

Into the Unknown

~ Daniel 1

Pastor Justin

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Good morning everyone. As you already know, today is our graduation Sunday, which means that this is the Sunday where we honour and celebrate our graduates for grades 9, 12, and post-secondary. Of course you've already seen the grad slideshow, and after the service today we're actually going to have a get-together with all of our graduates in the parking lot which will be a ton of fun! And we would love anyone who would love to drive by and honk or share words of encouragement with our graduates after 3:30 that would be awesome.

I've been thinking and praying for you graduates for quite some time, and just thinking about what a crazy year this of course is turned out to be, especially for our graduates. For a grade 12s, you have gone through most of your life in school anticipating graduation. You have spent close to 20,000 hours in school, working towards your degree. Pretty much your entire life that you remember has been you attending school. Can you still get your piece of paper at the end of the day but you've been robbed of your celebratory season. And your parents as well, have been looking towards this day for much of your life. And post-secondary students you've been working hard for your degrees, and have looked forward to finishing. And it while you could say this is simply just about managing your expectations with the reality, but there's still a lot of emotion and feeling the goes into the situation that of course we can all relate to. The world has gone a different way than the scenario that you expected. The world is upside down right now for everyone. The other day my family and I went for a walk. It went through the park just behind our house and there's a playground there with big signs of course warning about the recommendation for children to play on the playground. From there we continued to walk and went down a path that goes to the Ravine where they were more signs reminding about social distancing. We had went to the nearby gas station which of course I more social distancing markers in place. When we go shopping to Costco we see the same kind of strange dystopian like environment. It is still so weird.

And of course that is just the visual lay of the land so to speak. For many there is of course been a change of schooling or work that has taken place. Some have lost their jobs, others are facing Financial hardships, and unfortunately more financial hardships are even supposedly to come. At this point we have completed about three months of this new reality that we find ourselves in. We do not know how long it will last and we do not know how hard it will get. We are asking questions that are numerous and difficult to answer with the information that we have.

This morning we are going to talk about how to move forward when our world is turned upside down. For a graduating student this is the time in your life when you're looking ahead to what's next; And it's hard enough as a teenager to try to figure out what you're going to do with your life after you graduate, let alone when the world shuts down and nobody knows what is going on! So what are you supposed to do? Should you just hunker down and wait? Should you just barrel ahead and try to do the things that you wanted to do before? Or do you abandon your hopes and dreams and try to board another ship? It's interesting because those questions are not

uncommon as to what you will ask over the course of the rest of your life. Those who lived more years already already know that it does not take a global pandemic to have your world flipped down.

I believe that scripture teaches us some valuable lessons about what we should be doing in these times. And I firmly believe, that as the church, as believers, we will continue to be able to move forward and transform the World by sharing the gospel and bringing the kingdom.

It has actually being really awesome to see how the church has responded to our situation. Oftentimes the church can be slow to change, but in these last few months we have seen the church mobilize and step up quickly and effectively. Many churches have gone online with their services. Some have begun Drive-In services. Over and over I hear stories of how people are looking to care for their neighbours in these times especially the vulnerable, making meals, buying groceries, helping with technology, and being present how they can. And for all the stories like these that I hear, I see too many other believers distracted by the wrong things. Individual believers have to be careful not to let a time like this crippled us. Many Believers will leave all of the work to the online Church, feeling as though they are stuck at home or stuck in their small bubble and will not be able to affect any kind of meaningful change for the gospel. But we cannot let our situation cripple us. We cannot let our situation distract us from what the scriptures clearly call us to do. That has not changed. We are called to love God with all of our heart mind soul strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are to stand up for the oppressed, to uphold the weak, the Widow, the Brokenhearted, through the power of the Gospel. We are to share the message of Salvation with everyone we can, and lead them to the hope that is within us and we do all of that by God's power.

Although our situation may seem unusual to us, it is not unusual for God. All throughout scripture we see different examples of people's worlds being flipped upside down. And this morning we will turn to Daniel chapter 1 to read one of those examples. So go ahead if you have your Bibles or device when you want to go to Daniel chapter one now there we will see that Jerusalem has been handed over to the Babylonians, to King Nebuchadnezzar because the king of Judah, King Jehoiakim, had not been faithful to the Lord. So as a result the Babylonians come in and Conquer, and even take many captive. In the story there for familiar young men who are noted in verse 6: Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah. Let's read together.

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We will pause there because to really understand what is happening in this passage, we have to put ourselves in their shoes. See, there's the city of Jerusalem, the city has been conquered by the Babylonians, by an enemy force. I don't think we can really fathom and understand what that would be like. During World War 1 & 2, the Canadian government practiced conscription. This is where men were required to go to war by the government. As you can imagine many of those didn't come home from the war. I can't imagine what it would have been like to have your brother husband father or son called to go to war were they might not return. Talk about an upset in your plans, or your dreams for the future, when you are suddenly plucked from your life

and thrown into a war or somebody from your life somebody you love is taken and put into the war. That is a far more upsetting turn of events than what we are experiencing. And here in this chapter is even one step further than that. The fighting has already happened but at the end of the day they have lost their battle, and are conquered by the Babylonians. On top of losing, this passage says that they also took many of the Holy vessels of the house of God and put them into the treasury under another God. To those Jewish people this would be blasphemy of the highest order. Then many of them we're taking away from their home in Jerusalem and brought into enemy territory where they are put to work for the enemy. Even their names were stripped from them. Once captured they were expected to be learning the enemy's culture language and literature. The verse says that they chose youth who are without blemish of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom and out of knowledge and understanding learning and competent to stand in the king's Palace and teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans

So we don't know exactly the reasons the Babylonians had for doing this the most likely reason would be that this was some type of integration and assimilation technique where they would train some people in the Chaldean culture only today either send them back to smooth transition and quell Rebellion, and to keep the best of the best for themselves to reinforce the Babylonian culture. Daniel Shadrach Meshach in a Bendigo we're actually going to spend their time in enemy culture, helping the enemy grows stronger.

The Babylonians were the enemy of God's people. In scripture, Babylon is always associated with anti Jehovah. They did not encourage or support the worship of the Jewish god, they did Evil things against God's law, and every time they are mentioned in Scripture, they are associated with evil. All the way back to the Tower of Babel, is where we see the Bible mention slavery for the very first time. Their ways are not God's ways.

So what would you do in a scenario like this? Being conquered, taken away to a land that is not your own, everything that you've known to be true, your rights and personal freedoms are all taken away. Should they have resisted the evil King Nebuchadnezzar? Should they have laid down their life refusing to serve this wicked King? Should they have starved themselves or fought in protest of their rights? Of course they could have, but they didn't. Instead they were faithful to the Lord, and they worked hard at using the gift that God had given them.

Here we see a couple of things that happen in this familiar story with these four young men. The first is the situation with the food. It looks familiar story they refused to eat the Kings food that is provided for them. So we don't know what the food is you something here is that it would defile them in some way probably against the dietary laws of the Jewish people had. So they asked for a special diet of just vegetables and they trusted God will sustain them on that food. Which of course turns out to be the case, and they are found to be stronger than any of the others that came with them. The second thing we'll see is it they continue to work hard to learn the literature and language and culture of the Babylonians using the talents and gifting that God has given them.

Let's read the rest of Daniel chapter 1

This morning we won't get into all of the nitty-gritty details about the story. In this passage because I want to draw your attention just simply to the response of these young men who have lost everything, and their whole world has been turned upside down. We can see that when their Societies is in upheaval, they remain faithful to God, and work hard at the things God has set up for them to do. In the situation with the food they advocated for the right to follow God with their diet. Of course many of the Old Testament dietary laws restricted a lot of foods for Jewish people. These young men wanted to be faithful to God's law, so they responded by reasoning with the guards so they could be faithful in following God's law. When they are compared after 10 days, they're doing better than anybody else physically. And what we learned here is that these young men rusted in what God had called them to do and how God had called him to live, and by being faithful to that, they not only pleased the Lord, but they are also put into a better position because of it.

I think it is easy for us to sometimes feel like following God might lead us into a worst position or worse place, but that's not having faith in what the Lord has set out for us. These boys knew that when it came to doing things God's way versus doing them the way of the world, that God's way has to win every time. And we learn from later in the book that doing things God's way, putting God first above everything else is the most important thing and that is worth standing up for. When Nebuchadnezzar forces everyone to bow to his image and worship the statue of him, Shadrach Meshach and Abednego refused and they put God before men. And their situation seems to get worse as they get thrown into the fiery furnace. And I've course love their response when they say our God whom we serve is able to Deliver Us From The Burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand O King. But if not, let it be known To You, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. They're not worried about the outcome of the punishment they are more concerned about being faithful. Then later in chapter 6, when Daniel refuses to obey the new law that prevents people from praying to their gods, we see that Daniel is not concerned about the laws of men over the laws of God and he continues to pray to the Lord faithfully and as a result ends up being thrown into the Den of Lions where once again God delivers him. These four men recognize that following the ways of the Lord being faithful even when times are tough being faithful even when it cost you everything including your very life, that trusting in the Lord should supersede all else. And this is true for us today, as we look at navigating our way through this weird situation that we find ourselves in. We must look at what God has called us to do and do those things with everything that we have as faithfully as we can. We don't have dietary laws to follow anymore, and we don't have civil or ceremonial Purity laws we have to follow, but rather we are called to love God with all our heart mind soul and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves.

Has this time of not meeting in person been a form of persecution against the church that we need to stand up against? Far from it. In fact, even as we see the government loosening restrictions, in Alberta the churches seem to be getting more freedoms than businesses. As of phase 2, they have lifted all caps on the numbers allowed to attend church services safely. There are people across the globe who are living in real world situations of persecution where it is illegal for them to meet because of their faith. Our situation is temporary and changing and we

are collectively as a church in the same boat as everyone else, slowly resuming safe ways to meet again. In fact, our temporary pause in meeting together in person is a way that we can care for those among us who are most vulnerable in this situation. In simply meeting together in a different way and limiting our freedoms temporarily, we are collectively as a church helping to love others. 1st Corinthians 10 Paul talks about laying aside your rights for the sake of another. It is a completely different context, however the principal I've just because you can doesn't mean you should, is clearly seen. So as a church in North America and Canada at this time, we do not have to live in fear of an illusion that we are somehow being targeted and persecuted, and that cannot be distracted from our mission. I'm sure there's room for skepticism and advocating for a return to former Liberties that makes it easier for us to be the church, but we certainly do not have to be afraid at this point. These four men in this story knew that their old normal would never return. They knew that the road ahead of them was going to be different than they had ever known before. But I'm sure that we will be living for a long time in the effects of this pandemic it may affect how exactly we do church for a long time. But like these boys, that will not stop us from doing the things that God has called us to do worshipping Our God or loving others. Regardless if our meeting together looks different or not.

The second big thing I want to draw attention to how hard these boys worked. Before they are captured, they obviously have skills and they have position and privilege that puts them in a certain spot where they become Targets in this oppression. God gives all of us skills talents and abilities in different ways that we grow into and learn how to use, just like you graduates have skills talents and abilities that you are looking at how you might be able to use in your future. But as everyone in this room can attest to, working hard at school is not always easy. Some things might come easier for certain people, but it's still hard work. Now imagine these four boys being conquered and captured, take it away into enemy territory, and told they now must learn the culture a literature and the language of this enemy culture so that they can be used to help Propel the enemy culture forward. Remember, this is the same culture that stands for everything that God is against. This is the same culture that is taking some of their valuable pieces from the temple and placed them in with other gods mocking the Lord. They are being told to continue to work hard to learn to become better in all learning. Again, they could have rebelled, they could have stood their ground and said we will not help this evil culture that is around us, we will not do anything that supports this evil King Nebuchadnezzar. But they don't. Rather, what we see here is that they chose to do hard things. They work hard at growing in their knowledge and learning, and at the end of the time in verse 18, when the King has commanded that they should be brought in among all of them who were taken, none were found like Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah. They stood before the king and in every matter of wisdom and understanding which the king inquired of them he found them 10 times better and all the magicians and enchanters that were in his kingdom. But this was not simply of their own hard work. At the beginning of verse 17 we can't miss that it says as for these four God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom. God was responsible. No it is not likely that God just snapped his fingers and all of the sudden they had an understanding and knowledge. What is more likely, is that they went with everyone else to class every morning, learning from the teachers and from the Scrolls and putting in effort and God gave them what they were working towards. And this set them up in a very unique Place among this evil Kingdom. It is because they chose to be

faithful to God and to do hard things, to use the gifts that God had given them, which then God would continue to grow in them, that God had set them up to be the ambassadors for the name of the Lord. God had Amplified their skills and given Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and visions of all kinds, which of course as you read through the Book of Daniel and I encourage you to do so, you will see how these four men were in positions to make a stand when it really mattered. And the change that they affected through God's leading Direction and power is something that we are still reading about today. The impact that God had on the Babylonian Empire through this event was massive. God took this bad situation that he had allowed used it for his good.

As Christians today, as we are facing a situation that is full of unknowns where it seems like things are upside down. I believe that we have to do the same things that we see throughout scripture including here in these passages, we have to be faithful to the Lord above all else and to be faithful to the things that God says are important. We cannot get distracted or hyper focussed on other issues. In both our knowledge and through our actions we have to demonstrate faithfulness to the Lord in these times. That means we don't live in fear over these circumstances. We don't live in fear that hard times will come. Rather, we trust that in all circumstances that we must remain faithful to the Lord and love him with all of our heart our mind our soul and our strength and love others in the way that he has called us to love them. We don't become paralyzed in a time like this waiting for opportunity to fall in our lap, instead we use the gifts talents abilities resources and position that God has given us and we move forward, growing and contributing to the world around us in God's Power. And God will position his church, you and I, to make a difference in this world as we preach and share the kingdom of heaven with others.

So graduates, although the immediate future is full of far more questions than it has answers oh, there are two things you know and two things you must do as you look to what is next. Do not neglect the Lord Prayer reading and obeying his word meeting together virtually or as we're able in person, spreading the love of Christ and his gospel with others who need it in order to be saved. And look at ways that God can continue to grow and use your gifts talents and abilities in whatever circumstances you find yourself in. In time, covid-19 will be a thing of the past and the next life Interruption will come. But we will be faithful, and we will work hard and we will bring glory to God in all that we do.

Let's pray

Father this time is so strange for us. It has brought unique challenges and emotions and difficult circumstances. But all of these things we trust in your sovereignty, in your ability to turn this hard situation into something that brings you much Glory. We pray this morning that the church here in st. Albert, in around the globe will be uniquely positioned to make a massive impact in your name. We pray this morning for our graduating students, that you would continue to draw them to yourself, and that you would continue to grow them in learning, so that they can use their gifts talents and abilities to serve you in every circumstance, giving you the glory that you deserve. Use our grade nine students impact the high schools. To be a light among students

who are unsure about their futures who are developing their worldviews amidst a lost world. Help them Shine the Light of the Gospel. Help our grade 12s and post secondary grads to be faithful to you above any obstacle that might seek to draw them. Help them to do hard things make hard choices that will uniquely position them to spread your kingdom