Daniel…and Love

1. The Book of Daniel is a very strange book. The first half is full of tragedy and triumph. We see a lions' den, a fiery furnace, a weird dream and a strange prophecy…and then the book changes dramatically. It becomes a long, involved prophecy that seems disconnected with the first part of the book.

2. All of this is too much to cover in one sermon, so let's come at this a different way. Let's look at the bare facts of Daniel and see how he got to Babylon.

3. When the Bible speaks of Israel being taken into captivity, it doesn't mean that the whole population was uprooted and taken away from their land. No, that wouldn't work for the Babylonians or Assyrians or any other nation. Who wants all those refugees inside their borders?

4. Instead, the royals and those in powerful position and their families were taken as hostages and used as bargaining chips, slaves, or prisoners. The majority of the people would be left where they were but with no government, no status. Many would be taken and "resettled" in border areas where the invaders needed a buffer zone (La Pearla in Puerto Rico).

5. Those of the highest class – royal blood and priests – would receive the worst treatment. Daniel and his circle of friends were brutalized, physically maimed. They had seen their families killed (often forced to watch – all sorts of heinous acts – and then their families' deaths). They were then marched across harsh ground for weeks while their guards continued to humiliate them and degrade them.

6. They would have to bow down before the very people who killed their families and loved ones and call them "master" and "lord."

7. What would you do? I think most of us would have just curled up and died (fight, flight, freeze…flow). A small percentage might have determined to survive and live for revenge. But action movie heroes aren't real. None of them would have much of a chance to poison their master's food, cut the throat of their jailers, and free their people (the Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris movies where one man

defeats the Vietnamese and returns the POWs were insulting to all who fought and died before them).

8. Daniel didn't indulge in revenge fantasies. Daniel had Kingdom Eyes. He was not a pinball in Nebuchadnezzar's arcade. He didn't live a "you did this so I'm going to do that" life. He didn't even post negative comments about Babylon on Snapchat or Yelp. He decided to live a Kingdom Life right there in the most unlikely place on earth – the eunuch's prison in Babylon.

9. I'm impressed by the lion's den story and by the faithfulness of the three young men tossed into the fiery furnace but I am more impressed by Daniel's response to his situation. He flowed with it and decided to use whatever was in his hands to do whatever he could do. He was never going to be a super hero. He would never have power over Nebuchadnezzar. What he COULD do was live a righteous life in spite of what had happened to him.

10. God likes to ask people "where are you?" and "what do you have in your hands?" Daniel was ready with an answer.

11. In the place where he was thrown in order to be humiliated and ashamed and afraid the rest of his life, he chose a different path. He chose to be a representative of the King of Kings. He chose not to react, but to act – to live an "on purpose" life.

12. He chose to do something hundreds of years before Christ would command us to do it: love your enemies.

13. Love them? That's outrageous and don't pretend that it isn't. LOVE your enemies? God, didn't you see what they did to us? Don't you care that we are in pain? That we lost families and friends, our physical and cultural identity? Don't you care that your chosen people are now the lowest of all slaves?

14. That's the thing about love – and you can't pretty this up: it costs you something. We may laugh over what it costs us when it comes to girlfriends, wives, kids or parents but the fact is that love costs something and loving your enemies costs you a lot.

15. You have to disengage from revenge fantasies and drop them from your daydreams. You have to deny yourself a little self righteous chest beating while calling for justice. You have to decide that there is something and Someone more important than you and bigger than your dreams.

16. You think this was easy for Daniel? I don't And I don't think it was easy for Jesus. He left the throne room of heaven to be born as a baby. Yuck. He had to hear nasty things said about his mother while he was growing up. They still said them 30yrs later. His dad left – maybe died, maybe just got tired of it all. He owned nothing and those who owned stuff thought they were better than him. And Jesus responded in love, even dying for them, even forgiving the people who were pounding nails into him.

17. Wow. How do you do that? You don't do it by accident. You don't do it because you were just naturally born that way. You have to decide to do it. You have to be intentional. You have to have Kingdom Eyes, even when you look at your enemy.

18. He didn't look at Nebuchadnezzar as a deeply troubled, mentally ill man who reveled in killing and conquering…even though that was who and what he was. He saw him as a man who needed God and, since Daniel was there, he decided to be the one who told him about God…and who demonstrated a life of faith.

19. Jesus took this a step further. He didn't wait until his country of origin was overthrown before going to a far land to speak of God. He came to all of us in Bethlehem and then…he went to Samaria.

20. Samaritans were, to the Jews, the worst people in the world. Think about your Samaritans. You might hate them or dislike them. You might look down on them because you think it is right and proper to do so. That is why Jesus made it a point to go to the Samaritan woman and reveal himself there first. That is why he told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

21. MLKjr said "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"

But…the good Samaritan reversed the question: “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”

22. Even on the cross, as he hung in incredible pain, dying, he looked around with Kingdom Eyes to see who he could help, who he could forgive. And he found John with his mother and the thief on the cross. This is incredible and jaw dropping and outrageous all at the same time.

23. We call this love but we also call it courageous. Not only did Daniel and Jesus live honorable lives, they honored and valued those whom they met. Daniel did not pour scorn and hateful words on Nebuchadnezzar and Jesus did not call down fire on those who crucified him. They treated everyone from the high priest’s servant to the thief on the cross with honor. By doing so, they lived lives of honor…and courage…and love.

24. Daniel never returned to his homeland. He would have died an early death due to complications from being a eunuch. But he rose above the world by loving the people in the world, where they were, and who they were.

25. The strongest person in the room is the one who loves the most…even to the point of loving their enemy. MLKjr said “Let no man pull you low enough to hate him.”

26. Rise above it all, even if you have to rise on a cross.