

Resist "Us" looking like "Them"

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Preacher: Dr. David Hardage

[0 : 0 0] I have one of my favorite people in the world with us this morning as our guest speaker. His name is David Hartage. He is the just recently former Executive Director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, lovingly called Texas Baptists. And we are a Texas Baptist church and very glad to be one. And Dr. Hartage is actually the one that sent my resume to the search committee, First Baptist Henrietta. And so really he's the reason I'm here. So if y'all don't like it, blame him. All right. No, I'm very grateful to him. And he's been a dear friend for the last several years and mentor as well. And I'll just give there's too many accomplishments and places that God has taken him across the years to give you the full rundown. But he's been a pastor for what, 25 years thereabouts. And he's, I believe, originally from La Mesa, Texas and pastored up in our neck of the woods, up in a town that shall not be named, that we may have lost to a couple of weeks ago in football. So, but don't hold that against him. It was a long time ago and he was just trying to love those people to Jesus up in holiday. They need Jesus. All right. So, no, that's all right. But, but he has served churches in Oklahoma and Texas and God has used him mightily. And he served over 10 years as the executive director for Texas Baptist. He's a graduate of Baylor, a graduate of Southwestern Seminary and Midwestern Seminary. And we are very, very honored to have him with us this morning. And I'll tell you what, I wanted to bring him out here regardless to preach because I owe a great debt of gratitude to him as well. And I know he'll be a blessing to you all. And God worked it out really well because I was sick this week and I had to take a trip down, down to New Orleans for seminary and got back late last night. So it was really nice that I had a guest speaker here this morning. So we are honored to have Dr. Hartage and not to take any more of his time. Why don't you come on up?

Well, thank you so much. Truly honored to be here. And Pastor, thank you for the gracious invitation. And my year serving Texas Baptist as the executive director gives me an opportunity to say thank you to this church for the faithful and generous support you have provided over the years for our mission and ministry. We couldn't do the work we do and have the impact that we have in Texas and far beyond were it not for people like you and churches like this. And so I want to say thank you. And we're grateful. Since I retired at the end of December, as my daughter calls it, my side hustle now, I've been helping the work of Texas Baptist men out just a little bit. That's our disaster relief arm, if you know about that. So just a real quick update on what Texas Baptist men are doing in response to the war in Israel. Two weeks ago, you helped us send 20 people to Israel who have for the past two weeks been providing about 5,000 meals a day to people in hospitals and a whole lot of other people in that war-torn region. Last Sunday, you helped us send 50 doctors, nurses, and paramedics. So on behalf of all those people whose lives have been helped because of people like you at First Baptist Henrietta, on behalf of Texas Baptist men and the Baptist Union Convention of Texas, thank you. We're making a difference. And keep praying, as Psalm 122 says, keep praying for the peace of Jerusalem. And we'll all join in that together.

And what you get today from me is just kind of what's been on my heart for the last while, what I've been praying about in the last few weeks, months. But I probably ought to start with put your minds at ease. One of my spiritual gifts is brevity. So I won't take long, but I do want to share kind of what's on my heart about where we are as a country today and a world and what you and I as believers and followers in Jesus Christ can do about it. So that's what you get today. But I'll start with this. Back in 1844, there was Queen Victoria in England had a husband named Prince Albert. And I don't know that much about the royals, but it never has struck me that the prince of the queen is overrun with opportunities or responsibilities. So Prince Albert, looking for something to do maybe, heard about an event that was happening in Paris. And he got the idea that maybe what was happening in

Paris, France, could happen in a larger scale in London. So he had this idea in 1844 that he would bring to London from all over the world, the latest and the greatest, whether it be cuisine, fashion, technology of 1844, bring all of that to London in one place under one roof. It was something he was going to call the Great Exhibition. Now, where were you going to house the Great Exhibition? So he had a building built. The building was called the Crystal Palace, almost a million square feet of iron and glass built in London. And sure enough, on May the 1st, 1851, the Great Exposition unfolded. It went from May the 1st to October 31, and people from all over the world came for this exhibition in the Crystal

Palace. And then when it was over, they moved it. Took it down and moved it to another part of London, where it stood from 1854 to 1936 when it burned. But you can still see it today in Dallas, Texas.

[6 : 29] So if you go to Dallas, and you drive down what the locals there call Stemmons Freeway, I-35 East, and you're going towards downtown, and on your left, there is a really large brown World Trade Center. And just next to it, right across the street, is a white iron and glass building called the Information Mart. It is an exact replica of the Crystal Palace. Now, why do I say all of that?

Because I think that's where our biggest problem is. I think that's where our biggest temptation is. I think that's where you and I face our greatest challenges as believers. I'll use the phrase, this looking like that. And if I could use it, if I could say it another way without being offensive, the biggest temptation we face, the biggest challenge we face as believers and followers of Jesus Christ in 2023 is us looking like them. So what do I mean by all of that? Well, take your Bible, turn to Psalm 106. I am not a Bible scholar. I am a Bible reader.

And in my Bible reading, I've come across these two verses that I'm going to read for you today, and they really strike me as significant verses for you and me in 2023. So it's Psalm 106. I'm going to read verse 34 and verse 35. So here we are, follow along. They did not destroy the peoples the Lord had commanded them. Instead, they mingled with the nations and adopted their ways.

So it's that second verse there, verse 35, I want to focus on. They mingled with the nations and adopted their ways. Now I'm going to draw a line here. I think it's one thing to mingle.

I think it's one thing to engage the world, the society, the culture around us. I think it's one thing to interact somehow, some way with the world and the culture and the society around us. I think it's one thing to mingle. It is a completely different thing to adopt the ways of the nations.

[9 : 00] And I think that's where our greatest temptation comes today. Us being so drawn to the ways of the world that we eventually adopt the ways of the nations around us. Now, if it's any consolation to us, that's always been a problem. It's always been a challenge for God's people. I'll give you some examples. We like what's comfortable. Who doesn't want to be liked? Who doesn't want to fit in? Who doesn't want to blend in? Who doesn't want to be accepted? We all do. And we always have. I remember the story. God used Moses to bring the Israelites out of bondage, taking them to this promised land, which, by the way, was not just a promised land. That was a promised life he was giving them.

So they make their way out of Egypt. They haven't gone very far. They come to their first really bump in the road, their first really trial. And what happens? They start complaining, Moses, take us back. We want to go back. Yes, we were enslaved. Yes, we were oppressed. But we were familiar. We were comfortable. Who doesn't want the familiar? Who doesn't want the comfortable? And the comfortable thing is to blend in. The comfortable thing is to fit in. The comfortable thing is to do what it takes to be liked. And we always have wanted that. You remember Joshua chapter 24? He finally draws the lines. Kind of the first Alamo scene. He finally says to the people, Joshua 24, folks, you got to choose. Now I'm paraphrasing here, but folks, you got to choose. Are you going to serve? In other words, are you going to adopt the ways of the nations around you? Are you going to serve the gods of the peoples in whose land you're living? Are you going to serve those gods? Or will you serve the Lord your God? And that's when he makes that statement, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. But they had to choose. By the way, we have to choose. And it's a daily choice. It's constant. I think maybe the best example is 1 Samuel chapter 8. So in 1 Samuel chapter 8, you know, there was Moses, then there was Joshua, and then the people of Israel were led by a series of judges. Samson was one of those judges. Samuel was the last of those judges. So there's Samuel.

He's the leader of the people. Samuel's getting older. And so the leaders of the Israelites, they come to Samuel and they make a request of him. Do you remember what they requested?

Samuel, would you anoint us a king? Well, Samuel, he is so disappointed in their request. You don't need a king. The Lord your God is your king, he says. And they said, no, anoint for us a king. [11:53] So Samuel says, why? Do you know what their answer is? Do you remember their answer? I'm going to paraphrase again, but their answer is, everybody else has one. Seriously, that is their answer. We want to be like the other nations. They all have a king and we do not. All that to say, God's people, we've always struggled with this. Now there's an extra challenge in 2023. So the tug of the world has always been there. The tug of the world is real, it's strong, and it's always been there. But you know what's compounded that temptation and the challenge for us today? We now have a portion of the Christian community pushing us that direction. There's a portion of the Christian community that now pushes us to compromise, pushes us to sacrifice, pushes us to try to blend in and not offend. Well, I don't want to be, I don't want to offend anybody.

But at the same time, for you and for me, the challenge is clear. Mingle with the nation, but do not adopt their ways. We cannot afford to look like them.

1910, the president was William Howard Taft, and he went to a baseball game.

Now, William Howard Taft, president in 1910, was a big guy. So he'd been sitting at this baseball game for a while. And you know, when you're the president and you go to a baseball game, everybody's looking at you, everybody's watching. So after he'd been sitting at this baseball game for a while, he decided to stand up. Well, the president stands up, so everybody stood up.

Well, there are two things you need to know about that. One, that's where the seventh inning stretch started. And two, just because somebody else does it, doesn't mean you and I have to.

[14:03] Even if they're someone of significance and influence and importance. So, what do we do?

How do we stand our ground, hold our place? What do we do? Well, Paul wrote to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 2, and he says, do not conform to the world around you. In other words, do not adopt the ways of the nations around you. The way Paul said it was, do not conform to the nations. But instead, he said, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. So, you and I are to live transformed lives.

So, what does transformation look like? I'm going to spend these next couple of minutes talking about what transformation looks like. So, right now, I got to tell you, I don't know if I have six points or two points. What I really know for sure is you hope I have two.

But what does transformation look like? Number one, it all starts with the way we think. And so, we have to think differently than those who do not believe in and follow after Jesus think.

That's what Paul said, Romans 12, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Jesus said it like this in Matthew, chapter 22, when he was asked about the great commandment.

[15:42] He said, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. You got your Bible with you? You can look over to what Paul said, Philippians, chapter 4, verse 8. Paul said it like this. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any moral excellence, and if there's anything praiseworthy, dwell on these things.

Think on these things. We, you and me, as believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we just have to think differently. That's where it all starts, with the way we think.

It's one thing to mingle with the nations, but we cannot adopt their ways. We cannot adopt the ways that the people who do not know Jesus, we cannot adopt the way that they think. We think differently. It's just different.

Number two, we talk differently. Now, by that I mean two things. One, the words we use, we use different words.

There are words we don't use. So, if you want to distinguish yourself as a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, it all starts with the way you think, but the way you think will also be translated in the way we talk.

[17:02] So, we have to talk differently. And it begins with the words that we use, and secondly, it's the way we use those words. We have to use our words in ways that are uplifting, helpful, beneficial.

Even if we are condemning, even if we are not condoning, we have to use, we have to say those kinds of things in a way that we can be heard rather than put off those who we're trying to speak to.

It all has to do with the way we think, then it's the way we talk, then it's the way we act. Just the way we live our lives. By that I mean, there are some things that because I'm a believer and a follower of Jesus, there are some things I'm just going to do.

I'm going to be faithful to the Lord and to His church. I'm going to be generous with my time, my talent, and my treasure. There are things I'm going to do because that's what the Scripture requires of me.

But there are things that I will not do, places I'm not going to go, things I'm not going to do, activities into which I will not engage because I'm a believer and followers of Jesus. So what does transformation look like?

[18:16] It looks like thinking on a higher level, talking in a nicer way, behaving in a way that's commendable and biblical.

Remember that 2007 movie is the first of like five or six, maybe the first of too many, Transformer movies? You remember that 2007?

So yeah, you know, that movie was based upon a cartoon of 1986. But it all has to do with, when I was raising my kids, my son, they had these little toys. They were like little cars and trucks.

And you start turning them around a little bit and all of a sudden, they become a little robot. Well, they made a whole movie about that. You know, it was one thing and then something happens to it and becomes something else. Well, we've been transformed.

We were one thing, we came to know Jesus, now we're something else. We were one thing, we know Jesus, now we're something else. And that something else is somebody who thinks and talks and acts on a higher level.

[19:19] Still mingling, still engaging. That's when Jesus in John 17 prayed for his followers. Do you remember what he prayed? Do not take them out of this world, but keep them from the evil one. In other words, keep them from adopting the ways of the nations.

Let them mingle. Let them engage. Let them be involved. Let them be involved. But God, please, keep them from the evil one so that they do not adopt the ways of the nations.

They do not conform to the ways of this world. Now, I am going to meddle just a little bit, but I'm a one-time wonder here, and so, you know, that's the way it is.

Now that I've retired, I've got this newfound freedom to say what I want to say. So just deal with it.

So I've got to tell you, there are some underlying challenges here.

So I'm just going to put it out there. Underlying challenges to mingling but not adopting. So what are they?

[20:24] Well, I don't know. I got three. There may be more, but here's three. Number one, the temptation to separate too far that we lose our influence.

You know, I don't want to adopt the ways of the nations, and the Bible says come out from among them and be separate. I'm just going to remove myself.

You know people, I know people who are believers in and followers of Jesus, and they just separated so far from the culture, they have no influence over it.

They have no influence on it. So the underlying challenge is to find that healthy balance of mingling but not adopting. Don't separate so far. When it says come out from among them and be separate, it means come out from among them and be different.

Don't get so far out there that you can't have an impact on them. So that's the underlying challenge number one. Stay engaged. Stay involved. Stay influential. So underlying challenge number two.

[21:38] Don't get mad. Now, there are things happening out there that I'm mad about. I got to tell you. But there's a difference between righteous indignation and ungodly anger.

Jesus exemplified righteous indignation. And so that's where we have to find ourselves. Things that are happening around us that we don't don't get mad because what happens when you and I get mad?

We get mean. And when you get mean, you have, you lose your influence over those who don't know Jesus. So I'm telling you and me, when those things happen around us, when people say things and do things and things are unfolding around us and righteous indignation is one thing, but don't get mad because when you get mad you get mean and when you get mean you lose your influence.

And now this last one I am going to say in the sweetest way I can possibly say it. I'm just, this is, I'm just like covering this with honey. This is just the sweetest, I'm just, this is, this is me saying

something that may be hard but saying it in a sweet way.

This is it. Don't get weird. Don't go there. Have you ever heard that phrase, oh he or she, they're just odd for God?

[23 : 13] Don't be odd for God. That doesn't really draw anybody into the kingdom. Can we not just be normal people who are abnormally thinking and talking and living in such a way that it's attractive to those who don't know Jesus?

Can we not be those people? Let's be those people. Just don't get weird. So I'm finished. You're not, I know that's not how you're supposed to end a sermon.

I went to seminary. But that was a long time ago and I'm, and I'm retired. So I'm, I'm finished. I'm finished. I'm finished.

I'm finished. I'm finished. I'm finished. That's all I got for you. But folks, Psalm 106 was written a long time ago but I don't know that there's a more relevant verse for 2023 than that.

It's one thing to mingle with the nations. Do not adopt their ways. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the day, the blessings of the day, the chance to be together.

[24 : 36] I pray for this church. I thank you for the pastor. God, I pray that right here in Henrietta at First Baptist Church there would be a movement of your spirit that just changes this community and this county and spreads far beyond that.

And Father, I pray that you would help the people of this church, me, the people of this, help us to be people of godly Christian influence that draw people to your kingdom and we never push them away.

We stand our ground in a way that's attractive. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, can I have your attention just for a real quick second? I am finished.

But, a couple of things. One, we're going to have an invitation. The pastor will be standing right here at the front. If you don't know Jesus, today, you have a chance to walk down this aisle, take the pastor by the hand and say, I just want a personal relationship with Jesus.

You heard the deacon talking about it's not a religion, it's a relationship. If you don't have a relationship with Jesus, you'll never be in a room more filled with people who want to see you make that decision than you are today.

[25 : 44] So you come and we will celebrate that decision. Maybe you're here today and you need to walk before the Lord in a fresh spirit. You can kneel at this altar and pray. You can take the pastor by the hand. You can pray with him. But if you need to read it, commit yourself to being the kind of person who mingles but doesn't adopt, you want to be that person, you come and let's let it happen right here today.

You're looking for a church home? What a great church this is. I live in Dallas and I'm thinking about joining. whatever decision you need to make, you make it as God leads you. Let's stand together and let's sing.

We invite you to come to pastor. We'll be at the front. We'll be at the front. We'll be at the front. We'll be at the front.