

Sermon Transcript from July 24th, 2016 Compromise Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Hey, everybody. How are you? Great to see all of you. Happy summer. I love you guys so much. If you're new or visiting, my name is John Mark. I'm one of the leaders here. I'm the pastor for teaching and vision. Before we get into the teaching, first, one pastoral word. So, like a lot of you over the last few weeks, I've just been reeling from the emotional weight – like a lead kind of weight – on my soul of all the racial tension in our country and in our state.

I didn't say anything about it last weekend just because it was my first day back after a four-week summer break and I was offline for most of that. So, I was still playing catch-up on the news. And, like a lot of you, trying to process what the heck is going on in our country right now. And honestly, I'm really scared to say anything as a white guy. I just feel like, "Shut up, listen and so on and so forth."

But, I have some kind of responsibility as one of your leaders. So, I just wanted to say a word. One: on behalf of our community as a whole, and in dialogue with a whole bunch of you over the last week through email and conversations at church and over coffee – and I know there's a lot of passion in the room right now and I love that and I love the heart for justice in our community. I just want to say that we recognize the obvious and axiomatic reality that systemic racism is a huge problem in our country and in our state; that right now we are reaping the consequences of hundreds of years of sin in the form of racial bias. America is a nation built on genocide, rape, pillage, plunder, slavery and injustice.

One of the many reasons that I do not buy the "America is a Christian nation" myth. For starters, I don't think there is such a thing. But secondly, even if there was, it would not have been built on the backs of slavery. And we're still just staggering under the weight of it. And, like a lot of you, I'm new to this conversation. I was born white, male, in a middle class family in suburban California. The only African American friends I had were all affluent, at least middle class or above. I lived in this little bubble. I bought into the myth of a post-racial, colorblind America, which is not only not true, it is a dangerous myth. I moved to Portland, the whitest large city in America. If you saw the Atlantic article from a few days ago, that's not an accident; that's not haphazard; that's not random. That is intentional social engineering by systemic racism on the part of our city, our government, our mayor, the people that have gone before us and even some of those in power today.

So, I move here, I'm in a white city. I think of myself as not racist. My wife is second generation Mexican; my daughter is Ugandan. And all of this over the last year or two is just exposing what a lot of you have known is there all along; that the post-racial thing is a total myth and that ignorance and indifference on the part of white people like myself leads to white supremacy, leads to ongoing injustice that does not go away. So, obviously, the time has come for this to end and for this to change, and we all play a part. One of the great problems with white culture in America is it's so hyper-individualistic. So, we think, "I'm not a racist. I have a black daughter. I live in Portland. I'm a post, you know, secular progressive (I'm not secular) guy."

Whatever. So, we think, "Hey, this is just not an issue for me. And it's easy to think you're not racist when all of your friends are white and it's easy to not bear responsibility for the white community; for those that have gone before you. The reality is that if you are white in particular, we all bear a tremendous amount of responsibility. Not only as an American citizen, but first and foremost as a follower of Jesus. Because, in the Kingdom of God, the good of the community always goes ahead of the good of the individual. And we bear responsibility not to just not have racism in our heart or mind, but to actually stand up for justice and to work for healing in our society.

So, at the risk of just sounding like a total idiot white guy and sappy or sentimental, I just want to say to all of you – and please so me grace here if this is not the right way to say it – but, to all of those of you who are black in our community, we just want say, we want to say that we love you, we value you, we are so sorry for what you have gone through. We are so sorry for our ignorance, for our indifference, for what we and those who have come before us – our grandfathers and great grandfathers – what we have done to you. What our city has done to you from slavery to the Homestead Act of giving 650 free acres to you if you are a white male. If you're a black male, you're not even allowed in our state and much less allowed to own land. To the Jim Crow laws, to post-World War II giving free education and a free home loan in

suburbia to white men only. To red-lining, which is as recent as the 1980s in our city.

So, when I was here, one-year-old, my dad was a student at Multnomah Biblical Seminary. We lived in Northeast. 1981. At that time, if you were a black man or woman, it was really hard, if not impossible, to even get a home loan in our city. And, if it was, it was only in a select neighborhood, which was then later razed for Emanuel Hospital and Memorial Coliseum and now the gentrification in Northeast. So, we just see it and we want you to know that I don't understand it. In all honest, I don't know what it feels like to be scared of a police officer. I have nothing but good to say for law enforcement. But, I see it and we just want you to know that you are a part of our community, that you matter, that we value you, that you have not only a seat at the table, but we want you to even lead our community in this area and many others.

To those of you who are white, which is a few of you, I just want to say, as your pastor, with all due respect, now is not the time to Tweet or hashtag or blog or debate. Just shut up, if you would. Now is the time to listen and to learn. I think the right posture right now is humility. It's a lot of reading, it's a lot of podcasting, it's a lot of conversations with your friends who are people of color. It's a lot of you are the teacher, you are the mentor, I'm the student. Teach me. Help me better understand this. It's a lot of owning stuff that maybe you and I don't want to own, in particular as a white man or woman.

And that's the posture. The reality is if you were born white, in particular if, like me, you're male in a middle class family in a safe, suburban context where I grew up, then you are the beneficiary of hundreds of years of accrued privilege based on systemic racial injustice in our country. And that is something that we can't wink at and just say, "Hey, it's not a problem anymore. We've moved on."

We've not. And it's something that, as followers of Jesus, we bear a responsibility for. So, I honestly have more questions than answers. I would love to just not say anything for the next two years and just read everything there is and podcast everything there is and get 25 mentors, but I don't have that luxury. So, I want to say on behalf of our community and behalf of our leadership, this matters to us. It matters a lot. I don't know exactly what the way forward is. I'm in dialogue with some really incredible people of color and leaders that I really look up to and respect, and we'll have an ongoing conversation, in particular toward the end of this summer. We'll dedicate at least a night, probably in September, just to go deeper on this as a community in both thought process and in prayer.

So, please show us grace, in particular those of you that are way ahead of us on this conversation or those of you for whom this is not an abstract idea, this is a reality that you live with. Show us grace and just know that we love you and I think that, in the cultural climate we're in right now of anger, hate, blatant unforgiveness, sound bites and hashtags, I think a forgiven and forgiving community with love at the center of the way of Jesus, that is the path forward. So, that's what I want to be as a community; whatever that looks like.

So, would you just pray with me for a moment?

Jesus, it's a beautiful day and it's summer and I love our city and I can't wait to open up the Bible. But, I just feel this weight on my soul. And God, I ask that You would lead and guide our community forward as we read in the New Testament, in particular in the writings of Paul, about the new humanity that is the Church. And it's not a post-racial, colorblind humanity. It is a celebration of every color, of every tribe, every tongue, every nation. And we want to be that. I have no idea how to do that in the whitest city in America. And I know I have no idea how to do that after hundreds of years of accrued tension.

But Jesus, we ask for You to pastor us, for You to shepherd us. I pray for love to be the center virtue in the life of our community and I also pray for humility, for wisdom, for us to own our part across the aisle. And God, I ask that You would show mercy and grace in a time of need to our community, to our city, to our state, to our nation and to our world. And may You, Jesus, have Your way and may You shape our community, with all its problems and all its issues, into the image of Jesus as we move forward.

And now, as we open the Scriptures, again we just invite You, Holy Spirit. We want more that information. We want formation. So, shape us. As a community I pray, Jesus, amen.

Thanks everybody.

Please turn in your Bibles to Daniel 1. Daniel 1. Last week we started a new series that

we're calling "Life in Exile" on becoming a creative minority. If you were not here, please go back and listen to the podcast to frame it up. It was one of the most important teachings for sure of the summer, if not for the year. To recap the basic idea, we are living in a new cultural moment. Over the last few hundred years an, in particular, over the last two or three decades, the ground underneath our feet has moved. And we're now in a full-on, post-Christian world.

The metaphor that best captures this kind of a culture moment in the Bible is the metaphor of exile. It's used all through the library of Scripture for whenever followers of Jesus are – interesting – a minority in a culture where the dominant values are alien or even run hostile to the way of Jesus. And, last week, we said there are two postures that we really want to avoid in exile. The first is the posture of separatism. The kind of subculture where "Christian" is an adjective. You have your Christian church and your Christian school and your Christian coffee shop with really bad coffee and your Christian music and your Christian bookstore and your Christian friends and your Christian community and your Christian book club and your Christian dentist and your Christian auto mechanic and your Christian pedicurist or whatever. Like, everything. Right?

We want to avoid that. But then, on the flip side – and this, we laugh at that. Because, the far greater danger in city like Portland, it's not that at all. It's syncretism where we assimilate into the host culture and we're just swallowed up by our city. That's the temptation nine out of ten times here. So, last week we said there's a better way forward, and it's this idea of a creative minority. And, if you want to know more, listen to last week and then we'll keep on the dialogue in the coming weeks and over the summer.

Here's one definition of a creative minority in the form of a church: "A community of followers of Jesus seeks to rediscover the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the early Church and apply them to the soil of a post-Christian world."

And I would argue there is no closer parallel to our culture moment in the Old Testament than that of Israel in the exile. So, as a community, we've been reading through the Bible all year long. This coming week we're in, I think tomorrow we start Esther. Then, after that, we actually get into Daniel. And the book of Daniel will be our sherpa or our guide to kind of help navigate the strange, new, alien terrain of the exile.

The book of Daniel breaks right down the middle into two halves. So, the first six chapters are all about stories of these four guys in exile. And then the second half of the book of prophetic stuff; a pointer to the future. So, we'll send most of our time in the first half of the book. The plan for tonight is, put simply, to just work through chapter 1. Does that sound good? Yeah? Okay. Here we go.

Daniel 1:1: **"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,"** – that's a name for the southern part of Israel. The kingdom, at that point, was divided – **"Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it."**

Now, Judah was located right at the nexus between three empires. Egypt to the south, Assyria to the north and then Babylon to the east. And the sixth century B.C. was a time of enormous upheaval all over the ancient Near East. All three empires were at war. First, Assyria fell. I think we have a map up here. First, Assyria fell to Babylon. And then, next up, if you're up there in the north, Babylon wanted to invade Egypt. But, to do that, it had to go straight through Jerusalem and all of Judah.

So, tragically, **"The Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god."**

Now, that phrase, "The Lord delivered," is tapping into the story that we as a community have been reading over the last seven months in Old Testament. Put simply, God called Israel to be His covenant people, a light to the world. But, Israel turned to idolatry, the worship of other gods, and to its twin sister, injustice, time and time again. And, after literally hundreds of years of God warning Israel, "Listen. Stop. Pay attention. Come back to me. Turn away from injustice and idolatry or you will go into exile."

After hundreds of years of warning after warning, prophet after prophet, finally God says, "Okay. Enough is enough. No more of this rampant, rife injustice. Enough is enough." And He takes away His hand of protection. And, within just a few years, Israel is dragged away to exile in Babylon. Now, before we move on, in particular if you're new to the Bible, I just need to lay out a picture for you of Babylon; the context for the story that

we're about to get into.

Babylon was the zenith of civilization in the ancient world. At the time, it was the largest city in the known world at 2,500 acres. Its walls were 80 feet thick, 320 feet high – that's even high by today's standards – 56 miles long. You would enter the city through a gate named after one of the many Babylonian gods. Here's a picture from the Pergamon museum in Berlin of the Ishtar gate, named after the goddess of love and war, which you single people should know is essentially the same thing. Notice how it's decorated with blue and gold tile and there's artwork over the top. That was a sign of the opulent wealth of Babylon as well as the city's artistic and architectural brilliance.

But, that wasn't even the most stunning part of the city. It was this Ziggurat; a tower shaped temple called Etemenanki, an Acadian word meaning "house of the foundations of heaven and earth." Does that sound familiar? Think "Tower of Babel" in the back of your mind. It was hundreds of feet high. The closest thing to a skyscraper in the ancient world. Overall, the Greek historian Herodotus said, "Babylon far surpassed any other city in the known world."

Now, I tell you this because, all through the Bible, Babylon isn't just a city; it's an archetype. So, starting in Genesis 11, which tells the origin story of Babylon with the Tower of Babel, there's that iconic line, "Let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens."

Do you know that line? That's the driving ambition of Babylon. To build a society apart from God. And this motif of Babylon, of society not only apart from God but in open rebellion against God, runs all the way through the library of Scripture all the way up to the last book, if you've ever read it, Revelation, where there are three entire chapters devoted to Babylon. And Babylon there isn't a nation state anymore, it's a global economy based on trade, commerce, globalization and the injustice and slavery that comes with it; the opulent wealth and hedonism and luxury of the rich.

Does any of this sound familiar? Who in the world that we call home is Babylon? You are. I am. We are. The United States of America is the engine driving the global economy forward. So, it's a city, but it's more than that. It's an archetype. And Israel, in this story, is dragged away to, of all places, Babylon. Then there's that fascinating line about the articles from the temple of God carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia. That was common practice in the ancient Near East.

If you defeated a nation, it was thought that you defeated the nation's god. So, then you dragged articles from the temple or shrine or whatever – in this case, the temple in Jerusalem – into your god's temple. And it was a way of saying, "My god beat up your god."

So, the idea here is not just that Israel was defeated by Babylon, but that Israel's God, Yahweh, was defeated by Babylon. Can you imagine how gut wrenching that would have been if you're a young man like Daniel? Now, let's keep reading.

"Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility," – sisters, here's your life verse right here – **"young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace."**

Just make that your little Instagram "looking for." OkCupid. "I'm just all about the Bible."

Whatever. You know?

"He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service."

So, these are essentially smart, well-educated young men from the nobility in the royal line, affluent, with modelesque good looks. Not good enough to be good, you have to look good. Image matters. Nothing has changed in millennia. And these men are put into a three-year cultural immersion program. And then we read this.

Daniel 1:6: **"Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah,**

Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego."

So, the book of Daniel tells the story not of all the Jewish men, but of four men in particular. Daniel and his friends, who are all renamed from a Hebrew name to a Babylonian name. But then, look at this key line in the story.

Daniel 1:8: **"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."**

So, in the ancient Near East, in particular in Jewish culture, your diet or the food you would or would not eat was a cultural marker and even a spiritual marker. It was a sign of your spirituality or which god you worship, especially if you're a Jew. So, he asked for permission.

Daniel 1:9: **"Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel."**

So here, God is where? He's in Babylon. Not only in Israel; He's in Babylon and He's at work.

"I am afraid,' the official says, 'of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men of your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

"Here. Have a hamburger. Or a protein shake. You need to work out. You're the king's man."

"Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.'"

So, you doctors, this is like the first controlled trial ever right here.

"So he agreed to this..." – he was like, "Alright. That's a good idea." – "...and tested them for ten days.

"At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than all of the young men who ate the royal food."

And all the vegans said, "Yeah. Exactly."

"So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead."

So, what exactly is going on here? First off, I hate to break it to you, but this is not like a God-inspired weight loss plan. Alright? This is not like, "Put on some weight on vacation: Daniel 1. It's from the Holy Spirit."

No. Although I'm sure if you eat nothing but vegetables and you don't drink any alcohol for ten days you will, hopefully, lose a little bit of weight. That's great. But, it's not exactly the point of the story here. So, what exactly is going on? There's a lot of debate and controversy around what exactly it is. The most likely theory is that the meat from the king's table wasn't kosher. So, to eat it, was to break the food laws from the Torah. There are other ideas as well with idol sacrifice and all sorts of stuff. But, that's the most likely. And Daniel draws a line in the sand. He says, "No. I'm sorry. But, no. I'm a Hebrew. I worship Yahweh. That's against the Torah."

But it actually works out. Look at Daniel 1:17: **"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."**

So, it's not just that Daniel is smart and hardworking, it's that God gave knowledge from the Holy Spirit there in that moment to his education, to his career, into what? Into the language and the literature of who? Of the Babylonians. Get that. God gave knowledge into pagan, pseudo-spiritual culture. This is absolutely fascinating.

"At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every manner of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them..." – we'll talk about this next week – "...ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

So, they essentially graduate summa cum laude with a PhD in Babylonian and do really, really well. Then you have the closing line.

"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus."

So, that's a fast forward, just to clarify, from Daniel 1:1, the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, to that last line, the first year of King Cyrus. That spans well over six decades. So, that's the writer of Daniel's way of saying that that's the beginning, literally the first date, to the end, the last day, of the exile. It's the writer's way of saying that Daniel is the prophet and paragon for how to live and not only survive, but thrive in exile.

Now, let's take a step back and start to transition into what all of this means for you and for me. There are two sides to becoming a creative minority. On the negative side, a creative minority has to fight off syncretism, as we've said. So, it has to figure out, you and I have to figure out, how to not get influence by the culture. But, that's not enough to be a creative minority. That's just a subculture. On the positive side, it has to figure out how to fight off separatism. So, we have to figure out how to actually influence the culture. It's not just passive; it's active.

So, here's the plan: this week I want to talk about Babylon's strategy to influence Daniel, which means we'll talk about compromise. And then next week we'll talk about Daniel's strategy to influence Babylon. So, we'll talk about calling. In particular, about work. Is that alright? For tonight, I just want you to see Babylon's strategy to influence Daniel and his friends, because it's the exact same one, at least I would argue, used by Portland to influence you and me.

So, four steps. If you're taking notes, write this down. If not, just feel awkward or at least a little bit guilty. First off is isolation. In verse 4, Daniel is isolated. He's separated from his parents, his family, his home, the temple in Jerusalem or the ancient equivalent of church. Remember, we think he's a teenager. Thirteen, fourteen or fifteen years old. And no offense to those of you who are in that age bracket at all, but he's young, he's impressionable, he's easy to seduce. And there is a social glue that a lot of people underestimate. It's why so many 18-year-old kids go off to U of O freshman year and just do stupid stuff. It's why so many people get into trouble on a business trip. Like an affair or a strip club or something. Like, what the heck? What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. There's that kind of inhibition when you're unglued from your community.

So, the first step is to get Daniel away from his community of faith. But, it was a failure because Daniel stayed true to his community of faith. He was right there, shoulder to shoulder, with Azariah, Hananiah and the guys. And, like Daniel, we have to stick together. That's one of the many reasons that missional community here at Bridgetown, it's not like an option on the side if you're in the mood or have time for it. It is the spine; it is the backbone of what our church is all about. Because, if we are going to make it in a city like Portland, that I love, but, oh my gosh, the overwhelming pressure. If we're going to make it here, then we have to do life together, not as an event on a Sunday night, but as a community all week long.

So, first is isolation. Second is inculturation. They are inculturated in Daniel 1:5. First he's educated, as I said, in the language and literature of the Babylonians. That's way more than learning Acadian. This is a kind of social engineering. It's designed not just to educate Daniel on Babylon, but to make Daniel Babylonian. But, that's not even the worst part. That's school or whatever. Then, the best of Babylonian culture, food and wine from the king's table, more than likely with female companionship as was the custom in the ancient world, was spread out in front of the boys.

"Hey, here you go."

And Daniel's a refugee. The odds are he has not had a decent meal in who knows how long. Notice they appeal to Daniel's appetites and ambitions. "Here. Just give in to your desire; your craving. Be true to yourself. It's okay. You deserve it. It's how things are

done here. You're not back home anymore."

They hold out a vision of the good life that is so tantalizing. But, in the face of inculturation, Daniel lived out of an alternative story; what we call the Bible and what he would have called the Torah or the Law and the Prophets. As we read through Daniel, you'll discover that he was regularly reading the Bible of his day. It's one of the many reasons that we are reading through the Bible as a community this year. Even though it's a pain in the neck, it's because we are living out of an alternative story. It's a way to saturate our mind and our imagination, not in the narrative of Portland or the secular West or whatever, but in the narrative of Jesus and the writers of the Bible.

So, isolation, then inculturation, then third is integration. Daniel and his friends are integrated into society. So, they don't get the luxury of living or hiding away in an urban ghetto or in a hippy, homeschool co-op in eastern Oregon or even in the privacy of suburbia. They are right in the thick of Babylon. Under the king's roof in the king's university. But, in the face of integration, they lived out an alternative way of life. Daniel built his entire life around practices, alternative practices, like fixed-hour prayer. We'll discover this in chapter 6. He would pray three times a day. Morning, noon and night. Like fasting, that was a regular part of his life. All sorts of things. What we, today, call the spiritual disciplines.

I would argue – and please hear me – that one of the the most important things to do in exile in a cultural moment like the one we live in right now is to lean into the spiritual disciplines, or what I prefer to call the practices or the habits of Jesus. Things like Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, a weekly meal with your community, church here on Sunday night, the teaching of the Scriptures. All of this, every single discipline, every single practice, every single habit, is an act of rebellion against the empire. It is counter-formation against the formation machine of Babylon or, in our case, Portland.

So, isolation, inculturation, integration and then, finally, identification. In Daniel 1:6 they are identified or renamed. Now, it's a little bit tricky for you and I to wrap our head around. But, in the ancient world, your name was may more than a label to pick up your drink at the end of the bar or sign up for a spin class. Your name was your identity. It was more than that. It was your destiny. It was prophetic. It was a one-word moniker for the truest thing about you. One Old Testament scholar writes this:

"In the world of the Hebrew Scriptures, a personal name was often thought to indicate something essential about the bearer's identity, origin, birth circumstances or the divine purpose that the bearer was intended to fulfill."

Another writes this:

"Names are revelatory of the nature of a person."

Now, all four boys are renamed – get this – after the Babylonian pantheon. So, Daniel, in Hebrew, means, "Yahweh is my judge." He's renamed "Beltshazzar," which means "treasurer of Bel." That's another name for Marduk, the king of the Babylonian pantheon. Hananiah means, "Yahweh shows grace." He's renamed "Shadrach, under the command of Aku," the moon god.

Misrael – this dude really gets the shaft – in Hebrew means, "Who is like Yahweh." It's changed, he's renamed to, "Who is like Aku," the moon god. Azariah means, "Yahweh is my helper." He's renamed "Abednego, servant of Anu," yet another god.

You see what's going on here? This is not like, "Hey, your name is hard to pronounce." This is a deeply repressive move to replace their God-given, Hebrew identity with a pagan, Babylonian identity. But, thankfully, it was a failure. Because, once again, Daniel's identity was rooted in God. He was renamed, yes, but you notice two fascinating things in the story. One, you notice that Daniel never calls himself Beltshazzar. He never calls himself by his Babylonian name. He always calls himself Daniel.

And then, two, this is so funny and nerdy and awesome. So, the writer of Daniel, we don't know who it is. A lot of people assume it was Daniel himself. The writer of Daniel constantly misspells all the Babylonian names. So, at first, scholars thought it was a textual problem like a transmission problem like a scribe screwed up a thousand years ago. And now we have all these manuscripts and it's like, "No, no. That was right. It's on purpose. It's intentional."

It's like the writer, Daniel or whoever, is like, "Yeah, I don't even know how to spell that name. I don't really even care. Who cares. That's not my real..."

It's so punk rock. It's rad. "That's not my real, true identity."

So, isolation, inculturation, integration and identification. That's what Babylon does; that's what Portland does. Alright? If I'm reading this story for the first time, which I'm guessing a lot of you are new to Jesus, the Bible or whatever – we're so happy you're here. You're like, "Wow. Never read this before."

If I'm reading this, I get to about verse 7 and I'm thinking, "Man, these boys don't stand a chance."

But then you read verse 8 and that haunting line: "Daniel resolved..." – make sure to star that, underline that, circle that, tweet that or whatever. Memorize it. Tattoo it. Whatever. Don't actually, please. Been there; done that.

But, "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine."

Somehow, this teenage boy found the courage to stare down Babylon eye to eye; no compromise. No compromise at all. That, by the way, I would argue, is what this story is all about. The temptation to compromise. There are all sorts of dangers in exile. But this, I would argue, is at the top of the list of the dangers that we face in a cultural moment 2016 in the West in a city like the one that we love and live in and call home.

Like Daniel, we live in a city where we stick out; where we're different. We're not like everybody else and we live under this overwhelming pressure – in the language of Lee Beach from last week – to conform to the tyranny of majority opinion. To just compromise, to just give in, to just calm down and let it slide and chill out and assimilate. You know, Mark Sayers, who was here recently, his book, "Disappearing Church," is really what inspired this entire series. I just think he's one of the most important teachers in the world right now.

He has this great point based on a number of sociological writings about how pre-Christian culture and post-Christian culture are not the same thing but are, in fact, polar opposite. So, think of a pre-Christian culture like Europe before the Gospel of Jesus. Like, back around the turn of the millennium. That's not the same thing as a post-Christian Europe. So, Europe, the West, America, we've not reverted back to our pagan roots. We don't worship Thor. I mean, that dude is really hot. What's his – even I, I'm a straight man, but that guy is like "Wow." You know? Wow. Holy cow.

But, we don't worship Thor or Lokai, who's dating Taylor Swift, by the way. How crazy is that? I know all of this stuff. But, we don't sacrifice our first born child. That was from a new Seasons, I promise. I was just there in line and it was on the front cover. Whatever. I'm just inculturating myself. You know? Inculturating.

We don't sacrifice our first born child at Stonehenge or whatever. We have not reverted to a pre-Christian world. The post-Christian world is more like a progressive, mainstream, secular version. It's like Christianity without Christ and kind of an altered morality or ethic. It's like the kingdom without the king. Now, Sayers makes a great point that if you are from a Christian or a Christianized culture, say America 50 years ago or 100 years ago or England 200 years ago, and you take a missionary posture as a follower of Jesus, if you go to a pre-Christian culture, say an indigenous tribe in the south Pacific or Africa 100 years ago or whatever, the danger, the temptation that you have to watch out for is that you colonize the culture.

So, if you've ever been to Africa or Uganda, where my daughter is from, it's just gut wrenching to walk into a church and everybody's wearing suits and ties and singing hymns from a dead white guy from London 150 years ago. See, that's the danger. That you colonize, that you make that beautiful, indigenous culture British or American or Anglo or whatever. But, in a post-Christian culture, if you're a follower of Jesus and you take a missionary posture and you move to a city like Portland, you live here and you life here, the danger is not that we colonize the culture. That's not a danger. That's not a temptation. It's not like, "Oh, we really screwed up. All of Portland's singing Bethel songs. Ah! And wearing Veggie Tales shirts."

That's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. Alright? The danger is not that we

colonize the culture, it's the exact opposite. The danger is that we are colonize by the culture. So, pre-Christian culture, the danger is you colonize. Post-Christian culture, the danger is you are colonized. So, this is the issue. This is the problem. That, as a follower of Jesus, in a city like ours, you and I are wrestling with. After you live in this city for a while, it starts to wear you down.

As a Pastor, I see this pattern. My guess is you see it too as a part of our community. Kids, 20-somethings, move into the city, usually from a small town or a suburban background. Like, nobody here, for the most part, actually grew up in the city. We're all from Tigard or Des Moines or something. So, people move into the city, usually from a conservative church culture, and people love the city and it's so great. Then, give them a few months and then people start to get cool. It's like, "Yeah. I'm cool."

You start to do your thing and you live off division and you get to know everything and whatever and you change how you talk and they're like, "Where you from?"

You're like, "Southeast."

Like, "You moved here two weeks ago from Sacramento. That doesn't even count. Whatever."

People start to get cool. People start to drink, usually more and more, because that's a huge part of the culture here. Alcoholism is a rampant issue in our city. People start to cuss. You know, just a little bit here. Just little stuff here and there. Usually people start to maybe slide a little bit theologically toward a liberal vision. I don't mean that at a political level, I mean that at a theological level. Usually morally, after that. People start to just kind of chill out a little bit. Usually, it's with sexuality. A boyfriend or a girlfriend. Or maybe it's money or consumerism. People start to drift from the church. Like, you're there every week and then it's like three out of four and then it's every other and then it's once a month and then it's like, "Mimosas, anybody? This weekend?"

And people just drift away. It's tragic, and I see it all the time. This city is great. You all know I love it. I live right up the street. I'm raising my kids here. I love it. But, this city is so hard to say "no" to. Sociologists talk about the difference between hard power and soft power, in particular at a political and economic level. Hard power is ISIS. Like, "Convert to Islam or I will behead you."

And not all hard power is bad. The police, for example, are hard power. Like, "Obey the law or go to jail."

Soft power is Portland. It's, "Moscow mule?" It's, "Hey, you had a drink? That's great. Here's another one. You had two? No problem. It's Sunday afternoon. Come on. Just have a third one. Here you're out with your friends. It's not a big deal. You're alone with your girlfriend at her apartment at night on the couch? Yeah. That's totally fine. Don't worry about it. Yeah. You love her. Just, yeah. You have some extra money? You don't need to give that. No. Racism? You don't need to worry about racism. You're not racist. That's not your problem. You don't need to do anything about that. Oh, yeah. That new show is on Netflix. Oh, Orange is the New Black. That's great. Yeah. It's not porn. No, that's okay. It's like a huge thing."

This is just how this city is. And soft power is lethal because it's so unassuming. Nobody says, "I'm going to move to the city and stop following Jesus."

Well, some people say that, but that's a whole other thing. No. It's not like that. It's just one little compromise at a time. And people start to grow numb and then apathetic and then, eventually, just stop following Jesus. It happens all the time. How? One little compromise at a time. Small, incremental decisions that have a massive affect on our long-term life. The thing is, you guys, sin, it numbs us. It's like this weird antiseptic to the soul. And little sins are the worst, because we don't realize the cumulative affect that little sins have on us over time.

To pause right here, I just want to ask or create space for you to ask the Holy Spirit, is there something that right now just pops into your heart or into your mind that you're thinking about that you're feeling that just starts to rise to the surface in your life? Like, "Man, maybe that is. I'm not sure. But, maybe that's an area of compromise."

Maybe it is alcohol, like the alcoholism. And you know me, I love a glass of red wine. But, the alcoholism in our city is insane. Maybe it's your sexuality. Maybe it's a justice issue. Maybe it's a money and consumerism issue. Maybe it's a gossip issue. Maybe it's an

integrity issue. "Just lie a little here. Cut a corner. Leave that detail out of the report."

Maybe it's a theological disloyalty to Christ. You know what the New Testament clearly teaches, what Jesus clearly teaches, but you just really don't like it. So, you've found a way to explain it away and make it fit your late-modern, Western, progressive view of the world. I mean, I have no idea. My point here isn't to make you feel guilty. But, does anything come to mind?

You know, before I ever stand up here and talk to you, I have to talk to Jesus about all of this. So, I had a great last week. My wife and family were all in California and I'm super introverted, so everybody's like, "Are you missing them a lot?"

I'm like, "Heck no. I'm loving my life."

They're not here, so I can say that. And I love my family and my wife a ton. We had a great date last night. It was great. But, I'm alone all week and, you know, it was like this weird week. It was a great week. I got a ton of work done. Plenty of time to read and all that. Beautiful. Summer. But, I just felt this distance between me and the Holy Spirit. And, like a ton of you, one of the main things that I'm working towards in my apprenticeship to Jesus right now is just learning how to always be two places at once. I'm at church or on my run or at the office or whatever and in the presence of God. I love that language. The practice of the presence of God.

So, I'm just practicing how to be with Jesus all day long. So, I just felt this distance between me and Jesus through the week. As I was gearing up for the weekend I just started to ask, "Alright, what are the areas of compromise in my life?"

And I realized this distance was created by this show I'm watching on Netflix right now. And it's not like, you know, the XXX version of Game of Thrones or whatever. Okay? But, it was over the line. It was something I, as a man and as a follower of Jesus, I have no business watching that. My wife was gone, my family was gone, I get home, I've got plenty of time, I'll watch something on TV. I don't normally watch a lot of TV. Everybody says that. I actually don't. I promise.

And I realized, man, this was an area of compromise in my life. This is something that, two years ago, I never would have watched this. But, I got sucked in. I'm like, "Oh, I know I shouldn't, but the season finale. What's going to happen? It's so good."

And I just got sucked in, you know? And I realized it had created this distance between me and the Holy Spirit. And nothing is worth the loss of the practice of the presence of God. So, my point here isn't to guilt you or to shame you or myself at all. It's just an invitation for you and for me to repent, to turn around, to come back, to call out, "Yeah. This is an area of compromise in my life. This is an area where I've been seduced by Babylon, by Portland. Just because everybody's doing it, just because everybody at Bridgetown is doing does not mean it is a part of the way of Jesus."

And just to call that out, to own it and to repent of it. And remember that to repent doesn't mean that you feel all sad and miserable and, "I'm horrible," and beat myself and fast for 8 years. Like, that's not what it means. But, it does mean to change. So, in closing, I just want to chat for a minute or two about this question: "How do we actually change to be more like Jesus?"

Or, in this case, "How do we not change to compromise? How do we not change to become more like our city?"

We'll talk about this a ton in the fall. We have this series that we're gearing up for that I'm more excited about than anything, I think. Not to over promise. But, I just did that. But, really excited about. So, we'll talk more about this at length. But, recently, I was introduced to a paradigm from the spiritual formation literature that, at least for me, was incredibly helpful about how we change or, in this case, don't change. This is hopefully – disclaimer – the first and last time I will ever use an acronym in a teaching.

But, here we go. I used four "I's" and now an acronym. It's like 1985 all over. So, it's VIM. V is for vision, I is for intention and M is for means. Let me unpack this. The basic idea is that, listen, if you want to change or, on the flip side, if you want to not change or have

no compromise, the first thing that you and I need is a vision. A vision of life as it could be, as it should be. Of life as Jesus intended. What Jesus has in mind.

You know, we live in a world with all sorts of competing visions of the good life. At the political level, at a moral level, all over the place. Urban versus suburban. All sorts of competing visions of the good life. And that is why we need to saturate our hearts and our minds in the four Gospels of Jesus, especially in the teachings of Jesus, and in the writings of the New Testament and in coming to church on a weekly basis to get that vision, to fill up our mind and our imagination with this vision of, "Oh, that's what it means to be human. That's life as God intended; sexuality as God intended; marriage as God intended; singleness as God intended; money as God intended; racial justice as God intended; power as God intended; emotional health."

You get a vision of life as God intended. Then we need intention. At some point, you and I have to decide in our heart at a core, soul level, at your will, this kind of backbone of your person, that you want to either change, start doing something, or not change and not start doing something. It's what you see in Daniel in that great line in verse 8. "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine."

Like Daniel, we have to decide in advance, ahead of time, how we are going to live, and we need an inward resolution of heart and mind that comes long before the moment of temptation. We need to make a decision before God and our community. "This is how I'm going to live. This is how I'm not going to live."

But, here's the thing. A lot of the time we just stop right there. Vision. We're inspired. Yep. Intention. But, that's not enough. If all you have is vision and intention, the odds are you will fall of the bandwagon. How often do you listen to a teaching at church or you read a book or a podcast that you download or you're in a conversation with a friend and you're all inspired to read your Bible more or diet or whatever your example is. You're so inspired and you go out and you're like, "Yes. Here we go."

And then, three days later, you're right back where you started. To make it all the way to change, you need to M. You need means. Concrete, calculated steps in the right directions to change. So, to run it through that filter, let's say you have an addiction of some kind. Alcohol, pornography, or, let's take the elephant in the room, you have an addiction to social media. Just a few of you. Just 900 of you. Just a few. So, let's say you have this addiction and you realize, "Man, I'm just not fully present with God and I want that. I want to live in relationship with the Holy Spirit from the moment I wake up in the morning to the moment I go to sleep. Far more aware and alive. I want to be fully present with my family, with my friends, with my community at my job or school or whatever."

So, you have this thing and you realize it's hurting you. How do you change? Alright? So, for me, this is just out of my own story. First, I needed a vision of a better way to live. So, I remember I read this blog post a few years ago on the distraction-free iPhone. It was so good. I'm like, "Oh my gosh. That's it. Let's do that."

And I changed a bunch of stuff. Then I read all the minimalism stuff and it was like love at first sight. I was so into it. Then I read this book "Deep Work" that I just reread over my break. I started to get a vision of what a life where I'm not marked by addiction to my phone and social media and email and wired in all the time; where I'm fully present and I'm awake and I'm alive to God, to my wife, to my three beautiful little kids, to my job where I'm focused and I'm hard at work as a craftsman in my thing and what God's made me to do.

So, first I had this vision. Then there was a moment of intention where I had to actually decide like, "Yeah. This is hurting my life. I want to live a very different way. I want to be far more like Jesus in the moment, and that does not come naturally for me."

But then I had to add in means. So, for me, you know – and you don't need to do this – I turned my smartphone into a dumb phone. So, it has no Twitter, it has no email, it has no apps, really, except for maps and stuff that actually are helpful. There's no Pokémon Go on my phone. I know. I'm sorry. I just have a job. There's no alerts of any kind. Not even a text message alert. You could call me or text me and it's like maybe three hours later I see it or something. I just want an iPhone still.

So, I turned my smartphone into a dumb phone. I scheduled Twitter into my weekly work schedule. It had to be on work hours and it was like set times during the week. I turn my phone off every night now at 8:30 and I don't turn it back on until 9:30 the next morning after two hours of deep work where I'm focused. Usually working on my teaching early

in the morning. I turn my phone off every Sabbath for at least 24 hours. Usually more. I'm not saying you need to do this stuff. I'm just saying that for me, it wasn't enough to be like, "Oh, I really don't want to be addicted to my phone. I'll try harder this week."

Like, how well does that work? Just to clarify, it doesn't work at all. Not at all. So, I actually had to transition that vision or a whole other way of living and that intention to actually means. Now, I'm not saying you need to do that at all, and the analogy for you might be something way different and way harder. All I'm saying is we have to think in that paradigm of vision and intention and means.

So, for the coming week, here's the ask: I would ask you, even tonight, to create space to listen to the Holy Spirit and just ask God, "God, what are the areas of compromise in my life?"

And the odds are there's already something right there stirring right at the surface of your mind and imagination. God, what are the areas? Maybe right it down. Don't make a list of like 20 things. This is not shamefest. Okay? One, two or three things, an area of compromise in your life. Work through it. Pray through it. Have a moment of intention. And then, when you're ready, maybe just write down some means; some concrete, calculated, what are new habits to cultivate, to change or, in the compromise issue, to not change? Then maybe just throw that in an Evernote or on your phone or on a 3x5 card and tape it to your fridge or your closet door or something like that just to keep it before your mind and your heart.

I don't know what "it" is for you. For Daniel, it was meat from the king's table and wine from the king's table. I'm guessing that's not a problem for you. Maybe it is. You're like, "The king's wine. I just have to say no. The king's meat."

I'm guessing that's not the thing for you. But, I just want you to notice this in closing. Notice that Daniel went above and beyond in his pursuit of holiness. So, all the Torah said or the Bible of his day was, "No unkosher meat." Daniel said, "No food at all from the king's table. And, on top of that, no wine."

Now, wine's not a bad thing. It's all over. It's a celebration all through the Old Testament. But, you can say whatever you want about Daniel. You can call him a legalistic, you can call him a fundamentalist, you can say he's from whatever. But, that dude made it through the exile and, in doing so, he changed the world. You know, often, in exile, we make the tragic mistake of erring on the side of freedom rather than the side of holiness. Exile is not the place to do that. If there is an in between area, a grey area, an amorphous area, maybe that even right now you're thinking about something in your life and you're like, "Is that conviction from the Holy Spirit right now or is that my religious upbringing and guilt and shame and whatever?" And you're not really sure.

Well, first, you just ask the question: "Is this something that Jesus would do if He were me?"

If the answer is "no," then there you have it. If the answer is, "Well, I'm not really sure. I don't really know. Jesus didn't have Netflix. I'm not exactly sure. He didn't have a girlfriend. I don't exactly know." Then my encouragement to you, based on the example of Daniel, is err on the side of holiness. I really don't think that we'll get to the resurrection of the dead and just be like, "Man. I wish I watched Game of Thrones. I hear it's amazing."

And horrible. And no follower of Jesus has any business watching that. I don't think that will happen. I think we'll get there and we'll be like, "Man. What the heck was I thinking?"

You're in the presence of God and it's uncut, unedited joy in your entire person. My guess is we'll be like, "What was I thinking? Why did I trade the presence of God for 50 years, 60 years, 70 years for that thing or that stupid relationship or for that show or for that extra line item in budget or for that corner cut? Like, really? For that?"

It's so not worth it, because nothing is worth the cost of the presence of God. Jesus, over and over, would refer to that iconic line in the Old Testament, "Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy." And He would say things like, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

If you want to see God, if you want to wake up in the morning and have God not be an abstract idea or a feeling that you get at church once in a while, but a relationship that you're in, a presence that you enjoy from morning through to night, then you have to be

holy. Not to earn God's favor. If anything it's more for you than for God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. It's a life of no compromise.

In closing, you know, I'll never forget when I was in high school. I think I was, I don't know, seventeenish years old. Junior in high school. I read Keith Green's biography. Anybody know Keith Green? Yeah. He's this hippy, counter culture, prophet, singer-songwriter from the Jesus movement in the 1960s and 70s. Died young in a plane crash. There's a biography by his wife. I read it. It was forever ago. I just remember the title was "No Compromise."

And I don't know. For some reason I just, as a 17-year-old boy, that shaped me. I just remembered, "I want to live that way. I want to live no compromise."

The reality is the people that we remember, that we read about, that we follow the example of, are not people who go with the flow, meld in and are like everybody else. It's the people who say "no" to compromise. And I don't mean that our desire here is to be famous or well known. I just mean our desire is to follow in the example of men like Daniel here. To live no compromise. Not only make it through exile, but to change the world in the meantime. Let's stand and pray.