

Daniel 05-10-16a

This is Sunday, the 16th of October, 2005. We gather to worship the Lord through our fellowship, through the exchange of blessing that comes when two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are the beneficiaries of that which God the Holy Spirit has distributed amongst us.

Each one of us is important. Each one of us has a spiritual gift. Each one of us is able to encourage and to bless, not by any work of righteousness that we have done, but through the mercy of God and the perfect plan that God has incorporated each of us into.

We, many times without knowing it, bless and build up the body of Christ just by obediently assembling ourselves, by manifesting our enthusiasm for the Word of God and our commitment to fellowship with believers of like mind, whether it is in a remote location from here, listening to a tape or a recording, just as a family or even as an individual. The thing that counts is that God looks down and sees someone who is asking and seeking and knocking, because there are very few of us, even as believers, who recognize how critical this time is, the time that we spend in this life, our place in history, the preparation that we make for the coming Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and beyond that, the Kingdom of the Father. It is essential that we redeem the time because the days are evil.

This is one of the key steps in redeeming the time. It is not the only step. Our spiritual life is not defined by our intake of the Word of God.

It is a necessary part of what we do, but it is not by any means the definition of our life and growth in Christ. There have been times and places and groups that have defined the Christian life by taking in Bible doctrine, and to that extent we as believers can miss the point, because it is our meditation, it is our dedication and commitment to implementing and applying and putting into practice the things that we learn that keeps us from sitting and soaking and souring, from being sort of spiritually constipated, where it is all intake and there is no implementation. So we remind ourselves of these truths as we approach the study of the Word of God.

We recognize how important it is to refresh our souls and to establish our viewpoint on life as we look at the promises and principles and doctrines in Scripture, recognizing as we do it that it is what we do when we leave. It is what we do after we close our Bible and move back into the practical exercise and the story problem solutions that we face each and every day. That is where we are measured, and that is where our growth and our productivity actually take place.

We do not bear spiritual fruit in taking in the Word of God, we bear spiritual fruit by pushing it back out into branches and twigs and leaves and hopefully healthy fruit that hangs off the tree that is planted by the rivers of water. The tree in Psalm 1 brings forth his fruit in his season, and so we want to be able to discern the times and the seasons, and that is a matter of application.

So, having given a mini-sermonette to start our worship this morning, let us pause to go before the Lord in prayer to ensure that our souls have been sprinkled, that our bodies are washed, that we are qualified to approach God's throne and to receive from him that essential spiritual nourishment that is contained in his Word.

We recognize that we can't either take in or apply God's Word without the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, and we know that our prayer and our concentration, our recognition of sin in our lives and claiming God's cleansing grace all make possible the healthy and clear ministry of God's Holy Spirit to us. So, we pause at this point to go collectively and individually before the Lord in prayer. Father, it is a wonderful blessing to count ourselves among the redeemed, to be recipients of your grace so that we can wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb and make them white.

We have nothing in and of ourselves that enables us to deliver ourselves or to separate ourselves from the influence of sin and evil in the world. It is only by your supernatural cleansing grace and power that we are able to make any progress at all in recovering your image that we lost as a race in the garden and have been born citizens of a kingdom of darkness. We know that we are transferred positionally into the kingdom of the Son of your love, and we know that we can begin to experience and to exploit the fullness of that deliverance day by day as we grow in grace and knowledge of our Savior.

We thank you for the country in which we live. We thank you for the freedom and the relative prosperity that we enjoy. We are not persecuted.

We are not imprisoned. We are not having to pursue our spiritual life in secret under fear of reprisal. We can be open.

We can be confident. We can gather in the sure knowledge that we have every support, we have every grace, we have every provision to study your word and to live by it day by day. We thank you for our government.

We thank you for those who are currently implementing that government in each of its branches. We thank you particularly for those believers who are fulfilling their responsibilities in the light of your word and are seeking to please you as they lead our nation, and we pray that you will continue to encourage them and bless them and comfort them in the face of great opposition, both seen and unseen. We pray that we can continue to enjoy for this season the opportunities that we have to equip ourselves for every good work through the study of your word.

We ask your blessing on us now as we study this great book of Daniel, give us insight, and enable us to see the truth that we should apply, each one of us, in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Matthew, Matthew chapter 19. There is

a discourse here that Jesus delivers in response to questions, and some of these pertain directly to our study in the book of Daniel. It's always exciting to me to go into the Gospels and study the life of Jesus Christ, His active ministry amongst His people for those three and a half years.

You just can't get any better than being transported 2,000 years into the past and given a glimpse of God Himself walking amongst His people. I defy anyone to find scripture that is more inspiring and more awesome in the true sense of the word than this record of Jesus Christ walking step by step amongst the Israelites of the first century A.D. You hear Him speak, you see His actions, you see the way He lived His life as a human being, empowered, guided in the same way that you and I are empowered and guided. Not by His own divinity, but by the presence and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It's a shame that people who get hung up on whether or not Jesus Christ was divine, we were talking about this before church this morning, the Jehovah's Witnesses are big on telling you that Jesus wasn't really God and isn't really God, He's just a really amazing man. But He's God with a small g, just a mighty man or something. But to argue back and forth about the divinity of Christ is to misunderstand His earthly ministry.

The reason scripture is careful about what it says on the divinity of Jesus Christ when He came in the incarnation is because Jesus didn't walk around operating as God. Scripture, what the theologians call the doctrine of the emptying of Christ, the doctrine of kenosis, is that Jesus emptied Himself. He did not think of equality with God as a thing to be grasped, as a thing to be held on to, but He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant.

People want to say, well, Jesus was just a form of God. No, He was God in the form of man. The form of man is what He took on.

And that thinking and that decision about equality with God was made before He took on the form of a servant. These people don't want to go to those passages. But the reason scripture is careful about what it says on the divinity of Jesus Christ is because He operated in this life for His 33 odd years just like we do.

He was the first human being to live His life under the filling and enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Men in the Old Testament days were endued. They were overcome.

They were overshadowed by the ministry of the Spirit. You see Samson and it says the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him. But it happens more than once.

Why? Because it's a temporary ministry for a specific act or a specific purpose and then it goes away. To be blessed with the presence and the power of God's Holy Spirit on an ongoing basis is a unique gift in this age. And it was first demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every miracle, every insight, when He knew what was in their hearts, when He healed, when He stilled the wind and the waves, all of those supernatural and beyond mortal powers and enablements came from the presence of God's Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus said to His

generation, if you claim that I am doing this by casting out demons by the prince of demons and you ascribe this power to the demons, you're blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Because it is the Holy Spirit who's making these things happen.

And you're ascribing it to demons. You're blaspheming the third member of the Trinity. Now, how can the Holy Spirit not be God and be blasphemable? If I can coin a word.

They say, oh, there's only one God. The Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe the Holy Spirit is God either. Well, Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Why? Because He's God. Well, all of this brings us to Matthew chapter 19. It came to pass when Jesus had finished the sayings that you find earlier in the book.

He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him testing Him and saying to Him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? Jesus makes a reply.

And then they respond with another question in verse 7. Why did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce? And so on. Then He says in verse 9, I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for fornication and marries another, commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. His disciples said to Him, if such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.

But He said to them, All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb. And there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men.

And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it. Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hand on them and pray.

But the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them. For of such is the kingdom of heaven.

And He laid His hands on them and departed from there. This is a fascinating passage for two reasons, as it relates particularly to our study in the book of Daniel. First of all, if you remember, we have completed our study of the first chapter of Daniel.

And we know that when Daniel and Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah were taken captive and brought to Babylon, who is put in charge of them? Who is put in charge? Verse 3, The king, Nebuchadnezzar, instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, good-looking, gifted in wisdom, possessing knowledge quick to understand, ability to serve in the king's palace, whom they might teach the language and

literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Who is in charge of this? Ashpenaz, the master of who? The eunuchs.

Who is allowed to serve in the king's palace? Who serves before the king in these advisory and wisdom-providing capacities? The eunuchs. What do you think happened to Daniel and Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah when they were brought to Babylon and entered into this three-year training program? They were made eunuchs. There is no Mrs. Daniel.

There are no children from Daniel. You cannot enter this program and serve before the king unless you are a eunuch. This is why Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs, is in charge of this training program.

What is the whole idea of castration, of making someone a eunuch? Jesus says this is done by men. In some cases, some people are born unable to conceive children, some are made eunuchs by men, and some make themselves eunuchs in the sense that they don't have any children by choice rather than by a physical disability or a physical change that is inflicted by others. There are a lot of references to eunuchs in the Scripture, almost 40.

Most of them are in the Old Testament. You have, for example, in Leviticus chapter 21 and verse 20, a man who is a hunchback or a dwarf or a man who has a defect in his eye, an eczema, scab, or is a eunuch is disqualified from serving as a priest. God tells Aaron, No man of your descendants who has any such defect may approach to offer the bread of his God.

It disqualifies a man from serving in the temple, serving in the tabernacle, serving as a priest. So, this disqualifies from priestly service, but we might conclude that it does not disqualify from serving in a prophetic office, does it? Because that's exactly what happens to Daniel and his three friends when they come to Babylon. You cannot be brought close to the king in a cabinet position of this nature and in a position of trust without this operation being performed.

Ancient kings felt that these men needed to focus all of their attention on the king's business and to not be distracted. This is why in days gone by, boot camps and service academies and so forth segregated the sexes because they didn't want the distraction. You need to focus.

You need to not have your attention wandering as you're sitting there trying to learn how to field strip a rifle or how to navigate by the stars or whatever it may be by somebody sitting next to you and their endorphins or whatever it is that, what is it? Pheromones. It's not their endorphins. They have some kind of a physical problem.

But to, you know, when you're in your late teens and early twenties, you have trouble enough managing your hormonally induced urges without introducing the very object of those impulses. And so they would segregate. Well, this is a very permanent and effective way of ensuring that someone is not going to have secondary interests crowding into their mind.

You make them a eunuch. You castrate these men and they're not going to have an interest in

the king's harem. They're not going to take an interest in the women who might try to pull some kind of a Mata Hari intelligence coup and gain information by way of pillow talk that is going to leak out of the palace and create intrigue and create problems and breaches of security in the palace.

So kings, as a precautionary measure, it was thought to be a good idea. And, you know, back in those days, you're talking about the hack and slash, take no prisoners kind of thinking. And there weren't a lot of sensitivities and there weren't a lot of deep thoughts about, oh, what will this do to their psyche or whatever.

Ashpenaz is the overseer of the eunuchs. And when these people are taken captive, do you think that they're going to take these foreign-born captives and repose any more trust in them than they do the native Babylonians who they have castrated to ensure that they remain loyal to the king? These young men, the first thing that happened when they were brought back to Babylon is they were emasculated. They were made eunuchs by men, as Jesus says over in our scripture reading this morning.

This, I would suspect, is a traumatic event. Would you think? You're a young man in Israel. What is the whole ethos of Semitic culture? It's a patriarchal society.

What is a patriarch? He's a father. The greatest blessing from God in your earthly life is to have sons and to maintain your possession and your heritage and your place in the clan and in the family and in the tribe because you have offspring. Abraham pines for a son.

He has to wait a hundred years before he has a son. And he prays to God and he says, Oh, that I would have an heir. And God says, you're going to have an heir and it's not going to be your servant there.

It's not going to be a second best. He's going to be a son of your body. And it's not going to be with the Egyptian woman.

It's going to be with your wife, Sarah. And Abraham is a hundred years old. He's 99 when Isaac is conceived and he's a hundred years old when he's born.

I saw a funny theory floated by a guy this past week saying, Oh, you know, these people got the Bible all messed up. Those ancient patriarchs didn't live so long. People have misunderstood the Hebrew way of reckoning age.

Methuselah and all these old guys that were supposed to live hundreds of years. People have just fouled that up. That's months.

That's not years. Methuselah lived 969 months. And you divide that by 12 and you get, he was within the normal range.

So my response was, I see. So Abraham was, what, eight years old when he fathered Isaac? A

hundred months? Come on. Your theory works great as long as you don't read your Bible.

But there are those who suffer traumas. Now, we think about traumas that we suffer in life. And I would submit to you that as a young man in his late teens, to be taken captive, ripped away from your family, put in a strange land, and the first thing that happens to you is you are castrated.

That's a trauma. That's a pressure. That is enough to make you throw over your faith in the God of your fathers.

This is the background. This is the situation when Daniel and his three friends make the decision that they're going to continue to serve God and they're not going to partake of the king's meat. You notice Daniel doesn't say, look, don't castrate us and give us ten days and see if we don't operate better than everybody else.

There's no way to argue with this procedure. There is no get around it. There's no miracle from God.

God is going to deliver Daniel from the lion's den. He's going to deliver the three friends from the furnace. But he doesn't deliver any of the four of them from being emasculated, from being made eunuchs.

That's the first thing that happens. And everything that happens after that is based on the decision that Daniel and his three friends make that though he slay me, yet will I trust him. I have been uprooted.

I have been enslaved. I have been carried away and now I have been made a eunuch. What do I think about the God of my fathers? What about all of those promises that were in the law? I've been faithful.

I've been obedient. I've been raised as a child to study the scriptures and to trust in God and look at what has happened to me. What has it gotten me? Do you think this could have been a thought that would float itself through the minds of these four individuals? Jesus says there are those who have been made eunuchs by men.

There are those who have been born a eunuch. And when you're in a patriarchal, head of the household society and your potential to ever have children, to ever have a wife, is taken away, what are you going to think? This, I would submit to you, was a blow to these young princes of Judah whose future has been wiped out at a stroke in terms of anything they could have expected in the normal sphere of life. It's just extraordinary to think about.

But what do you see in chapter 1? Daniel purposed in his heart that he was going to serve God whatever it took. It is risking his life to go to the steward and say, I don't want to partake of this diet. Let us do a trial.

And I'll show you that it won't endanger your head to let us serve our God within the context of this captivity. And God honors that. And the four young men thrive compared to their peers.

Well, it's a very powerful example of the faithfulness of God transcending what we understand. We want to measure the faithfulness of God in certain areas and in certain ways. We have expectations of how the faithfulness of God is going to manifest itself, how the blessing of God is going to work itself out.

Now, how many young men in Israel do you think in various generations grew up and married women and had offspring and lived nice full lives, had flocks and herds and tents and had the normal life? These young men are deprived of all of that. Never see their families again. Never are able to have any family of their own.

They are isolated. All they can do now is serve in the Babylonian court. And yet they make the decision to continue to serve God.

How does God honor that? In what way were they blessed? We don't know the names of countless thousands and hundreds of thousands of young men that live normal lives. These young men are honored forever in the pages of Scripture. Their names are known to us.

And I don't mean their Babylonian names. I mean their Hebrew names. Each of which incorporates the name of God.

Each of which reflects a facet of God's character. And their faith is vindicated in that day when they don't die in the furnace. Daniel, remember last time we saw that he, at the end of chapter 1, remember what it says? Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus.

You know what's amazing about that? Let's say Daniel was 17 years old, thereabouts, when he's taken captive in 606 B.C., 604 B.C., along in there. He is going to live all the way through the Babylonian captivity. He will live to see the day when the people of Judah begin to return.

His life spans the entire captivity. And he is alive when the captivity ends. There's no indication that he ever saw his homeland.

He was a man of around 90. But he saw the fulfillment of God's Word. So it makes it more difficult for us to rationalize and to justify in our minds compromise and departure from the plan and purpose of God when you see examples like this of faith and of obedience in the face of overwhelming difficulties, overwhelming circumstances.

I just wanted to point that out this morning as a part of our Scripture reading. So now, back to Daniel chapter 2. By the way, the passage I was looking for last week and could not find is what we just reviewed there in Daniel chapter 1, where the four young men were entered into the training program in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, which was a three-year program. We know that Daniel and his friends were taken captive very early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, in his first year, which was the third year of the reign of Jehoiachin.

And as we approach chapter 2, we find that it is the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign when he has this dream. Now, if Daniel and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are entered into a three-year training program sometime late in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, they have not yet graduated, have they? They've got another couple of years to go. They are either late freshmen or early juniors.

They were never sophomores because it's just a three-year program. But in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar has dreams. This is why Daniel and the other three are not included in the group that is called before Nebuchadnezzar.

They're trainees. They're still healing up. They're still learning their way around.

The first-year curriculum, they are not going to be consulted on a matter of this importance. Nebuchadnezzar calls the group that advised him when he went forth to battle. It is interesting that the empire that Nebuchadnezzar has built to this point is unprecedented.

It's the first worldwide empire in terms of the known world. The Egyptians have dominated history for the previous centuries. But Egypt never went forth conquering and to conquer.

Egypt never established a known worldwide empire. They might subjugate. They might influence.

They might levy. But they did not go forth and seize territory and claim it as a part of the Egyptian. They stayed down there in their land because it's protected.

Their flanks are covered. They've got desert. The only way you can really attack Egypt and try to take it is to sail up the Nile.

So if they protect the Nile, who's going to march across the burning sands trying to attack Egypt? Egypt is secure in that pocket that surrounds the Nile. The Nile Delta. The Nile Valley is a pocket surrounding that river and surrounded on all sides by virtually impenetrable geography.

So Egypt can survive and Egypt can dominate and Egypt can go forth and wage war on its borders and go up a little ways into the area of Israel. But they're not going to march up into Syria. They're not going to go against the Assyrians.

They're not going to go up into the area of the Greeks and go forth and dominate all of that. They're happy down there in their little corner of the world. Nebuchadnezzar outdoes the Assyrians, outdoes the Syrians, outdoes the Hittites because he goes out and conquers and seizes.

He's the prototype and the forerunner of Alexander the Great. He goes out and takes everything. And it's unprecedented.

The like of it has never been seen. So when he has this dream, it gives us a little bit of insight into the head of gold because there's never been anything like it. It's a new thing on the stage

of world history.

And you can imagine that Nebuchadnezzar might have been thinking, I think it was Vernon McGee that said, and Nebuchadnezzar is probably involved in that idea of having a tiger by the tail. You can't keep hanging on and you can't let go. What do you do now? And he is suddenly master of the known world and you can imagine that there's no precedent.

There's no book to follow. How do you rule the world? And there might be an environment in which God can plant this vision and this dream in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar because he's troubled in his sleep. What now? Do I just sit on what I've got? Do I continue to conquer? How do I consolidate? How do I govern this sprawling territory that I am now the king of? What do I do? Well into that melee, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams.

His spirit is so troubled that his sleep left him. So he gives the command to call the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dream. And I mentioned last time there are two different kinds of Chaldeans in scripture.

There's Chaldean in the general sense of somebody from Chaldea. And then there's the more narrow and restrictive sense that this is a special group of wise men who sort of belong to an order. This would be like Mensa or MIT graduates or something.

You can say, well, the MIT grads were called in. Well, lots of people graduate from MIT, but if you have a brain trust of MIT graduates, that's kind of a unique thing. And that's what these Chaldeans are.

This is what Daniel and his three friends are initiates and candidates for, is entering this society, this order, this brain trust of the Chaldeans. And as I mentioned, there were actually two separate words for this that got blended together and amalgamated because of a language change between the letter L and the letter S. The Khazdim and the Khaldim used to be two separate things and got blended together when the language changed and then was retroverted, but they are not actually the same thing. So the Chaldeans are the spokesmen.

They're the wisest. They're the boldest. The astrologers and the sorcerers, these are your sort of palm reading phrenologists and your tea leaf readers and your spooky wild-eyed sort of emotional types.

Well, they don't know what to say when Nebuchadnezzar says, hey, tell me my dream. King says, I've had a dream. My spirit is anxious to know the dream.

I want to understand it. Well, who's going to speak up? It's not going to be the tea leaf readers and the ganja smokers and the rest of these wild-eyed ones that come in. Your smartest people are going to speak for the group.

You say, let the guy with the law degree and the university education, let him speak up. I might say something that gets my head chopped off and I want to get back to my bowl of tea or

whatever. So it's the Chaldeans in verse 4 that speak.

Now this is smart. This is a group of the wisest people in the entire Babylonian realm and what do they do? They know enough to shut up and let the smart guy talk. And this is a good principle to remember.

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. And you've got to know your limitations and if you're not good on your feet, let the person who's good on their feet speak. That's what these people do.

That's how they've lived this long in a sort of physically barbaric environment such as surrounds Nebuchadnezzar. I'm worried about you, I'll emasculate you. I'm worried about you, I'll kill you.

I'll throw you to the lions. I'll put you in the furnace. Let's sit down and talk this out.

How do you feel? Nebuchadnezzar's just not that way. He didn't have a red, I'm okay, you're okay. He says, I'm okay and if you're not, you're dead.

So the Chaldeans speak to the king in Aramaic and I mentioned that this is the place where in the book of Daniel you switch. And if you're a guy like me, when you're reading along, this is like going from English to French. There's a lot of cognates and things but it's a different language.

Aramaic is not Hebrew. Hebrew is not Aramaic. If you speak Aramaic, you can't understand Hebrew.

Remember when Ezra brings back the law and tries to read it to the people in Hebrew and the people are scratching their heads saying, what are you talking about? They have to have scattered guys through the crowd to interpret and explain to Aramaic speaking people what the Hebrew Bible means. So when you go to seminary to learn your Old Testament languages, you've got to learn Aramaic and Hebrew if you want to tackle the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament. Otherwise, you just have to defer to other people.

And I will tell you that when it comes to studying the scripture, it's nice if you don't have to defer. You don't have to take somebody's word for it if it's your job to go in there. Now, you have to take my word for it, but we can't all go to seminary.

But if you are a seminarian and if you are someone that's been tasked with rightly dividing the word of truth and preaching the word in season, out of season, you want to be sure that you can stand before God and say, I looked at the text and I taught it as well as I could. I didn't just let dear dead Dr. So-and-so that wrote 150 years ago tell me what it said and if you want that, just hand out Dr. Dead So-and-so's books and let other people read that and we'll all go home. So, they speak to the king in Aramaic.

Now, I just want to point out that from 2-4 all the way through the end of chapter 6 here, you

have this Aramaic language. Why? Well, I'm going to... In fact, maybe I won't. I started to say I'm going to steal my own thunder and tell you, but I'm not.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, I'll tell you why this is in Aramaic and why it switches back to Hebrew at the exact point that it does and to do that, we have to know the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and so we're going to move forward and see Daniel tell Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was and then we're going to stop and we're going to explain this Aramaic language drop in and drop out and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at the level of significance that this has because it actually refers to you and me. So, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll continue in Daniel chapter 2.