terms of comparison. I want to read you the Republican party platform section, just four issues having to do with abortion, and I want to compare it to the Democratic party platform. There's lots of other issues but this is where I'm talking about there are

parts of our politics that are literally shaking their fist in God's face. This is the Republican platform on pro-life issues. They say: The Constitution guarantees that no one can "be deprived of life, liberty or property. This deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all" are "endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to children before birth. We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. And finally, we call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and healthcare plans that include abortion coverage. That's the Republican side.

The Democratic platform states with the very same issues: "We will appoint judges who defend the constitutional principles of liberty and equality for all, and will protect a woman's right to safe and legal abortion. We will fight Republican efforts to roll back the clock on women's health and reproductive rights, and stand up for Planned Parenthood. We will continue to stand up to Republican

efforts to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, which provide critical health services to millions of people. We will continue to oppose -- and seek to overturn -- federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment." That means that we're going to make tax money pay for abortions and you will pay. "We will support sexual and reproductive health and rights around the globe." That also means that we intend to export this.

This is just abortion. If you read the documents, there are like 30 or 40 pages. There are all kinds of other areas where one party is literally shaking its fist in God's face. I'm not telling you which way to vote, but I can tell you this much, we have a vision like Daniel had a vision. Daniel in 8:27 says: *And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I arose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.* I'm looking at a vision that is appalling. It is literally appalling. And so we respond like Daniel responds, we do the very best that we can but then we trust God for the results and we do the next thing. If we elect a very pro-abortion Hillary Clinton, then we just double our efforts to change the hearts and minds of those who are pressured into aborting. And if marriage equality and gender confusion begin to reign even more in our culture, then we double down on our efforts to change the hearts

and minds of people who are enslaved by those lies. And we do this because we know this honors God and glorifies his church. And we do it knowing it is by God's grace and power alone by the power of the Holy Spirit that hearts are brought into the kingdom of God. And I guess what I'm saying is for us -- not just us locally, but the church itself in this country, it's time for us to put on our big boy pants. This is serious stuff. And it's time for us to recognize the real possibility that regardless the outcome of November 9th, neither candidate deserves our trust. But God does. We have the privilege of God's book. And God's book takes us literally into the throne room of heaven. And it shows us that politics on -- at street level in Daniel's day is not that much different from politics on the street level in our day. And the solution is still the same. We pray, we worship, and we trust in God's sovereign hand. We follow the very same words that Jeremiah spoke that empowered Daniel in *Jeremiah 29*, he said: *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.* Then we do the next thing. Let's pray.

Father, I just want to again, I just I want to pray for the spirit of fear that I just sense so many people being defeated by this, the sense that the sky is falling, we're going off a cliff and what will happen to us. And Lord, I just want to reassert the fact that

you are absolutely sovereign and nothing, not a molecule anywhere is out of the place you want it to be in, including our politics. And so Lord, whatever the results on November 9th, you will still be king, you will still be honored, you will still be glorified, you will still sovereignly rule. Help us to understand that. Help us to trust in that. Help us to go forward regardless. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.