

Fireproof Faith

“New Names”

August 3-4

Introduction

Hey everyone, I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. Last week we concluded an amazing series called *RISE* where we discovered the joy of abiding in our God-given purpose. I want to give a huge shoutout to the ministry fair last weekend — it's awesome to see so many people get connected and grow in their gifts and purpose.

This weekend, we are so excited that you're here because we are kicking off a brand new series called, *Fireproof Faith*. How many of us want a fireproof faith? Because when you look at the state of the world today, wouldn't you say things are getting pretty heated? There are many people who are concerned with global warming and in one sense it's hard to deny that things in our world are getting pretty heated!

This Presidential race is getting pretty heated, even boiling into an assassination attempt on Former President Trump's life. Not since Ronald Reagan in the 80's have we witnessed an attempt on a Former President's life.

The national rhetoric has reached alarming temperatures with one side being likened to Hitler and the end of Democracy as we know it and the other side Stalin and the rise of extreme socialism. Both sides are hell-bent on keeping their constituents fired up and seething mad.

Global tensions are getting heated with wars breaking out everywhere. It feels like the temperature is rising in international tensions with China, Russia, Iran, and so on.

Many people are feeling the heat in this economy. We're sweating bullets trying to keep up with bills and the rising cost of living — especially here in Hawaii.

And with the temperature rising all around us, it's hard not to feel the temperature rising within us. People today seem more prone to anger, offense, and resentment. I had a guy just yesterday run a stop sign, cut me off, and then give *me* the bird! We feel the tension at work, in traffic, and even at home. Like a frog in a kettle, we're at risk of being cooked alive!

Why So Serious?

What is going on? Why do things feel so tense? Why do things seem like they're going from bad to worse? Why do so many of us feel a heaviness and discontent with the state of the world? Why are so many giving up hope for the future? Listen. I believe God is turning up the heat to remind us of one very important thing: This world is not our home. Turn to the person next to you and tell them, "This world is not your home!" Turn to your other neighbor and tell them, "Don't get too comfortable!"

Babylon

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul,” (1 Peter 2:11).

I fear that more and more Christians are forgetting that this world is not our home. The Bible says that as Christians we will always be foreigners and exiles here.

Exile Clip 1 [3:07]

In the beginning, when mankind rebelled against God, we established a new world order. The Bible refers to this world order as Babylon. Babylon, or the Babylonian system is any society that lives in rebellion to God and His ways. And throughout the pages of scripture we see this manifest time and time again. Occasionally a people will come under the rule and reign of God for a time and experience His blessings, but eventually the Babylonian system always creeps back in.

Is America Part of the Babylonian System?

“But Mark” you say, “What about those of us living in America? Are we part of the Babylonian System?” Isn’t America historically a Christian Nation — A promise land of sorts? Let me pose the question to you? Do you think that America has succumb to the Babylonian system? Let me pose the question this way. As a citizen of heaven, are you feeling increasingly at home here or increasingly alienated? Today fewer and fewer Americans are identifying as Christian. In the last decade, the portion of religiously unaffiliated or (“nones”) has grown at an alarming rate.

Church attendance is nearly half of what it was just a few decades ago. Younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z are less likely to attend religious services or identify with a religion compared to generations past.

Judeo-Christian values, such as the sanctity of marriage, the importance of religious education, and traditional views on morality, have seen a shift in public opinion. Issues like same-sex marriage, gender identity, and secularization in public spaces reflect changing societal norms.

Increasing acceptance of secular and pluralistic values reveal a major shift away from a predominantly Judeo-Christian cultural framework.

While Christianity remains a significant influence in America, it is no longer the sole or dominant cultural force as the trend towards secular and pluralistic values are increasingly prevalent.

How to Live an Exile in Babylon

So if you feel an increasing unease about the world we live in. If you’ve been feeling more and more like an alien living in a strange land. If you’ve been feeling the heat. Take heart. This has been the Christian experience from the very beginning and is a powerful reminder that this world is not our home.

And God, in His providence, has left us some amazing stories from scripture of men and women who were sentenced to exile but lived to tell the tale. Their stories of hope, resilience, and bravery teach us how to align our hearts to an everlasting Kingdom and not the passing kingdoms of this world. But to do that will require a fireproof faith. Who’s ready to develop a fireproof faith?

Into Babylonian Exile

The year is 605 B.C. and the ancient world is in chaos. The Egyptians attempts to invade Babylon. A young prince, by the name of Nebuchadnezzar, soundly defeats the Egyptians at Carchemish. Not satisfied with his victory, he pursues the Egyptian army all the way down the Sinai peninsula. Along the way, he comes across the city of Jerusalem, which had been loyal to Pharaoh instead of trusting in their God. Let’s read about what happened next,

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And 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,” (Daniel 1:1-2).

So Nebuchadnezzar conquers Jerusalem and ransacks the temple. Imagine how you would feel as you watched these pagan invaders march right into your temple — the holy place, and plunder all of the sacred articles of worship. You would feel completely abandoned by God. Things are getting heated. But why is this happening?

The pattern is repeating itself again. Israel, which was once a Promised Land — an Eden space has become divided and steeped in idolatry. Two of the “gods” that the Israelites were prostituting themselves with were Baal and Asherah. Baal was the god of weather and rain for their crops — so their money and success. Asherah was the goddess of fertility and you worshipped her by engaging in prostitution at the temple. So instead of worshipping Him, God’s people were worshipping sex and money. My how times have changed.

And the home of God’s people — the Promised Land falls to the Babylonian System.

There are some who dispute that America was ever a God-fearing nation. I’m of the opinion that the Founding Fathers, though imperfect, built this nation on Biblical values and that the success of this Nation has been in large part connected to the ideal that we are one nation under God. But just as Eden fell and Jerusalem fell, no people are immune from the Babylonian system if God is removed from His rightful place and sin is allowed to enter in. We are a people divided. We are straying from the God of our fathers. Our nation is steeped in idolatry — worshipping sex and success.

So. Is there any hope for America or are we too far gone? Are we watching the pattern repeat itself yet again? I’ll be honest, there are days I wake up and I believe so. But there’s another part of me that says, “Hell, no. We won’t go.” I stand on the promise that,

“...if My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land,” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Nothing is impossible for our God. No situation is too far gone. I believe that God is not done with the United States of America and that we can once again be united under Him.

We Must Resolve

But until we experience the deliverance of our God, we need to learn how to stand in the midst of the fire and demonstrate a fireproof faith.

Sadly, the articles from the temple weren’t the only thing carried of into Babylonia.

³ *“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— ⁴ 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. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ 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.*

⁶ *Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego,” (Daniel 1:3-7).*

So not only did Nebuchadnezzar plunder Jerusalem of its material wealth, he also plundered the next generation — Judah's hope for the future. How many of us know, the enemy is less concerned with the older generation. No offense. He's not going to waste his energy going after people who are already set in their ways. He knows the best way to turn a people is to go after their youth. Look how he's working overtime to change the landscape our children will grow up in. Jerusalem's best and brightest were led away into captivity to be indoctrinated and assimilated. Each of the four young Hebrews was born with a name that spoke of God but their captors changed their names to reflect their gods.

Daniel means "God is my judge." His name was changed to Belteshazzar, which means, "Bel's prince."

Hananiah means "Beloved by the Lord." His name was changed to Shadrach, which means "illuminated by the sun god."

Mishael (Like Michael) means "Who is like God?" His name was changed to Meshach, which means "Who is like Asherah?"

Azariah means "The Lord is my help." His name was changed to Abednego, which means "the servant of Nebo."

How many of us know, the enemy loves nothing more than to take those who were made in God's image and distort and corrupt them. Nothing brings him more pleasure.

As Christians living in Babylon we will face the constant pressures of this world trying to conform us into its image. The natural undercurrent of this world leads to darkness. Sin has a gravitational pull on all of us. None are exempt. The minute we stop resisting is the minute we're carried off. We are constantly being bombarded with messages that tell us to conform, give in, go with the flow. Like Daniel and his friends we will find ourselves in situations where we will have to make a choice — take a stand.

Living in Babylon represented a new start for these young men. Nobody knew them here. They could be whoever they wanted to be. They could indulge in the pleasures of the palace. Why hold out for God? It certainly didn't seem like God was present in this strange new world. Why continue to cling to things from the past.

Every one of us will enter new environments or seasons of life that will present the same temptations — A new work environment, a new duty station, a work trip, moving to a college campus. Who are we when nobody's looking?

"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," (Daniel 1:8).

Despite this new chapter of Daniel's life — this opportunity to reinvent himself or deconstruct his faith, Daniel remains resolute. It's possible that there were other Hebrew exiles that aren't mentioned here who didn't take the same stand. Nobody would know or care what Daniel did at this point so why does he hold out when everyone else was doing it? Because, in the words of Augustine, *"Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it."*

But Daniel, it's just a little meat and drink. It's not like they're asking you to bow down before an idol or stop praying to your God! Not yet anyway.

A good Pastor friend of mine received Jesus while incarcerated and it completely changed his life. Today he is doing an amazing work for God right here in Wahiawa. In prison God completely flipped his moral compass right-side-up and gave him a resolute faith. In the halfway house before being released there were certain rules that the inmates had to abide by. They couldn't possess certain contrabands and they couldn't take food out of the mess hall. But he would occasionally watch a fellow inmate steal an orange from mealtime to take back to their room. And though he would call them out, he was often ignored or sneered at. "Really? You're going to bust me over a little orange? "But you know something Mark," he shared "Those same guys who were stealing oranges were the same guys getting caught with drugs again on the outside. The same inability to resist the orange was the same inability to resist greater things."

The four men's ability to resist something seemingly small like forbidden food and drink was the same ability to resist bowing down before idols or abstaining from prayer. For Daniel, it wasn't about being legalistic but about denying anything that would turn his heart away from God and toward the pleasures of Babylon. Daniel did not want to indulge in anything that could possibly align his heart to this dark world and away from God's Kingdom. The choice was less about where he was at the moment and more about the direction in which he was going. Little acts of obedience or compromise are less about the moment and more about the direction you're going. Which direction are your actions taking you? Are your actions aligning your heart with the pleasures of this world or the Kingdom to come?

In the same way, for us as believers, the choice won't always appear to be between good and evil. As Spurgeon said, "Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right." As we would say in our Church, between a good thing and a God thing. Which choice will lead us closer to God and increase our love for Him vs. which choice will lead us closer to the world and increase our love for it?

Conclusion

So how do we do it? How do we make the difficult choice? How do we exhibit a fireproof faith?

"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," (Daniel 1:8).

But Daniel resolved. That word resolve literally means to determine, to fix, to set in place, or plant. I love this picture. Daniel fixed his flag in the ground and said this is where I draw the line. I don't care what you do to me. This is where I draw the line. You can change my name, put me in chains, or throw me into a den of hungry lions but I am placing upon my heart a standard that I will uphold.

This was not a decision Daniel made on a whim. This was a pre-meditated resolution that he had fixed in his heart. Daniel resolved to align his heart with an eternal Kingdom and not the fallen kingdoms of this world. Because of this God blessed Daniel and his friends with good health, favor, knowledge, understanding, and supernatural wisdom. God always saves His best for those who give Him the choice. How about you? Do you resolve today to live for Jesus in matters great and small? Will you align your heart to His Kingdom and not conform to the patterns of this world? If so, the same fires that the enemy meant for your destruction will be the very fires God uses to strengthen and refine you and impart to you a fireproof faith.

Group Discussion Questions:

- 1. In order for Daniel and his friends to stand on God's Word they had to know it. In what ways can you continue to increase in wisdom and Biblical understanding?**
- 2. In order for Daniel and his friends to stay true to their God-given identity they had to know who they were in Him. How would you describe your identity in Christ?**
- 3. Sometimes, when Christians feel the heat, they either terrorize and react defensively or they compromise and give in to the pressure. How do Daniel and his friends respond? Read 1 Peter 3:15-18 for a deeper look into how we respond in the midst of persecution.**
- 4. Are there areas of our life where we are allowing compromise? Are there choices we are making that are turning our hearts from God and to the world? In what ways must we humble ourselves, repent and turn from our wicked ways? In what ways must we resolve in our hearts to stand for God?**