

Singing When You're Not Winning

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Lovely to see you today. My name is Graham and I'm the pastor here. And it's lovely to welcome you to church this morning. And particularly if you're new or this is your first time, maybe you're visiting us, know that we want to be the kind of church family that blesses you during your time with us.

So if we can do anything to help or anything to love you, then please let us know. We would just love to do that. But let's pray as we get to Daniel 8 together. Father, Holy Spirit who inspired these words, we pray that you, the one who dwells amongst us, would come and help us see the beauty of our King.

Lord, help us, we ask, as we come to this word, this challenging passage. Father, help us see the main thing. Help lift our eyes to the beauty of Jesus, we pray in his precious name. Amen.

Daniel 8, if you've got it there, has reminded me of a chant that you will hear in football stadiums all over the world. And one set of fans normally sings it to another set of fans when they're not doing well.

The chant goes like this. You only sing when you're winning. You only sing when you're winning. And it kind of just repeats until you kind of lose enthusiasm for the song.

[1 : 22] And it struck me in preparing for this that our German friends were so, so merciful in not singing that on Friday night. So, so merciful were they that they actually scored our goal for us.

And then they let us celebrate like we have scored the goal. I love that. But if you are into sport or not, I think you kind of resonate with this song.

Okay. So, we know what it's like to sing when we're winning. We get that it's easy to sing when things are going really well in life.

When your job is secure, when your health is steady, when the grades are good, when the kids are behaving, when your marriage is in a good place.

It's really, really easy to sing. But here's a question I want to ask you today. We're going to think about this morning for the next half an hour or so. And it comes to all of us, but maybe particularly if you're here and you wouldn't say that you follow this Jesus that we've been singing about.

[2 : 27] Love that you're here. Want you to think about this today. What framework do you fall back on when your world falls apart? As you stare down the barrel of the darkest of times, what is the grid through which you process things?

How do you sing when you're not winning? You see, before I became a Christian, the people that utterly baffled me were the people that I looked at in my church.

And I could see by the way that they lived their lives, I could see that they had embraced the paradox that was right at the heart of the Christian faith. Okay. And it's this.

It's that Jesus is the place where deep and satisfying joy is to be found in life. There is no greater thing to live for and know as we spend our lives in this world than him.

That's what the gospel does. It transforms a people. And it puts a new song in our hearts, one that doesn't fluctuate with the changing circumstances of our lives.

[3 : 33] So I could see that they were embracing the joy of knowing Jesus. And yet at the same time, I could see that they were embracing the fact that to follow him puts you on a direct collision course with the world.

And you read Jesus say in John chapter 15 that the world will hate you. And I saw them embrace this paradox of the Christian life.

And boy, was it wildly attractive. And I thought to myself, whatever fuel that they are putting in the tank of their lives, someone point me in the direction of that petrol station because that's what I want for my life.

So how do you keep on singing when you're not winning? That's the sharp end of this passage today. And I know it reads a bit like Godzilla meets King Kong.

But hang with me and we'll see that that's the point. How do you keep on singing when you're not winning? Because this centers on God centuries before it even happens, telling his people about one of the darkest days that's coming up in their history.

[4 : 40] And he's given them both a framework for understanding it and he's giving them a way to keep singing through it. Now we thought about last week how we were in a new section of this book of Daniel.

Okay. Because previously Daniel up until this point has been interpreting other people's dreams. That's what we thought about. But now as we step into chapter 7, Daniel himself is having these dreams.

And we thought about the fact that that is telling us that God has got something to say to the souls of his people. But now add to that in chapter 8 that the language changes that this is originally written in.

You wouldn't get that from the plain reading of it, but it does. It changes from Aramaic, which is the language of the everyday person in the world at this day. It changes to Hebrew.

So it changes from the language of the world to the mother tongue of God's people. So that tells you that this is doubly for the souls of God's people. And it flags to us that whatever's going on in our lives today, we need this.

[5 : 49] This is the proverbial cod liver oil tablet view. That was my childhood growing up. Okay. These things taste terrible. But they're really good for our souls in the long term.

So this passage is. What's God doing here in this passage? As he tells his people about one of the darkest days that's going to come up in their history. I take it it's something like this.

I remember when our little girl Grace was young. What started out as a routine GP appointment. They flagged a murmur in her heart.

And all of a sudden we get taken to the sick kids hospital. And they tell us that she's got a tiny little hole in her heart. And what they did is they took us into one of these calming rooms.

Now you don't need to be a genius to work out that that's a place where they take you to tell you bad news. And they take us there. And the doctor comes in and he speaks to Alex on medical terms.

[6 : 49] Ways that she can understand things. I don't have a scooby what's going on. But then he turns to me and he speaks to me in a way that I can understand in layman's terms. And he said this.

He said I know that the next couple of weeks months are going to be bumpy. But what we're going to do is we're going to book her into the sick kids in Glasgow. And look at me. Everything's going to be okay.

Everything's going to be okay. And I could tell from the tone of his voice and I could look into the whites of his eyes. And in that moment, because he wasn't panicking.

Do you know his stuff played out over the next weeks and months just as he said. I wasn't panicking either. As scary as it was because I knew somebody was holding it.

It was okay. And I think that's exactly what God is doing in this chapter with his people. As he tells them about the darkest hour for them as a nation that's going to happen just around the corner.

[7 : 48] So what I want us to do is we want us to take in some of the details of this vision. And there's three pit stops. Particularly as it maps onto history. What we're going to say is this is incredibly historically accurate.

And then I've got two lessons that we can take as we seek to be disciples who are embracing those twin tracks of the Christian life. Joy and persecution. Joy and persecution.

So three pit stops in Daniel's dream. That happens interestingly verse 2. If you look at it there. At this city called Susa. Now Susa is 220 miles east of Babylon.

Susa is in modern day Iran. And Susa in Daniel's day is small fry. Nothing happens in Susa. But if you fast forward time in history you will soon find that Susa becomes a big deal.

In fact the book of Esther it happens in Susa. So Daniel's vision takes in three things. Now here's the first one of these at verse 3. It's this ram. Do you see it?

[8 : 55] This two horned beast that charges in all directions. That did what it pleased and became great. So the picture we're meant to have is that this ram rules the roost.

It's the top dog if I can change the metaphor. At this point in time. Verse 20. And this is the great thing about this chapter. It gives us the dream and the interpretation.

Verse 20 tells us that the ram represents Media Persia. So this is Darius who we met back at chapter 5. Who himself received power from Belshazzar of Babylon.

So the ram at this point in time is ruling the world. That is until we get the second figure on the horizon. This is pit stop number 2. It's this goat at verse 5.

Do you see? And what happens? I mean this really is Godzilla and King Kong isn't it? This goat charges at the ram and it obliterates the ram.

[9 : 56] And this goat verse 8. It becomes great. Again verse 21 tells us that this goat is the king of Greece. So this is Alexander the Great.

He defeats the Medes and Persians. And he establishes himself as the world power on the world stage. And what's interesting about the goat verse 8.

How many horns emerge? Do you see it? Four of them emerge. And in history we know that that's what happened to the Greek kingdom.

Once Alexander the Great dies. His kingdom splits into four. Four of his leading generals. They take a bit of the kingdom each. And they come to dominate a different part of the world.

Do you see how Daniel's dream focuses verse 9 on one of those horns. On this little horn. And track with this in the text. This is us moving towards the center of this dream.

[10 : 56] This little horn causes utter courage to God's people. And so that is what the language of verse 9. Of the glorious land.

Of the sanctuary. Of the burnt offering. Of the desolation. Is meant to convey to Daniel. He would have understood the glorious land as where?

It's Jerusalem. This is God's people. This is God's place. That's in the firing line for this. The rage of this little horn.

And what history tells us. Is that what happens at the hands of this man called Antiochus. In 167 BC. Is that he ransacks the temple.

He massacres thousands of Jews. And in the place where the Lord was worshipped. He puts up an idol of Zeus. And he worships and he sacrifices to him.

[11 : 59] So in 167. When it all kicks off. What is happening. Is a systematic program. Designed to eradicate. Every trace of Israel's faith.

Worship and life. What we need to understand. Is that God's people. Have never before. Faced something as brutal as this. And what happens. Is that Antiochus.

Becomes a type. He becomes a prototype. If you like. Of the anti-God sentiment. That's going to keep on surfacing.

In history. Right the way. To the end. And God tells his people. That it's coming. But he's got it.

And so God's people. Aren't meant to use this. Like a kind of Mecca. Bingo card. Throughout history. That they can look at history. As it unfolds. And go. Media Persia. Tick. Greece.

[12 : 56] Tick. They're actually meant to use this. As a road map. Because this. Antiochus spirit. Is going to keep on coming. At God's people.

In different shapes. And sizes. Through different people. And guises. Right up until the point. When Jesus returns. And just in case. This feels distant to us.

We do so well. To recall. That for a good proportion. Of Christian believers. Around the world. This is normal life. What we need to do. Is go on the.

Open Doors website. And read reports. Of brothers and sisters. All around the world. Who face the daily reality. Of death. For their faith. And all of a sudden. This becomes really.

Really real. You know. We're going to hear from. Danny later on. At the end of our service. And the very fact. That we have to do that. After the live stream. Ends. Should alert us.

[13 : 52] As a church. To the fact. That what she is doing. And the organization. That she's part of. Really are on the front line. With this stuff. But closer to home.

I think the greatest challenge. That the book of Daniel. Has brought to my heart. And I wonder if. This clicks with you as well. Is it's just revealed. The idol of comfort. That exists there.

Because. I love the smooth ocean. Of my life. And I love my hazelnut lattes. And Starbucks. Yeah.

I love putting my feet up. With a good book. I love being on nice terms. With my neighbors. And friends. I like to be the guy. In the schoolyard. Who people like. And yet.

This has challenged me. All the way through. Am I ready to stand. For Jesus. When it's going to cost me. And it might even be. Just on a little scale. Nothing. Nothing really compared. To what brothers and sisters.

[14 : 47] All around the world. Are facing. But. Am I ready. When the going gets tough. To stand for Jesus. Even if it's just a conversation. With a football dad. Am I ready to tell him.

About. The future. About who Jesus is. Come and meet the Lord. Am I ready to stand. When it's going to cost me. How are we going to do that.

Well in this passage. God equips his people. With two things. To equip them to do it. And the first one. Is.

Is a rule book. For processing persecution. And the rule is. Here's the rule. That God is the one. Pulling the strings of history. That's the rule.

We've been thinking. All the way through this. About God's sovereignty. Haven't we? But this. This. Wonderful truth. That should stabilize. The saints. That God is sovereign.

[15 : 45] Over all of history. That there's nothing. That's slipping stealth. Into his radar. He is the one that. That is in control. Of all things. And that means. That this persecution.

Has not escaped his eye. Actually. It's factoring somehow. We'll think about this. In a minute. Into his grand purposes. And in this. Vision. Do you see.

This persecution. Is intense. But it is limited. Come with me. To verse 14. Because Daniel. Do you see. Just before verse 13. He rightly asks.

Is he. God presents him with this. He says. How long. Oh Lord. How long. Will this. Happen. I take it. That's verse 14. What this whole. 2,300 morning and evenings.

Is saying. Is meant to indicate. Now here's my shot at it. What's quite cool. Is that if you divide that number. By two. You get. And if your math isn't strong.

[16 : 41] 1,150. Which is roughly. The three year period. That this persecution. Under Antiochus. Lasts. Until a disease.

Kills him. And that might well explain. The not by. Human hands. Language. That you get. At verse 25. But regardless. As hard as it gets.

God is saying. That I am the one. Who will bring this. To an end. And we've got to know. That. That nothing happens. In this world. According to. Out with his sovereign. Plans and purposes.

Nothing's going to topple him. You know. I love just to give you. A little illustration. Is this. We were in the states. A few years ago. We got to know. This older couple. Called Jeff and Julie. And over dinner.

Julie starts telling Alex and I. About how when she was a student. She was part of this mission team. That travelled all the way. To the country of Albania. Right. And if you were watching the football last night. You might have got a little bit of this.

[17 : 39] Albania. And she. Gets to the border. With her team. And only to be told. That you're not getting in. You're not getting in. Because we know what you're here to do.

And if you know the. Communist history of that country. You'll know that a point in time. And it really wasn't that long ago. They tried to just eradicate religion. Yeah.

And thousands of priests and imams. Were imprisoned. And executed. Churches and mosques. Either demolished. Or turned into state run institutions. Can you imagine being a Christian believer.

Living in that country at that time. One of the darkest hours that you are facing. As people high up. Their plan is just to take you out. But the one thing that Julie and her friends could do.

They couldn't get in the country. But what they could do. Is they just prayer walked around the country. Maybe not the whole thing. But you know. Just the border. That they were at. They just prayed. And prayed and prayed. God we can't get in.

[18 : 37] But we know that you can. Would you do your work in this place? And at dinner she says. I always wondered what happened. In that country of Albania. And it was my absolute joy.

To be able to tell her. About the many family. They used to come here. They now worship at Bellevue. Themselves from Albania. And I love it.

Speaking to Florence really recently. They would call their parents. First generation Christians. What's really cool. Was that when Julie and her friends. Were praying roughly. Their parents were becoming believers.

This is telling us. That as hard as it gets. God is bigger. We've got to fight by faith. To believe that that's true.

God gives us every reason. In scripture. To trust his promises. And know that it's true. And not just that he is bigger. But that he is in control. And as hard as it gets.

[19 : 34] Ephesians 1 chapter 10. Is true. That God's plan. To unite all things. In heaven and earth. In Christ. Is bang on track. God is bigger.

His plans are mysterious. And yet they are purposeful. And yet. This does. Raise the question. Doesn't it?

I think we'd be foolish. Just to skip on. Without addressing it. Why does God. Take his people. Through these times. You haven't wrestled. With that one. That is a great one.

To get your teeth into. Honestly. Rawly. Why? Because that's what Daniel asks. In this passage. Why? Here's my best shot.

Perhaps friends. It's to refine us. To wean us off of ourselves. The idols that we cling to. For life. So dearly. And realize that God.

[20 : 32] Is all we have. Jesus is glorious. And all we need. Perhaps though. It's to increase our yearning. For the return of King Jesus. I mean. Is that not how you've been.

Responding to all the. The stuff in the Middle East. Lord. Would you come. Put it to an end. As you see the evil. In this world. Put it to an end. How long.

Oh Lord. I take it. Is the cry of the saints. It is a faith. Filled. Cry. That we should never. Stop. Making. And with that.

We need to understand. The difference. Between grumbling. Which is moaning at. And turning away from God. And lamenting. Which is taking.

Our tear. Soaked. Pain. Filled. Questions. Not away from God. It's taking them. To God. And God. As you read it. All the way through.

[21 : 27] Scripture says. Come to me. With your tears. Let me recommend to you. If you want to think about this. A bit more. This book. By a man called. Paul Mallard.

Who works for the FIEC. And he's written this book. Called Learning to Lament. And I read it recently. And it was absolutely fantastic. And if you click the QR code. You'll get to it. Or you can just come and. I'll give it to you.

Later on. But he says this. Get this. Lamentation. Is the prayer language. God has given to us. So that we can tell him. About the sorrows. And rekindle our trust.

In his fatherly care. All humans cry. Get this. Only Christians lament. Lament stands in the gap. Between pain.

And promises. But that still really doesn't answer the why. And I take it ultimately friends.

[22 : 22] That we can know who this God is. We can trust him. And what he does in scripture. He says. Take your why. And let me meet it with my who. Because if we know his fatherly heart.

If we know that this God is for us in Christ. If we know. As we'll see right at the end. That nothing will separate us from his love. If we know that he works all things. For the good of those who love him.

Then we can trust his heart in the why. God gives his people here. Do you see? He gives them a rule book. For processing persecution.

And he gives us. In here. A role model. For endurance. I just have a look. Right at the end.

You might blink and miss verse 27. Have a look at it there. If you have it. In front of you. Daniel is overcome and lies sick.

[23 : 21] But do you see how he rises? And in response to this. Do you see how he just keeps. He keeps faithfully obeying God's words.

He just keeps doing the thing that God has asked him to do. And I take it. He's just meditating on what God has said. We thought about this right at the start. Through the prophet Jeremiah. About how he said to his people that.

During the time of exile. He wanted them to be a blessing. A blessing to the people of Babylon. And do you see how Daniel. What does he do? He rises.

And he just goes about the king's business. And you've got to ask yourself. Which king? This is King Belshazzar. The guy who we met at chapter 5.

The young guy who thought he owned the joint. The king for whom the writing was on the wall. It was him that Daniel kept on serving. And so when times get really hard.

[24 : 18] What does God say to his people? Trust me. And just keep on walking by faith. Doing the thing that I've called you to do. Keep on trusting my promises. And be a blessing to the world.

And just as we close. Let me leave you with one image. And I've got two real quick points of application. For us to make off the back of it. You ready for these? Here's the image. And it's the image that's been all over our news.

The last few weeks. Is this man Rob Burrow. Has died of motor neuron disease. And I loved watching the image that came out.

Of his friend Kevin Seinfeld. Who carried him across the marathon finishing line. In Leeds raising money. For the charity. It's a lovely image isn't it?

And so here's quick fire point one. As we think about this corporately. As a church family friends. Who is on the deck just now? Who needs that comfort right now?

[25 : 20] Who can we get alongside that's really struggling just now? Particularly on the firing line for their faith. And who can we get alongside and help up to keep on going?

Keep on going. And second thing. And this is where we want to end. Thinking about a friend who is able to help to the utmost.

We cannot leave this passage without thinking about Jesus. Who in his life would also be on his knees. As he faced his darkest hour.

And yet who would rise and do the thing that God had called him to do. The rescue plan to rescue sinners around the globe.

Down the ages. As he goes to the cross. And as he sheds not silver and gold. But as he sheds his own blood to secure our eternal future.

[26 : 18] And what this means is that because he has done that. That we can face our darkest hour. And I read this this morning right at the end of Romans 8.

We can face it knowing that nothing. Famine, persecution or sword. Nothing can separate us from the God who loves us. Nothing can separate us from the God who is for us.

And actually we first point of application. We thought about being the friend who carries. Actually when you think about the gospel. Jesus is the friend who carries us all the way home. And this is what it's telling us right.

As hard as this gets in this life. As hard as it gets for standing for Jesus in our world. Nothing is going to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So how can we sing even when we're not winning? I take it by knowing the beauty and might of our king. And knowing that he is our song.

[27 : 29] Okay let's pray. And let's close with these words of Romans 8. Paul would write this. Knowing all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life.

Nor angels nor rulers. Nor things present. Nor things to come. Nor powers. Nor height nor depth. Nor anything else in all creation. Will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Father we thank you for the wonderful security that we have in the risen, ascended, and one day returning Jesus.

And it's our prayer Father that as we just spend this time together this morning. Lord that you would equip us. And that you would strengthen us. Father that you would challenge us where we need challenge.

Where there's idols in our hearts. Lord that we need to rip out. And Father would you fill our hearts with a greater and an ever increasing love for Jesus. Lord this is our prayer because we make it in his strong and in his perfect name.

[28 : 39] Amen.