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Daniel...An Introduction

Daniel 1:1-2

Prayer: *Father God, we just again thank you and praise you for who you are. We thank you for the gifts that you've given to us, especially the gift of your son. We thank you also, Lord, for the gift of your word. We're starting this Sunday opening up a new book, a new examination into the book of Daniel, Lord, it is a gift from you, as well as your Holy Spirit, Lord. And so we pray as we open up this book that we would have the privilege and the presence of your Holy Spirit who makes these things make sense. Give us your Spirit, give us the ability to hear, give us the ability to hear and listen and to make these things of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I just alluded to, we are starting a new book today, we are starting the book of Daniel and so we ask what does the story about an ancient man who sees his country and his culture overwhelmed and overtaken by powerful outside forces, what does that have to do with 21st Century America? If you're a Bible believing Christian well, you'll see that there's lots of parallels

between what we see in Daniel's life and what we see taking place in this culture today. I mean Daniel himself is kidnapped. He's kidnapped and he's forced to live in a culture that is completely foreign to his and many believer today feels overwhelmed and more or less held hostage by a culture that looks more and more foreign every day. And so in many important ways, Daniel's story has much to do with ours.

The book starts out by saying in *Daniel 1*: *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Jehoiakim had decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. It was an incredibly bad decision by an incredibly bad king. Verse 2 says: And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand -- that's Nebuchadnezzar's hand -- with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. This was not supposed to happen to God's chosen people or so at least his people thought. Not only was the city of Jerusalem besieged, but think of it, some of the sacred vessels, the vessels used in the worship of God himself were taken and now were going to be used in the service of Nebuchadnezzar's god. Now if you believe in a sovereign omnipotent God and you see the most sacred aspects of the worship of this god co-opted and used in the worship of a false god, you've*

got only three options going forward: Option number one, my god is real, but I guess he's just not that powerful because a more powerful god has over taken him. Option two, my god is not real and perhaps I need to rethink this whole idea about god. And option three, my God's ways are not nearly so simple and simplistic as I thought they were.

Now I have no doubt that there were probably many contemporary Jews who reacted in any one of those three different ways, and those that went the third way, that is that God is not nearly so simplistic as I thought, had only to scratch the surface to find out that that was the case. What had happened was shocking but not at all unexpected if you're willing see beneath the surface. Our almighty and omnipotent God suffered a crushing blow at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and there is a lesson there for all of us.

Verse 2 makes plain the fact that this didn't happen by chance. It says: *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.*

You see, it wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's power or wisdom that caused Jehoiakim to fall, it was God's hand. I mean think about that just -- just for a moment. Jehoiakim was an incredibly miserable king guilty of the excesses that all wicked kings are guilty of. But God never reaches a point where he gets so emotionally fed up that he has no other choice but to respond, because that's not the way God works. I mean, how could a god who already knows the future be

so subject to so human a reaction to the unfolding of events?

Well, the fact is he cannot. There are no events whatsoever that are a surprise to God. And furthermore God is not subject to his emotions as we humans are. He's got a much bigger, broader and wiser perspective that he operates from and in this case it was a perspective that went years back to the reign of King Hezekiah who preceded Jehoiakim. In fact, God had warned the kings of Israel that if they continued to disobey, there would be consequences. He even prophesied through the prophet Isaiah years in advance just what those consequences would be. This is *Isaiah 39:1-8*, it says this, it says: *At that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered, and Hezekiah welcomed them gladly. And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. When Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?" Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon." He said, "What have they seen in your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them." 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 to 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."

Well he was right, there was peace and security in Hezekiah's days and that ended with Jehoiakim. You see, precisely as God had indicated, men had come from a far country and had begun the process of taking from Jerusalem and all Israel everything that meant anything. For the next 70 years, Daniel and the people of Israel would be under the thumb of Babylon. Things couldn't have looked bleaker. Think how in the world could Israel allow itself to be put into these awful circumstances? I mean how could Israel's God allow himself to be so humiliated? Well, we think now it's thousands of years later and many Christians are beginning to ask themselves the very same questions. I mean instead of Nebuchadnezzar, we now have ISIS in the very birthplace of Christianity raping and pillaging and mocking the kingdom of God with absolute impunity. And here at home we face a bewildering array of attacks against the very foundations of the faith that

we've always accepted as rock solid. Perversion, fornication and child sacrifice have now become normal, accepted parts of our culture, and woe to you if you point that out. Woe to you if you stand against it. I mean is it any wonder that many a Christian today seems to be either captured by the culture or bewildered by a god who appears to do nothing to stop it. You know, we sing "Our God is greater." I wonder if we simply doubt that to be the case. I mean how can an all powerful God allow himself to be put in this kind of a situation? Well, can I counter that thinking? Can I counter it by stating that God knows precisely and exactly what he is doing, that what is unfolding on the other side of the world and right here in our own backyard is no surprise at all to God and it is still part of his sovereign plan for us. Now can I say that with any confidence?

Well, the first thing that we have to do is look at the circumstances from God's perspective. And that's what I want to do this morning, and here's why. You see, part of my job in the pulpit is to help you fall deeper and deeper in love. You're to fall in love with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and the secret to falling in love with God is knowing him, is learning about him, understanding him better and better each day. See, the source of our power in life, according to Jesus, lies in how deeply and intimately we get to know our God. Jesus

puts it in terms of abiding. In *John 15:7* he says this, he says: "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" Now what God is saying here is that the more intimately we get to know him, the more powerful our lives are going to become. My guess is that many, many folks find that an incredibly mysterious and perhaps very frustrating scripture because for many of us, it just doesn't line up with our personal experience. I mean all of us know what it's like to pray deeply for something that we desperately wanted and to have it not done for us and so we doubt God's promises. But you see, it's the "if" clause of that statement that catches us up. In *John 15:7* Jesus says: "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you.*" And what Jesus is saying here is if you really come to know me intimately, so much so that my words are a very part of your own thinking, then my presence within you will reshape everything about the way you see the world and your place in it and your desires will become identical to mine. Now *Psalms 37* says: *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Jesus lived to do the will of his Father and he's in the process of developing in his children the ability to live so that the son of God's will is done on earth. What Jesus is looking for in us is an intimacy that connects the way we think with the way he thinks. And to do that we have to learn more and more about him and his Father.

And so we're looking at the book of Daniel and trying to get some of what God wants us to learn about him, and the very first thing that leaps out of his passage in Daniel when you begin to scratch the surface is that our God is a God who frequently embraces losing in order to win. I mean God makes it crystal clear at the very beginning of Daniel that it's he who is in charge of who is winning and who is losing. The fact is God is losing here in the opening lines of the verse -- first verse of Daniel, and he's losing in a very, very big way. The absolute disgrace of having the sacred vessels of the temple of God now sitting in the treasury of the gods of Babylon, well, that came about for a very specific reason. Verse 2: *The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hands.* So God allowed Nebuchadnezzar this incredibly costly victory even though we know that God had complete and absolute control over every single aspect of Nebuchadnezzar's life. I mean after all, it's God we're going to see in the next few chapters who turns Nebuchadnezzar into a raving lunatic for seven years because he overstepped his boundaries. But for now God is content to let Nebuchadnezzar revel in what appears to be God's own disgrace. What God is seeking to win here is not some hollow victory gained by having his minions out power or outfox the minions of the enemy. God's intent here is to prepare his people to serve in a world that was altogether opposed to the kingdom of God. This is a world we're becoming increasingly familiar with. See, it was God's

intent to shape and mold Daniel and the others into models as to how we can handle being on the losing side and to enable us to learn and understand how it is that in God's economy we often lose first in order to win.

And this is not the first time that a sovereign God has embraced being on the losing side. See, it's important to understand that for as many times as it appears strange to us to see God going after what appears to be his glory, well he likewise is just as willing to pursue humiliating defeat. Some cases in point.

Remember God's leading his people out of Egypt and as he's leading his people out of Egypt, he's putting the finishing touches on the complete and utter humiliation of Pharaoh. It's going to include the destruction of his Army in the Red Sea. And this is what God says in *Exodus 14:4*. He says: "*And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them*" -- that's the Jews -- "*and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.*" And they did so. Now new I confess to you every single time I read that passage I struggled, and I struggled with my image of God. It just appeared as if God is desperately seeking some kind of glory, the glory of grinding the Egyptians into the mud. "*I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host*" sounded like something that somebody with a very large ego need would say, somebody who's convinced that the most important thing

is "me." I felt exactly as Brad Pitt feels. You may not know this but he's quoted as saying this: "I didn't understand this idea of a god who says 'You have to acknowledge me. You have to say that I'm the best, and then I'll give you eternal happiness. If you won't, then you don't get it!'" It seemed to be about ego. I can't see God operating from ego, so it made no sense to me." Well, Brad, it made no sense to me either. But here's where you have to scratch beneath the surface a bit. First by asking a very, very simple question and the question is this: Do you think that God needs the glory that I, his creation, could give him? I mean, does it make sense to believe that the creator of the sun, the moon and the stars and every single thing that exists, who has been in complete and total fellowship for all time with all three parts of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now suddenly desperately needs these creatures of him to tell him how great he is? Do I really think that's who God is? I mean God answers that question in Acts 17:24, he says this, he says: *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

Well now there is a reason why God sought to get glory over Pharaoh and all of his host but is it had nothing to do with God's ego

needing to be satisfied and everything to do with his plans for his people. In fact God states the reason why he sought glory over Pharaoh in *Exodus 14:31*. He says this, it says: *Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.* So here's what actually took place. You see, when God determined that his people needed a demonstration of power to cement their belief, then he went after it. When he knew that his people needed the exact opposite, that is, a demonstration of absolute humiliation and powerlessness, God went after that as well. Just consider the ark of the covenant. You know, the ark of the covenant was a symbol of a covenant that God made with his people to be their God. And as the sign of this covenant he had this wooden chest made and it was overlaid with gold and it was built by his people and in that chest were the actual stone tablets that the ten commandments were written on, the original staff of Aaron. It was the most incredibly sacred piece of furniture that ever existed. And once a year the high priest would go into the temple and there in the Holy of Holies he would offer up the blood of a sacrificed animal on what was called the mercy seat of the ark. Like I said, it doesn't get more sacred than that piece of furniture.

Well, after a time the Israelites abandoned their covenant with God

and they grew, as they often did, more and more wicked. In addition without God's presence they began to fail militarily. 1 Samuel 4 describes one such disaster. This is what Samuel says. It says: *Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."* You see even though the Jews at this time had repeatedly broken the covenant, they were still identified as the chosen people of God and the ark represented God's power, God's glory that was among them. Verse 4 goes on to say: *So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there, with the ark of the covenant of God. As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What's what does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the*

camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness."

Okay. So let me stop right here and connect the dots for us. See, the Philistines knew their history, their recent history very well. They knew exactly what the God of Israel had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians and so they were filled with absolute terror. They knew this was the very same God and that the power of that God was absolute. Now this very same God who appeared to be bragging that he would get glory by crushing the Egyptians was now on the verge of gaining even more glory by utterly crushing the Philistines. The stage is now set for God certainly to do that, but God was never interested in glory for glory's sake in the first place. That was never the case. We learned that the reason why God wanted that glory was not so that he could get attaboys from his creatures but so that they could see his power and believe. Well now it's years later and God's people have once again embraced unbelief, but the people that they're fighting, that is the Philistines, they still remember the glory of that God. They know everything about that God was represented by the supernatural success that they had in battle and by God's presence conferred upon them. The ark of

the covenant was a symbol of that presence and the Jews now possessed it. Everything about the battle points to an imminent victory for God and his glory and the Philistines are terrified. What the Israelites didn't count on was that God doesn't give a fig for the glory that human beings can provide, and he's willing to lose any and all of that glory in the pursuit of his people. See, God knows how to win by losing.

The Philistines attempt to rouse themselves from certain disaster by stating in the very next verse, verse 9, they say: *"Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."* So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. So much for a God who's determined to get glory at any cost. You know, the chapter ends with this inglorious final statement in verse 22: *"The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."* Now I wish I just had about five minutes to point out to Brad Pitt the times that God has purposely chosen to forego glory and embrace inglorious defeat sometimes at the hands of the Philistines, sometimes at the hands of these marauders from Babylon. You know, Nebuchadnezzar won a stinging victory over the

people of God for one reason and one reason only. Verse 2: *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.* See, our God has no problem winning by losing.

Now there are three things that I think we can take away from this opening statement in Daniel, and the very first one has to do with the bewilderment we experience when we see what appears to be the good guys losing and the bad guys winning. And when we see news reports that claim that Christianity itself is about to be completely eliminated from certain parts of the Middle East, and when we hear still other stories about the church being mocked as hopelessly out of touch and out of date, we are tempted to think that God and his kingdom are now under siege. Well, the mistake that we make here is thinking that there was ever a time when the church wasn't under siege. You know, from the day where the church first started with Jesus's resurrection until today and on until the future, the church will reign triumphant always under that siege. Jesus said in *Matthew 16: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* And the key word in that statement is the word "prevail." Jesus is acknowledging that the gates of hell will always be arrayed against the church of

Christ, and what he's saying is they're never, never going to stop trying, but they will never ultimately win. There has not been a single day in the when kingdom of light has not been at war with the kingdom of darkness. I've said it over and over again, this is a proxy war going on. There's a proxy war between two great kingdoms. There's the kingdom of God and there's the kingdom of this world and every last one of us on the face of this earth are fighting, whether we know it or not, for one kingdom or the other. And at the center of this proxy war is you and me, chosen by God for the express purpose of glorifying God in the way we play our part. God says in *1 Peter 2:9*: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Now how many times have you looked at the news or gotten into a discussion at work or school or read an article in a newspaper, felt the weight of a culture seeming to be turning against you. I mean maybe you've been tempted to speak up at one time or another but felt cowed into silence by a reaction that you never could have even anticipated just a few years ago. You know, it's easy in today's cultural climate to think that God is somehow or other on the losing side of the equation, that the kingdom of God is somehow in eclipse and now struggling to find its voice. Well the more you

feel that pressure, the more you need to put things into perspective, the more you need to see things from God's vantage point. God lays that out in *Psalm 2*. He says this, he says: *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury. You see, it's incredibly easy to forget who we are compared to who God is and to somehow think that we're not really that different and God's up there really struggling. We don't have a clue. God says in *Isaiah 40:15*: *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales. You know what dust on the scales is? When they're going to weigh something, and they got a scale here and a scale here, and they want to make sure it's absolutely accurate, they blow on the scale to get the teeny little pieces of dust off. That's so you get an accurate measurement. What God is saying is the planets, they're dust, dust on the scales. He says: Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. God further says in *Romans 2:5*: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous***

judgment will be revealed. God is saying that day is absolutely inevitable. But he has no problem whatsoever allowing the enemy the perception that he's on the winning side for now. We grow impatient waiting to finally see the good guys on the winning side and the bad guys on the losing side getting their just punishment and over and over again it just doesn't happen, and so we continue to grow more and more impatient. God has a precise reason for why it doesn't happen, and it has to do with his patience. In 2 Peter 3:8 God says this: But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. What God is saying is God says I know the exact day, the date, the time, to the second when the very last one of my chosen ones is going to enter into that sheep gate, when the very last man or woman is going to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior. And when you and I grow tempted to be impatient with God, we have to realize that he left that gate open long enough for you and me to get in. It's now our turn to wait patiently for the rest. And until that day there's going to be many a ruler who will

make a claim "*against the LORD and his Anointed.*" ISIS is just the latest.

You know, a second mistake that we can often make in thinking that God's kingdom is in retreat is buying into the enemy's definition of what constitutes a victory. I mean to say that God has a long distance view of victory as opposed to the short distance view of the enemy is to really make an understatement. We look at it completely differently. You know, we are consumed with quantity; god is not. Jesus leaves the 99 healthy ones, he goes after the single one who's sick. And what God counts as a victory we might think of as a defeat. Let me cite one such instance that looked for all intents and purposes like a massive victory for ISIS and the powers of evil.

I think we've all heard of that hideous day awhile back when 21 Coptic Christians were marched out onto a beach in orange jump suits, they were all ordered to renounce their faith, and when they refused, they were each summarily beheaded by their captors. You know, ISIS thought they had scored an amazing propaganda victory by demonstrating their absolute dominion and domination, but God doesn't keep score the way ISIS keeps score. You see, hidden in that tragedy was a subtext, was another story completely. In fact there were only 20 Coptic Christians and a black man who

stood out because he looked different from all the others. I think his picture is going up there. That was taken shortly before they were butchered. And it turns out that man was very different. He was from Chad, he wasn't from Egypt and he was not a believer. His name was Matthew Ayairga. And here is his story as told by *Voice of the Martyrs*: "Following the martyrdom of Coptic Christian men by Libyan Islamic State militants in February 2015, the names of 21 of the martyrs were widely shared. The martyrs were kidnapped from Sirte, Libya, where they were working. Initially, it was believed that all of the men killed for their faith were from small villages in Egypt. However, the name and background of one of those killed, a black man, was unknown. Matthew Ayairga was soon identified by friends after being recognized in video footage of the killings released by IS. According to *Ahram-Canadian News*, Matthew was from Chad. Matthew had gone missing in January 2015, captured by one of the radical groups in Libya who have kidnapped hundreds, both Muslim and Christian. The video made public on February 15 shows each of the men dressed in orange jump suits kneeling on a beach, with their black-clothed attackers standing behind them. Each one is systematically beheaded and the video clearly shows many of the men praying "Lord Jesus Christ" in a final moments. According to reports, Matthew Ayairga was not a Christian. However, when moments before his death the IS extremists demanded that he follow Islam, Matthew turned them down. After repeatedly witnessing the

'immense faith' of the Egyptian believers, he decided to become a follower of Christ. On camera one, of the terrorists asked Matthew, "Do you reject Christ?" "Their God is my God," he responded, and he became one of the 21 men laying down their lives for their faith in Christ." You see, the butchers of ISIS thought they could defeat God's kingdom by sheer savagery. They had no idea that the testimony of those who were being butchered would be used by God to draw one lost sinner into the kingdom. They fully intended their actions for evil but God was superintending those actions for good.

So who's the winner here? I mean, Jesus said in *Luke 15*: "*Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*" Well, if you're like me, you saw that photo and story and you thought it was yet another portrait of the good guys losing. I don't think that's the way it was viewed in heaven. Now short term, no doubt, the ISIS beheaders certainly had their day. But ten years, a hundred years, ten thousand years from now, Matthew Ayairga will still be celebrating the astonishing victory he had and the ongoing joy of eternal life due in large part to the faith of the 20 other believers who appeared to be victims and no more. His beheader, unless God intervenes, will face God's terrifying glory. Now like I said, God often appears to win by losing.

Like I said at the beginning of this message, we're going to be looking at the life of Daniel and what makes his life so meaningful to us is the way he understood the sovereign power of God operating in the midst of a culture that was antithetical to the kingdom of God. I mean look at it, the book of Daniel opens up with what appears to be an absolute disaster. Jerusalem is overrun, the sacred temple articles are now sitting in the treasury of a false god, lives are lost, Daniel and his contemporaries are kidnapped. It was by all appearances an absolute disaster. Over the next few weeks we're going to see that God is still sovereign in the midst of what appears to be an overwhelming disaster and we will see how best to respond. When we see that we are bewildered by what appears to be a collapsing kingdom of God, we recognize God's promise that the gates of hell will never prevail against his church. We've seen that when we're impatient with the enemy's apparent victories, that God's own patience is what staved off the day of judgment until we could come to a saving knowledge of him. And finally, when we are faithless, we look at the nature of God's willingness to win by losing, and we realize there is no greater proof for that than the cross. I mean we have the benefit of 2,000 years of history. I mean we've seen God's hand on his church for eons now. But just imagine that you were one of the disciples or maybe that you were a believer in Jerusalem at that time, and walking among you is the son of God and he's living out his life

and he's living it perfectly, he's healing the sick, he's raising the dead, he's challenging all of the nonsense that the religious leaders has placed on the heads of their people, he's literally ushering a brand new kingdom where the blind see, the lame walk, and the captives are being released from centuries of bondage. You see the kingdom of God coming in this man and suddenly he's arrested. Within the course of 24 hours you see this man, Jesus of Nazareth, going from who you thought was the Messiah to becoming the worst example of the victims of the power of Rome. I mean this very same Jesus who brought life and light and goodness to thousands is now broken and bloodied, stripped naked and crucified. He cries out, "*It is finished!*" and he's hanging dead on a cross. You couldn't make a deeper more abject portrait of the most resounding defeat of the good guys by the bad guys than this. Little would you have known had you been standing there that you were witnessing the greatest victory in the history of mankind. God won by losing. God himself had become a man, he had lived out a perfect life and then orchestrated his own sacrifice on our behalf and three days later when Jesus rose from the dead, he had successfully rescued and ransomed all of his sheep by paying the penalty of their sin on that cross. To say that it didn't look like a victory is perhaps the greatest understatement human words could ever express. God knew exactly what it was. This is what he said in *Colossians 2:13*. He says: *And you, who were dead in your*

trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

We know it was a triumph. But that's not how the world or the followers of Christ saw it in that day. And you know, sometimes that's true for us. You know, if you look at the state of the church or maybe as you look at your own relationship with Jesus Christ, are you bewildered? Are you impatient? Are you faithless? Do you feel like you're on the losing side of God's sovereign will? I would be lying if I told you I'd never felt that way. If you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, that means something. It means you have a relationship with him, and successful relationships are always the product of hard work. And the hard work that we have to do in this case is that we have to drill beneath the surface that is so often deceptive to find the heart of the loveliness of Jesus Christ. Brad Pitt stopped at the surface.

I said at the very beginning of this message why God's ways are not nearly so simple and simplistic as I thought they were and a God who was able to win by losing is also a God who deserves the effort

of looking and listening long and hard to see the beauty that lays hidden in the pages of scripture. Jesus once castigated the religious leaders by saying in *John 5:39*: "*You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.*" You see, every word of scripture in both the old and the new testaments bears witness to the loveliness of Christ. And the more you know about him, the more you will love him, the more you will be empowered by his beauty and by his grace. We will be seeking that beauty in the book of Daniel. Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you that you are in charge, that you are sovereign, that nothing takes you by surprise. And Lord, we open up the book of Daniel and the first thing we see is disaster upon disaster upon disaster, and the first thing that you're teaching us is that you are in charge of what seems to be disasters. Father, you win by losing. Give us the ability to understand that and to see things from your perspective and not from the perspective that the world desperately wants us to see it from. Give us the ability to trust completely and implicitly in your sovereign good will, in the love that you have for us and in the ability that you have to give us the victory no matter what the cost. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.