

Sermon Transcript from July 31st, 2016
Living in the Tension
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Well, good morning. How are you? Good. Good to see you this morning. I didn't run the marathon. You can probably tell. But, what a great joy to be here in this city. I'm from Australia, originally, those of you who don't know me. Everywhere I go I bring just a few little reinforcements just to pop those in. They keep it real.

Hey, I really do love your church. I've been really impacted by the Reality family of churches. And your pastor, Pastor Dave, is a really good friend of mine. We talk very, very regularly just about life, God, the Church, mission and culture and we have the privilege of doing a couple trips together. So, it is a real honor for me to be here with you this morning and to be able to kick you off in this new series in the book of Daniel.

Now, I just have to give you a heads up. I'm actually not going to teach from the book of Daniel tonight. How many of you, when you go through the Bible, you realize, if you have any sort of study Bible, that at the beginning of the study Bible, there's a thing called "Intro to the book of" fill in the blank. And how many of you, by default, skip that and just go straight to the book of the Bible? Well, this morning, believe it or not, I'm going to give you one of those. "Intro to the Book of Daniel."

So, I'm not going to teach from a particular passage. But, what I want to do is give you just a little bit of the cultural setting; a theological framework of what's happening in the book of Daniel. And I want to do that for two reasons. Number one: most of us, when we think of the book of Daniel, are probably haunted by Sunday school songs and one or two events from the book of Daniel that really rob this book of its theological depth and its ethical ramifications. So, we think, "Oh, it's Daniel in the lion's den with his three mates. Yeah. I think I understand the book of Daniel."

Or the back half of it's filled with prophetic weirdness and you're like, "I don't have a clue about any of this."

But, this is an important book. So, I want you to understand this so that we get rid of any childish assumptions about this particular book. And I also want you to understand this because I think this is a book for Christians in a city like San Francisco. This is maybe one of the most important books about what it means to follow Jesus and be faithful to the covenant that God has called us to in a city like this. So, I think that this is going to frame up today the things you're going to hear in the next few weeks. And, hopefully, it will be helpful. So, that's what I want to spend our time doing this morning.

Okay. I want to jump in by talking about the tension that maybe you feel in our culture in this given moment about what it means to be a Christian. I'm 39 years old. I've been a Christian since I was 17. I had no plans of becoming a Christian. It wasn't in my bucket list here or later. I had no desire to become a Christian. And I remember getting swept into the Kingdom of God and then running into all of these problems about trying to get rid of and deal with my old life and then learn what it means to become a follower of Jesus.

And I spent about 20 years doing that. But lately, I'm beginning to feel this shift that's making it increasingly challenging to be a Christian in a city like this. And it's really hard to articulate. It's not one thing, it's everything that is making this challenging. It feels like the foundations fall away in the areas of sexuality and ethics. But, not just that. In the areas of authority, the areas of citizenship and what it means to be a person. So many things seem like they're in doubt or being questioned or they're being reframed so that all of the things that used to work when you just read your Bible and applied it don't seem to work anymore.

And this doesn't just show up in my head, this shows up in conversations with my friends, this shows up at happy hour after work when you're trying to articulate why you bother to follow Jesus at this time of history. This shows up in relationships when you're trying to explain to somebody you've met on Tinder, though none of you would use that. But, when you've met someone at a Christian Bible study and you're trying to articulate what your Christian convictions are. As you're talking through those things, it's weird to try and figure out what being a follower of God looks like in a culture like ours. And I think this has happened because we are, for the first time probably, really at a popular level, at a post-Christian moment in our culture.

And here's what I mean by that. I don't mean that Christians aren't around. I don't mean that Christians are easily dismissed. I just mean that the general assumption and values of our culture have moved beyond a Judeo-Christian framework at a popular level. It's

been like that for decades at an elite, educational level. But now, the typical seven-year-old growing up is at that place where God and the Christian worldview seems like it's easily dismissed.

So, how do you be a Christian in a post-Christian context? How do you have a framework and understanding that enables you to participate in a winsome and beautiful and compelling manner in a larger culture when they've said, "We're behind that. We don't need that. Leave it out of our future."

Now, some people think I'm exaggerating. But, I came across this article. It's called "Googling for God." And they had a few interesting insights here, because the future of the world is through search engines and search optimization. Kids are figuring sex education out online. You've seen the ads for Google. But, this is what I've said. I thought this was fascinating. This was from the New York Times:

"It's been a bad decade for God. At least so far. Despite the rising popularity of Pope Francis, who was elected in 2013, Google searches for churches are 15% lower in the first half of this decade than they were during the last half of the previous one. Searches questioning God's existence are up. Many behaviors that supposedly oppose have skyrocketed. Porn searches are up 83%. For heroin, it's 32%. How are the Ten Commandments doing? Not well. Love thy neighbor is the most common search with the word 'neighbor,' but, right behind it, number two, is 'neighbor porn.'

"The top Google search including the word 'god' is 'God of War,' a video game with more than 700,000 searches per year. The number one search that includes 'how to' and 'Wal-Mart' is 'how to steal from Wal-Mart,' beating out questions related to 'coupons,' 'price matching,' and 'applying for a job.'"

So, it does appear that, at a popular level, in a general sense, we are in a post-Christian moment where trying to follow Jesus, trying to be faithful to God's Word is very, very challenging. And we have experienced a major shift in our culture. And I think it's important to understand what that is. Because, if you can't name something you can't respond to it. If all you have is symptoms without a diagnosis, you have illness but not hope of treatment.

So, Charles Taylor, who's a Catholic sociologist, has written a lot about the secularization of our culture. And he says, "We have moved into, at a popular level, something called 'The Age of authenticity.'"

The Age of Authenticity. And this is what you're feeling when you're trying to communicate with your friends; when you're trying to articulate why you believe what you believe and why your faith still matters to you. You are interacting in a framework where, for you, Jesus is Lord. But, for everybody else, authenticity is Lord. This is how he articulates it talking about the Age of Authenticity:

"I'm in the understanding of life, which emerges with a romantic expressivism of the late 18th century, that each one of us has his or her or their own way of realizing our humanity and that it's important to find a live out one's own as against surrendering to a conformity with a model imposed on us from outside by society or the previous generation or religious or political authority."

So, we live in a culture that is defined by, at a popular level, freedom from almost everything. So, these are the things he lists out: freedom from outside. This is a tectonic shift in an understand of what the good life was about. Dating back centuries and centuries, but probably popularized by the Greeks, was the concept of virtues, and the goal of life was to conform your internal disordered desires to an external set of virtues that have been tested culturally that enabled a culture to live.

So, the typical person growing up, it didn't matter what was in them, there was these beautiful virtues. Cardinal virtues. And these were things that you were to live into. But now, we don't want any of those things. So, the goal of human life is not an inward conformity to external norms, it is rejecting any external norm and then using the culture as a blank canvas to express yourself. He says we're also free to express ourselves and we are free from society. Which means nobody in our culture, no government, nobody else, has the right to tell us how to live. So, things like popular ethics or popular narratives or popular understandings are irrelevant. "Society has to bend to my will. I don't bend to society's."

The third thing: free from religion. Any sort of dogmatic truth claims have been reframed as oppressive and often those that victimize others. So, we're free from religion. We're free from the previous generation. We have a fundamental disconnect from previous generations, which gives you this intoxicating lie that the universe started when you were born; that there was nobody before you; that you're not on the receiving end of a ton of privilege

and opportunity; that it's yours and you're entitled to it.

Lastly, we're free from authority, which means it's the individual against everything else. So, as a result, we live in a culture where when you are trying to tell everybody the goal of your life is to take all of these areas of your life and submit them to the Lordship of Jesus, they don't have a plausibility structure for how that would even happen when the whole of life is freedom from claims of a person like Jesus. So, there's a deep conflict. Jesus is Lord of all versus nobody has the right to be lord of anything but me. I am lord versus Jesus is Lord, and there's a cultural tension between these two things.

Do you feel that? Do you feel that in your own heart? Do you feel internally torn? This seductive, compelling narrative that's coming at us from every conceivable cultural angle? But also, we feel it when we're trying to share the Gospel or talk about our faith with our friends. They just don't have the framework. If the goal is to throw off any sort of authority and be your authentic self, the concept of "self-denial" seems like spiritual insanity.

How did this happen? How did this happen? There's a political theory called the "Overton Window." It's the Overton theory of cultural influence. I'm only saying this just to explain how this has happened to us. Look, I'm not a conspiracy theorist person. I don't think the government is intelligent enough for a universal conspiracy. But, I do think that this has happened.

So, the Overton window basically goes like this: "We've got a new vision. We have a vision for 'The Age of Authenticity' being the dominant cultural narrative. So, we have this vision of what it wants to be. It's a new idea and we're trying to push it to becoming a reality."

So, it basically works like this: someone comes along and they put forth an idea that just seems unthinkable. Do you remember Leave It to Beaver? I've never seen any of it. Maybe the Wonder Years. I don't know what your framework is or what "long ago" was for you. But, the typical family back then, you would look at that and there would be no conceivable way that what's happening in our culture could happen. Imagine trying to write a modern TV script and inserting it into the middle of an episode of the Wonder Years. It's just like there's no way that this is ever going to happen.

So, that's unthinkable. And then people keep pushing and then what's unthinkable becomes radical and then what's radical becomes acceptable and what's acceptable, at some point, with enough argumentation, becomes sensible. And what's sensible ultimately becomes popular and what's popular is ultimately regulated and what's regulated ultimately becomes history. So, in a generation, you can move from one vision of life to another vision of life and you're barely even aware that this has happened.

Now, in your mind you're probably thinking, "Yeah. I can see that happening in a particular area." But, it's not one area. It's every area that this has happened. And so, as a result, our ideas just don't have a place. They fit in the culture that has accelerated away from a Christian foundation. So, what's the result of this? Well, I think there's several things that have happened to people like you and I, who are trying to follow Jesus in a culture like this.

The first thing: we've been pushed from the center to the fringe. From the center to the fringe. This is not expressed like that. Nobody's like, "Get those Christians out of here," because that would be intolerant. But, it's basically put forth like this: "It's okay for you to have a faith, but it's private."

America's a schizophrenic country. I'm an American citizen, by the way, so I can critique it now. By choice. But, America is so bizarre because nobody wants anybody's personal faith to impact public policy. Yet, every political candidate is still asked about their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What the heck is that? It is so bizarre because, if anybody was like, "Hey, what's your vision for the future?"

"Well, I've been reading the Sermon on the Mount and I'd like to start with the beatitudes."

People would be like, "Shut up. That's not going to work."

So, we love private faith, but nothing that impacts publicly. So, faith has been shift to the realm of the private and it's been pushed away from the center to the fringe. Secondly, it's been moved from being perceived as strange, maybe even compelling and different, to being seen as a threat. It's like when Christians show up, nobody's like, "Oh, thank God the Christians are here. They're gracious, kind, they serve the poor, they're good for the

city."

People probably think, "Oh, here come the Christians."

This is a little bit more of the vision of what's going to happen. People are worried that if Christians get cultural power they're going to take away the gay community's rights, they're going to institute a Christian version of Sharia law, that we're going to destroy culture, that we're bad for the city.

Gabe Lyons released a book recently called "Good Faith" where they said that Christianity is now perceived as two things at the same time: irrelevant and extreme. See, the typical person, when they see you, they'll think, "They're totally extreme and what they're extreme about is completely irrelevant to my life."

These are challenging words to describe our faith. So, we're moving from being seen as strange to being seen as a threat to our culture. And lastly, from control to penalization. So, we've gone from controlling much of the legislation of this country – at least from a moral framework – and now anybody who holds those same convictions is often penalized and pushed out in many ways. So, the result of these shifts is that we've moved from being a moral majority to a shrinking minority. Now, I have friends in other places of the country like Kentucky and Atlanta, and they say, "What are you talking about?"

I'm like, "You've never visited San Francisco and you don't live in New York."

Because, in many ways, particularly the city center, this is true. This is true. People are terrified. People know that if they're public about their faith, HR will come down like a hammer in their environment. People are worried that if it gets out they could be passed over for jobs or perceived as different. So, what's our response to this? What's your response to this? Well it's been my experience that Christians tend to have four gut reactions to a culture that embodies the Age of Authenticity.

The first reaction is a reaction of fear. You don't see these among too many young people, but you see this amongst middle-aged and older folks. It's a reaction of fear and it's like, "Look what's happening to this culture. Oh my gosh. The anti-Christ is coming. The end is near. Look at what's happening to blah, blah, blah."

That's a narrative dominated by fear. But, I don't think this is an appropriate narrative because it has a false assumption. Here's the assumption: Christians have to be popular and in power for the Church to thrive. That's a false assumption. The second gut reaction is a reaction of self-preservation. How do we bundle up and get around with one another and preserve whatever rights we have left? So, fear is translated into a grasping for power and for rights. Now, I'm not saying religious rights are unimportant. I think they are fundamental human rights. But, if I could think of two narratives that are the least compelling narratives for our world, they are fear and self-preservation.

And yet, these have been many people's gut reaction, particularly middle-aged and older folks. Younger folks, their reaction's been a little different. Their reaction is compromise and syncretism. Compromise is basically saying, "Hey look, man. The world's a different place now. I don't know about you, but we need to reinterpret the Scriptures and God's expectations through the lens of our culture."

So, we reverse the authority structure. Instead of saying "here's what God's Word says" we say "here's what our culture says" and we try and fit God's Word into it. The only problem is, when you remove the authority of Scripture, it just doesn't make sense anymore because you remove it from its source of power, which is God Himself. And then you're left with this awkward set of morals that you sort of live by, but don't work. And I see this a lot with compromise. If you compromise on Biblical standards, you'll never fully enjoy it, because the Holy Spirit will be in you and He's jealous. So, you will never be able to enjoy sin and you'll never be able to enjoy church. You'll live in this horrible place.

The solution for that is repentance. There'll be an opportunity for that at the end of the service. And then, lastly, syncretism. Which, basically, you end up with some sort of folk religion which is just like a mashup of God concepts and little snippets of Jesus teachings and they're put together in some palatable form which is basically easily dismissed by everybody else.

Fear, self-preservation, compromise or syncretism. Is there a better response? Is there a better response? Is there a better way to respond to the times of history that we live in? Well, I'd like to put forth that there is and I'd like to introduce a phrase. I'm sure you've

talked about it before, but it's going to play itself out over the next couple of series, and it's the concept of becoming a creative minority. A creative minority.

This is what you see in the book of Daniel. The context of the book of Daniel – you want to talk about cultural disorientation, they went from living in Jerusalem observing temple worship in the Kingdom of God to being dragged into the courts of Nebuchadnezzar where they were educated, basically brainwashed, for years in the literature and language of the Babylonians. Have you ever studied Babylonian literature? Have you ever studied the Enuma Elis? Perhaps in a college course on the side?

What this cultural narrative was and what their story was could not be any more opposed to what the children of God were taught. And yet they found a way, in a hostile culture, not only to live, but to thrive as the people of God. Their identity, their posture wasn't fear, it wasn't syncretism, it wasn't compromise and it wasn't control. Their approach was becoming a creative minority. So, what is a creative minority? I want to give you my definition of it. A creative minority is a Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships, knotted together in a living network of persons in a complex and challenging cultural setting who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world.

Did you get that? One more time. A creative minority is a Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships, knotted together in a living network of persons in a complex and challenging cultural setting who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world.

This is the opportunity. This is what we saw with Daniel; their faithfulness to Yahweh. And this is the opportunity before us. But, this means we're going to live in a tension. We're going to live in tension with our culture and we're going to live in tension with our faith. We have to make these things come together. Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, who, as far as I know, is the person who coined this phrase, he says this:

"To become a creative minority is not easy, because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith. Seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning, but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part. This is a demanding and a risk-laden choice."

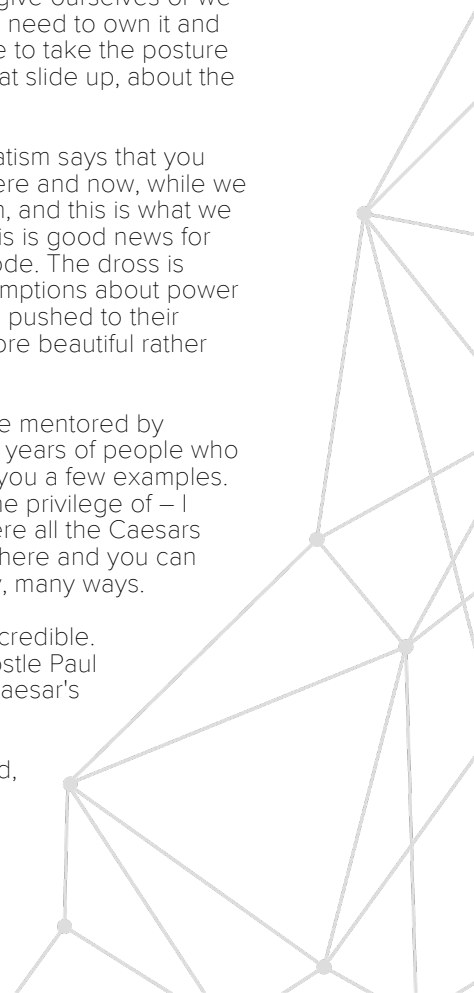
The tension between faithfulness and the tension between influence. So, this means that, when we're trying to figure out "who am I as a follower of Jesus" in a city like San Francisco, we have to give ourselves or we have to have a new understanding about our cultural identity. We need to name it, we need to own it and we need to internalize it. We have to have a vision, not of those in power, but we have to take the posture of those who are living as those who are in exile. I've got a slide here, if we can put that slide up, about the tension of living between these two things.

Syncretism says we're living only for what's presently available and accessible. Separatism says that you withdraw from culture and wait for another world. But, our call is to live fully present, here and now, while we long for another kingdom. This is the tension that a creative minority lives and works in, and this is what we see all through the book of Daniel. Now, I mentioned earlier that I actually think that this is good news for the Church. A loss of cultural power gets the Church out of its lazy and assumptive mode. The dross is burned out through persecution and hardship. When we're challenged, all of our assumptions about power and about discipleship and about Jesus' vision of ethics and morality, these things are pushed to their conclusion. And, as a result, the Church becomes more potent, more powerful and more beautiful rather than more hypocritical, more judgmental and more lukewarm.

The reason I think this is that, when you talk about being a creative minority, we can be mentored by redemptive history. We don't have to start now. We can look back at the thousands of years of people who have faithfully followed the way of God and lived as a creative minority. I want to give you a few examples. First slide here, this is a picture of Caesar Augustus. I was in Rome recently and had the privilege of – I don't know if you've ever been to Rome, but they've got the Palatine Hill, which is where all the Caesars lived. They've recently opened Caesar Augustus' house; the ruins. So, you can go in there and you can see where Caesar Augustus brought the Pax Romana. An incredible emperor in many, many ways.

I read a biography about his life and some of the cool things that he did. Absolutely incredible. And then, an hour later, I'm in the Mamertine Prison, which is where Peter and the Apostle Paul were before they were crucified. And I remember sitting there thinking, "I was just in Caesar's house and now I'm where Paul wrote some of the prison epistles."

And I thought, "Would you have ever bet that this guy in this prison would have eroded,



through love, the empire of that guy on the hill?"

You never would have bet on that. And yet, that's what happened. Paul says, "The Word of God is not chained," though he's chained to a little post. "The Word of God is free and it's doing its work." We don't need cultural power for the Gospel to be affective. But, we need to be a creative minority.

Second example. This is William Wilberforce. Most of us love William Wilberforce as an abolitionist, and he's gotten more popular as of late because of the issue of human slavery that we're facing. But, do you know when he went in to deal with this issue, do you know how hated he was? They said, "If you get rid of slavery, you're going to bankrupt the British empire."

Slavery and the slave trade was baked into almost every industry. The economy was built on it. And he said, "I don't care. There's a call of God. People are made in the image of God. There's a way that we should live and I'm going to use whatever influence I have."

And he was hated. He had a couple of nervous breakdowns. But, by the end of his life, history will look back and record that a tiny group of friends living in the Clapham Sect, as a creative minority living in the tension of their culture and faithfulness to God, were able to exert redemptive influence in a way that brought the issue of slavery to its knees.

What about China? You look at China. Mao Tse-tung brought in his Red Revolution. Millions of people were killed. The Church, the expelled all of the Christian missionaries and the thought was the Church would die. Have you been to China lately? What is happening in the underground Church in China is breathtaking. They're almost at a cultural tipping point, and you can go to places all over China and you will see these Christians. They don't have cultural power, but they're a creative minority and they're living true and they haven't compromised and, as a result, their numbers are increasing. They're having a powerful impact.

What about someone like Hitler? And what I want you to do as I'm going through this is imagine you're there in that moment. Imagine going to one of Hitler's giant rallies. Imagine what it would've been like. Have you ever been to a rally here in San Francisco and you're like, "Oh, gosh. I hope someone doesn't throw a punch," because it's like a tinder box. Imagine being at one of Hitler's rallies and then imagine being a pretty inconsequential PhD student and this guy ends up dying, being hung, in a very, very low-level Nazi camp. When people look back on World War II, who's the hero and who's the villain? Somebody who died as a martyr for their faith with a tiny little group called "The Confessing Church," absolutely committed to purity, absolutely committed to discipleship, functioning as a creative minority. Years later history will record that Bonhoeffer was the hero and that Hitler was the villain.

What about something like communism? You talk about another ideology with all of its power. And yet you look at the wall of communism and the movement of God's people bringing down the walls of communism through prayer. You look at the fall of the Berlin Wall. One of the major events. It happened when I was in the seventh grade. And I remember my parents saying to me that communism has fallen. I didn't quite grasp it. But now, I look back and I go, "What an amazing event."

Those Christians in the underground Church thriving when they come out. Or the ultimate example: the early Church. Here's an example. This is some graffiti that was found. You may be saying, "Well, what is that? That looks like a picture of a donkey on a cross."

That's correct. This is graffiti on the streets of the Roman empire that says, "Worshipping your God who is an ass."

This is the vision. This is how Christians were perceived. They were mocked and they were laughed at. The cross was the ultimate point of political failure. It's the modern equivalent of lethal injection or the electric chair. And yet, this tiny little group of Christians, only 120 people on the day of Pentecost, acting as a creative minority in the Roman empire, 300 years later the Roman empire was confessing that Jesus is Lord.

To give you an equivalent, I want you to imagine that somewhere in Puerto Rico, a guy is put to death by electric chair who claimed to be God and, 300 years later, his religion being the official religion of the United States of America. Can you imagine that happening? You'd just be like, "There's no way that would ever happen."

A creative minority that doesn't compromise that lives with prophetic tension, history tells us that when moments come like this, this is actually an opportunity and not a threat. So, let's go back to the Overton window just for a minute here. The Overton window. Maybe the unthinkable idea is that this is the best moment for the Church when many people are thinking it's the worst. Maybe it's the time for us to live fully as a creative minority without compromise and without fear and then that will become something that's radical. Maybe this is our opportunity to reverse the cultural narrative by faithfulness to the Gospel.

Okay. Back to the book of Daniel. Back to the book of Daniel. So, the reason why I share all of those things is because these are the tensions that Daniel had to live with. So, there's so many cross references between the time of history they lived and the time of history that we find ourselves in. Daniel, you know what his name means? "God is my judge."

That's not a bad name. So, the first thing Nebuchadnezzar tries to do is to rename everybody. His name means "God's my judge" and he can't be touched. So, he transcends whatever our culture says about him. The book of Daniel was written over a period of about 70 years, which means he had time to see the implications of what it meant to be faithful and to ride those waves out through a changing culture. He was there under various leaders, he was there under various political regimes and various empires. Yet, here he was, faithful to God in the midst of it.

Something else that's fascinating, and you see this throughout the Scriptures: the more the people of God are a minority and they're displaced, the more supernatural God begins to act. The darker our culture gets, the more you should expect the supernatural power of God to move. You could go through all of the places where it's getting dark and you'll begin to see that God's breaking in. So, half of the book of Daniel is of dreams and of revelation. It's about intercessory prayer. It's about angels showing up. It's a crazy book. Because, the more you press in, without all the cultural excess, you press into the heart of the Christian faith, the more the supernatural power of God is revealed.

It was written over 70 years. More supernatural. And it's a story of personal discipleship. This is his example of what it looks like to have favor and to be imprisoned. To go from moments of power to being completely dismissed. It is a case study in how to be a creative minority. How did the book of Daniel happen? How did they get there? How did their Overton window get them from being the head and not the tail, the people of God with power and influence over the nations to where they're completely displaced, the temple is destroyed and all the articles are taken out and carried off? How did that happen?

Several things. They neglected the poor. God warned them again and again and again: "You were slaves in Egypt. Do not treat your slaves poorly." He warned them again and again and again: "You've been brought out. You need to rest. Do not work around the clock," which doesn't have implications for a place like this. Taking Sabbath seriously. He warned them about idolatry and again and again and again they were seduced by the gods of other nations. They were trusting in other powers. And God says, "If you do these things, you will be judged."

So God, in this picture that we're seeing, is so sovereign that He's actually using the pagan nations to judge and shape His people. Now, you have to understand how absolutely revolutionary this was. At that time, your God was connected to your geography. So, if you lived in Egypt, you had Egyptians gods. If you lived in Israel, you had an Israeli god. Your geography and your God could not be separated. And yet, Daniel makes the claim that there's a God who's above all other gods who is so sovereign and so powerful He's directing all of the affairs of men so He can be trusted even when we're in a position of exile.

The Babylonians come along, Nebuchadnezzar, with their god "Marduk," their creation story, their world power. And then Daniel finds himself in a position of being faithful to God, but also fruitful in his relationship. He's given favor. He's a cultural elite. He's trained. He's given a position of influence. He's speaking truth to power on multiple occasions and he ultimately experiences persecution where his faithfulness to God gives him a death sentence. So, you see this incredible example of what it means to be a creative minority. Not to trust in the things that are happening around you, but to trust in the one, true God. A creative minority in Babylon.

So, you may be thinking at this particular point, "Okay. I get this. Thanks for framing up the book of Daniel. Okay. The people of God are being judged. They've violated the covenant. The Babylonians are coming in. They're in exile. Then they have to figure out how to be God's people. Okay. Daniel has a God who's his judge. He seems to have a vision that transcends any political environment, and that's great."

But, in your mind, you're probably thinking in your heart, "What about ethics? What about sexuality? What about discipleship? What about HR in the workplace? How do I interact with other people? When do I know I'm being a jerk or I'm being faithful to God? When is this prophetic tension and when am I being a Pharisee? How do I take what's happening in the book of Daniel and live it out in my workplace?"

Well, I've got good news for you. I'm just a guest speaker. My job is done. I've introduced you to the book of Daniel. Next week, Pastor Dave Lomas is going to come back and unpack the rest of the book of Daniel so you can understand what it means to be a creative minority here in San Francisco.

Let me pray and then I'm going to transition us to communion.

Father, thank You for this morning. Lord, thank You for these people here. These are Your people. Lord, You know them. Lord, You know how they feel. You know the conversations they have; the tensions they feel. You know some of them love You so much in their heart and yet feel absolutely paralyzed at letting anybody in their workplace know that they went to church this weekend. They're controlled by shame. Others, Lord, have compromised and they're just ridden with guilt. They have no joy in their world and no joy in church. Other people are fearful, Lord, and they're just lamenting for loss of Godly influence in this country.

Lord, thank You that, wherever we are, You see us, You know us, You love us. And thank You that You invite us in deeper. But, what a miracle this church is here in the city of San Francisco. This church is a living miracle. It's a testimony of the saving power of Jesus Christ at this time of history. And we thank You for the privilege of learning from Your Word, even hearing how Your Word connects to our culture today. We just pray, Holy Spirit, that You use the rest of this gathering, the taking of communion, the singing of songs, the praying of prayers, the confession of sin, the affirmation of our faith, to shape us into being a creative minority for Your glory and for the good of this city. In Jesus' name, amen.