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Good morning. Congratulations, Adam. Thank you. That's awesome.

I know I've shared this before, but I also know you probably don't remember much of what is said up here.

Tim and I can't remember what we said yesterday when we preach and talk about it on Monday. But anyway, it's a line that I've used for years. It's simple but profound. I heard it and it stuck with me. And here it is.

If you know who you are, you'll know what to do.

I could be wrong, but I believe that what we believe about who we are is one of the most important things about life. Because our identity and what we think about ourselves dictates and determines what we do and how we are. And our identity guides and governs our decisions and activities. And honestly, like many, I've struggled with my identity over the years. Like who?

Who am I? Who am I really? What determines who I am? Is it what I do? Is it my job?

Is it achievements, accomplishments? Is it my failures that define me? Is it what I have? Is it degrees, titles, roles, possessions? Is it about performance?

Well, clearly some of those things are identifying marks because I am a minister, I'm a father, I'm a grandfather, I'm a runner, I am a farmer, a homeowner, and a bunch of other things, but those things are not truly and fully. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend her. But that's not truly who I am. Those things that I do and those things that I are, that's not. That's not my core identity.

Years ago, I was exposed to the writings of Henry Nouwen. And he says some things that are really helpful to me. And one of the things that he says over and over again, he says that our core identity, who we truly are, which is a reflection of biblical teaching, is that we are beloved children of God. Let that sink in. Am a beloved son of God.

There are several scriptures that talk about this in various ways. John says it like this very plainly. In First John 3, he says, See how very much the Father, our Father, loves us, for he calls us his children. And that is what we are.

Beloved son, beloved daughters, beloved children of God. That's who we are. So knowing that, trusting that, believing that resting in that is really what produces in us peace, joy, confidence, confidence that no matter what life throws at us, we can handle it, we can navigate it.

And confidence that we have a glorious future, no matter what happens in this life. Now, I believe Daniel knew that.

I believe Daniel experienced that. I believe Daniel lived that out. He knew he was a beloved son of God. He knew who he was. And because Daniel knew who he was, it allowed him to navigate major disruptions and major challenges and changes in his life.

This morning, we think about Daniel 6. It's a chapter that describes Daniel and the lion's den. Probably everybody, at least, is somewhat familiar with that story. And I want to look at that story, but I also want to look at it in a deeper way that kind of makes the story even more powerful. This is.

This was a little surprising to me. Daniel is probably 80 years old when he's thrown into the lion's den. I always pictured he's like a young guy, but he's probably 80 years old at this time of his life. And I think about his life leading up to this famous story. How was his identity formed over those 80 years?

And how did his identity guide him and govern him and sust sustain him over those 80 years? How does his identity lead him to be such a strong man of integrity? And what can we learn from it? What can we learn from Daniel? Well, Daniel six is where we are this morning.

Daniel six tells us that Daniel had so impressed King Darius that King Darius wanted Daniel at the top of his pagan empire. That's unusual. And so Daniel was about to be placed in a position at the very top of this kingdom. And you know how this goes. Because of that, other people were jealous.

They were envious of his role and the ascension to it. And so they were trying to find some stuff on Daniel to disqualify him. His enemies were. But Daniel six says they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy.

So you can imagine these guys that were jealous. It should have been me instead of him. So they get together and they're trying to figure out a way to get Daniel. They go all the way back through his social media to when he was a young guy trying to find some dirt on Daniel, but they just can't find. Find anything.

And so they just all go quiet in frustration.

Then I imagine finally one of them breaks the silence of frustration and says, hey, what about his religious practices?

What about them? Think about it. He prays three times a day, right? Yeah. So what if we go to the king, who doesn't really know this, why

don't we go to the king and, you know, really suck up to him and say, hey, why don't we have an executive order in the empire here that says that anyone who prays to anyone but the king will be put to death.

I like it. I think it'll work. Yeah, let's go. So they go to the king, they play into his ego, and the king says, yeah, yeah, it makes sense to me. So he writes an irrevocable executive order that anyone caught praying to anyone but him will be put to death by being thrown into a den of lions.

Well, Daniel prays three times a day in a fairly public way. His enemies know it, but the king does not. So when Daniel hears the word of this executive order, what do you think he's thinking?

I don't know what he's thinking, but I know what he does when it's time to pray. He goes to pray, he kneels down, he prays, he thanks God, and then he asks God to help him. His enemies had waited for this moment. They catch him in the act. They go to the king and said, hey, we actually caught somebody praying to someone else besides you now just to confirm they're to be put to death.

Yeah, in the lion's den. Yeah, that's right. King says, who is it? And they tell him it's Daniel.

The king is devastated because he never anticipated this. He's so concerned because he loves Daniel, he respects Daniel. And so the king tries for a whole day to find a legal loophole, but he can't. He just can't find one. So he says, all right, yeah, that's what has to happen.

So the king goes to the lion's den. He meets Daniel there and he kind of prays. He says, may your God whom you serve so faithfully rescue you. I hate to do it, Daniel, but got to do it. So Daniel's thrown in the lion's den.

The king was so upset, I think he runs away very quickly. Can't do anything, can't eat, can't sleep. Early the next morning, he goes to lion's den. And when he gets there, the text says he calls out in anguish, daniel, servant of the living God. Was your God whom you serve so faithfully able to.

To rescue you from the lions? I don't know what he was expecting, but this is what he got. He hears Daniel. I think he's probably shocked. And Daniel answers, long live the king.

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've not wronged you. Your Majesty. The King is thrilled. And the first thing he does is he writes another executive order saying the guys who are Daniel's enemies are to be gathered up and thrown into the lion's den.

Their outcome was not as good as Daniel's.

Just leave it that way.

So here's what I want us to do this morning. I want us to stand with Daniel at the entrance of that lion's den before he's thrown in. Can you see him? 80 year old man, Just imagine being there. You're about to be thrown into lions who have not eaten for a while.

You trust God, but I mean, come on, aren't you a little bit afraid? I used to work with hospice patients all the time, and hospice patients would say, with faith, they would say, I'm not afraid to be dead. It's just getting there that kind of scares me. And I think Daniel's probably in the same position. Imagine he's standing there, you can smell the lions and, and you can hear their low, you know, they have a low guttural growl.

They're pacing about in the pen, just waiting impatiently for some food they've been deprived. And I imagine as Daniel stands there, he looks back over his 80 years of life and he's wondering, is this it? Is this the way it ends? Is this my last day? Is this my last hour?

And I just imagine that he thinks back to being a little boy in happy times with his mom and dad and how they had been good to him. And they taught him about Yahweh, they taught him about God. And he then fast forwards and he remembers that fateful day in 605 when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar comes to Jerusalem to begin the first wave of conquering Jerusalem. And Daniel and some of his best friends are carried away as teenagers because they were considered the best and brightest of Jerusalem. And they were carried away to Babylon, which takes about two or three months to get there by foot.

And they're carried away and put in a position of privilege in a foreign land because the Babylonians are no dummies. They say, well, if we can convert these young guys, they become influencers for everybody else. And our way and our culture will then permeate everybody else. So Daniel and his friends were given new names. They experienced all kinds of things in new ways, and this is it, this is this.

Now, while remaining true to their core identity, they were able to live in and experience another culture. They learned a new language, and they learned in many ways to live like the locals. They did it without compromising their core identity, which was rooted in the will and the ways of God as revealed in scripture. So Daniel and his friends took to Heart. The words of Jeremiah 29, which we often quote today.

Now, this is interesting to me. Did you know that Jeremiah and Daniel, along with Ezekiel, are all contemporaries? They all lived at the same

time. And so Daniel is carried off in 605 BC to Babylon. Jeremiah, for various reasons, was left in Jerusalem.

And since he was there, he was ministering to the people left behind.

Jeremiah the prophet is a good leader. A good leader defines reality as ugly as it is, and provides hope. So Jeremiah says, this is what's happened. This is why we're in this mess. But there's hope.

And so Jeremiah defines reality, gives hope. And his message that he provides to the people living in Jerusalem carries all the way to to Babylon. And Daniel reads it. Daniel says, I Read Jeremiah. Daniel 9, verse 2.

Dan I. Daniel understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years. So there's a significance here. Daniel recognizes Jeremiah as scripture. But the main point he's making is there is an end to this mess we're in. At the end of 70 years, we'll be restored.

We'll go back home. So he knows there's an end, and he knows the people will be brought back in 70 years. But here's the question that Daniel must have. And Jeremiah provides an answer for what are we supposed to do while we're waiting to go home? What are we supposed to do while we're waiting for those 70 years to unfold?

This is where Jeremiah comes into play. Jeremiah 29 addresses specifically to the people who have been taken to Jude from Judah and are now living in Babylon. Here's what he says. You're familiar with these words, probably Jeremiah 29, 4, 7. He says, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they may too have many sons and daughters. Increase in number, do not decrease.

Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too prosper. So these words lead into the words that we often use out of context, I might add. But you've heard them from verse 29 or chapter 29, verse 11 of Jeremiah. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Plans to give you hope and a future. So these, these plans that God is articulating through Jeremiah are God's presence in the present mess and God's presence in the future. God's going to bring them home. But in the meantime, which is going to be a long time, the people are to

make the most of it. They are to learn new ways.

They are to settle in a bit, to carry on with normal life, to pray for the prosperity of the pagan culture in which they live. That's a little unusual, isn't it? While doing that, they know who they are, they know they're not home. And while adapting and adjusting in many ways, they are not to compromise their core identity by remembering who they are. They'll know what to do and what not to do.

I believe Daniel soaked those words in and lived them out. He took them to heart, and he becomes an example for me and for you and for all of us. He navigated cultural wars. He walked. He worked and walked within the culture.

He adapted, he adjusted while doing so. His core identity would not allow him to compromise on some things. There were non negotiables, and one of them appears really early. And Tim talked about this a couple weeks ago, and that was food.

Daniel would not compromise about food because it was tied directly to scripture and God's dietary laws. And also to participate in Babylonian food would be to participate in the worship of the pagan God. So that was a non negotiable. Another non negotiable was praying three times a day, which is what gets Daniel in this present mess. It was a non negotiable.

These things were tied to his core identity as a beloved son of God. He knew who he was, he knew what to do, and he knew what not to do. It was all based on God's word. So now here he stands at the entrance of a lion's den. The non negotiables tied to his identity used by his enemies have put him here.

God has been faithful all of his 80 years. And Daniel knows even now not to compromise, even if it costs him his life.

What does that mean for us? Well, I think it means a lot because Daniel navigates all kinds of cultural challenges, and he does so in a way that gains him deep, deep respect and admiration from the people who were drastically different from him. They had different gods, they had different lifestyles, they had different values, they had different ways. And yet Daniel, because he knew who he was, learned to adapt, adjust, and accept some of those ways. Yet there were non negotiables that he would not bend on.

So I believe, and I think this is really important, I believe that Daniel's success has to be tied to the way he worked this, to the methodology. I think his success is tied to the way he approaches the culture. I believe Daniel was respectful. I believe he's clear on who he was. People knew it, but he was respectful.

And he was probably always kind and gracious in his ways. I don't believe Daniel was out being judgmental about the culture. I don't think he was condemning. I don't think he was demeaning. I don't think he was condescending or mean, arrogant, harsh, provocative.

I don't think he. I don't think he would have put provocative means on Facebook. I think he. I think he was listening. I think he was trying to understand, and even when disagreeing, he was respectful about it.

As I think about what that means for me and for you. I believe we need to know what the non negotiables are in our lives, and they come directly from Scripture. I'm tempted to list a whole bunch, but you should know these. There's some things that are non negotiable about our faith. And those things, we need to be able to present them lovingly, not hide from them, be able to defend them.

If we're asked to defend them, defend them with love, with kindness, goodness, and in a respectful way. People, my experience as an old man appreciate integrity. Whether they disagree or agree, they appreciate integrity in a person, but they do not appreciate condescension or judgment. So Daniel, over 80 years, I believe, had exhibited beautifully respect without compromise. The other morning in our Salt Shakers class, we were talking about something and somebody said, well, we have seen so much change in our culture.

We had a seismic shift. And the older you are, the more you know this. And if you're younger, you may not realize just how hard it is to be older and just see what's happened in the culture. But here's the thing. The question was, well, how are we supposed to speak into a culture and stand strong for what we believe, stand strong for what is right in the face of confusion and even hostility toward it?

I think Daniel shows us what it looks like to live faithfully in a culture that doesn't share our values? He adapted in many ways, but never compromised the non negotiables, which were his devotion to God's Word, prayer. He's described as being faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. So his practices should be our practices, and that is devotion to the Word and prayer. Now, it's interesting to me that in John 17, Jesus prays about the tension of being a part of a heavenly kingdom while living in a worldly world.

And he prays about his disciples. He prays about us. He says, they are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them. Set them apart by the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. So Jesus, like Daniel, had some non negotiables. But in many ways, if you look at the life of Jesus, and this was the rub that the Pharisees had, in many ways, Jesus accepted and participated in the culture around him without compromise. He wasn't critical of

the culture.

He wasn't. He just showed a different way. This is the way. This is the way to life. I did not come to condemn the world.

I came to save the world. He knew who he was. Jesus did. He knew what to do. And it was loving others.

It was ultimately giving his life. Jesus was put to death, but death could not hold him.

He was put to death because of non negotiables. Daniel was thrown into lion's den, but their mouths were closed by an angel. I doubt we're going to face crucifixion, and I doubt we'll ever be thrown to a den of lions.

But daily we face pressures, challenges, and moments where compromise would be the easy way out.

Don't do it. Stand your ground and trust this. The same God who shut the mouths of lions is with you, with me, with us. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead has given us the same power in our lives. Remember who you are and you'll know what to do.

Is there any better reminder than communion? Because communion reminds us of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He died to take away our sins. You cannot be good enough to be saved. Jesus said, I will take your sins.

He died, but he rose again. He took the punishment that we deserve. Death did not have the last word. Jesus rises from the dead. And when we place our faith in Jesus and embody that faith in baptism, like Adam did this morning, then we become beloved children of God.

Galatians 3, 26, 27. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. And then, to use the words of Paul from 2nd Corinthians 5, this means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. You become a beloved child of God.

So in communion, we are reminded that we're not identified by our failures, not identified by the past. We leave those in the water, but we are identified by Christ because we're clothed with Christ. We become beloved sons of God, become beloved daughters of God, beloved children of God. And then, strengthened by his grace, we go out and we live it out, loving others, trying to show them the way to eternal life. If you know who you are, you'll know what to do.

And we do it with integrity. We do it carefully, graciously and kindly. Let me pray. Father, thank you for Daniel. What a story.

And what an example of how to live in a culture that's rapidly moving away from what we believe. Help us to live in the culture and to do so with integrity and carefully, with kindness. We pray that you'll help us. As we take communion this morning, we're reminded about who we are as your beloved children, and so help us to know what to do. We thank you for the bread which reminds us of the body of Jesus and his incarnation into this world and how he lived in the world and reminded through the juice of his blood, which is the price of our salvation.

We thank you and we proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again.

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