



Sermon – 04/30/2017

The Normativity of Christian Non-Conformity

*Daniel 1:8 - 21*

Thank you, brother. Before I, I didn't know you were going to mention my Philadelphia martyrdom. But I don't know if you saw the draft, the NFL draft, in Philadelphia this week. And Drew Pearson, OK, I figured if I couldn't get a response on Drew Pearson here in College Station. You've got to go watch the tape of Drew Pearson making the pick for the Cowboys to see the Eagles fans in the house taunting him and then Drew Pearson just pushing back with everything he's got, it's anyway. Right now you're all judging me. You're like why is he opening with talking about the Eagles and the Cowboys. But that's just, those are holy things. They're holy things.

I do want to bring you greetings from Louisville, as we call it, and we are about to jump into a crazy week in Kentucky and Louisville, you know the Kentucky Derby is about to start so I'm glad that I'm here. And I'm glad I'm here. I had to bring you greetings from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of the six seminaries that you support through your giving through the Cooperative Program. We have had so many young men and women come to Southern over the years. Right here from Central Baptist Church. So grateful for this congregation, the way the Lord has used you and your witness for Christ, and in fact I have some of my closest friends in ministry, some of my own colleagues, in fact, were brought to faith in Christ through the ministry of this church. So you have no idea what a privilege it is. It's always a privilege to get to go to a congregation and open up God's word, but there's a particular joy and delight and it's mine this morning because of those connections. I also want to tell you how much I love your pastor. I don't know what it says that the weekend I'm here he chose not to be here. But I love Chris Osborne. I thank God for him and just his ministry, his faithful ministry, of being here for this time and the way the Lord has used him in this congregation. So thank you in so many ways.

We're going to be in Daniel this morning. And if you haven't been reading the book of Daniel in your devotional life, it's in the Old Testament right after Ezekiel. I don't know if that helped you at all. So you're going to have to find Daniel. And as you're turning there, Daniel chapter 1, we're going to be focusing on just a few verses really. But I want to tell you. I know first hand the power of the force, the pressure to conform. I don't know if you've ever experienced that in your life. The pressure to conform to your surroundings, to your context, to your circumstances is an incredibly powerful force. I know this. I spent a portion of my childhood living overseas in

Spain. And I was a little taller than everyone else. I was the best basketball player and the worst soccer player. And then when I came back to America that flipped; very dramatically. But I remember my first year as a kid there, I was in first grade, and we went to a Spanish school, and I felt the pressure to conform. My mother, like a typical American mom, she packed our lunches. And all the other Spanish kids they had lunch provided there. They bought and ate Spanish food at the school. And I brought my like peanut butter and jelly and oreos and whatever else, you know, kids ate and drank in the states. And I remember on one occasion, you know, we had lemonade in like a little thermos. You remember back in the '80's you had like a Star Wars thermos and you could put soup in it one day and then you could put lemonade in it. And it tasted kind of like both no matter what you put in it. And I had this little thermos with lemonade and the teacher's, they'd never seen anything like this, and they took it and I think they wondered, "Is there contraband in here?" And so she's smelling it. Is this like cleaning solution? She didn't know what lemonade was. And so there's always reminded of being an outsider. And the only other kid who didn't, who brought his own lunch, for example, was a Pakistani kid who was Muslim. So he had to bring his own food. So it's me and the Pakistani kid and all the Spanish kids. And so I'm just, even as a seven year old, I'm aware that I don't fit in.

And we get to the end of the year, and like every school, this is a global phenomenon. There was a year end musical performance. We were going to send a number of songs and you know the parents, grand-parents, aunts, uncles, whoever would possibly want to sign up to hear first graders sing, they were going to show up. And some of the songs were in Spanish, but one of them I distinctly remember was an American song by Stephen Foster; Oh! Susanna. Right? Oh! Susanna, don't you cry for me; 'cause I come from Louisiana with a Banjo on my knee. I still to this day have no idea what that's about. Why should Susanna be reassured that you're travelling with a banjo. I don't know. But I guess whatever. Anyway we spent weeks, I suppose, preparing for this. And my parents distinctly remember showing up on the day of that recital and they heard all the other songs and then we start Oh! Susanna. And they hear my voice, but it doesn't sound like me. Instead of hearing my sing Oh! Susanna, don't you cry for me, they hear my voice, my little 7 year old, maybe 8 year old voice at the end of the school year, and it sounded something like Oh! Susanna, don't you cry for me; I come from Louisiana with a banjo on my knee. I had assimilated. I had tried to blend in in a way that was available to me. I couldn't do anything about my height. I couldn't do anything about my basketball skills. I couldn't do anything about what I brought to lunch. But I could change my accent. I could try to assimilate. I felt the pressure to conform. It's funny now, but it's a powerful force. Even for us as adults, isn't it? That the pressure and the power to conform to our circumstances and the culture around us.

Well I'm going to suggest to you from the passage this morning that Christian non-conformity is normative. In other words, our title this morning is The Normativity of Christian Non-Conformity. To follow Jesus means to be a non-conformist. We're going to at this passage in Daniel this morning and try to draw God's truth from it. So we're going to pick up in Daniel 1, verse 8 and I'll read to the end of the chapters. So Daniel chapter 1 starting in verse 8. This is what God's word says.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. <sup>9</sup>And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, <sup>10</sup>and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." <sup>11</sup>Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup>"Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup>Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." <sup>14</sup>So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. <sup>15</sup>At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. <sup>16</sup>So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. <sup>17</sup>As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. <sup>18</sup>At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup>And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. <sup>20</sup>And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. <sup>21</sup>And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Would you pray with me?

Father we are grateful that we come to you as our Father and we trust that your word is true and powerful. So would you take your word and by your Holy Spirit plant it into our hearts, help me, give me clarity of thought and concision of speech and may all of us be not only hearers of the word but doers. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

I want to suggest to you three big ideas. Three big ideas from this story, from this text, and we'll walk through them and try to apply them in our own lives. But first Christian non-conformity requires resolve. Christian non-conformity requires resolve. Let me give you a little bit of a context here. The text we read it opens with Daniel resolving that he would not defile himself with the King's food or drink. Let me tell you again the context here, this is about 605 B.C. And Nebuchadnezzar is the ruler of the most powerful empire on the face of the planet at the time. And Daniel is one of these young men taken out of the southern kingdom of Israel, out of Judah, so Jerusalem will fall in 586, it will be destroyed. But before that there was an early wave of exiles taken away. Daniel is one of these. He is a member of the elite. If you read the verses preceding this in chapter one you would understand. Daniel is as educated, he's a son of privilege, he is among the one percenters so to speak. And this was typical Babylonian strategy to manage their empire. How do you control and manage and exercise power over a massive empire? Well one way you do it is you take that constituent, you take those elites and you bring them to Babylon. You take them out of their homeland, you bring them into Babylon, into the center of the empire, and you try to assimilate them. You try to make them basically

Babylonian. And so if you had read the first few verses of this chapter you'd understand that's exactly what's going on. We know from Babylonian literature and also from Persian literature that this was customary, usually around the age of 14 or 15. So let that sink in for a minute. We're talking about adolescent boys, teenage men, if we can use that term generously. I have boys so I can say that. That's who we're talking about. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. And as evidence, right, of this attempt to get them to conform, to assimilate into Babylon, we're told they're offered food, rich food, from the king's table, they're given access to power, they're given access to privilege, they're given an incredible educational opportunity. It seems from the text this was going to be a three year program. They would be in the king's courts, trained for three years, at the end of which they would serve directly to Nebuchadnezzar; the most powerful ruler on the planet at the time. What an opportunity. What a privilege. In fact we're also told they're given new names, right. We often remember them as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But they're given new names to try to, again, assimilate them, trying to get them to blend in to Babylon. So Daniel resolves not to defile himself. Non-conformity requires resolve.

Why does Daniel refuse to eat this food and drink this wine? Why would it be? Well there are a number of reasons that are possible. One, the most likely, is that the food that was set before him was most likely ceremonially unclean. So if you remember your Old Testament you know that God, through Moses, had given his people his law at Sinai; and there were all sorts of restrictions on what they could and could not eat. Most famously, right, they couldn't eat pork. But there were rules on what they could mix, you know, and how they had to prepare food. And it seems very quite predictable in fact that the food that was set before them was in violation of God's law. It was unclean food. It was not Kosher. But there may be more than that. It seems Daniel likely also understood that the way the hooks that the empire was trying to use to get into his heart and to bring him into Babylon was through his belly. If I can give you privilege, if I can give you access to power, if I can give you certain perks, I can draw you in and then I can control you. Now whether it was the issue of ceremonial cleanliness or whether it was the issue of kind of manipulation, or both, either way, Daniel has a decision to make. I don't know I use my imagination here a little bit. I imagine him and his friends; they're at the cafeteria. I don't know what the setting was like in Babylon, but the food comes out, the menu was shown to them, I don't know how it worked, and they look at the menu and Daniel goes, "This is going to be a problem. Can I see the manager? In fact I need to see the chief eunuch. Like the top eunuch. I don't want the waiter, I want the manager." I don't know how it went down, but whatever happened we're told that Daniel has to resolve not to defile himself; not to make himself unclean. Of course we know that to resolve something is to make an active and willful determination of the will. It doesn't happen by accident, right. You resolve something; you make a new year's resolution, you put it on a list, you say, "This is an active and willful determination. I am making this. I'm defining this. I'm putting it before me. I'm going to put it on the fridge. I'm going to have it on the list and I'm not going to let myself forget I have said this is my resolution. I am resolved to do this this year." Well Daniel does that. This is an active willful determination. Why would that be? Daniel remembered who he was. He knew he was not Babylonian. He knew he was a son of Abraham. He was part of the people of God and no matter where he lived, no matter what the pressures around him looked like, no matter what the temptations to conform might have been, he knew who he was and what God had called him to do and who to be. It's a question of identity and beyond that Daniel understood truth. This is

non-conformity that is founded upon the word of God. Daniel knew that God had said, “Live this way. Don’t live like this. Eat this. Dress like this. Don’t marry this person.” All these rules that God had given that were in his grace to protect his people to bless them. Daniel knew those. So let me just point out to you. Our culture gets the non-conformity thing. American culture says, “Oh, yeah, you’ve gotta be your own person.” In the name of personal autonomy and self-determination. Don’t let anyone tell you who you’re supposed to be. Don’t conform to whatever the majority view is, right. American culture gets non-conformity. But this is a non-conformity that is very different from the culture that we live in. Biblical non-conformity recognizes now our refusal to conform to the world around us is because we are subject to an authority greater than Nebuchadnezzar. We are subject to an authority far more sovereign, far more majestic, far more eternal, far more holy. We are subject to the authority of God Almighty himself. And we have his truth and his word. So this is not me being me. This is not Daniel just saying, “You know what. I don’t feel like eating it. I’d rather eat vegetables so I’m not going to conform.” No. He refuses to conform to Babylon because he is devoted to conforming to the will of God.

I wonder how that works in your life? How does that work in your life? Have you resolved, have you resolved, have you regularly, daily even, set before you, “I want to live for Christ. Oh I don’t want to do anything that would bring shame on the gospel. I don’t want to do anything that would bring reproach or scandal to the name of Christ. I don’t want to live like an unbeliever. So Lord would you help me by your grace. Lead me. Guide me. Protect me. Protect my spouse, my children. Help us as a family that we would be resolved not to defile ourselves. That we would be resolved to live according to your will and to your ways.

And lastly just notice his resolve, it has influence. When Daniel makes this resolution, we’re told in the text this is Daniel, personal, this is his personal resolution. But notice his three buddies kind of take notice; Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, it’s almost like they’re sitting there and they go, “So we’re not eating this? OK. Daniel says we’re not eating it. Let it go.” I don’t know how that went down, but they clearly take notice of it. And all four of them then are joined in this resolution not to defile themselves. All four of them refused to eat the king’s food and to drink his wine. His faithfulness, his refusal to conform, had an impact on those around him. I can just promise you when you live for God, when you refuse to conform to the world, you will have influence. Maybe not in the way that you think. Maybe not in the way that the world says are important. But people will notice. And they will follow in your example. It may be your children. They see you, mom, living in a way that’s different from what the world says. They see you being faithful to Jesus and they’re watching you and they’re noticing you. Student, it may be you and your high school or your middle school or wherever God’s put you, and you’re faithful. You don’t blend in. You refuse to and it looks like everyone thinks you’re crazy. But there’s someone in your school who’s taking account of it and who’s saying, “You know what if she lives like that, I want to follow that. I want to be like that.” You may not have clue they’re even thinking that. So first, Christian non-conformity requires resolve.

Secondly, Christian non-conformity will bring testing. Christian non-conformity will bring testing. Now you know from this story that we read that when Daniel and his friends refused to conform, when they refused to defile themselves, and eat the king’s food and drink his wine, there’s a scenario presented. Daniels says, you know, the chief eunuch’s worried. If you don’t

eat, you know, the king's made a lot of investment in you, we've got this three year educational program, at the end of which you're supposed to function as his basic senior advisors, and if you waste away and shrivel up and die, I might get my head cut off. Because my job is to keep you healthy, fat, and growing. So he's worried. So Daniel says, "Let's do this. Just give us vegetables and water for 10 days." Now let me just say. If you want to take this as a diet plan, go for it. But that's not the point of the story. OK. The point of the story is the diet, in fact, that Daniel and his friends are taking on themselves, it should have resulted in their nutritional deficiency. Because the eunuch rightly understands if you do this, you're going to lack all kinds of nutritional content. You're going to waste away. You're going to look weak compared to the other guys in this program. This won't work out. Daniels said, "Just trust me. Just trust me. Give us the vegetables. Give us the water. We won't defile ourselves. Put it to the test. Put it to the test." There is, in other words, a confrontation happening here. And that is the nature of testing isn't it. Testing involves an unavoidable confrontation. Now you know if you know this book, that this story of Daniel and his friends is full of moments of confrontation. Think about maybe the most famous story, right, Daniel in the lion's den. Daniel kind of gets, there are some guys who have it out of Daniel and he ends up, he finds himself vacationing with lions in a cave. And he's spared publicly. Maybe most famously you know the story of his three friends who when Nebuchadnezzar, who seems to be something of a narcissistic egomaniac, has this massive statue built and he says there's going to be a day. We're going to build the statue and then we're going to set aside a day and anyone who's everyone is going to come together, we're going to get the orchestra, we're going to have everyone there, and when the band starts playing everyone goes down on the ground and they worship. I mean, just imagine Kyle Field full of, what is it like half a million people now, I don't know. Kyle Field full of people and there's this big statue right at the 50 yard line and then, you know, when the band starts going and the yell leaders get it started, everyone drop down and you worship this image of Nebuchadnezzar. And picture that whole stadium filled with people, packed, there's no room left, everyone goes down, except for these three young guys. They're standing in a sea of people and the music's going and suddenly people realize, "Wait a minute. Why aren't those three guys over there down?" And every eye immediately goes onto them. Imagine that. It is a moment of public confrontation; of public testing. But I want to suggest to you that the seeds for their faithfulness in that public confrontation, the root of that was set much earlier right here in chapter one. In a moment of private confrontation, of private testing, of private faithfulness. It happened just around a dining room table; not out in a massive arena in front of a huge statue. I don't know how this went down again, this is my imagination. I imagine when the food was set before them originally, the kings food, their thoughts went something like, "I mean we're a long way from Jerusalem. Would anyone know? Are we even sure that God really cares about this stuff? I mean we are in exile. Is God even going to keep his promises? I mean what did we do to deserve this? Maybe we, maybe we should just eat it." I don't know what went through their head. But their private faithfulness in this moment of private confrontation would lead them to be ready to stand in a moment of public confrontation just two chapters later. Let me just tell you. If you want to live for God, if you want to be faithful to Christ, you will be tested. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. Like we could go home right there I guess. But we won't. But you can count on it. You will be tested. So how are you being tested this morning? If you left, by the way, if you let just kind of your own ease take you along, it's like inertia. Any of you physics majors, inertia is just once you push something, it's the weight of the object itself that continues to carry it until deceleration kicks in and it eventually comes to a stop. But for a while it can continue one just

basically coasting as we call it. And a lot of Christians just let inertia carry them along. No. You've got to have an active resolution that you're going to live for God and when you do that you will be tested. Are you being tested this morning? If you're not being tested, if you don't feel that pressure, then let me suggest to you you may have a problem. If you're that comfortable, if there is nothing in your life that confronts your resolution to live for God, if there is no testing, then we might have a problem. Now it may be public, it maybe in your job, in your office, people know you believe this, you believe that, you're a Christian, you're a follower of Christ, and there are people who actively oppose you because of that in your school, in your workplace, wherever it may be. It may be public. You may be a business owner who's thinking, "If I do my business in a way that honors Christ, I'm going to have legal pressures put upon me, the culture is increasingly hostile to me, I don't know what that will bring and it scares me." That may be you. But let me suggest to you the reality of this testing is often private first. It's what we do when no one's looking. When the culture says, "Oh no. You're entitled to this. You're owed this. You can look at whatever you want on your computer. You can do whatever you want with your money. God doesn't care about that really, does he?" It's the little decisions that we make. Those little things when no one seems to be watching. And if you aren't tested in the private ways, if you're not faithful in those ways, you won't be ready for the public testing. It's so easy, isn't it, to rationalize conformity. To say, "Well, I know, but it's OK. I mean God doesn't really care about that, does he. I mean he cares about like murder, adultery, maybe, but does he really care about what I eat, what I look at on the internet, how I spend my money?" Yeah he does. It will bring testing. You will be tested.

Third, though, Christian non-conformity will be vindicated. Christian non-conformity will be vindicated. So you've seen the resolution. You've seen the testing. And now the story tells us, well how did it end. What happened? Well you heard it read in your ears. They go through this testing and after this they are healthier and thriving and flourishing. And everyone can tell. And it works out great for Daniel and his friends. They end up, the text says, very dramatically they stood before the king. That is to say, they have everything they were supposed to have. They have access to the king. They have access to power. They have been vindicated. They've been given this opportunity. Everyone looks at them and says, "Great. These guys have it going on." They were vindicated. It's public and then the rest of the book, by the way, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they end up in that fiery furnace, right, and there's this fourth figure in there with them and they're spared. They don't burn up. Again, publicly vindicated. When Daniel finds himself in the lion's den and the lions don't consume him, he's rescued, publicly again, publicly vindicated. Was that always the way this works for God's people?

If you honor Christ, if you live for God will you always be publicly vindicated? Well no and yes. No and yes. Let me give you some examples of what I mean by this. Think about the book of Acts. Acts 5. Acts 6. For example Peter and the disciples are preaching the gospel of Christ after the Ascension, after the Pentecost in chapter five and they're taken before the counsel and they're told, "Stop preaching the name. Knock it off." Do they say, "Oh, OK." No. They're beaten, they basically have to, they have to resolve, "Hey you can tell us that we're not supposed to preach the name of Christ, but we are under a greater authority. We will proclaim the gospel. And you can basically do whatever you want to us. But we have to obey God rather than man." What happens to the apostles? I mean you don't have to read very far in Luke's account in Acts, they start getting their heads cut off. They start being killed as martyrs for their faith. You go to

chapter 6, Stephen, is he vindicated? He's stoned to death. To be faithful to Christ. He wasn't publicly vindicated in his lifetime. We see it through the eyes of faith in the scripture. We understand what's going on. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. But if you'd been there, if were right there with Saul, kind of supervising this execution of Stephen that day, you would have said, "He got what he deserved. He's a blasphemer." Stephen wasn't vindicated in the way that Daniel was in his life. So can you expect that you will be vindicated if you stand for Christ in your school, in your work place, in your community. Will it always mean there will be a moment on this side of glory where everyone will go, "You know what. She was right. She's not crazy. He's actually faithful. God is good and true and we were wrong." Not always. This is the story then of the gospel. This is why we need the gospel. Here's the problem. If I stop this sermon right here and sent you out, you might just think, "OK. The point of the message was I need to leave here and I need to grit my teeth and I need to resolve harder to live for God. I need to work harder at it." And that might work for you for about five minutes. And then you're going to defile yourself. Maybe nothing crazy. You might not go nuts, but you're going to have a selfish thought, you're going to twist the truth just a little bit to make yourself look better in a conversation. Something will happen in word or thought or deed you will fall into sin. But the story of the gospel tells us that there was one man, one man, only one, not even Daniel, only one man who perfectly lived a life of obedience and righteousness. There was one man who from the moment of his conception until he was ascended to the Father, he lived a life of perfect obedience to God. He never once defiled himself even in his thoughts, in his words, or in his deeds. And it tells us, the gospel tells us that this undefiled one, this holy one, this righteous one, he became defiled for us. The holy one, the righteous one, Jesus Christ hung on a cross, cursed and afflicted by God, he became defiled, cursed, wicked. Why? Not because he was. The thief on the cross get it. This man has done nothing. He doesn't deserve this. We deserve it. He was holy and righteous but he became accursed and afflicted for us. Defiled. Why? So that all those like that thief on the cross that put their trust in him would be with him, they would be renewed and restored, cleansed, washed, and there's the vindication. Because when the holy one of God hangs on the cross, the pure and righteous Christ, when he hangs on the cross, defiled for you and for me, what happens three days later. He doesn't stay defiled. The worms and the forces of corruption do not win the day. His body is raised by God. He is resurrected. Just two weeks ago we celebrated this, didn't we. And the one took our defilement, the one who took our shame, the one who took our punishment, he is vindicated. Whatever vindication Daniel experienced was just the sneak preview. Just an appetizer to point us to the full vindication that God demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead. And the promise for you and the promise for me is that if we are united with Christ by faith, if we are trusting in him as our Lord and Savior, we will be vindicated. Maybe not in this life, it may not happen. You may die a martyrs death. You may be a pariah, an outcast, for Christ. But there is a day coming for every son and daughter of God where they will be vindicated. We will be raised up with Christ. And this is what baptism testifies to. We are buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk with him in newness of life and there is a day coming when every follower of Christ will be vindicated. So however your testing feels right now, whatever the pressures to conform may be right now, that's your hope. There is a day coming of vindication. Now let me say this. If you hear this, again if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, so glad you're here. What a privilege to be here on a morning when you're here to. We got to be here together and that's no accident. If you're here this morning and you're thinking, "OK. What's the point of this message is to go be a good person?" You've got to hear me. This is the most important

thing you could hear this week. Frankly this is the most important thing you could hear in your life. The most important thing you need to hear, if you're not a Christian this morning, is that you can only find forgiveness, salvation, and vindication in Christ. You can spend your whole life trying to live an undefiled life. You can work really hard. But you will fail. The only access, the only way you get to God, is by saying to the Lord, "I am defiled. I'm not clean. I'm not holy. I've broken your word. I haven't lived the life that I'm supposed to live. And I can't do it. I need your grace. I need your mercy. Would you forgive me of my sins. I trust in Jesus as my Savior, as my substitute, that he did for me what I could never do for myself." If you will do that you will be vindicated with Christ forevermore. You will be with God. You will have eternal life. That's the hope of the gospel. It's, the gospel's for Christians who need to be reminded of it and it's also for you to call you into the family of God.

Paul wrote to some Christian in Rome much later, and Rome by the way was often referenced in the New Testament as Babylon. They kind of took Babylon and just dropped it in for Rome in the first century. And Paul will write to them and tell them, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Peter will do something similar. I'm going to end with this and then I'll take my seat after we pray. Peter writes to the church scattered throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia and he refers to them as exiles, kind of like Daniel and his friends. You're exiles. You're scattered. You're not at home. You're awaiting your home. And he tells them they are exiles. Then he says this and after this I'll pray and we'll go. This is what Peter says to these first century Christians and he says to us, "Therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you." Future tense, right. It's coming. "The grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as he who called you as holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written you shall be holy for I am holy. And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deed, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

Would you pray with me.

Our Father in heaven we are so grateful for the gospel. We are grateful that Jesus Christ, this lamb, this sacrifice, who gave his blood without blemish or spot, he was undefiled. We're so grateful that we are righteous in him. Lord we're grateful that we can resolve to live for you. We can resolve to not be defiled. Not to get to you, not to earn salvation, but as a response of gratitude because of what you've already done for us. We now live for you in obedience. Lord I pray right now in this room that you would, by your Holy Spirit move.

If you're here this morning, with every head bowed and every eye closed, if you're here this morning and you know this is you this morning, you're a Christian, but you need to resolve, you've wandered from Christ, there is sin even this morning in your life that the Holy Spirit is convicting you of. You look at your life, you examine it, maybe even in just this last weekend, you think, "I am living, not like a son or a daughter of God, I know I feel in my heart, I'm convicted of it." If that's you this word of grace is for you too. We're going to have ministers

here at the front. In just a moment they're going to come forward and when they do, I would invite you, if that's you and you're under conviction of sin this morning, would you resolve to turn from your sin to trust in Christ afresh; to walk in repentance as a son or a daughter of God. Resolve today to live for God. But maybe you're here this morning and you don't know Christ. Again with every head bowed if you're here this morning and you know, "I'm not a Christian." I don't know what circumstances brought you here this morning, but you're not here by accident. It's no coincidence that you're hearing my voice and whenever God's word is proclaimed it always calls for a response. And maybe God is stirring in your heart this morning. Maybe you're heard this message; the truth of the gospel a thousand times. But this morning you're hearing it in a different way. The Holy Spirit's at work in your heart. If that's you this morning, you've got to stop trying to earn this. You can't get your way close to God. You can't clean yourself up. You can't make yourself pure and undefiled. The only way you get close to God is by running to the cross with open hands, with nothing to commend about yourself. The only plea, the only hope you have is Jesus. If that's you this morning, you say, "I want to have life in Christ, I want to turn from my sins, I want to trust in Jesus as my Lord and Savior." I'm going to invite you as we sing later in just a moment. Would you come forward? There are, again, ministers here who are ready to pray with you, to lead you to the cross, to trust in Jesus. Today is the day. If God is calling you to trust in him, to follow him, and to have your life transformed, not just now, but forever, Father we do pray that you would do this. Stir up our hearts that we would live for you and that the gospel would change everything about us and about everything that we believe. In Jesus name. Amen.