

Sermon Transcript from August 14th, 2016
God and Country
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Daniel 3. Let me pray before we get into this, because I'm going to kind of weave in the reading into the teaching. So, let me pray right now as we open up the Bible.

Lord, on a Sunday like this, my prayer is that You would just help and that You would guard my words and that You would give me words, Lord. I really need Your help this morning in teaching and talking about the things that we'll talk about. Maybe coming up against some of the things that we hold real dear as Americans in our life. So, I pray that You would help us, God. Give us grace today and willing hearts and ears to hear and then to receive the things from God. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, Daniel 3. First of all, before we start reading, I want to give you a little bit of background. We talked about this the last couple weeks. Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon. Babylon is the most powerful kingdom at this time. It has crushed Jerusalem and Jerusalem is the like the epicenter of God's activity in the world at this time in redemptive history. And the temple is there and God's presence is there and God is telling Israel to be a light to the nations. And, over and over again they don't do what God has called them to do and do what God's called them to be. So, God allows Nebuchadnezzar, this powerful, megalomaniac of a ruler, to destroy Jerusalem and then take Jerusalem's best stuff and best people.

So, he takes the stuff from the temple and he puts it in the temple of his god saying, "My god beat up your god. My god's more powerful than your god."

Then he took the best of Jerusalem's people. And in that little sub-narrative is where we get the book of Daniel. So, Daniel and three of his friends, that will come into the spotlight in chapter 3, get taken from their homes as teenagers and put into a cultural immersion program. The cultural immersion program is to make them Babylonian, to take them from being Jewish and to uproot them from their Jewishness, to squash out all of their Jewishness, to assimilate them into Babylonian culture and give them government jobs. So, that's what happened.

But, here's the tension in the book of Daniel, and this is why we're reading it even today in our Bibles and this is why we're doing a series on it. The tension in the book of Daniel is that Daniel and his friends didn't become Babylonians. They did, but they didn't. They remained very much Jewish. They remained very much devoted to their God. They remained very much. At the core of Jewishness was being very distinct and set apart as a people of God. They remained set apart as a people of God. They remained faithful to God; to the vision of what it meant to be Jewish and their devotion to God. They were faithful to that.

Though they were Babylonian in the sense that they worked for the Babylonian government. They dressed Babylonian. They talked Babylonian. They succeeded in Babylon. They had "secular" jobs that they succeeded at. "Secular" in quotes. They had "secular" jobs that they succeeded at. But, they were very much still faithful as Jewish people.

So, what Daniel has taught the people of God for centuries – and I hope that it will teach us – is how do we live in a culture that has a competing vision of what it means to be human? That has a competing vision of human flourishing? A competing vision of freedom? A competing vision of life? How do we live in a culture that has a competing vision of life and future and joy and hope and still remain faithful to God's vision of being human, of flourishing, of freedom of life? How do we live in a culture like San Francisco in a town like San Francisco that has a competing vision than Jesus' vision for the world? How do we do that?

And not just how do we live here, but how do we succeed here? How do we, like Daniel and his friends, succeed in that culture? By serving it rightly. By serving their culture rightly. By serving our culture rightly. But also, by pressing against the culture to shape it into God's vision for the world. How do we do both? These are big questions. I think these questions are what we're all kind of asking. So, I'll say it like this at the top of the sermon because it needs to be explicit. So, let me make it explicit.

There is a profound tension at the heart of being a follower of Jesus in this city. There is a profound tension. If you don't feel the tension, you should ask yourself why you don't feel this tension. There is a profound tension at the heart of being a follower of Jesus; to be loyal to Christ in a city like San Francisco. Because, first of all, we're San Franciscans for one. Or, Bay Area-ans or... I don't know how you say that. But, most of us, for the most

part, who have lived her for a while or, if not, our whole lives, we're very much San Franciscans. We're NorCal people (and not SoCal people, because those people are like... whatever.)

We love San Francisco. We're very much San Franciscans, but we're not primarily San Franciscans. We're primarily disciples of Jesus. That is who we are. And being a San Franciscan and a disciple of Jesus will rub up against each other; will create profound tension. Because, there are times when you have to not participate. Where you will have to say, "No. I'm not going to do that. No. I'm not going to say that. No. I'm not going to believe that. No, no, no. I'm not. To do that thing would mean me being disloyal to Christ. And I'm more loyal to Christ than I am to America or San Francisco."

One writer puts it this way in a great book called "Artists, Citizens and Philosophers." He says this – and the first sentence you should just write down. It's so good.

"The Church is shaped by a vision of God's Kingdom; the ordering of human life by an alternative vision."

The Church. Us. The followers of Jesus in this room are shaped by a vision of God's Kingdom. That means all of our lives are shaped by a vision of what God calls right and true and beautiful and good and pure. Like, our lives are shaped by those things. And then we order our life underneath His vision. So, we take Christ's vision for everything and we order our lives underneath it. We do not take the vision of the policy of San Francisco and order our lives under that. We don't. We just say, "No. I am loyal to Christ. He is my Lord and I'm ordering my life under His Lordship."

So, that's just the first sentence. He goes on:

"Christians belong to the Church, the body of Christ, a community that confesses loyalty to Jesus Christ..." – we confess our loyalty is with Christ – "...who calls it to live in a way that places Christians in profound tension with many of the fundamental values of larger culture."

So, what he's saying here, and what the book of Daniel is speaking to is that we live our lives loyal to God. We live our lives, if we're Christians, we live our lives loyal to Christ and His vision for the world; what He believes about life and love and freedom and joy and sex and money and power. What He believes about all those are what we practice believing. We just live our lives under that order. And all of our lives are ordered under that. And when there's competing things, we go with Jesus. But then, we find it very hard to live in this world and live as a follower of Jesus. We don't move away. We don't go, "Well, fine. I'm just going to go live in the woods. It's way easier to do it that way and live off the land. It's just too hard to live in San Francisco."

We don't do that. We actually live in the middle of a city that has a competing vision than what we think and we do it for the good of God's world. So, what does it look like to make choices about how we relate to the wider culture as people with an alternative vision. Let's turn to Daniel 3. Let's start reading. I'm going to read some of it and make some comments and we'll go through it like that.

Daniel 3:1: **"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up..."** – it's basically 90 feet tall – **"...on the plane of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers,"** – all the guys. All the people – **"and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.**

"Then the herald loudly proclaimed, 'Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.'"

That is a setup for the whole story. Now, some of you guys are going to have flashbacks of Sunday school and go, "Oh, yay. A fun Sunday school lesson. This is really, really fun. I can't wait."

What's going on here? Well, first of all, Nebuchadnezzar sets up a statue that's 90 feet tall, plated in gold. And he summons everyone of power, everyone who works for his government, to come and worship the statue he has set up. So, the question is: "What is this statue of?"

Is this a statue of Nebuchadnezzar that he just stands there for three days and then someone carves him out and then makes it? Is it him? Is it of a god of Babylon or is it of some random animal? What is the statue of? We're not told in this text what the statue is. We're not told. Some people think – well, Daniel 2, it's a vision of Nebuchadnezzar as a statue and that's a statue. Maybe. But, we're not told. In chapter 3, we're not told. And I think that's important. Because, a statue is a symbol of two things that you never bring up at a dinner table. Politics and religion. This statue represents politics and religion; together; combined. And it's powerful. This statue represents the kingdom of Babylon, national power of Babylon. This statue is an embodiment of the Babylonian empire, of its gods, of the power of Nebuchadnezzar. It's all represented in this one statue.

Now, you may be thinking, "Oh my gosh. Ancient people. They worshiped everything. Those people worshipped... we would never erect statues like that today and sing songs to them. That's just silly. We don't do that."

Remember that we have a statue that stands three times this tall in the New York harbor that embodies our national ideology. Liberty and freedom. Think about that. I mean, we don't bow down to the statue. And I'm not even making a judgment call on whether or not it's a good or bad thing that we have the Statue of Liberty that's the first thing you see when you come into our country from the East. I'm saying that we still have these sort of things that embody our national identity.

So, lest you think, "Oh my gosh. Those ancient people with their gold things that they're worshiping all the time."

We have those things today too. And we still sing songs. Like, that zither is still in full effect. I have no idea what that is. I wish someone would tell me what a zither is, because I don't play any instrument, but I think I would be good at the zither. We still sing songs today. We still do. Has anyone cried watching the Olympics yet? I mean, Simone Manuel anyone? Have you cried? What happens when someone wins gold? They stand there and the flag raises and a song is played. A song is played. Not a movie. A movie doesn't come on about your country. A dancer doesn't come out and dance for your country. An artist isn't painting your country. It's a song.

Music, nationalism, pride and affections are still a very powerful alchemy. It's still a very powerful combination that's formative. And we can poke fun at this. "Oh my gosh. A golden thing and a zither and then people singing and bowing? We would never."

You always. We always do this. We've not gotten this far from it at all. But, because we live today, "No, that's not what's happening. I don't worship."

See, Nebuchadnezzar says, "When you see the statue that represents Babylon's power, it's ideology, it's leadership, it's military power, Babylon's way of life, Babylon's culture, all that's being represented in this one image. When you see this statue and you hear the music, fall to your knees and pledge allegiance to it."

Just think about that. Please don't hear this as anti-American. I'm not anti-American. I really do love this country. I just want you to see how this isn't just some playful kid's story. Like, this happens today. This is us today. So, you read this and you're like, "Oh my gosh. Cute Veggie Tales story."

No. It's us. See, they believe that Babylon defines reality, that Babylon gets to define what's right and wrong in the world, that Babylon defines what success is and what failure is. Babylon defines what hope and happiness is. Babylon is god. That's what's happening here. All of that is being symbolized by this image and they are forced to pledge allegiance to it. And my point is not that we shouldn't sing the national anthem or say the pledge of allegiance, my point is that we should always consider any pledge of allegiance of anything in light of our allegiance to Jesus. And we don't really. We don't do this.

We will pledge to anything. We will make a pledge to anything. We'll click the box of like, "Have you read the terms?"

"Yes. Yes. Yes, I have. Yes, I have."

And we just click it like yes on everything. Everything yes. I mean, what's the worst they

can do? We don't stop and think, "Am I pledging my allegiance to this thing and does this clash with my allegiance to Christ?"

And we're like, "Oh, who cares? We live in the West. That's just not how we live."

It is. This is very, very, very much right now. These men had to think about this. It took a lot of conscious discernment, I think, on the part of these men not to bow down to the statue. Because, I think, it might have looked a lot more subtle than we would read it in the story. Maybe it looked more like gathering in a stadium and a flag is brought out and a song will start playing and war planes fly over and then you have to sing. We're like, "Oh, yeah. Of course we'll sing that."

But there's something in these men going, "I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to sing that song. I won't sing that song. I will not bow down to that thing. My allegiance is to Yahweh and Him alone and I can't do that thing."

For us you're like, "It's just a song, man." We think, "Oh my gosh. It was a statue of Satan and it was a song to Satan and everybody's like, 'Satan is awesome,' and everyone's singing to Satan."

We think of it like that. But, it's not. It was way more subtle than that. It's way more subtle than that.

In Daniel 3:8 it says: "At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, 'May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of...' – there's that list again. Just a lot of instruments – "...and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down in worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Notice that this is full on religion and politics. Look at the last verse. Daniel 3:12: "There are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs who pay no attention to you. So, they have no honor for you, the king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image, this national image you have set up."

So, this has to do with a nation, this has to do with loyalty to the king, this has to do with gods. This is religion and politics. It's the imperial power embodied by the king. The king's personal honor. It's the national story and the identity of Babylon. It's their civic religion is all merged here. And it is a civic religion. What does that mean? What is a civic religion? Civic religion is an elaborate "god and country" phenomenon that makes sacred the nation's character and its leaders are heroes.

And civic religion has three main convictions. It's on the screen. I'll use Babylon as an example, because nations conquering empires, empires have done this since before Babylon. And this is what they think. Civic religion has three main convictions. Conviction one: the gods have chosen Babylon. So, that's what they believe. They believe that the gods have given favor to Babylon. "That's why we're crushing them. My god's better than your god. My god crushed your god. I took your articles and put them in my temple. Our god's rule. God has chosen us."

Second: Babylon and its king are agents of God's rule, will, salvation and presence among human beings. So, wherever Babylon rules, our gods rule as well. And god has given us power to exert power and authority over the world wherever god wants us to extend our reach.

Thirdly: Babylon manifests god's blessing. So, if you want peace, you have to submit to Babylon. If you want security, peace, justice, flourishing, you have to let us rule over you among those who submit to Babylon's rule. So, Babylon thinks, "Okay. God has empowered us. God has chosen us. We're agents of god's rule and wherever we are there's actually peace."

So, this is what civic religion means. You can swap out Babylon for any nation. You can swap out Babylon for Rome. This is Pax Romana. This is what Rome believed. You can swap this out for Greece. You can swap this out for England. You can swap this out for America. Let's do America, because that's fun.

Civic religion has three main convictions. God has chosen America. This is manifest destiny. God has chosen us. We are God's chosen nation. America and its leaders are

agents of God's rule, will, salvation, presence among human beings. Wherever we go, God goes. We represent and our flag represents God's blessing. America manifests God's blessing, security, peace, justice, flourishing, among those who actually submit to our way of life. You submit to our way of life, our democratic process, our vision of the pursuit of happiness. You submit to our way of life and then that's true flourishing.

This is very much – the reason why I say this is because we, as a church, can get so in bed with America as a Christian nation. And it's just not a thing. America is not a Christian nation. First of all, there's no such thing as a Christian nation. There just isn't that's not a thing. But, if America was a Christian nation, it wouldn't have been built on the backs of slaves or genocide. It's not a Christian nation. It's not. It's an empire just like Rome was, Babylon was, all this stuff. It's just an empire. We're an empire that has a civic religion. Our civic religion is called "liberty and freedom."

I'm going to say this. If at this point of the sermon, if you're liberal in the room, you're like, "Oh my gosh. Finally. He's doing the thing."

You're going to get just pummeled here. If you are not that liberal and more conservative and you're just like, "Come on. Are you kidding me? You can't do this here."

Just listen to this. I'm going against the civic idol of our nation, which is liberty and freedom. That's what I'm going after. And how we think that's manifest destiny of God. We wed that Christianity. So, Michael Gorman has this quote in one of his books that I actually read a while ago and I've been stewing on it for when we did Revelation series. I think you might agree with this quote whether you're liberal, conservative, republican, democrat or other or whatever. This is America's true religion. He says this:

"American civil religion values human liberty and rights as a divine gift and considers it, perhaps on par with strength, as one of the highest national values. The protection and furtherance of freedom is therefore a divine mandate and mission. The operative notion of both political corporate and personal, individual freedom is that of God-given, inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; an idea derived both from the enlightenment and from one of the most important sacred texts of this civil religion: the Declaration of Independence."

So, our song, our flag, our statue, our god is liberty and freedom. And what we want to do as Americans is bring that to bear on the world. We think of other nations who are not like us, we call them oppressive. What they do to women is oppressive, what they do to politics is oppressive because they don't think like we think. And we are God's chosen nation and we want to bring liberty and freedom to bear on your nation and we will kill you if we have to to protect our freedoms. This is dangerous. This is so scary. And this is why Daniel 3 is not a children's story. This is why Daniel 3 is like, this statue that Nebuchadnezzar makes, it's like, "You will worship our national idol and you will be completely brought in to our way of life and if you do not, we will kill you."

And they say, "We pledge an allegiance to Yahweh. We just can't do that. We're sorry."

Daniel 3 is not a children's story. It's about god and country. It's about politics and religion. Christians, we cannot get into bed with our civic religion. We can love our city and we can love our nation and we must. Our nation is great. I mean, most of it. A lot of parts of it are great. Some of them are really not great. But, some of it's really great. But, we cannot love and serve its gods. We cannot. We live in a great nation, but our nation is not the Kingdom of God. We are loyal to Jesus. America and its way of life is a civic religion that most of us worship. America and its way of life is a civic religion that most of us worship by the nature of living in this country. And don't think nationalism here, because I know some of you in here are like, "Oh, I'm so not nationalistic."

Most of you would agree with Rebecca Solnit in her book, "Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas." She starts her book by saying this:

"San Francisco is the most left part of the left coast; the un-American place where America invents itself."

The un-American place where America invents itself. Un-American. So, don't think of nationalism. Some of you guys feel that. "I feel so un-American. I'm just so not American."

Whatever. Don't think nationalism. Think this. Think you have been intoxicated and indoctrinated by an American way of life that you worship. Think secularism, think progress, think money, think materialism, think sexual freedom, think justice, think radical autonomy, think pursuit of individual happiness. That is the American way of life and all of us in here have taken that in and it's what we worship. And we think we would never worship ancient gods. We would never worship a gold statue. We would never bow down to a statue. We wouldn't worship Bacchus, the god of wine, or we wouldn't worship Moloch by turning our babies over to be burned in fire. We would never do that.

But, we drink too much. We have treated our kids less than what is right and good and godly to chase our ambitions and our careers. When we actually stop and reflect on what we do, we would find that we do many of the same things in modern form of what many ancient people did to serve their gods. We do the same thing. There will always be a test for our allegiance. How will you refuse such things and live under a different way of life? How do these three friends do it?

Notice they don't mount a loud rebellion. They don't mount a loud rebellion. They quietly do their own thing. They didn't write a letter saying, "King, I can't believe you would do this. I'm blogging about this. That's it. My blog's going live tonight if you don't."

That's not what they do. They just go, "Oh. We're not going to do that."

And then people take notice. Look at Daniel 3:13: **"Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?'"**

Now, very interesting. He is not telling them not to worship Yahweh. He's saying, "Add this. Just worship one time. I'm not saying not to worship your God, but worship this god too.

"Now when you hear the sound of the [band], if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good."

"If you want to bow down and worship right now we'll have a private ceremony. Here. You guys just bow down and worship. That's great. We're good."

"But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Some of your translations says, "What god is there that will save you from my hand?"

"I'm the most powerful man on the planet and you're not going to worship our way of life? Who can save you from my hand?"

Daniel 3:16: **"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar,'" – this is seriously, probably one of my favorite paragraphs in the Bible today. But, this is so good.**

"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter."

"We don't need to fight. I'm not going to argue."

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Oh my gosh. That never gets old to me. Every time I read that I just get chills. Like, it's just so good. This was non-participation. This was non-violent non-participation. Not just that, this was polite non-violent non-participation. Do you see how nice they are? I can't get over how nice they are. Guys. Kindness is a good thing. Being kind. Going, "King. Yeah. I got the letter. You know, I don't want to argue with you. I don't want to fight. I don't want to get into a debate. Here's the thing: we're just not going to do it. Your Majesty, if we have to go into the fire, we understand. You have to do what you have to do. I get it. Our God could save us. He will save us. But, even if He doesn't save us and we perish, we're not going to worship, Your

Majesty."

Just so kind. I mean, what do you do with that kind of kindness? Nebuchadnezzar just gets angry. He gets furious with them. They don't plan to protest. They didn't start a hashtag. They didn't call Fox News. They didn't call Fox News like, "Oh my gosh. We have a thing." Or lawyers for religious freedom. They didn't do any of that. They said, "Your Majesty, we're sorry. But, we're not sorry. I mean, we're just not going to pledge allegiance to your thing."

And why not? Why didn't they do it? This is elementary and fundamental, but you have to hear this: because they were Jews and the very beginning of their commandment says, "You shall worship not other gods."

They didn't worship this idol because of who they were. They didn't worship because they knew who they were. "We're Jews. Oh. We don't do that. We're not going to worship other gods."

They said no because of who they were. See, our action flows out of our identity. Sadly, we prove we are more consumers or Americans than we are followers of Jesus when our actions go that way. But, we have to remember, those of you guys that are followers of Jesus, you are Christian, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. That's who you are. Therefore, that means we live life under the rule and the life and the vision that Jesus calls us to live under. His teachings, His vision for money, for the poor, for sex, for marriage, for food, for friendship, for sacrifice, for eternity. We live under His vision. That's who we are.

So, why do we say no to things? Why can we say no to things? A non-participation, it can be a kind, "No, thank you."

Why do we do that? Because of who we are. See, whenever there is a commandment given in the New Testament and even the Old Testament, it's always rooted in who you are. So, you will abstain from sexual immorality. Why? Because you are a Christian and the Living God lives in you. You are not your own. That's why. And it always roots it back to who you are. Why do we live this way? Because of who you are. They said no to this idols because of who they were. Like, "Oh, we're Jewish. We're followers of Yahweh. We don't do that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Politely, we're sorry."

And what they said about God to Nebuchadnezzar, oh my gosh. "If we're thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and He will deliver us from your hand."

Kind, but like, "Listen: our God is more powerful than you think."

And then he says this, "But, even if He does not." I think that takes so much faith to say that. See, they know God's ability. "Oh, God is able to save us." What they don't know is God's purposes. "God might not save us."

He might not save them. But, that's not the issue. Because, what matters to them is not deliverance, but obedience. That's what mattered to them. "We don't care if we're delivered or not. All we care is about being obedient to God. We're followers of Yahweh. We're followers of God. We want to be obedient. We're Jews. We're followers of God."

See, faith is not being sure of all God's ways. Sometimes they ways of God are summed up with, "I don't know. I don't know what God's going to do."

Biblical faith knows the power of God, but holds in tension the freedom of God. It's like, "But, if not. But, if God doesn't do it."

We might think a better translation of this would be if they got in Nebuchadnezzar's face and they said, "We're going to call down God's deliverance from heaven. We will bind the fire in Jesus' name."

It's that was thing, we'd be all pumped. Like, "Come on!" But, it wasn't like that. See, faith doesn't predict God's ways, it simply holds to God's Word. It obeys God's truth. It does not manipulate God's hand. One commentator writes this:

"Faith's finest hour may be when it can oppose Nebuchadnezzar's three words, burning fiery furnace, with three of its own: but if not."

Faith is saying, "God can do it, but even if He doesn't, I still hope in Him. I still trust God."

So, you draw a line. You take a stand. A polite, non-participation stand in your faith in Christ. Is God going to bless you materially for it? Is God going to give you stuff? Is He going to deliver you? Maybe. But, even if not.

"I say no to that. I won't lie to get the sale. And then God's going to bring me favor," and then you get fired. You're like, "What the heck? God, where were you? But, even if not, I'm going to be obedient to God. I was obedient to God there. And even if He doesn't deliver me."

Daniel 3:19. Let me just read the rest of it and I'll make a couple notes and we'll close.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers of his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace was so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'Weren't there three men that were tied up and thrown into the fire?'"

They replied, "Uh huh. Certainly, Your Majesty."

"He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'"

Or an angel. Notice that God didn't keep them out of the furnace. So, did God deliver them from the furnace? No, because they went in it. But, did God deliver them from the furnace? Yes, because He was with them. And they didn't get hurt or harmed.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted," – I love this. He just opens the oven door and is like – "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out!"

Like, he knows they can come out. Like, "You guys are walking around in there. Come here. Come here. You guys. Come here."

"So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!'"

So, you can imagine them going, "Yes. Yes."

"They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

They're like, "Yes! Yes!"

"Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces..."

And they're like, "Wait. Calm down. You're crazy. Like, yes. Amen. But, no. Not that. Just strike that part, but keep the rest."

"...and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other God can save in this way."

"Then the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

What are the implications of this just beautiful story? Redemptive participation and non-participation. This is a whole sermon in and of itself. So, I'll go quick. I hope to even talk a little bit more about it next week. When do we participate to bring the Kingdom of God to bear on something? When do we participate and say, "Yes. I'm getting involved."

I'm not saying it's bad to be in politics. It's actually, probably, very, very wise as a follower of Jesus to be in politics. They were. But, you have to be very discerning and clear on where you're drawing the line and who you're worshiping and why.

When do we participate to bring the Kingdom of God to bear on something and when do we practice non-participation as an act of resolve and resistance? These are the things that we need to discern as a community. These men knew how to redemptively participate in their culture. They were set over the affairs of the province of Babylon. They didn't get there by who they knew, either. Remember, they were refugees. They got there because they did a great job at what they did in service to Babylon.

I would say that – and maybe a point of clarification is that when we think about shaping culture, I don't think that that's necessarily a thing that we can shape an entire culture. What we can do is be a part of shaping cultures. Lower-case "c," plural. Cultures. And a culture is where there are two or more people in a place. That's a culture. We have an opportunity to shape that. Whether you're a full-time mom, whether you're on a team and your company works on ads for dishwashing detergent, whether you're the person whose job it is to write on cups or little sticky notes at a local coffee shop, you have – if you have one or two other people, that's a culture that you can help shape. You can apply redemptive influence in all those places and see those places as places where you pray. "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done in my place of business as it is in Heaven."

Where you can serve in Jesus' name. Where you can love. This is a place where you bring the Kingdom of God to bear, where you pray for people, where you get to know them. Like, this is a place where you can speak vocally about your faith in Christ. These are places. These are places where you can bring the Kingdom of God to bear. This is called redemptive participation. Most of our time in San Francisco will be spent in figuring out ways of how do we participate in redemptive ways as followers of Jesus. And there are times where we're going, "Quiet. Non-participation."

And participation, gosh, I think about a friend of mine whose name is Jesse who runs a lighting and grip warehouse in the city. I visited his place of work like five years ago when he first started working there or something. This warehouse that he worked in five years ago was like a cold and lonely warehouse and I just visited him. I was walking by his shop a few weeks ago. I was walking by and I walked in and the place was like the Garden of Eden if you like lighting stuff. Like, everything was organized. He had hired a crew that were working. I kind of remember people whistling and singing. I don't know. That could be in my head. He often talks about building relationship with the guys he hires and he works for and gets to know their lives. This is the quiet Kingdom of God breaking in.

This is someone who has brought in redemptive participation and, because of that, this place has changed forever. Like, the people that work there and the places change. Like, visibly change. I think of another one of my friends named Nadia who is an ivy league grad with an insane resume and finds no greater joy and call in her life than to bring the Kingdom of God to bear on her four children; two that are adopted. Quietly working away at subverting the kingdom of this world with four kids who know Jesus as Lord. And hopefully resolve as teenagers, like Daniel and his friends did, in their hearts, "We will serve God and God alone. Christ is Lord over our lives."

This is us redemptively participating in the life of this city. Most of our time will be spent this way. But, there also is quiet non-participation. And we need to learn this. We need to learn this in a very subversive nation like America that is the most powerful nation in the world. That should scare us. It should, as Christians. Like, we live in the most powerful nation in the world. That should cause us to think, rightly, on how we use power and money, how we use and how we adopt our nation's ideologies and even gods.

We have to practice quiet non-participation in our culture. In our cultures idea of what sex is. That's an easy one. I say this one a lot because I think this one is, especially in our town, especially with the sexual revolution having its epicenter here, sex in our culture is

individualistic, self-fulfilling, free market consumerism. It's not covenant. It's quietly, as Christians, saying no to that with our hearts and with our bodies. Sex is covenant. It's saying that quietly with our hearts and with our bodies. It's living in this culture that has an idea of freedom that is not God's idea of freedom. Freedom, in our culture, is autonomy to do what you want when you want to do it as long as it doesn't hurt someone else.

Freedom is not like that when you're following Jesus. Freedom is living under the rule of Jesus, who frees us from sin and shame to live into who we were created for by God. That's freedom in God's economy. It's saying no to rampant materialism that we have. Like, enough is enough. We don't have to have it all. So, I'll end here. This church is here and we gather from all over the city here in this auditorium once a week to worship. We are here at this church to worship. Christian worship is one of the primary arenas where we participate in practices that shape who we are; where we sing, where we kneel, where we stand, where we pray, where we receive communion and we say with our lips and our body and our hearts and our minds that Jesus is Lord and He is Lord over all and I take my whole life and put it under His Lordship.

The vision of this church isn't necessarily to be hyper cool or relevant or whatever. It's really to counter-form us into people who follow Jesus in a very formative nation we live in. To counter-form us to be the people of God.

Let's pray.

Lord, there's a lot to process here. There's a lot to think through. So, Lord, we ask that You would give us, now, wisdom to do that, even ways to respond now that You are Lord, that Jesus is Lord, that we sing Your praises out from this place and even something prophetic over this city that Jesus is Lord over San Francisco. We believe that, God. We know that it's so hard to live in a town that would want us to just be quiet about faith, to be quiet about religion, to be quiet about our relationship with Jesus. That's private stuff. It's not. We just say it's not. That's a lie. It's not private. It's everything.

Our faith in You, Jesus, is everything, God. Open our mouths, now, to proclaim that You are Lord. Open our mouths to sing and our bodies to worship You, Lord. Let this place be a house of prayer and a house of worship. In Christ's name, amen.