

Where Does Living Faithfully Leave Us?

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[0 : 00] Now, I know this evening that as I come here, I know amongst us that wherever we're at spiritually, we're all a complete mixed bag.

There are people sat amongst us who've had faith in Jesus for years, and some of us, it might be relatively new. Maybe this is the first time you've been to church in a long time or ever.

But wherever we're at spiritually, there's a big question that I want us to address this evening, which is the question actually, the title of what I've given that our sermon tonight is, where is a faithful life following Jesus, the living God leave you?

Where does living faithfully leave us? The reason I'm asking that is because in this passage we see where living a faithful life following the living God leaves this man, the prophet Daniel.

Daniel's faith in the living God is part of who he is. It is central to his identity. It's what he's all about. His identity in this, perhaps you might say a pluralistic Babylonian society that worshiped many different gods, many different Bals and Astros that he finds himself in, that he lives in.

[1 : 23] And there are lots of similarities between Babylon and 21st century Britain because we live in a pluralistic society where identity or what we identify as is a hot topic.

Now I know what you're all thinking as soon as you hear me say identity, you're all thinking I'm going to start talking about sexuality or gender. And don't get me wrong, of course, that's a part of it. But the reality is, the reality is that identity is such a bigger, such more a bigger issue than those two things. Our identity is such a bigger issue because it is what we construct our lives from every part of our lives that matters.

Our job, our income, our political affiliations where we live, the car we drive, what we promote, what we turn our nose apart. All these are markers that identify and where we position ourselves within certain camps within society.

And you know what's most telling to someone in their life what identity matters to them is when you're introduced to someone, what question do they ask you?

[2 : 38] What question do they ask you? The majority of the time it's, what do you do? Isn't it? The majority of the time you're introduced to someone, people say what do you do?

And the expectation is that you're going to talk about your job or something that is an indicator of how you get value for yourself.

This is what identity is. It's so much more than we think it is because it's actually the way that we construct value for our whole lives. The question, the reason I'm talking about this, because the question I'm really getting into is where does our faith fit into all of that?

Where does following Jesus fit into all of those ways that we put value on ourselves? Does it fit in? Where does a faithful life of following the living God, Jesus Christ, leave us?

And so as we ask that question of what that means for Daniel, what my hope and my praise is we'll see that what it means for Daniel is also true for us.

[3 : 46] And so there's three answers to that question that we're going to look at. Where does a faithful life to the living God leave us? And firstly, it leaves us as a foreigner. It leaves us as a target.

And it leaves us as a victor, a foreigner, a target, and a victor. So firstly, as a foreigner. Now, I don't know when the last time you were visiting a foreign country was.

Once not so long back, I was over in the States. I'm a classic Brit when I go away. Of course, I don't know about you, but I always like to try a little bit of something cultural, maybe something of the cuisine.

But deep down, I know that I'm a foreigner. I don't really belong. I might, in the States, I might have spoke the language, but there's certain foods and ways of doing things that you just don't have.

Now, don't get me wrong. I enjoyed a Southern breakfast, biscuits and gravy and grits delicious, but there was no baked beans, there's no haggis, no lawn sausage. I was in a foreigner in a foreign land.

[4 : 50] Daniel is a foreigner living in a foreign country, and things would have been different to him. He's an Israelite, and along with the rest of his countrymen, they've been expelled, exiled from their home country, the land of promise Israel.

Before we get going with all this, I just want to pause and remind, sort of remind us, remember that the reason he's living in Babylon, that God has exiled them, the Babylonian empire, as you may remember, was the instrument that God used when they took Siege of Jerusalem.

We get it all the way through Daniel, we're reminded of the Israel's history and what's happened to them. Daniel chapter one, the very first verses it starts with, it says, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiachim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, besieged it.

And we read verse three, then the king commanded Ash Penna's, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel. Daniel is one of those people brought to Babylon, and the whole of the book is played out with that backdrop.

It is worth pointing out that whilst they're still in Babylon, the Babylonians are conquered by the Persians. And it's in the last couple of verses in chapter five, just before our reading this evening where we get to chapter six, that we read that the time of the Babylonians, the Chaldeans has ended and there's a new king in town.

[6 : 16] Daniel five, last verse, verse 30, that very night, Bel Shazad, the Chaldean king was killed and Darius the Mede, the Persian received the kingdom being about 62 years old.

Darius is the new king. He's the new king and Daniel's under him. Now all that said and done, okay, all that said and done, Darius has still been taken from his homeland to his new place.

Whoever's in charge, personally, I'm not so sure what my mindset would have been like to any authority that existed over me that had taken me out of my home country being conquered and being escorted to a new land, Babylonian, Persian, whatever.

Because he's still being ruled by, with a foreign nation that has conquered him. So I think, I don't know, but I think what we see in Daniel, it is surprising because one thing that we don't see, have you noticed we don't see any cynicism in him?

There's no gossip or discussing the foreign leadership negatively. In fact, it's the opposite. He actually works for the good of this foreign nation.

[7 : 29] You look with me, we read that he's thought of, well, he's held in high regard. Verse two, he's one of the three high ranking officials given responsibility, protect the king's wealth and positions.

Possessions. Verse three, he goes on to become the most distinguished governor in the land. He's given that position and power because we read he had an excellent spirit in him.

And there's plans afoot even to help Daniel to set Daniel to help to rule the whole kingdom. It is helpful to notice this about Daniel that we never see in him any real complaining about the rulers of the country.

There's no indifference in him despite him living in a foreign place that does not have God's law or rule as its ultimate priority.

As followers of Jesus, as followers of the same God as Daniel, we find ourselves in a very similar position to him today. Now I'm not talking about the status within the nation as a high ranking official, but that we are foreigners.

[8 : 42] Jesus Peter calls us sojourners or exiles, Philippians three says that our citizenship is not anywhere in earth but is found in heaven. We are foreigners in the world we live.

We belong to another kingdom and we live by God's kingdom values. The real issue, the things that we have to reflect on is if that is true, how do we respond to the world that we live in?

Now there's a few options for you. You could, you could. You could separate yourself completely from the world, put yourself in a Christian bubble, immerse yourself entirely with Christians and Christian things and that's attractive because you could protect yourself from any negative influence.

But the danger with that is you can view the world as dangerous and become cynical and full of condemnation about everything that's not allowed in your bubble.

And I'm pretty sure that we could probably, or maybe we have, think of when that sounds attractive or where we've even done that. But notice that's not what Daniel does.

[9 : 51] Now Daniel works for the good of the culture and society that he's become a part of. No matter how ungodly they might be, he actually works to serve King Darius.

He has an excellent spirit. He wants to influence society by demonstrating a set of values, a different model for living that fundamentally is directed not by Persian or Babylonian laws but by the law of God.

It's exactly like Jesus Christ. When the living God comes to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, he swaps his home, heaven, for an earthly life taken on a human frame and human nature being born of a virgin and who does Jesus spend time with?

Is Jesus constantly cynical and bemoaning the fact that he's on earth but not in heaven? That's not what Jesus is like because he comes to serve the world he made that is foreign to his true home. John 3.17, for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save it through him.

[11 : 03] He cares passionately about Jerusalem and all the places he visits. We see that in the interactions with his people. And so we need to not be austere about the world we live in, about Edinburgh or the decisions in Hollywood.

Now that doesn't mean we can't respectfully debate and have opinions but with respect and gentleness. We are foreigners, exiles because Scotland is not a true home.

Our citizenship is in heaven and therefore we mustn't look to get in needless confrontations that are fruitless but pray and work for the gospel that Jesus would save our nation.

So work and celebrate the good that we see. Okay, secondly, so this is the first point. Where does a faithful life leave us?

It leaves us as a foreigner. Secondly, it leaves us as a target. It leaves you as a target that you're marked. Now we're not entirely sure what Daniel has done to upset the people, what they object to.

[12 : 20] There's a number of suggestions that we could make. Perhaps it's jealousy at his high position. Perhaps it's the way he conducts himself in that role with godly integrity.

Perhaps but perhaps. This is a slight stab in the dark but perhaps it could be connected to where his true loyalty lies.

Perhaps. It's clear that Babylon is a pluralistic society like ours where different beliefs are tolerated but perhaps they're tolerated only up to a point.

It seems to be well known that Daniel prayed three times a day and well known where he prayed and where well known whom he prayed to and he seems to be allowed to get on with that.

I wonder if perhaps it's when the king's plan to set him up over the whole kingdom becomes known that that's just a line too much.

[13 : 22] That's just too much. A line is crossed. Perhaps that's a stretch too far that really someone to rule over the nation really needs to be Babylonian or Persian.

That is totally committed to the kingdom of Darius. Having someone who obeys the laws of Yahweh, the Israelite god, running the country, that's too much. Perhaps.

In the pluralistic world as long as religion remains private, that's okay but once it affects public society, once it influences, maybe that's a step too far.

It's more than a reasonable assumption to make because the response that we see from these three men, it is dark, deceptive and devious.

Daniel's character is so well thought of that trickery is the only way of getting around this, and so that's what their plan involves, is they pepper the king with flattery and manipulation and persuasion.

[14 : 21] They trick Darius to alter the law so that is illegal to pray to anyone except him, with the punishment being that the perpetrator will be thrown to the lions. It is a brilliant plan to trap someone but it's completely unjust.

And Daniel's response is fascinating. It's fascinating. Do you notice there's not even a hint of deliberation?

Verse 10, when Daniel knew that the documents would be signed, he went to his house, way out windows, in his upper chamber, open towards Jerusalem.

He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his god as he had done previously. The men finding they bring their case to the king, again using flattery,

manipulation, persuasion.

Daniel's faith at this point appears to be sealed. We face a similar challenge.

[15:23] That faith is allowed but public faith, nah. A public faith that suggests that confronts the way things are done, the status quo, that's a stretch too far.

Personal prayer is fine but don't you dare, don't you dare offer prayer to someone with same sex attraction. Don't you dare.

Even if they ask for it, that's not allowed. Don't you dare bring your private faith into somebody else's life. Don't you dare attempt to influence a society with biblical values.

It's the same for Jesus. I mean, if only he'd kept quiet, told the line with the religious elite, didn't claim to have authority over them, didn't point out their hypocrisy or eat with sinners.

Imagine God eating with sinners. Imagine that. Upsetting the status quo and the Bayfriars blood.

[16:31] Being target, for us, I do wonder like being a target for following Jesus, it can seem still I think like a relatively new idea.

I don't know if we're still, are we really, are we still prepared for this? The problem is that historically, Western ideals, they're founded upon Christian values and in days gone by, the Western morality and biblical morality had some sort of affinity but we've long left those days.

And so following Jesus comes at a much higher cost than 50 years ago. You are a target if you live your faith publicly. The spiritual history of this country is an anomaly at best or an illusion of history because the status quo for Christians is that they've always been targets.

At this point, I wonder for some of us, perhaps the question might come, is it worth it?

Should I just throw in the towel? The thought of being a target doesn't leave a nice taste in my mouth or any of our mouths. I even remember the first time someone told me that following Jesus would come at a cost.

[17:51] My first thought, I didn't sign up for this, I'm happy with the forgiveness and blessings but the cost being a target, I'm not sure I'm up for that. Is it worth it?

You may be well thinking that now. The only way we're going to deal with that question, the only way that, because those thoughts will come, if you haven't had them or you're not having them now, at some point in our life you will think that.

The only way we're going to deal with that question is by looking at the final point where a faithful Christian life leaves you. Taking a glimpse of the future that lies ahead, and probably more than a glimpse, a sustained, long, hard meditation, that living a faithful life leaves you a victor.

Victory is a reason that we press on through difficulty. It's the hope of victory or achievement.

It is that. I love watching sport. I watch any live sport, even sports that I know very little about, especially, I don't know, you've probably done this during the Olympics.

[19:08] It comes around every four years, even the Winter Olympics, I don't know if you... There's sports there that I only watch once every four years, but when they come I'm absolutely transfixed on synchronized swimming or the diving, and within two minutes of watching it, as most of us, I'm sure, do, pretend to be an expert in all the things that come along with these peculiar or seemingly peculiar to me, because I don't watch them for four years.

But the fascinating thing about the Olympics, isn't it, is that's part of the reason we're fascinated by that is it does take a certain character and drivenness if the highlight of your sporting career is one event that only happens every four years.

It must be soul destroying if you get injured, you've trained for four years, and yet time and time again you see them pick themselves up and go again. When we're a target, when we face opposition as Christians, how do we pick ourselves up and go again when we face opposition? What gives us the hope to keep living out our faith in the public arena? What do we need to know? We need to know that a faithful life, it does mean you will be a target, but...

This is the important thing, that label is only temporary. The foreign label as well, the foreign label and the... The foreign label and the target label, they're only temporary labels, it's not eternal.

[20:48] You know what I mean by that? It's not an eternal label, but you will always be a victory in Christ. You will always be able to claim God's victory as your own. The realization of His promises to you, to claim an inheritance that is a promise.

The promises He made to the second Adam, to the Lord Jesus, are yours to take hold of as you find yourself in relationship with Him. When we face trouble, what we really need to look, is a fresh art, is the promises of God and we find three that we find when we look at Daniel.

The promise of deliverance, the promise of justice and the promise of God's everlasting reign. The promise of deliverance, the promise of justice and the promise of God's everlasting reign. Verse 17, look with me. And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his Lord's, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

Matter of fact, Daniel is dead, he's dead. And there's no hiding what this points to.

[21 : 58] When the stone is rolled in front of Jesus' tomb, there is a dead body inside.

King Darius is in a panic. He thought a great deal about Daniel. He can't sleep. He fasts. He says, verse 16, may your God whom you serve continually deliver you.

And the first time, actually, the first time we hear Daniel speak in this whole chapter, verse 21, it's to tell us he's alive. O King, live forever.

My God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouths and they've not harmed me because I was found blameless before him. And also before you, O King, I have done no harm. And King C. sent Daniel's literally lifted out the grave with den of lions.

Now, just, I just want to pause just for the sake of Clare, this is not saying that you should expect deliverance in this life at different moments.

[23 : 00] Daniel does, but the whole point as New Testament believers is really this is pointed to our ultimate deliverance. On that first Easter Sunday, a different stone was rolled away.

The one that was put across the tomb where Jesus dead body lay. The Almighty God delivered Jesus from death and he walked out of the tomb.

The resurrection, all of Christianity hangs upon it. And the real deliverance that we all long and hope for is when we arise on the other side of death, we arise in the arms of Jesus.

If you're asking, is it worth it? Jesus' victory over death, his deliverance from death is ours. We've been buried with him and we will be raised with him.

It is the promise of eternal deliverance, of eternal rescue and redemption arising on the other side of death in the arms of Jesus. Being a foreigner is temporary, being a target is temporary, but you'll always be a victor in Christ and he is the prize.

[24 : 13] He is the one we run the race to receive. The consequences for the men who are responsible for all this, they are drastic.

There is the promise of justice. They receive the punishment, meet it out for Daniel and the angel is not there to save them. But it's just, no sin will go unpunished.

It is the promise of justice. In light of recent darkness that we've seen throughout, across the globe, we've seen unprecedented darkness in the last year or so in Ukraine, now in Sudan.

We've seen the constant, horrible, brutal shootings in the States. The list could go on and, but ultimately here we have the oppressors, those who've committed vile crimes will be held to account for their actions against the living God.

Hostility against you will be dealt with. Now of course we hope and pray that oppressors will, enemies of God will repent and turn from wickedness, but we were once enemies too.

[25 : 28] Just by grace we've been saved, the gift of God, but if He doesn't we can hold on to the fact that God is truly just. There's nothing hidden. There's no corruption in Him and people are held account for what they've done.

Lastly, the promise of God's everlasting reign. Look with me at what Darius writes to all the nations of the earth, end of verse 25.

Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, enduring forever.

His kingdom shall never be destroyed and His dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues, He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions, the living God.

He's the Lord of lords and the King of kings and His dominion. His reign will last forever. Of which of the leader can that be said?

[26 : 31] Pharaoh is dead, Herod is dead, Nero is dead, Henry the eighth is dead, King James the first is dead, Muhammad is dead, Napoleon is dead, Hitler is dead, Stalin is dead, Idi Amin is dead.

Where are they now? Jesus is alive. His kingdom will reign forever. It will never be destroyed and His followers were found in Him and given His reign to reign with Him, to share in His glory forever.

And so as we come in for landing, we've tried to answer the question, where does a faithful life to the living God leave us? It leaves us a foreigner, we're strangers and aliens in this world, but our home is heaven, we belong to the kingdom of God.

It leaves us a target, faithful, godly living woman where opposed just like the Lord Jesus, but it leaves us a victor. In Jesus is victory. His resurrection life is giving to us and His kingdom will reign forever.

But one more thing, one more thing, I want to point as we close, when Daniel's in the den, did you notice he's not in there alone?

[27 : 48] The angel is with him. God sends his angel to minister to him in the moment of his metaphorical death, in the moment where you think he's alone, but the angel is with him.

The living God provides ministers to Daniel in the middle of one of his darkest moments.

But it reminds us that in Jesus' darkest moment, he really was all alone. He was totally alone and separated from his father so that we never would be.

So that we never would be. When we look across the darkness in our world and we think of the Christians in Ukraine and Sudan across our world, this assures us that Jesus was alone on the cross so that in the darkness of people's lives, these people will never be alone.

Jesus is by their side. And whatever you're going through or will go through in this life, Jesus will always be with you. Always with you.

[29 : 10] Let me pray.

Living God, we praise you and we thank you that we are found in you, that you have given us life and we pray that we ask for your help that you would equip us and help us to walk faithfully with you all of our days.

The goodness and mercy would follow us. And we ask, Lord, we know that in this life, living faithfully will mean that we're, because we live according to the values of the kingdom of heaven, that we're foreigners, that our home is not Scotland but is heaven.

We know that we're going to be a target when our faith is lived out publicly. But I pray that you would strengthen us and help us and equip us. I pray that you'd motivate us by the fact that our future is with you, raised to life, that you have made us a victor in your Son, that your victory over sin, over death and over evil is our victory too, as we're found in you.

And so, bless us, we pray, we ask for this, in Jesus' name, amen.