

How to Live in Babylon: Called to Be Distinct

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Tonight before we start digging into Ezekiel, I could not help but think when I was hearing those words, one of the most frightening and yet thankful moments in my life is as I was going through graduate school, what is known as an oral examination. Now the way in which my degree was constructed, most people would say in graduate school their oral or at least their oral examination is a defense of their dissertation. Mine was actually the reverse, the oral examination was a defense of all the "knowledge" that you hopefully receive when you were in seminars for three years, and so basically everything that you were responsible for for three years, they within about three hours, they just, yes, they asked every question feasible and possible. Now I promise this is relevant. So one of my professors asked a question. He had taught me a course entitled "The History of Spiritual Awakenings," probably one of the most influential academic exercises of my life. And he said, "If you remember the time period in the late 18 and early 19 hundreds, we studied that great tent revival movement." I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you think in your own opinion you can name the top 10 evangelists of those days?" And I said, "Well, I believe I can." And so I named 10 very well-known evangelistic figures. He said, "Okay. Now that you've named their names, can you go back and tell me the respective denomination affiliation?" I said, "I think I can do that." So I do and when we got done he said, "Did you notice anything missing?" I said, "Yeah, I didn't name a Baptist in the group." Most of the great evangelists over 100 years ago were Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists and he said, "Can you name any Baptist evangelist from that time period?" And I thought about it and I said, "I can't." And he said, "Don't you remember a little guy by the name of Mordecai Ham?" For those of you who don't know who Mordecai Ham is, he's the preacher that led Billy Graham to the Lord. And so at least in the last 50-75 years, the most influential evangelical voice was actually led to the Lord by a preacher who even in an academic exercise like that just becomes a footnote in the pages of history.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we turn to the pages of your word that so often is neglected and at times is confusing, Lord, give us clarity, Lord, give us purpose, give us understanding. May tonight not be an exercise ethereal but an exercise in the very practical. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Well, tonight we are in Ezekiel 1. Now let me be honest, we're only going to spend a little bit of time in Ezekiel today, we're going to spend the majority of our evening in the book of Daniel. Now I know many of you are thinking, "Woo, that's a whole easier to handle." Well, don't worry, we've still got five more weeks of Ezekiel ahead of us. But I want to share with you an illustration that was shared with me years ago, one of the most profound images that I've ever heard when it comes to studying scripture or listening from God's word. The illustration goes as such. If you were to take any page on your Bible, it doesn't matter what page it is, and you take all of the words that the Lord has given us, and you were to take the ink that comprises those words, and forget the word but you just arrange all the ink in a solid conglomerate, that the average page in your Bible only consists of one square inch of ink. Now think about that. That means that if you're going to quantify the ink versus the paper, there's actually more paper than there is ink. Why is that important? I believe in the last chapter of the gospel of John, that if everything Jesus did were written down, it wouldn't, the libraries of the world could not contain it. God has not given us everything but he's given us all that we need to know in respect thereof.

Tonight as we come to the book of Ezekiel, if you'll kind of imagine that illustration, we're going to go behind the scenes. We talk about the great visions of Ezekiel, the crazy wheel within the wheel with the eyes all around, but what we may not realize is historically speaking there were some pretty significant events that led up to the River Chebar where he was when he received the vision of the Lord. So Ezekiel 1:1-3, it says,

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, 3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

You notice verse 4, it says, "I looked up and saw the wind out of the north," and thus the visions begin.

Now when we read those first three verses, can I just go ahead and confess what took place this week as you began Ezekiel: you didn't think about it, you just moved on. Let's get to the good stuff here even if I don't understand it. And oftentimes when we're studying the scriptures, the dates and the times and the names and the places, we know they're important but oftentimes it just doesn't seem like applicable to our everyday lives. Well, if you have a study Bible or a Bible that has any time of notations in it, I want you to pay attention to the date that your Bible would have for the events in Ezekiel 1. Most of your study Bibles will have a date such as 595, 596, you know, somewhere right after what you and I know as 600 BC. That's just a typical dating of the events of Ezekiel 1.

Now I want you to back it up to the book of Daniel, actually you're going to go forward in scripture, we're going to go back in time to the book of Daniel and discover that one of the most famous men of the Bible, one of the most famous stories in all of the Bible, if you'll notice the dateline in Daniel 1 took place about 10 years prior. Now for those of you who are students of the Old Testament, there is a year by the number of 586 that we somewhat revere in chronology as the year that Nebuchadnezzar what we know as destroyed Jerusalem. What we know as the destruction of Jerusalem really didn't happen in just one single solitary event. We put 586 on it because that was the final straw of the event, it actually began about 607-605 BC when he came in and did what we read in Daniel 1 where he took those men and those students who showed promise and academic fervor, he took them "hostage" into the foreign land, and that basically destroyed the economy, it destroyed the culture, and over the process of time things began to erode, others began to be transported into Babylon. The physical destruction of Jerusalem took place in 586. So it was a very long process, understand? Things did not quite happen in the expediency that they do today.

So what we discover is that when Ezekiel has his vision, the famous wheel inside the wheel and the following visions that we're going to study, that Daniel 1 had already taken place. In fact, those of you who may be interested going to Daniel 2, remember the famous statue of Nebuchadnezzar? That had already taken place as well. And I think sometimes we forget that there's a chronology in the background that fits into the story that we're studying. And so when the Lord gives him this vision, the famous statue with the head of gold and such from Nebuchadnezzar had already been seen, but for tonight's purposes, I want to go back into Daniel 1, I want to read Daniel 1 in its entirety, and then I want to look at the variety of aspects of a subject matter that we began this morning about living in Babylon.

Beginning in Daniel 1, it says,

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. 3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach;

and to Azariah, of Abednego. 8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. 11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. 16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. 17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

It's a story that we assuredly are more familiar with than the story of Ezekiel and his famous visions, however it is a story that sets the stage for everything that happens in the book of Ezekiel and why is that? Because Daniel has established a pattern for us of how to navigate Babylon, and for those of you that weren't with us this morning, just a little bit of a recap here. We're addressing the parallel that you and I today as believers in Jesus Christ, as a faith community, are not living a life different than the Israelites did in the Babylonian captivity. We're living in a land that is contrary to faith in the words that it expresses, the actions that it endorses, and the lifestyles that it celebrates. We are quantifiably outnumbered and qualitatively we are out-volumed, yet at the same time, we are called to live a life of distinction and Daniel gives this incredible model of how to do so, and I believe that tonight is important because it sets the stage for the book of Ezekiel. What we're going to discuss tonight is kind of a theme that overrides everything that Ezekiel is given by God, every challenge that he thus gives the people of God.

So tonight I want to begin by talking about the reality of Babylon. What is the goal of Babylon? What is the, shall we say, the MO of Babylon? How does Babylon operate not

only 2,000+ years ago in the life of the Israelites but to use the parallel today? If we're going to use this analogy or this metaphor today of a lost, secular, contrary to faith in Jesus Christ world, how is it that they operate "in the background"? Well, I want you to notice there are three things that happen in Babylon happened to Daniel and, by the way, have been happening to us for a very long time. Not just the last few weeks, months, years, or even decades, but for a long time. We'll discuss that in a moment.

The first thing is this: relocation. Notice that the Israelites were taken out of their homeland and taken to a foreign land. They were taken from Judah or Jerusalem specifically unto Babylon. Now you and I today have not physically been transported to a different land but what we see in our world today is eerily similar to what the Israelites experienced in 1 Samuel 17. Now we know 1 Samuel 17 is the great story of David and Goliath. We love to talk about the sling and the five stones, coming in the name of the Lord, the removal of the head. I mean, it's a great story. But we oftentimes forget to read the beginning of the story where it says that the Philistines actually came across the river into the land that was rightfully the Israelites', and so what we see in our world today when we're going to draw a parallel to living in Babylon, it's not that you and I have been taken to Babylon, it's that Babylon has actually invaded the place of which we already dwell. So the relocation isn't us going somewhere else, it's somewhere else coming in to us. In fact, one of the things that Solomon was warned by God when the Lord told him not to marry all those women of which he did in his latter years, was the fact that their idolatry and their false worship from somewhere else would be brought to the inside and that's exactly what took place.

So the first thing that "Babylon" as an illustration does is it relocates. Now in our vernacular today, we're not the ones that have gone somewhere else but somewhere else has come here with philosophies, ideology, thinking and culture. The second one is reeducation. Well, that's a word we've heard lately, is it not? Verse 4, "Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." Now here's where we have the evidence that the contemporary Babylonian captivity of our lives has not been a recent phenomena but a multi-decade experience. You and I, and it's been slow but it's been steady, have been a part of a reeducation plan whether we realize it or not. We have been told slowly but surely that which we thought to be true is not so much, and that which we never would have entertained is that which should be true for our lives. Let me give you the warning of Isaiah in chapter 5, "Woe unto those who call evil good and good evil." But it never happens in a 24 hour time period, it's always slow, it's always strategic, it is always so methodical and so incremental that you don't even realize it's happening.

So what did Babylon do to the Israelites? They brought them into a different land and said, "We're going to teach you a different tongue, we're going to teach you a different language, we're going to teach you a different culture. We are going to take what you thought to be true and we're going to 'flip the script' on you." Today, we might not call it reeducation but we might call it revisionist history.

Now many of you know I'm a fan of history because if we don't learn from history, we're doomed to repeat it, the problem is when you erase it, you always repeat it. Now here's the great thing about history: it's ugly. History's ugly. When you go back and you read the stories that make us uncomfortable and you see the walls that make us just cringe and say, "I can't believe they thought that way, and I can't believe they did those things." That's a good problem because it says don't repeat the same mistake. But when you erase it and you get rid of it, then all of a sudden it opens the door to repeat it. Allow me to use a very relevant contemporary illustration. It just marvels me that we have high profile figures that will stand before the United Nations as the head of their respective country and claim that the slaughter of 6+ million Jews never occurred, and yet it happens on a regular basis. If you get rid of the museums, if you get rid of the memorials, if you get rid of the gas chambers, you'll begin to believe it never actually happened.

I've walked through the chambers of Dachau in Munich, Germany, and it is an eerie sight to realize how it took place, to realize that it took place. I don't want to rewrite that because I don't want to repeat that, but at the same time there are that which has occurred that we must acknowledge. I know many of you are familiar with this illustration but it's just so relevant. One of the challenges that I love to offer people is to go on a journey through history and just read what people of ancient days wrote and see the buildings that they built. I'll just use our culture. We're talking about the "Babylonian captivity" of our own world. If you've never toured Washington, DC, please do so. Walk through the streets and walk through the buildings and you'll be amazed at what you find. Almost every single building of antiquity has a Bible verse inscribed on the building. Now I've said this before, I don't think our forefathers were Bible thumping, born again Baptists, but they at least revered the book. You go through the gates of Harvard, this is Harvard University, and you walk through that institution, our oldest, our most prestigious and on almost every exterior gate there's a plaque dedicated to a pastor and a church who gave the funds and the resources and the prayers to make it happen. And almost every building of antiquity at Harvard has some Bible verse inscribed on the outside, and I hate to tell you but there's a chapel that was built right in the middle of campus.

Why is that important? Because in Babylon they tried to convince the Jews that the faith of days past wasn't real, that the knowledge of the Chaldeans was all that needed to be known. We cannot deny the faith of days past, the expression of days past, and you and I are subject to a world today that wants to convince us that it never occurred, that it never happened, and they never wrote the things and they never built those buildings. The more buildings we tear down and the more books we burn, we revise the history that was actually true. Today for a young person who grows up in the "school district," they are given pages upon pages of the Islamic faith and a paragraph about Jesus. Those of you who'd like to question it, I was the parent of three of those children.

The third thing that happens is found in verse 10, is Babylon always renames you. Now think about it, they relocate you, or in our case they come in, they what we might say reeducate you, and then they rename you. Do you notice how many times in chapter 1 the Hebrew names of these young men is used, not the Shadrach Meshach and Abednego?

Yet we know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. How does this parallel to our world today? I don't know if you realized this but we have a culture today and to be honest we've given them ample ammunition, is contrary to the "church of Jesus Christ" and is antithetical to the people of faith. That being said, I believe there could be coming a day where we are "renamed." If you don't believe me, just go to any country where today Christianity is not received well or is not legal, and you'll discover that those congregations meet in secrecy, they meet in private, and they're not allowed to put the name on the billboard, they're not allowed to file for non-profit status, they don't get tax deductions when they give their financial gifts. Why? Because everything's got to be "renamed." One of the things you've heard me say over and over and over again particularly when we were in 2 Peter, is the church of Jesus Christ at least in this culture today is being positioned as the instrument of evil in our culture. And so therefore we've had a relocation, we're experiencing a reeducation, and do not be surprised if the days come where there is a renaming whether we want to or not.

That's the reality of Babylon. Let's talk about how to respond. How do you and I respond and this begins in verse 8 when it says, "But Daniel," and I want to draw a parallel. Mark 12:30, Jesus Christ is put in a position as far as discussion by an attorney, by a scribe, by a lawyer, who asked him a very strategic question. Now he was trying to entrap him but obviously Jesus wasn't going to be trapped. He said, "What is the greatest commandment. I mean, after all, there are 10 big ones, there are 613 small ones, what is the most important?" You remember Jesus' words, he said, "Love the Lord your God with all thine," you got it, "heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. These are the two commandments." I want to walk through Mark 12:30 as it parallels Daniel 1, and the one thing that you'll notice is in Mark 12 it's heart, soul, mind and strength, we're going to flip two of those just because they go in numerical order in the life of David.

Let's begin with his heart in verse 8, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." How do we respond to Babylon? How do we engage? How do we navigate? The very first thing is we have to say, "In my heart, my desire, my hope, my prayer is that I would not defile myself with the king's meat. I will not go where I shouldn't go, do what I shouldn't do, say what I shouldn't say, or think what I shouldn't think. I will not defile myself." It all begins with the heart.

Now I hate to confess but I will. My wife and I's favorite movie together, I know you're thinking something romantic, elegant. Nah, not really. One of our favorite movies together is a movie entitled "The Replacements." If you're not familiar with it, it's a movie about professional football. It's a comedy and it's about these replacement players who fill in for these entitled NFL players who think they deserve more money than they do. Well, there's a key quarterback that's a part of the story, that the, shall we say, NFL player comes back for the final game, it's one of those stories, I mean, it's kind of like a Hallmark movie, you see it scripted when it starts. I mean, we know what's going to happen here. It's just a Hallmark movie for guys, I mean, that's what it is. But at the very

end it's the final game, they win the game, they go to the playoffs, they don't, they don't. It's halftime and the team of note is losing and when the sideline interviewer comes to the coach and says, "Coach, what do you need for the second half?" I love his statement, he says, "We need heart. We need miles and miles of heart." He was referring to the backup quarterback that had been replaced who I know you're going to be shocked, shows up and wins the game. But that's a whole other story. But even he said if we don't have the heart, if we don't have the intent, if we don't have the desire. It all begins with an attitude of saying, "I'm not willing to cross the line."

Let me tell you the most dangerous question you can ask yourself as a matter of faith: how far is too far? You know if you ask that question, you've already gone across the line, right? Or how close is too close? In other words, when you begin to ask yourself when it comes to the, shall we say, the interaction with the world, how close can I get or how far is too far, then you've already defiled the heart. What did Daniel say? "I don't want to even get close."

What about his mind? Verse 9, "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs." Now this is interesting because Daniel is not the first one to employ this strategy. Remember back in the book of Genesis a man by the name of Joseph who was imprisoned wrongly because of the accusation before him that he had, shall we say, behaved improperly though he had not? He found favor again with the one who was charged over the prisoners and you even get evidence in the gospel that whom we know as John the Baptist did the same. Wisdom, wisdom by definition is doing that of use with what we already know. So when it says that he love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, I think sometimes particularly in our world today we say, "Oh, we just need more information." We don't need more information. We've got enough information, we just need to know what to do with what we've got and I want you to see what happens in verse 9, somehow, someway, and we're not given all the details, Daniel finds favor with the guy who was in charge.

Now I want to give you a piece of advice that my dad gave me years ago. There's a lot of things I inherited from by dad other than just my physical appearance and one of which was a work ethic. My dad gave me a statement as a teenager and I love this statement. He said, "Jeff, whenever you acquire a new position or a job," this is when I'm a young man, just, I mean, doing what we might call grunt work, he said, "walk in and the first question you ask is how do I run this place?" In other words, how do I get to the point where I'm in charge? Well, guess what, if you're going to walk in as the lowest of the low in whatever institution, then the first thing you've got to do is you've got to find favor with the people who make the decisions, you've got to find favor with the people who make the recommendations.

He found favor. You know, that's wise and even though we "proverbially are in Babylon," it would be wise of us not to necessarily go where the "world" goes, but at least have them respect us and find favor with us. We don't have to agree on everything but at the same time, as I mentioned this morning, the difference wasn't made by yelling at the Babylonians as much as it was challenging the Israelites.

What about the soul? Beginning in verse 12, there is this incredible showdown. "Alright, give us 10 days. Instead of the king's meat and the wine, let us have pulse," basically vegetable soup in our terminology. From any academic or cerebral perspective, it should not have gone well but here's what took place. Daniel and these other individuals trusted – listen to this – that God can do more with little than we can do with a lot. God can do more with vegetable soup than we can do with steak. And let me use the story of Samson in the book of Judges. Remember the guy with all the long nappy hair that was so super-strong when all his hair was cut off, it began to grow back, he called out to the Lord, did more in his last day than all his days combined? He did more with an inch of hair than he did with seven feet of hair.

Let me make this practical, let me use an illustration. You expect me to use it but it is so relevant. When we look throughout the Bible, the Lord commands us to be a generous giving people. I've met so many people over the years who say, "I can't afford to give to the Lord." Do you know what my response is? "You can't afford not to give to the Lord." And I could give 1, 100 or 1,000 testimonies of people who've done better off with 90% than they could have ever done with 100%. My personal testimony. Years ago Tracy and I were newlyweds. One of my best friends is a CPA. I sat down with my budget and in my budget the first line item was tithing, giving, and at the end of the columns, you know they're supposed to match, right? Well, mine didn't. I was in the "red," not the black. And I'll never forget my friend Derrick, he said, "Jeff, don't worry about it, it's all gonna work out." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You see that top line?" He said, "I can't explain it but when you give to God first he always works out the bottom line even though it doesn't make sense."

It doesn't make any sense that you could get bigger and stronger on vegetable soup. I mean, think about athletes today. They take protein powders and special supplements, they have diets of mass calories, can you imagine in our terminology a professional football player saying, "Don't worry, I'll become a starting offensive lineman, just give me vegetable soup. That's all I need." It doesn't make sense, does it? But he refused to defile himself and he just trusted that God knew what he was doing.

Love the Lord your God with all of your strength. Beginning in verse 17, we have the results of the test, the quiz. Not only has it been 10 days later, now it's been three years later. These four individuals had not been eating pulse just for 10 days but for three years. They had been finding favor with the head of the eunuchs and all these individuals, and I want you to notice in verse 20, "in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better." In other words, when we do it the Lord's way, it is infinitely of greater value than anything the world is selling or pitching to us.

Let me remind you of Ephesians 3:20, "Unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever think and/or ask." You know what the big trap is? Thinking we've got to do it the world's way to get the results we want. Daniel did it absolutely the opposite way of Babylon. He didn't eat like the Babylonians. He didn't live

like the Babylonians. He didn't party like the Babylonians. He did it differently and he was actually 10 times better.

When you love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength, what you see in Daniel 1 is a supernatural display of how God operates in our life. Now this is critical because this sets the stage for Ezekiel. You see, Ezekiel is on the River Chebar, Ezekiel is there, he's about to be fed by the ravens, he's about to see these crazy visions. As you read through Ezekiel, one of your biggest thoughts is going to be: how did Ezekiel make it through it? How did he do it? How did he eat food that was prepared in that way? How did he lie on his side for that long? Ezekiel had seen the witness of Daniel. Ezekiel knew the story of what had taken place in days past and if God could make Daniel 10 times greater, then he was going to provide for Ezekiel as well.

Last but not least. So what are the resources? What are the things that you and I need in our lives to make this happen? I want to go back into verses 17 and 18. It says, "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar." There were two things that Daniel and these men possessed and they walked alongside of that you and I desperately need today, and the first one is this: they and we need a community of faith. When you get to chapter 2 of Daniel, the famous statue situation with Nebuchadnezzar, do you remember when Daniel finds out they're going to kill all of the prophets, what does he do first? He calls his friends. He calls his community.

Why is this important? Over the last 10 months, we have been told that church is optional, have we not? We have been told that we are not necessary. We have been told that there are other ways of being together. I appreciate technology and I'm a fan of Zoom but it doesn't replace face-to-face, does it not? We need each other and we need a community of faith if for nothing else, I'm going to speak personally just to know I'm not the only crazy one, just to know I'm not the only one. Let me remind you what happens when you get alone. Remember Elijah. It's a great story. He defeats all the false prophets, all the false priests but he's all alone and when he's all alone he starts to whine and cry and say, "O God, I just wanna die. There's nobody else out there." Remember what God says to him? "Oh, there's 7,000 who haven't bended the knee." You know what I would say? That's a megachurch waiting to meet. Where are they? Where are those 7,000 people? I know we should be safe medically, I know we should listen to all the wisdom of those in the medical field, but we can still operate as a community of faith, we've just got to be wise about it. Let me encourage you in these days where we're receiving so much communication from "Babylon" not to get together, this is when we need each other more than we've ever needed each other. This is when we have to be. It can happen on Zoom, it can happen on a phone call, but the reason that these individuals, these four men were able not just to get through chapter 1 but to get through chapter 2 and set the stage for all of Ezekiel's life is because they reached out to each other.

The first thing Daniel did when he heard that his name was on the list to be exterminated, is he called other people of faith and said, "I need you to pray for me," which leads to the second thing: we need communication with the Lord. Everything that took place in Daniel's life, everything that took place in Ezekiel's life cannot be explained in human terms. The Lord just showed up and he worked.

Tonight I'll close with one of my favorite stories in scripture. It's found in Acts 4. The early apostles, Pentecost has taken place, the Holy Spirit's been poured out, and we've already experienced our first imprisonment or persecution. They've already been put in prison and let out of prison. They've already been beaten once. In Acts 4, they have a prayer meeting. They gather together and when they have the prayer meeting, it says they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke the word of God with boldness, the building shook. I've been to a lot of prayer meetings but I've never been to one where the building actually shook. What do we need right now? We need some boldness and we need some buildings to start shaking metaphorically speaking, and it happened when the people of God got together and they prayed to their God.

As you and I navigate Babylon, you know, if I were to ask you to make a list, what are the things that you think you need to get through all this? Oh, we'd make a list, wouldn't we? But the reality is we already have all that we need: each other and the Lord. And that's how we'll make it through. You know, some of the greatest gospel movements of the last 200 years actually took place where Christianity was illegal because they found a way to communicate with each other and they cried out to God and he answered their prayers.