

May 1, 2022
The Third Sunday of Easter
Pastor Matt Duerr

He is God Alone
Preparing for Babylon, Part I

Grace, Mercy, and Peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. As you know our Easter Sermon Series is titled “He is God Alone.” And the first week on Easter Sunday we talked about the importance of the resurrection because it is Christ alone who has risen from the dead. And it is Christ alone who has done everything to secure our salvation. That of course leads to what we see happening within the circles of higher education around the world; where they say Jesus didn't exist. Or if He did exist, He didn't really rise. And so, our challenge last week was to address that. We saw the historicity of Christ's resurrection. It is a historical fact that Jesus lived, and Jesus died, and Jesus rose. That is the basic foundation of the gospel message.

As we continue with this sermon theme, we now are going to break into a two-week subset. And as I look into my notes right here, you might be surprised what I have. I quote it's: “a grieving teacher and parents.” Now what am I talking about there? Well let me first tell you, this part is painful. It might hurt a little, it might hurt a lot. But as a former teacher, as a person who has taught confirmation for many years; I grieve when I see how many students that I taught have turned away from their Christian faith. And I know in talking with parents, grandparents, many of you feel that same grieving for your child or your grandchild who has turned their back on the Christian faith. The big question is why. And this is the part that might be uncomfortable, and it might hurt; but it doesn't mean it's the end of the story.

I would contend, this is my belief, and (I've been known to be wrong before) but I would contend that the number one problem is that all too often parents left the Christian education of their children to others. Parents, your number one responsibility is to bring up your children in the way of the Lord. The Church, Christian schools; they are partners

with you, but you're number one. Number two, this is where I will put myself. I should have spent much more time in my teaching on the why. We always walked through the Bible. The children in my classes, or when we had Zion Middle School, they walked through the Bible, they heard every single account that's in the Bible. But giving a bunch of knowledge without the why; (why do we believe that what we believe is really true?) I believe that's where my biggest failure as a teacher and as a pastor has been. Third; the Church, Sunday School programs, youth groups, have focused way too much on fun and entertainment and actually have adopted some of the premises of evolution in the way we have handled our children saying 'the young children can't understand this, this is too complex for them.'

Now let me reword that in a more theologically sound way. 'I don't believe that the Holy Spirit can create faith in a child, therefore I'm going to have to do it myself and do it according to the way society says.' And what did society tell us? What did the church tell us for years? Pull the children out of the church service for children church and let them draw pictures about the Bible accounts. They heard the word, but was there any addressing of the why? No, and was there any modeling being done of faithful worship? No, because the Church actually pulled the children away from the number one group, parents who are responsible for raising their children.

And then number four, and all too often we want to make this number one. But understand it's number four and it is an issue because of the failures of one, two and three. Number four, we're living in Babylon and it's time to wake up and realize that. And so, this two-week subset is called "Preparing for Babylon."

Now what do I mean by that? well increasingly young people, young couples are saying, 'I don't know if I or we want to bring up children in this evil world.' Knowing that God, Himself in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 following the flood said, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." The problem that the young people see, and I think probably everybody who is here or who is watching right now will say, 'yeah, but the reality is this, Pastor, the earth, the United States of America, it's no longer that

utopian society that it once was.' It is a spiritual wilderness and let me give a name to a spiritual wilderness, Babylon.

Because that's what biblical Babylon was and that's how the Bible paints the picture of a society like today that it is a Babylon. When we called the Book of Revelation we hear about Babylon, and we read about the great prostitute that is tied to Babylon. Now, why use a term like prostitute? Because a prostitute is one who lures a man away from his spouse to some unfulfilled desire, shall we say. What is it really? It is a luring away from the Covenant of marriage. That bond, that covenant, that promise, taken in the marriage ceremony. And why does God use that? Because that is how He sees His relationship between Himself and the Church. We are the bride of Christ and Babylon is luring us away from Him who is supposed to be our first love. This is the problem with the church in Ephesus, in the Book of Revelation, that they had lost their first love. God sees us as the bride of Christ. He is to be our first love.

And so, we now see Peter writing and saying she, that is the church, the bride of Christ, in Rome; writing to the churches and dispersion because they were under attack by Rome. She who is at Babylon, Rome, the church in Rome, sends you greetings. Now, how was Rome luring like a prostitute? Listen so carefully please. Number one, Rome was focused on meeting the emotional desires of those in the Empire and so they had the games in the Colosseum. They had the entertainment for the people. They had Pagan worship which was oftentimes very enjoyable. But Pagan worship was always allowed within Rome, as long as Pagan worship included emperor worship. This led to an extremely permissive society. Starting from the top working its way down, where the focus was on enjoy life to the fullest. An extremely hedonistic society. If you didn't embrace this, Romans were one of the first to invoke cancel culture. They killed you. Peter didn't embrace it; he was crucified for it.

Now, how does a country or an empire end up like this? Again, let's look historically back to Babylon and our Old Testament reading for today from Daniel chapter one. Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar came, he laid siege to Jerusalem, he overthrew Jerusalem, he took the temple vessels that were used in worship back to Babylon, put them in the temple of his

god. Why? There's a huge message there. To discredit Yahweh, the God of the Hebrew people, and say 'look my god won.'

He also took some of the people. People from the royal family, people of nobility. In other words, people who the children of Israel looked up to as leadership. He took the youth from the royal family, from nobility. These would have been teenagers to those in their early 20's. Those who were without blemish and of good appearance. So, these were people that you would look up to, because also they were doggone good to look at. But he also wanted those who were, and I quote here, "skillful in all wisdom and endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning and competent to stand in the king's palace." Why? To teach them the literature and the language of the Chaldeans, the wise men. This is the making of the educational elite, or in modern day terms, 'the influencers.' The ones who will influence others and get them to follow along.

The problem was four of these high quality, good looking Hebrew young men/teenagers, had a rigorous Hebrew education. They were rooted in God's Word, and as a result had a biblical world view. And because of that, they entered Babylon equipped and had what was needed to take a stand against secular ideologies of the Babylonians and of the Babylonian educational system. Please understand that Babylon then, and Babylon during Rome, and Babylon now seeks to indoctrinate. It was and it is not neutral. Consider what those four young men were told Shadrack, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel; they were told to defile themselves by eating unclean foods. And their response was that they quote, "resolved to abstain." They were told to bow down to an image, an idol of Nebuchadnezzar and worship or be thrown into the fiery furnace. And what did they do? They stood for Yahweh. They stood in the furnace and the Angel of God saved them, and brought them out. They were told not to pray to Yahweh, and what did Daniel do? He opened the curtains to his condo, and he prayed anyways. He got thrown in the lions' den for that, but again God delivered him. And we need people like this today.

How do we get people like this today? Going back to the beginning of the sermon, what our parents to do? Well number one, I'll tell you what not to do, what isn't the answer. It's not some pre-packaged

program with a bunch of cute parenting tips. It is a resolve, a personal resolve to teach and to model in context.

Now, what do I mean by context? Well, again going back to Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego. What occurred before these events? Well, if we go to Second Kings, chapter 23, we read about a king, his name was Josiah. He became king at the age of eight years old. This is what is written about Josiah. Please listen, because this might just shake you a little bit. It might take something that you thought was a biblical truth and reveal it isn't. This is what is written: "Before Josiah there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart nor did any like him arise after him." And I bet if I had asked at the beginning of this sermon, "who was the best king in Israel?" Probably 99% of you would have said David. I know that's what occurred with our consistory, because I put them to the test this week. It was Josiah. David, he faltered along the way.

Josiah, his heart was turned to the Lord in every way. These four boys, Shadrack, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel; they were raised going to the House of the Lord because that is what Josiah did. They or their parents, heard Josiah reading the book of the covenant. They or their parents saw Josiah make a covenant before the Lord, a covenant to obey God's word, and asking God to be their God, and to protect them. And they heard and they joined in with all the people who joined in with Josiah and basically said, Amen. We are with you on that! And Josiah didn't just give some lofty, you know, political speech. He followed through. We read that he removed all idolatry. He removed what we call syncretism, the mixing of Pagan worship, with God worship. The big point here is that there was teaching. It started with Josiah teaching God's word, and there was matching action. We call that modeling. And now bringing that context home. There were bad kings before him. There were bad kings after him. But in the middle of all that mess, there was one good king and that good king's actions made a very big difference over time.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ; we are in the middle, or the beginning, or maybe the very end of a gigantic spiritual mess. And what matters is what we do now. We need to follow in the footsteps of Josiah, Shadrack, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel and we need to teach and model wisdom that is founded in God's Word. It begins with one God. God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; who sent His son Jesus Christ to be the Redeemer of the world because the world is sinful and needs a Redeemer. And the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, sets us apart for service in His kingdom. The Holy Spirit who Jesus says will come with power. We need to stress the importance and the power of God's Word.

And it starts with the parents, the grandparents, the great grandparents. It continues with the pastors, the teachers, in the Christian schools and Sunday schools. It starts with the body of Christ, each individual member, resolving as those boys did, to abstain from the societal practices that defile and turn away from God. A God who is so gracious and He comes to us today, and He invites us to come before His throne of grace in prayer because He wants to hear from us, His children, the bride of Christ. And Who comes to commune with us today through the Lord's supper.

And He comes to us through that supper to bring forgiveness, to give us purpose, to fill us with the Spirit so that we may have that same resolve as Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego in Christ's Name, Amen.