

Daniel 5:8-31
“Weighed... and Found Wanting”

8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.

9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change.

11 "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father -- your father the king -- made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.

12 "Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"

14 "I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.

15 "Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing.

16 "And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

17 Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

18 "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.

19 "And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.

20 "But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.

21 "Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

23 "And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

24 "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

25 " And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 "This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

27 "TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

28 "PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, had grown up knowing the story of his Grandfather's humiliation and conversion. He had probably heard the text of Nebuchadnezzar's testimony of his conversion recorded in chapter 4, which he issued as a decree to his entire empire.

We know that from Daniel's rebuke in verse 22 – ***But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.*** Belshazzar was not ignorant of the Word of God, No, it seems that Belshazzar was like so many others who have descended from godly ancestors and yet who have chosen to love the world, and reject the savior of their forbears. Belshazzar had seen and heard the truth, but he had said in his foolish heart "***There is no God.***" He would not believe in this "most high God of the Jews" whom Nebuchadnezzar had praised. And it wasn't just that he rejected the message, waving it away, he goes out of his way to mock God.

He had commanded that the holy vessels of this God of the Jews, the cups that the Priests of Yahweh had used for the drink offerings and blood offerings in the Temple at Jerusalem, be brought in to the feast that they might use them to toast the false gods of Babylon.

A foolish boy might try to prove to his playmates that Bears aren't dangerous and that he is very brave by poking a sleeping bear with a stick. But when that bear wakes up and roars and stands up, how does that little boy react? Suddenly his bravado is gone, and he is utterly terrified. That is probably how Belshazzar felt the moment the fingers of God appeared in the banqueting hall and wrote on the white plaster above the high table where everyone could see.

Belshazzar learned what Paul would write to the Galatians 500 years later, ***God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.***

But let me ask you, has it been your experience that when someone who has spent their lives denying and mocking God is suddenly cast down, that they immediately take hold of the nearest believer and say "What does the God whom I have been denying mean by this? What does He want me to do?" No, not unless, as was the case with Nebuchadnezzar, that casting down is accompanied by a heart changing work of the Holy Spirit. Usually people do what Belshazzar does, they turn to the world, to their peers for an explanation. If you have been lying to yourself all your life, you do not suddenly want a dose of truth in a time of crisis. You want another lie, something that will soothe you. You want an opiate for your troubled conscience.

So Belshazzar calls in the astrologers and magicians and wise-men. Daniel who had once been their leader under Nebuchadnezzar is no longer among them. Times and leadership had changed, Nebuchadnezzar had learned to value the truth that Daniel told, but his successors preferred the comforting fairy tales. That kind of thing can happen in the church too. How many modern churches could tolerate *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*? And yet there was a time when preaching like that was used by God to produce sweeping revival in this nation.

Well the soothsayers can't explain the inscription, but there is still someone in the court who knows who can. It is at that point that the Queen enters. Since she was not present at the banquet to begin with we know that this isn't one of Belshazzar's wives – his wives and concubines were already present. This is one of the Queen mothers. And my guess is that it is Belshazzar's maternal Grandmother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar the Great. I'm guessing that because of the way she speaks of Daniel. She speaks as if she has first hand knowledge of him, she even knows his real name, and she obviously holds him in great esteem. As she puts it he has an excellent spirit. I wonder in reading her words if she wasn't possibly converted as well, she calls God the Holy God, and expresses absolute faith that his servant Daniel will be able to read the words.

Belshazzar calls for Daniel but immediately puts him in his place, reminds him who he is. ***You are one of those captives whom my forefather brought from Jerusalem.*** He also makes the same offer to reward him. It's as though Belshazzar still wants everyone to know that HE is in control. "Daniel you are my servant, do what I want and I will reward you." By comparison even to Nebuchadnezzar, this Belshazzar is a petty and weak man.

Daniel serves the God who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and that God has sent Daniel to deliver his message to Belshazzar. So Daniel refuses the offer of his rewards, give your useless trinkets to someone else. He is not preaching for gain, like a good gospel minister he is going to open up the word and make its meaning plain.

Daniel tells him, your Grandfather was a proud man, but when he exalted himself above God, God humbled and he repented and turned to the Lord in faith and repentance. You knew that, but you didn't learn from it. Instead you hardened your heart against the Lord and his rebukes. You were given time to repent, a time of grace, and now the time is over.

Proverbs 29:1 He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Daniel tells Belshazzar, the Lord has judged, the kingdom of Babylons days are over, even now he has given the kingdom to the Medes and Persians, and we remember that even as he was speaking the Persian army had completed diverting the Euphrates and was marching into the city on the dry river bed. Most terrifying of all is the assurance that Belshazzar Himself had been weighed in the balances against God's divine standards and found sorely wanting. God set before him life and death, and he is told to his face – "you have made your choice"

Belshazzar has been told to his face by God's messenger: "Babylon is fallen, and you are going to hell" but the amazing thing is he hears but does not listen. He even rewards Daniel despite his protest. No no doubt some of you are asking how on earth could he do that? Brothers and Sisters, I could ask the same question, because I have seen men and women sit under gospel preaching, hear that they are going to hell, and then at the end of the service they get up march to the back and shake the preacher's hand and say "thank you" and then walk out, totally unchanged. ***Thank you Daniel, that was quite a sermon, fall of Babylon you say, Peres means divided – imagine that.***

Well, brothers and sisters, I understand it. I can't tell you how many sermons I must have listened to on Christian radio in the year that I was converted and thought nothing much more than "That's interesting" until one day, I suddenly realized, wait a minute, *he's talking about me!*

Which brings me to my one and only application –

What about you? Is this all just vaguely interesting information about a wicked kingdom called Babylon and a foolish king called Belshazzar or have you realized that the writing on the wall is against you as well?

Friends, “*weighed in God’s balances and found wanting*” isn’t just Belshazzar’s problem. It’s the problem of every man and woman on earth. Perhaps you don’t believe me, maybe you are saying sure Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were proud sinners, but not me, I have plenty of good works.

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips";

14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways;

17 And the way of peace they have not known."

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

God’s standard is perfection, and life is finite, you walk about in this life constantly adding to your sin debt and you can be sure that someday, as it did with Belshazzar, that reckoning will come.

You remember the old gag from the cartoons where the character doesn’t realize his gunpowder barrel has a leak and he is leaving a trail behind him, and that trail is lit and the fire is following him. Then he realizes and runs, but he’s still leaving a trail and he can’t outrun the fire. That burning trail is your life, the gunpowder barrel is your sin. And if the fire catches up to you while you are still holding the barrel...

What can take away your sin, the debts that way down the scales? Not good works. No man has ever been saved by them,

Is. 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

and doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor:

Psalms 62:9 Surely men of low degree are a vapor, Men of high degree are a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They are altogether lighter than vapor.

Well how was Nebuchadnezzar saved? Faith and Repentance!

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.