

Chapter 18: Faithful Living in a Foreign Land

“Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ...Costly grace is the kingly rule of Christ...it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him...Above all, grace is costly because it cost God the life of his Son.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

A_____

L_____

I_____

E_____

N_____

All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-16

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

Philippians 3:20

Dear friends, you are like foreigners and strangers in this world. I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. People who do not believe are living all around you and might say that you are doing wrong. Live such good lives that they will see the good things you do and will give glory to God on the day when Christ comes again.

1 Peter 2:11-12

Today's Equipping Point

Decide who _____ you.

Takeaways

1. Your life really is just a _____ — treat it that way.

We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace.

1 Chronicles 29:15

2. Even in difficult circumstances, God never _____ us.

3. For all the _____ that are taken away from you, there are still some you get to make.

Discussion Questions

1. Which component of A-L-I-E-N challenges you the most?
2. Who defines you?
3. What are your non-negotiables?

Teaching Script

Every once in a while, sometimes every few generations, there is a contemporary story that echoes a Biblical story to such an extent that you just sit back and marvel at both saints.

As we come to Chapter 18 in *The Story*, and the example of how Daniel lived for God in a hostile culture, we also look to a 20th century Daniel, a Lutheran pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wasn't only a church pastor but a seminary professor as well. He studied the Scriptures diligently, meditated and prayed daily, disciplined young men in seminary, and spoke around the world. As a young man in his twenties and thirties, he sought reformations in the German national church. He defiantly preached against the influence of the Nazis. In the early 1930's, he studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

In 1939, he accepted an offer from them to teach, but he knew that his place was in Germany. So a month later, he returned to Germany to actively resist the cruel power of the Nazi regime, to boldly lead the underground Confessing Church movement. He was arrested in April of 1943. A year later, on April 9, 1944, the 39-year-old Bonhoeffer was hanged in a concentration camp in Flossenbug, Germany. Three days later the camp was liberated by Allied forces.

The Cost of Discipleship is Bonhoeffer's seminal work on what it means to be a follower of Christ. This is one of a handful of books that changed my life. In it, he wrote this quote on your outline:

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ... Costly grace is the kingly rule of Christ... it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him... Above all, grace is costly because it cost God the life of his Son.

Parallels abound between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Daniel. Both understood the Cost of Discipleship, even when it meant living out your faith in a hostile culture, even if it meant resisting the worst kinds of evil at the risk of your own life, even if it meant an underground faith that refused compromise.

And just as Bonhoeffer faced death by resisting the Third Reich, Daniel and his three friends faced death for their resistance of the Babylonian Reich, where much of Judah had been taken captive. And for the 21st century man who has taken up the mission of Christ in his life, who has dethroned himself and taken up the gauntlet to live faithfully in an unfaithful world, there are perhaps no greater role models than Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel.

You might not know these four men were probably teenagers when they arrived in Babylon; but despite their young age, they were faithful to God, even down to the Jewish dietary laws.

You remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream—Daniel's ability to recite it and interpret it really put him on the king's radar—he was promoted, and the king himself worshipped Daniel's God.

But when the king's other advisors played to his pride, he had a gold statue made in his own honor, and everyone was commanded to worship it. When Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego refused, they were thrown into a fiery furnace. But an astonished king watched a fourth man join them as they walked unharmed through the fire.

When Belshazzar became king, he threw a great party, but had the chutzpah to use the holy goblets stolen from Jerusalem's temple. The Lord wrote on the wall: "*Mene mene tekel parsin*," which loosely translated means, "This party is **SO** over." Sure enough, that night, the king died.

The new Persian king liked Daniel too, but was tricked into signing a decree forbidding prayer to anyone except the king, punishable by a night in the lions' den. Daniel, of course, returned to his house and prayed to God. King Darius was forced to throw his trusted servant to the lions, but God saved him, and the King once again worshipped Daniel's God.

We can learn so much from Daniel and his friends and their willingness, like Bonhoeffer, to take a stand in a hostile environment under potentially fatal conditions. In many ways, we can identify with Daniel much more than with Joshua, David, or other OT characters, because Daniel lived where *we* live: in an antagonistic culture that refuses to value what *we* do. But amazingly, without the slightest hint of ethical or religious compromise, Daniel serves as a role model for all of us: as a case study as an ALIEN—a journeyman in a foreign land.

Go through this acrostic one letter at a time...

First, Daniel had good...

Associations

Daniel developed a close community of like-minded faithful friends. It would be hard to overstate the importance of their relationship with each other.

- Together they resisted the lure of unlawful luxuries.
- Together they refused a non-Kosher diet.
- Together they refused to bow down to the golden idol.
- Together they faced the fiery furnace.

When Daniel was promoted, he asked that his friends also be promoted to positions of influence. Their friendship served to strengthen their faith and their resolve in the face of temptation and persecution.

Live Peaceably

Daniel and his friends chose to live peaceably in Babylon. When given food from the king's table, they respectfully asked for an alternative diet and test. Daniel used wisdom and tact when dealing with the king; his insight saved the entire court. Even when the decree was issued that forbade Daniel to pray to His God, he quietly went to his room to pray as usual. He lived peaceably under at least three different administrations.

Third, Daniel never forgot his...

Identity

Immediately after Daniel and his friends were chosen for the king's Academy of Chaldean Culture, the commander assigned them new names. These new names were associated with Babylonian gods. By changing their names, they were now labeled under Babylonian culture. This practice would have encouraged most young men to assimilate themselves and leave their Jewish identities behind—but not these four. The Babylonians could impose outward changes, but they could not change the inward identity of these young men. They held fast to God and their true heritage.

Engage his culture

While Daniel and the others could have refused to participate in the social and political life in Babylon, they did not. Instead, they fully engaged in life where they were exiled. Though aliens, they did not keep to themselves in small Israelite enclaves—they didn't withdraw out of principle. They became fully functioning members of society and more—they became respected leaders in a foreign land! They used their knowledge, wisdom, skills and favor of the LORD.

Non-negotiables

Daniel chose his friends wisely. He lived peaceably in a foreign land. He maintained his identity as a man of God all the while recognizing and respecting the governmental authorities placed over him. But he also knew what was non-negotiable. He and his friends refused the idolatry of bowing down to a graven image. They faced death in the fiery furnace and the lion's den for their faith, without a guarantee that God would save them. But they stood firm anyway, because of their concrete convictions.

The application for us today is inescapable. Do we have as much courage? Just as Daniel and his friends were foreigners in enemy territory, so you and I today are "foreigners" and "sojourners" in this world. When you accepted Christ, your citizenship was changed by God Himself. Your spiritual passport was altered to reflect a new homeland, one that none of us has seen but that we have accepted by faith—the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

In Hebrews 11, the great "Hall of Faith" chapter, the author recounted the faith of Abraham and Sarah who lived as aliens in the land of promise but were looking for the city whose architect and builder is God. Then he wrote:

All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-16

Later Paul would write,

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

Philippians 3:20

Peter echoed the same sentiment, bidding men to a calling higher than themselves:

Dear friends, you are like foreigners and strangers in this world. I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. People who do not believe are living all around you and might say that you are doing wrong. Live such good lives that they will see the good things you do and will give glory to God on the day when Christ comes again.

1 Peter 2:11-12

So let's revisit this acronym and make some observations about our sojourn:

Associations

We were never meant to go it alone. Two years ago, over and over in our study of Proverbs, we saw that God's men were created to live in community—iron sharpens iron. The fact that I have your back and you have mine demonstrates to the world that we are different—that we have been naturalized into a new commonwealth not made with hands. But which community you choose makes all the difference. One of my good friends when we lived in Dallas moved into a sales job last year, and all the company salesmen routinely take their clientele to strip joints and gentleman's clubs. He won't return my calls and his wife is scared spitless for him, because they don't go to their Life Group but he does find time to go other places “for business purposes.” We must choose our associations carefully so that they will help us stand firm.

Live Peaceably

Christians are called to be subject to our government and to be peaceable and considerate. Max recently recruited almost a quarter of a million people to pray for President Obama, because Timothy told us to pray for those in authority so we can live quiet and peaceable lives. If we do not represent Christ to the unbelieving world, who will?

Paul said, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*” (Romans 12:18). This also applies to our homes: how much does it depend on you to live at peace with your wife? As the spiritual leader of the home, the ball's in your court. How much does it depend on us to live peaceably with our children? Daniel shows us it's possible to take a stand and resist compromise, but do it not out of intimidation, but because we love more and love better than the world does. “By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you _____.”

Identity

Like Daniel, our identity is in Christ Jesus. We reside in a “foreign land,” but our identity should remain tethered to Christ. I told you a few weeks ago about some of the names my daughter is being called at school—and not just her, but her friends as well. Over and over again, it is my mission as her father to affirm her and assure her that she does not

consist of their labels, just as my Heavenly Father has gone to great lengths to assure me, again and again, that I am NOT what the world says. I tell her she is fearfully and wonderfully made, because God tells me that.

So many men define themselves by what others think of them. My friend in Dallas doesn't want to be considered a prude by his co-workers—their approval matters more than God's approval.

And so our Equipping Point for today is this:

Decide who defines you.

Engage

Engage wherever you are! Engage in the social, political, and daily life of the community in which God places you. Randy is deliberately moving us to an awareness, a compassion, and an impact on our neighborhoods—being Jesus where God has placed you.

Some Christians have withdrawn from the world to protect themselves from its defilement—this could be a monastic monk or a parent who completely isolates their child out of fear of “contamination.” But Jesus did not live that way. His participation in the world did not stain him, and it need not stain us, if we are in Christ. Adapting to the world is not the same as conforming to it. What better way to change a business, a school, a neighborhood, or a nation than to be an engaged “foreigner” whose character is trustworthy and uncorrupted like Daniel's.

And finally, pick your...

Non-negotiables

We have to know what our bottom line is and stand firm in our faith for it. For which things are you willing to draw a line in the sand? For which things are you willing to be persecuted? Or maybe just made fun of? Again, *conformity cannot be in our vocabulary*. I don't know who said it, but it's so true: “If you stand for nothing, you'll fall for anything.” We must return to our Equipping Point: ***Decide who defines you.***

Three quick takeaways and we're done:

1. Your life really is just a *layover*—treat it that way.

We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace.

1 Chronicles 29:15

If we accept the world's classification of who we are, if we invest ourselves in building bigger barns, in a corporate scramble, then we're treating this place as the be-all/end-all. Don't fall for that. Your final destination is elsewhere.

2. Even in difficult circumstances, God never abandons us.

The exiles must have been terribly discouraged. Despite all of the prophets' warnings, they were now experiencing the discipline of God for their failures. But even in exile—all alone and in way over your head, God will not abandon you either. He protected Daniel from the mouth of the lion and He protected the three friends from the fiery furnace—remember the fourth person in the furnace? Who could it have been but an angel or God Himself in the furnace with them? What a great picture...even if you find yourself in a fiery furnace, God walks with you.

And third,

3. For all the decisions that are taken away from you, there are still some you get to make.

I've been very convicted by this recently. There are a couple of circumstances in my life right now that absolutely drive me crazy. As much as I'd like to change them, they will not be changed. They are, for now, immovable objects. Those decisions have been taken away from me—I can have no impact right now on those conditions.

But like Daniel, for every circumstance he was not able to choose, there was another choice he could make. And so can I. I can choose to build good associations; I can choose to live peaceably. I can choose to draw my self-worth from God not man; I can choose to engage in my giftedness where I'm permitted. And I can choose the hill upon which I'm willing to die.

May we have the courage to live as ALIENS who belong to a better world. Let us today live up to our true heritage as Men of God.

Following is a long version of the chapter summary that was edited for time:

These four men were likely teenagers when they arrived in Babylon, but despite their young age, they were faithful to God, even down to the Jewish dietary laws. For them, it wasn't legalism, but obedience, and God rewarded them with favor.

It started with the troubled dream of a king. Nebuchadnezzar awoke and demanded not just an explanation of the meaning of the dream, but for the wise men to tell the dream itself - failure to do both was an immediate death sentence. The request was impossible, of course, except that God revealed both the events of the dream and their meaning to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a four-layered statue. Its head of gold represented Babylon's might. The remaining layers of silver, bronze, and iron symbolized world empires that had not yet risen to power. Daniel's interpretation satisfied the king and saved his life and the lives of all the magicians and wise men in the kingdom. King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to ruler over Babylon, made high-level officials of his three friends, and worshipped Daniel's God.

This devotion was only temporary, however, as the king's advisors played to his pride. He built a gold statue in his own honor, and all were commanded to bow down and worship at its feet. Daniel's three friends, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego, who were now Babylonian provincial leaders, were faced with a grim choice: idolatry or death. They refused to bow. The king was enraged and ordered them to be thrown into a fiery furnace. They defied the king's last chance order and chose to remain faithful even in the face of death. The fire was stoked; the young men were bound and thrown into the inferno. An astonished king watched a fourth man join them as they walked unharmed through the fire. And once again the king praised their God.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by Belshazzar. King Belshazzar threw a great party, but had the chutzpah and audacity to use the holy goblets they had stolen in the raid of Jerusalem's temple. In the original "handwriting on the wall" warning, the LORD sent him a mysteriously written message that appeared on the stucco of the banquet hall: "*Mene mene tekel parsin*," which loosely translated means, "The party is SO over." Sure enough, that night the Persian army invaded Babylon, killed the king, and Persia became the silver layer in the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of years before.

The new king, Darius of Persia, gave Daniel a promotion. Daniel's rivals were jealous and plotted his death. They deceived Darius into signing an irrevocable decree forbidding prayer to anyone except the king. The penalty was a single night stay in a cave of hungry lions. Daniel responded by doing as he had always done. He returned to his house, knelt and prayed. Of course, the king's officials felt "duty bound" to bring such dangerous activity to the king's attention, and Darius was forced to throw his trusted servant to the lions. So the king spent a restless night and rose in the morning to find that Daniel was safe and sound in the lions' den. And the great King of Persia worshipped Daniel's God.