**Turn the Page – Week 6 – From Captive to Courageous**

**Begin with Video Overview**

Need to make both the story and MLK story shorter.

**Captive in Another Culture**

If you’ve been with us at all over the last 6 weeks, then you know that we’re in a series called Turn the Page… where we’re walking through Bible together. And today we’re picking up the story just as a remnant of the people of God have been carried off into exile to a country called Babylon.

There are people in our world that still experience that today, thought most of us don’t know what it’s like. “Most of us haven’t experienced physical exile, but we’ll find out later that doesn’t mean we aren’t held captive in other ways.” Now exile is something that most of us have very little understanding of. I mean, let’s face it, most of us haven’t been forcibly removed from our homes, made slaves, and then relocated to a completely foreign context to live out the rest of our lives in servitude. But for the Israelites, that’s exactly what happened. Now they find themselves in a strange place, surrounded by an unfamiliar culture… just wishing they could be back home.

As I was thinking about the talk for this week, I was struck by the reality that, even though we might not know a lot about exile, many of us are familiar with the concept of culture shock. For anyone who’s travelled to a different country, for work or vacation, we know how hard it can be to adjust to a completely foreign culture.

How many of you have ever experienced that? Who’s ever found themselves uncomfortable and disoriented in a different culture?

Well here’s the thing… in the book of Daniel, we find stories about people who were experiencing the same thing… only 100 times more intense. The stories are about what Daniel and some of his friends encountered when they were carried off to live in Babylon.

And what these young Israelites faced was far more than just culture shock… it was more than just the disorienting presence of the unfamiliar. Instead, they also experienced intense pressure to abandon the ways of God... to stop living in the ways that set them apart as “the people of God.” And these pressures included 3 very distinct realities:

* The first was struggled with **Isolation** - they were far away from their home, their families, and the Israelite community. They seldom had interaction with anyone who spoke their language or appreciated their cultural practices. For the most part, they were completely alone.
* They also struggled with experienced **Indoctrination** - they were completely and totally immersed in Babylonian culture. Not only was their home culture absent, but also they were constantly exposed to a new culture with the expectation that they would assimilate into it. In fact, they had to undergo 3 years of intense cultural training that was meant to educate them on the Babylonian way of life and rewire them to live out that lifestyle.
* Finally they struggled with experienced Identity **Indecision** – and this came about because they were forced to take on new names. Now the thing is, this might not seem like a huge deal to us… but the reality is that names were central to their identity; it defined who they were as people. And now here they were in Babylon and that key identifier is taken away from them. It would have felt like they were living caught between two identities. And they had to decide which one they’d choose.

Today, I want to spend some time digging in to what happens to Daniel when this cultural pressure mounts to an unimaginable level and his commitment to God is directly challenged.

**Daniel and the Lions Den (TC)**

Our story begins in Daniel chapter 6 with the new Babylonian King, King Darius, appointing officials over his Kingdom to help rule. Might not need all these details. He appoints 120 leaders with 3 administrators who were to lead the 120 and report directly to the King.

And it just so happens that Daniel was chosen as one of those administrators. And then in verse 3 we are told that;

“Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.” -Daniel 6:3

Wow! Daniel is going to be promoted to be the 2nd most powerful person in the entire Babylonian Kingdom…This is great news for Daniel and for the Jewish people right?

After all, just 70 years before this they were dragged into Babylon as exiles and slaves and now here is one of their own, Daniel, getting the dream promotion…What could possibly go wrong!?

Cut down this section…co-workers were jealous, that’s the point.

Well, unfortunately, this excitement was short lived because apparently Daniel’s co-workers couldn’t handle his rise to power and they are filled with jealousy.

As a result, they team up to take Daniel down…BUT…

**“**…they couldn’t find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. Daniel 6:4b

So they decide that the only way to take him down is by being deceptive themselves…

They see that Daniel is loyal to the King…And as a result, he is honest and trustworthy BUT they also see that three times a day every day Daniel is literally bending his knees in loyalty to another…as he prays to God.

So these crafty men conclude that they can use Daniel’s loyalty to God to trap him…

(Daniel 6:5) You see, Daniel’s colleagues could see that it was this steadfast commitment to God that set him apart and so they attempted to turn it into his vulnerability.

And in doing so…they reveal the reality about themselves…their only true loyalty is to themselves and their own agenda and power.

Don’t need to say this every time.

**5**So they concluded, “Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.” Daniel 6:5

So these top officials approach king Darius. They come with a proposal for a new edict: 'anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den.'

Essentially, they propose a short term law that says, “worship the king as god or die a horrible death.”

What’s happening here is the new king is getting taken advantage of by these schemers…The inexperienced king could hardly have been expected to realize that some ulterior motive prompted this show of loyalty, or, if he was suspicious … he could think of no ground for concern. Should we mention that he would of gone forward because it played to his ego? So, he signed the irrevocable and unchangeable document that made him a “god-king” for thirty days.

The trap is set…These officials have created a high stakes conflict of loyalties for Daniel…How will Daniel respond when his life is on the line?

But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, **just as he had always done**, giving thanks to his God. – Daniel 6:10

Amazingly, Daniel seems to be entirely unaffected and un-intimidated by this law. His loyalties are first to God and then to King and country…never in reverse. So he continues to pray…”Just as he had always done.” And not only does he keep his loyalties internally, he makes no attempt to hide it externally!

I think if this were me I would have…I don’t know…SHUT THE WINDOWS!?!?! Come on Daniel!!

Daniel’s response was to pray openly to God… Daniel was grounded in his identity in God. He knew who he was (or rather “whose” he was) and how he was called to live. He didn’t flaunt it, but he certainly didn’t hide his convictions. He did not waver in his steadfast devotion to God

Daniel is displaying remarkable courage and integrity…In a lot of ways, this is one of the first peaceful, nonviolent protests in history…

And the officials think they have won!

**11**Then the officials went together to Daniel’s house and found him praying and asking for God’s help. **12**So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law. “Did you not sign a law that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions?” – Daniel 6:11-12

The trap was perfectly set and Daniel and the King were caught up in it in a bad way…

The text tells us that…

**14**Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament.

BUT not even the King himself can stop what has been set in motion...and ironically, now he places what little hope he has left in the God’s hands…And the story unfolds in v16-23

**16**So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, “May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel. **18**Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn’t sleep at all that night.

**19**Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions’ den. **20**When he got there, he called out in anguish, “Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?”

**21**Daniel answered, “Long live the king! **22**My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty.”

**23**The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God.

Incredible…In the end it is only an ultimate loyalty to God that can deliver us…The King’s primary loyalty to the law betrayed him…leaving him sleepless, full of anxiety and unable to do what he knew to be right…and the officials? Their primary loyalty to themselves ends up costing their lives (as graphically described later in the chapter)…

But Daniel trusted God…A trust that gave him courage in impossible circumstances.

I mean think about it…If Daniel had instead acted to save his own skin, he would have betrayed God and lost the opportunity to prove God’s faithfulness…

And Daniels proof of God’s faithfulness ends up sending a shockwave of revival through the entire Babylonian Empire!

Just look at the incredible reversal of this story at the end of chapter 6…

**25**Then King Darius sent this message to the people of **every race and nation and language throughout the world:**

“Peace and prosperity to you!

**26**“I decree that **everyone** throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.

Maybe don’t need this part ~~For he is the living God,
    and he will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
    and his rule will never end.~~**~~27~~**~~He rescues and saves his people;
    he performs miraculous signs and wonders
    in the heavens and on earth.
He has rescued Daniel
    from the power of the lions.”~~

Daniels unbending commitment and trust in God led not just to his deliverance, but to the king recognizing and declaring God as the living God to every race, nation and language throughout the world!!

When we have the courage to be loyal to God in the face of fear and consequence it has the power to change the world around us…

**STORY: MLK (TC –Intermixed quotes from Piper on 50th anniversary of death)**

In the modern history there is perhaps no better example of being loyal to God’s truth, and speaking that truth to power than Martin Luther King Jr.

The racial world he grew up in, and the one we live in today, are amazingly different. Racism remains in many forms in America and around the world. In fact, the last few years have brought a disheartening setback, as advocates of white supremacy have been emboldened to be overt.

But in the days of his youth, it was worse. So much worse. The segregation was almost absolute, its manifestations utterly degrading, and the defense of it rang not only from street mobs, but also from the halls of political power — without shame.

* + - In 1954, seventeen states required segregated public schools
		- In the south where MLK lived, In 1956, 85% of all white southerners rejected the statement, “White students and Negro students should go to the same schools”;
		- In 1963, 82% of all white southerners opposed a federal law that would give “all persons, Negros as well as white, the right to be served in public places such as hotels, restaurants, and similar establishments” (139);

~~The upshot~~ The result of those statistics was an unjust, unsafe, condescending, unwelcoming, demeaning, and humiliating world for blacks.

Have you ever paused to ask yourself what separate water fountains and separate restrooms could possibly mean except, You are unclean — like lepers? It was an appalling world.

Enter MLK (Picture of MLK)

Martin Luther King gave his life to change the world. And toward the end, he was increasingly aware that “the Movement” would cost him his life. The night before he was assassinated by James Earl Ray outside room 306 of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on April 4, 1968, he preached at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple.

His message came to be called “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

For a brief window of time — just long enough — MLK was able to use his voice to restrain violence and overcome hate. He, like Daniel, kindled a kind of fire that no fire hoses could put out, and a kind of courage that no dogs could defeat.

On that last night He preached about “a dangerous kind of unselfishness.”

A dangerous unselfishness.

So dangerous it would cost MLK his life. And he saw it coming. So he closed his sermon with these words ~~prophetically~~:

“We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life — longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And so I’m happy tonight; I’m not worried about anything; I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

Less than 24 hours later he was dead.

MLK was captive in an unjust and inhumane culture…and he, like Daniel (in spite of their “captivity”) had the courage to live according his faith in God, regardless of consequence.

And our world is changed as a result.

Courageous faith in the living God is an unstoppable force.

An unstoppable force that is available to ALL who will call on the name of Jesus.

**Modern Captives**

You know the reality is that we, too, live captive in another culture. Now maybe we wouldn’t think of it in those terms, but if we take a step back and look at how Scripture talks about our engagement with culture, it really is true!

~~In fact, the author of Hebrews tells us bluntly… “This world is not our home” (onscreen: Hebrews 13:14 NLT).~~

What this should tell us is that just like Daniel, we can sometimes feel the pressures of culture too.

* Sometimes we face **Isolation** - when we’re away from the support of our Christian community, feeling like we’re speaking a completely foreign language.
* We can also feel the pressure of **Indoctrination** - as we become immersed in a culture that’s very different than the one God’s called us to and we’re bombarded by its contradictory messages.
* And we feel the sting of **Indecision** - as ~~diverse~~ competing voices try to redefine our identity.

The thing is, if we’re not careful, we can end up conforming to the beliefs, values, and practices of our culture, instead of staying true to the way of life God’s called us to live. If we aren’t intentional about living as “the people of God” then before we know it we’ll find ourselves lost in another culture.

However, the key to living courageously… intentionally… like Daniel and MLK did is to be grounded in our identity in God. To know who we are… or maybe better said, “whose” we are… and how we’re called to live. We need to make sure that our loyalty is to God. Once we do that… when we’ve firmly put our faith in him, we’ll find the courage to live as God’s called us to live.

**Challenge: Take Courage**

Now if you’re anything like me, you’re probably thinking to yourself, “That all sounds great Jessie, but how do I actually do that? How do I begin to live the way God’s called me to live?” Well here’s the thing… I want to make this super practical for all of us today.

First, we can begin to live the life God’s called us to by refusing to let ourselves be held captive by the world… by refusing to be defined by the things our culture thinks are important, and instead letting our identity in Christ help us to live courageously.

So ask yourself: “what pressures am I facing?” Where is your loyalty to God being tested? And then once you’ve figured that out, the next step to living courageously is to Don’t use this word because of third point. stand up for what you know is right.

This could take many forms. It might mean there’s…

* A **word you need to speak** to someone. These can be words of encouragement or words of challenge… but as long as these words are from a place of genuine love and concern for one another, then they can help us all become the people God’s called us to be.
* Living courageously can also come about through an **action you need to take**. Where do you see injustice, where do you see the oppressed and forgotten, where do you see the marginalized and exploited? Sometimes we get stuck at just seeing the problem, and we don’t know how to fix it. When this happens we end up doing nothing… but living courageously means taking action… it means doing something even when we’re afraid of our first step!
* Courageous living can also be about a **stand you need to make**. Let’s face it we live in a world that desperately needs the love of Jesus, and sometimes that love comes through taking a stand. Wherever you see darkness in our world is a perfect place to make a stand and live courageously as the people of God.

I also want to make sure you hear me on this… it’s OK to be afraid. I mean it’s one thing to talk a good game in here, where we’re on the same page and want the love of Jesus to shine brightly in our world, but it’s something completely different when we’re out there standing on our own.

Understand, courage doesn’t mean the absence of fear… instead the exact opposite is true. An American writer and poet from the 1800’s once famously said: **“Courage is about doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared."** — Oliver Wendell Holmes.

**Conclusion/Communion**

Remember that even through you’re afraid… God is always faithful. Scripture is filled with stories of God coming through for his people time and time again. Daniel’s story alone is a clear demonstration of God’s faithfulness. So fear doesn’t need to have the last say, instead God’s faithfulness can conquer our fear and help us live courageously.

Listen, the battle’s already been won. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus the victory is ours. No matter what we face in life, no matter how big our fears may be, we can live victoriously and courageously because we belong to Jesus.

And that victory and that belonging is what we celebrate as we receive communion together...