

# **Living with Integrity in Exile**

*By Bobby Schuller*

I just want to begin this morning by reminding everyone what Jesus said about you. Very often we say, and should, that Jesus is the light of the world. But you know what Jesus said. He was on a mountaintop and he was with 5,000 people. Most of them would have been considered sinners or non-religious outsiders. Many of those people were sick, poor, or very old. Many of those people struggled just to get to that hill to see Jesus because they wanted to get a word from God and they wanted to be healed.

And Jesus looked right at them and he said these unforgettable words: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, it’s no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” And then he said, “You are the light of the world. You are a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to whole house. Therefore, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father, who is in heaven.”

Do you want to know something amazing? You are the light of the world. You are. You’re the light of the world. You’re God’s plan to

illuminate a broken, hurting, dark, suffering world. You're his plan to light this world. You are the light of the world.

And today, we're going to talk about this, and I just want to recognize the fact for many believers that you are the light of the world, that you're not ashamed of the Gospel, you're not afraid to say who you are as a believer, that you have stood in the gap for people who are suffering. You have interceded for people in prayer. You have been open to the idea of even sharing your faith with people who are searching and hungry. You have not hidden the fact that God is your Savior and your life. You've taken to heart the words of Jesus that says, "Anyone who acknowledges me before men, I'll acknowledge before the Father. But anyone who denies me before men, I'll deny before the Father." You've acknowledged God's goodness to you and you've become a bright, shining light in a hurting world. I'm so thankful for you.

And that's what we're talking about today. We're talking about what it means to overflow with God's light and love and goodness in this society, this world that we live in which is becoming very spiritually dark. The darker, the harder it gets, the brighter you shine, and that's great news.

Today, we're beginning a new series. It's called *Lions in the Daniel Den*. It's good, isn't it? It's not me. I stole it. "Lions in the Daniel den" is a line from Dallas Willard. And Dallas said, when Daniel in his old age was thrust into the lion's den, that he carried heaven in his very body, and that as he went into that lion's den, with him went all the Shekinah glory of God - all of the peace and power and spirit of God in his body. He had become so spiritually dense and rich that when he entered that physical space, he turned starving lions into sleeping kitty cats. He brought with him into that hole a tremendous sense of peace and rest. And that's what you are. You have that right now. You have that in your body. You have the power to carry into the violence and weirdness and brokenness of our world, a sense of peace and life. You do that. Many of you don't even know it. You don't understand that as a believer what you bring into the physical space around you.

And so today, we're beginning a series about affirming and teaching what it means to overflow with God's peace and life everywhere you go. You're doing it now and you're going to do it more. Isn't that exciting?

The book of Daniel, which we'll be studying on and off, is actually in some ways a tragedy. It begins with the Babylonian exile. It's so important to understand the history of the Babylonian exile. This is a

time in the Jewish timeline when Babylonia attacked Jerusalem. The way that it happened was a young prince named Nebuchadnezzar the second was responding to an Egyptian attack. So Egypt had made a puppet state out of Israel, and had gone north through Israel and attacked Babylon and failed. And so Babylonia decided to react and it started attacking back and decided to invade Egypt. And on their way, poor Israel's right in the middle, they sacked Jerusalem. And when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, he took all the furnishings of the temple, and he took most of the people back to Babylon and that's why it's called the exile. They were taken from their homeland.

And when this happened, this young prince Nebuchadnezzar, on his way home actually becomes the king. His father dies while he's gone so he hurries home to secure his throne. And then he begins to build his court. He was a new king. And he wants to build a retinue. And one of the things that they would do back then in Babylon is they wanted to pull all of the jewels, all the special people from the various civilizations that they conquered. And what they would want to do is indoctrinate these guys and assimilate them into Babylonian culture. But this time the Babylonian empire is the most powerful empire in the world and Nebuchadnezzar's probably the strongest, most powerful man alive. And so he wants to build this retinue around him of terrific people.

And so what does he do? He pulls these four guys that are Jews - Daniel and his three friends. And they basically decide to do three things to make them Babylonian and fit for the king's court; to not totally strip them of their religious identity, but make them not so religious and make them more Babylonian. Does that make sense? And they decided to do this in three ways.

The first thing they do is they change their names. This is so important because this is what's happening to you right now, by the way. The first thing they do is they want to change their names, and what I mean by that is they want to change their identity. Daniel's name means God is my judge. But Nebuchadnezzar says you're not Daniel anymore, you're Belteshazzar, which means Baal's prince. To his other friend, Hananiah, which means the beloved of the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar says you're not the beloved of the Lord anymore; you're now Shadrach, which means you're illuminated by the sun god. Very pagan. He says to Mishael, which is who is like God, he says you're not Mishael anymore; you're Meshach, who is Venus. That's what Meshach means. And he says to Azariah, which means the Lord is my help. He says you're not Azariah anymore; you're the servant of Nebo, Abednego.

So these three men, their names are changed to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, these pagan names, and Daniel's name is

changed to Belteshazzar. And the first thing Babylon does to these men is he takes away their identity in God and tries to put their identity in Babylon. That's what people try to do you and that's why every single Sunday we say you're not what you do, you're not what you have, you're not what people say about you. You are the beloved of God and no one can take that from you. Never lose that.

So the first thing Babylon tries to do is take their dignity and honor from where it belongs and the identity of being God's beloved children and tries to put it in being the king's beloved servants, and that's not who you are. You are not servants and you are not slaves of this world. Do not let the world take your identity. Do not let it change your name. In fact, Revelation says that you have a name that is written on a white stone that God made and only he knows it and someday you will know it. And let me tell you something, that name is good. That name is good.

So the first thing they do is try to change their identity. The second thing they do is they reeducate them. They said all that stuff you learned in school in Israel, some of that's good, a lot of its not, and they begin to put them through a reeducation process into the worldview of Babylon. That's happening to us, usually through entertainment in the US. And depending on what country you're watching in today, many of us we

have different ways in which society tries to reeducate us and make the religious part of our lives just like a hobby, a little thing on the side, but here's the education that really matters.

And the third thing they did, and this was the last thing, and the irony about this is that this was a big honor. King Nebuchadnezzar offered to give these four men the very food from his table. And in doing that, the symbol for the Jewish and Christian reader is that Nebuchadnezzar is essentially offering sustenance from the king versus sustenance from God. And the reason that choice is clear is because the food Nebuchadnezzar is offering to these four men is not kosher. It's not bagels, it's not salmon and lox. I love salmon and lox and I love bagels, and that's kosher. But you see in Nebuchadnezzar's day, they just cooked whatever.

And so for Jews back then, and Jews today, you can't eat bugs, you can't eat lobster, you can't eat cheeseburgers because you can't mix meat and dairy, you can't eat particularly pork, and you also can't drink wine unless it's made by a Jewish person, or is certified kosher. You can't eat bugs and very often bugs are on grapes so when those grapes are turned into wine, the bugs can make their way into the wine, making it un-kosher. So there are all these rules. By the way, even if they were to cook kosher for these four guys, you're not even allowed to use the same

cooking ware and utensils that have been used to make non-kosher food, right? So, if you cook bacon on a pan, you can't then go and cook some lamb chops, all right?

So, there's a big problem for these four guys. They know it's essentially going to be impossible for them to get kosher food. But for the Jews, this was so important because kosher laws were not a way of being healthy, as many people say. The kosher laws were meant for two things: One, to remember that Yahweh took his people out of slavery and bondage in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. And two, and even more important, is that kosher is a symbol of God's covenant. God actually creates for the Jews things that seem strange and weird so that they can never hide the fact that they're Jews. Did you catch that?

Jewish men, and I think this is a good thing, and women had certain things, like the way they eat, the way they dress, certain days they can't work, certain things they can't do, that definitely will make them stand out from the society that they live in. Why? Why does he do that? He does not want them to assimilate. He wants them to change it. He doesn't want them to be thermometers. He wants them to be the thermostat. He wants them to be the ones that change the world. They don't receive the world. He sent them in as lights, not as darkness. And it is too easy for us as Christians today, and it was too easy then to forget

the fact that we're supposed to be set apart. We're not supposed to assimilate. We're supposed to love, we're supposed to be gentle, we're supposed to be kind, we're supposed to be listeners, we're supposed to be healers, but God has called you to be a thermostat, not the thermometer, to be the change agent, not the one who is changed.

And kosher stuff, as funny as this sounds, kept the Jewish people separate. And so when they're offered this thing, to eat this food from the table, they're in a tough spot because it's a big honor. The king offers them food from his very table and they have to say no. They have to choose whom they're going to offend. Either they're going to offend the most powerful, wealthy, influential man in the world, or they're going to offend God. Whom would you offend?

Too often, we think God will get over it. He'll be fine. Right? I'll just do it this one time. And for them, this is just such a part of their identity; this kosher thing is such a big deal, that they literally risk their lives not to eat bacon. I love bacon. But really, they know, they recognize that this is non-negotiable. So even though they receive the names and they receive the education, this one thing they can't deny – the covenant of God.

So what do they do? They put a plan together and they tell this overseer, they say look we can't eat this food. It's not kosher. This is against our ways and our God. Just feed us vegetables and water. There is no vegetable, by the way, that is not kosher, and no fruit that's not kosher. So they're like just give us vegetables and we'll be cool. And the guy says I can't give you vegetables because if I give you just vegetables and water, you're going to get all withered and you're going to look skinny and horrible and all of your counterparts are going to look buff and awesome, and I'm going to have to report to Nebuchadnezzar for this. And they said put it to the test. Give us ten days and see who does better.

Of course, with modern science, we know who looked better, right? I mean those four guys, they have abs, pecs after ten days of vegetables and water? They're looking awesome! And that's what happened. And what was great about that is, by honoring God and even risking their lives, their reputations, risking chains, by honoring God, by standing out, by being a light, by being faithful to their principles, that actually caused them, you see later in this story, to be elevated in society. And they weren't judging other people. They weren't saying Nebuchadnezzar is bad or these other guys are bad, they were saying this is what we're called to do. This is who we are. We have to stand up for our principles in what we believe. I'm sorry if you don't understand. And because of their

faithfulness to their principles and God's covenant, God elevated them to successful position.

You are like Daniel. You have stood up for your principles. You have valued God's covenant. You have valued his promises, and sometimes you feel forgotten, you feel like you're left alone. I promise you, you're not alone. The light that shines in you is the very spirit, life, and heartbeat of God. Heaven is in you. And you have lived every day faithful to God's covenant and principle. Sometimes you've suffered for it. Sometimes you've lost chips in your relationships. Sometimes you've struggled in your friendships. Or even some of you in your family. You are picked on by family members because of your faith. God sees that and honors that. I know it's hard. It's hard sometimes to stand out and to be a light, but God sees that and he honors it.

You stand out and you stand up for God, that's what you do. I'm proud of you. That's good. It's hard to do in our world. It's very hard to do in our world because all of us carry this fear of being an outsider, this fear of offending others, of hurting others, of being talked about, of being pulled away. But very often, we forget that some of us have become slaves. We need to belong so much that we've abandoned what really matters to us. But, not you. You're that person that goes into a room and you change the whole environment. You don't even know it. You bring

peace, and life, and light, and encouragement into every room you go in. When you walk into a space, you actually bring heaven in and you don't know this maybe, but people feel it as you come into that room. It's wonderful.

I think that many people are just so afraid of standing out and standing apart. And that is so powerful when you're not afraid to be ostracized, to be picked on, to be bullied, to not be invited anymore because you pray with people when they're hurting, or you share your faith, or you read your Bible at your lunch break.

When you put God first in your life, things go better. Don't worry about offending everyone. Just worry about offending God. And if you do that, you're going to be much better at actually loving and caring for people when they're hurting and suffering. You already are.

Hannah and I had a wonderful privilege, recently. We were in Washington DC and we were honored by Dr. King's family to stand with them at the Washington Mall. And, we actually washed the feet of the Dr. King family in a ceremony of repentance for the church not supporting the civil rights movements in the 1960s. It was a very powerful experience. It was snowing. There were all sorts of colors and races and backgrounds, all of us interceding for the nation. We were praying for

lots of things, but this was my highlight. And Dr. King's niece and daughter gave me this stole that represents the reconciliation between races within the kingdom of God. It was very powerful.

And after that, Hannah and I had the joy of going to a church in Richmond, Virginia, by Victor Torrez. I don't know if you remember that name. He was in the story of *The Cross and the Switchblade*, and he has another movie coming out called *Victor*. But he was this young Puerto Rican guy in New York City that was moving drugs, and he was saved and overcame his heroin addiction, and then moved to Richmond. He and his wife Carmen started these houses to bring men and women out of drug addiction and off the street. Out of that was birthed this church, and I was invited to speak at the church. It's now a megachurch. It's called New Life International, and if you live in Richmond, check it out. You'll enjoy it.

Hannah and I were there in the front row and there's this front altar area. All of sudden as the worship was going on, these women came to the front and in front of everyone, without a care in the world, began to just do whatever the Lord called them to do; some dancing, some weeping, some on their knees, some like this on the altar. And there were two types of people that do this kind of thing. The one type is the one with the ribbons that wants everybody to see them. It wasn't that type.

And there's the second type, and that's the person that has been redeemed from so much that they can't help but pour out their life and their heart to God.

After the church service, we found out that all of those women that were in the front were women who had been saved through this Mercy House program. Women who were at death's door, women who were completely addicted to heroin, women who were on the street, women who had been sold in prostitution. And they had been completely redeemed by the saving power of Jesus Christ. And you could literally feel by standing near them the power of God in their lives. And I remember standing there in the front row looking at these women thinking that I'm a pastor and I don't have the heart for God that these women have. Lord, give that to me! Lord, make me like this redeemed prostitute. Make me like this redeemed drug addict. I want to be more like them and less like some of the heroes that I was taught about in my seminary. These are who the kingdom of God is for, people who have been saved from so much they don't care if the world sees how grateful they are to a loving God. I want to be more like that, don't you? Yes.

Well, as you know, I may not be that way, but you are. You are. And maybe you're in a time in your life where you haven't been that way as much, but it's burning. You see, it's the soul that has been redeemed.

It's like a pilot light. It's always going. Sometimes you just have to turn the gas on. Turn it on. Let it go. Let it go. Burn for the Lord. John Wesley said if you burn a flame, people will come from far to watch you burn. No, that's not right. He said live your life aflame and people will come to watch you burn. That's what it was.

They live from their first love and many of you are like, I remember my first love. I remember my heart for God. And the Lord has not left you. You are not farther from God than you were before. It's all in your head. You're just as close to God as you always were. You are aflame for God! You are a light for God. And you're like, you don't know about my sin, you don't know my skeleton, you don't know about mistakes, God's atoned for that. Receive grace. Receive forgiveness. You are not saved by works, and let your light burn for people. You do. You let your light burn.

And when you see someone crying in a Starbucks line, you stop and you pray with them. I know some of you; you said I feel awkward to ask somebody who's hurting, "Can I pray with you?" If you feel awkward asking them can I pray with you, you're the best person to ask that question. People that don't feel awkward about asking can I pray for you, are usually a bit odd, to be honest with you. But if it feels a little awkward, and you say can I pray with you, you're going to pray with them just the right way because you're going to understand all those

social norms about not hugging and rocking them as you pray for a complete stranger, or whatever.

I can't impress that one point enough. The more awkward you feel in different ministry type things for people, the better you are for that position because you'll understand the various cultural societal needs of that person, and not push them away. You'll draw them into God. So by saying can I pray for you, 99% of people will say yes. You're not going to be weird, you'll pray for them and intercede for them, and it will mean the world to them, and you, too. That's true of sharing your faith, that's true of helping the poor, that's true of mentoring. You are doing these things in your life. You're speaking up in defense of others. You are not participating in gossip in the workplace or in your school. You apologize when you make a mistake, of course you do. Your dignity is not rooted in having to prove anything to anyone; you're completely rooted in the dignity of God, and that's why you're living every day aflame, a light, and at peace. The world needs you to be bold, to be you, and to be a man or woman after God's own heart. It needs you to continue to be a light. You are a lighthouse.

You know, when the weather is good and you live in some town with a lighthouse in it, it's like oh there's this pretty little lighthouse there. Isn't it so pretty? But when the storm rages, and when the waves

crash, it's amazing how the look of a lighthouse changes dramatically. No longer is it this pretty little cottage Victorian thing. All of a sudden, it stands as a citadel, a shining sign of safety as it guides ships in a storm and to safe harbor. And the stronger the storm rages, and the bigger the waves crash, the stronger the lighthouse is, and the stronger it looks, and the brighter it burns. Lighthouses are not worried about waking the neighbors. The purpose of a lighthouse is to guide people into safe harbor, and if it gets darker, the lighthouse burns brighter. If the weather gets rougher, the lighthouse gets stronger. You are a lighthouse. You are a lighthouse and you feel it. I feel it, too. The spiritual temperature of this world is storming, raging, dark, and grey. You need to burn, you need to shine, you need to guide people into safe harbor, and you're doing it. You are guiding people every day into safe harbor.

Sometimes being a light of the world is like being a light in a dark room. It's like going to your brother or sister's bedroom when they're sleeping and pulling on the shade and the light fills the room. And then your brother or sister goes, "What?!!" Sometimes when you pull the shades open in a dark room, people get angry, people don't like it, people feel uncomfortable. But sometimes it's exactly what you have to do to wake up the people you love. You have to let the light shine. Do not hide it under a bushel.

Many of you have been picked on because of your belief or because of your faith. You have family members, frenemies who make fun of you because of your faith or because you go to church, because you read your Bible, because you share your faith. Let me just tell you something: It's training. It's training. The more great you're doing for God, the more people are going to go out of their way to criticize you. Do you know any wonderful women or men of God who have no critics? I already know you don't. Everybody who's doing great things for God has people who are criticizing them. The enemy doesn't just let you shine your light. You understand that, right? He's going to try to take your identity, he's going to try to reeducate you, he's going to try to snuff you out, and he's going to try to mock you, he's going to try to beat you, he's going to try to bully you, but you're going to continue to shine bright because that's who you are. That's who you are.

And the greatest thing about you is that the way you do these things is gentle, calm, and peaceful. Everything else is raging. Like the lighthouse in the storm, everything else, all the waves are crashing, and you're just gentle, calm, empathetic, kind, listening. Do not shove religion down people's throats. Just be you and, like a lighthouse, ships will be drawn to you as ships are drawn into a harbor. And God will bless you, even in secular positions of authority as he blessed Daniel. And that is great.

Be a light, be God's chosen one, fulfill your calling. You don't have to be shy. Boldly have courage to do what is right. And as you do that, the other good people that are near you will have the courage to do good, as well, because you had the courage to take the first step. I'm so proud of you. You're doing great and continue to let that light shine.

Let's pray: In Jesus' name, Lord, we thank you that you're here. I pray for everyone who is listening, Lord, that if they don't have this light in their heart, that today they would receive salvation. God is so good and his mercy endures forever, and his love is wider than your imagination. In Jesus' name, receive the forgiveness of sins. If you're watching on TV, or if you're here, simply say, "I receive. Amen." And we do receive it, Lord. We receive your love, your favor, and your life. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.