

Intro/ Bibles—turn to Daniel 5-2/3 thru the OT/ Guest/ Talk

Bible reading plan. OT. Narrative.

As we jump into the middle of the book...let's get some context.

God allowed Judah to be conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar and for his people to be exiled for 70 years as discipline due to constant and chronic idolatry.

And the book of Daniel is about, well Daniel and 3 of his best buds, who are taken captive to Babylon, they are given new names—named after the gods of the Chaldeans; taught a new language; and placed into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar working in prominent positions within the pagan government.

Here in Chapter 5—Daniel has been in Babylon for at least 65 yrs. (he's around 80) 20 yrs. have passed since the end of chapter 4. King Neb is long gone, and "King" Belshazzar is in his place.

As is the case when reading OT narratives, it's not about a history lesson. It's about what we can learn about God and then the principles we can pull out and apply to our life.

That's what we will be doing this morning with Daniel chapter 5, as we look at the sensational but true story of the handwriting on the wall.

You can't read this passage without clearly seeing the stark contrast between Belshazzar and Daniel. And I want to flesh that out by asking two questions (with two parts).

But for the purpose of honest self-assessment. Honest with ourselves. But most importantly with God—who sees and knows everything.

Read and explain 1-9

1 King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. (debauchery, decadence, and depravity at its worst)

2 Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father (predecessor) had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

3 Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, (when it was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar) and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. (he defiled the vessels and worshipped them as idols)

5 Immediately, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote.

6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. 7 The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the

Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

Belshazzar was a fool. And he was drunk. Put them together and you have a recipe for stupidity. His passions mastered him. He thought he was untouchable. He's the fool in Proverbs that says, "there is no God". And if there is one, Belshazzar openly and freely mocks him.

He took the beautiful goblets and bowls of gold and silver; taken from Solomon's Temple; meant for God's glory and his people and used it for his own entertainment. For his own worship. He exalted his gods and defiled and defamed that which was holy and consecrated. And he did so foolishly in the face of the God.

But God will not be mocked.

Whatever a man sows, that will he reap. (Galatians 6) It's clear what Belshazzar sowed. Foolishness leading to corruption

But before we pass judgment, let's not think we can't play the fool. Even as believers in Jesus Christ. Maybe it won't be as blatant as Belshazzar, but we are more than capable being a fool.

1. Are you acting like a fool, (1-9)

Because of sin, we have the fool gene. Foolishness lurks within our hearts. Just like Belshazzar, we can be fools for our own glory. Our own kingdoms.

I think, there are three ways we can act like fools:

- *By worshipping our own idols.* We find it difficult to understand how Belshazzar could praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

But not so fast. "*The heart is an idol factory*" John Calvin said back in the 1500's. and that includes your heart. My heart.

Our idols may not be crafted by our hands that we physically bow down to, but we naturally produce idols fashioned by our own hearts.

We commit idolatry when we elevate and ascribe our worship and devotion to good things like; our kids, job, reputation, comfort and safety.

When we make good things idols, we *exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator*, and in doing so, we act like fools. Just like Romans 1 so clearly tells us. Making us no different than Belshazzar shaking his arrogant fist in the face of God.

- *By pretending that God doesn't see our sin.* Belshazzar was foolish to think God didn't know what he was doing. Everyone lives fully and completely in his presence—known and exposed before God. He knows and sees all. God is more than aware.

- *By believing that God won't deal with our sin.* God will deal with our sin in one of two ways:

Discipline now for the believer. It's interesting that these are the three reasons God allowed his people to be exiled.

Judgment later for the unbeliever. Either way... God will not be mocked.

Read 10-12

10 The queen, (Belshazzar's Mom) because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change.

11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. 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, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers,

12 because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

Be honest, are you acting like a fool

...or led by God's Spirit? (10-12)

I think that is perhaps the best way to describe Daniel.... led by God's Spirit.

Consistently, over the past 65 yrs. of living in Babylon, Daniel submitted to the power and influence of the HS. And everyone saw it and knew it.

Not sure where Daniel was, probably sleeping. And maybe he's being called out of semi-retirement.

But he is summoned and walks in; seasoned, experienced, unimpressed, and the picture of self-control. The opposite of a fool.

He was still the same Daniel who served King Nebuchadnezzar; he was still being led by the Spirit of God. Still faithfully serving God..

And his faithfulness in following the One True God, still preceded him. The power of God's Spirit on his life was known and respected. And so, when all else fails, it was, "go get Daniel!"

- Does your witness precede you? Do your co-workers and friends know you serve the one true God? So, when life happens, they come to you. They come to you because your life matches what you say you believe. They witness your faith. Convictions. Joy. Hope.

The key to that kind of faithfulness, is being led by God's Spirit, like Daniel was. God's Spirit provided what he needed, when he needed it. And Daniel knew it and thanked God for giving him wisdom and might through the HS. (2:23)

God's Spirit was the source for Daniel's life.

And through God's Spirit, Daniel's character was marked with two consistent characteristics that we do well to apply to our lives.

- *Faithfully following God isn't dependent on our circumstances.*

Daniel's circumstances didn't dictate who he was going to be.

His environment didn't provide his identity.

He lived for the one true King of kings. And he longs for God's eternal Kingdom (prophesied in Chap.2). There was better coming. Eternal. Perfect. And as believers, same with us. This is not our home!

- *Faithfully following God is resting in his sovereignty*

(God's complete and constant control over everything)

Daniel knew God was always in control. This is one of the reasons Daniel was written. To give God's people hope. Hope based on God's sovereignty. Hope in the truth that God is in control of the righteous and unrighteous. God knows what he is doing.

Even if Daniel found himself in the middle of drunken party, in a pagan city, interpreting a message from the very hand of God. Or thrown into the lion's den. (chap. 6).

He rested in God's sovereignty. And so, should we. Always.

First question. *Acting like a fool or led by God's Spirit? Be honest.*

Let's jump to and read verses 17-23 (13-16 Belshazzar is speaking to Daniel and repeating what his mother already said, but doing it in a condescending way)

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. (he's too old and wise to be bought, has no need to be exalted) Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. (Daniel agrees to interpret the writing, but he takes full advantage to do some preaching. He reminds everyone the story of King Nebuchadnezzar—Chap 4)

18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory, and majesty. 19 And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. (the Babylonian empire was at its peak during his reign)

20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him.

21 He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.

22 And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, 23 but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in 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, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

Second question and certainly closely related to acting like a fool...

- 2. *Are you blinded by pride, (17-23)*

Pride the great cancer that infects everything.

And King Belshazzar had it bad. He was blinded to what he had done. The seriousness of it. Blinded by the exaltation of himself. He attempts to rob honor due only to God alone.

He doesn't even see the opportunity being presented to him. He has the same chance as King Neb. to be humbled. Daniel is giving Belshazzar a chance to sober up and come to his senses.

But he's so blinded by pride.

- If we aren't careful the same can happen to us. We all have pride. Pride always haunts us. It's at the core of all the sins we commit. We all, to some level or another, demand for ourselves the honor, privileges, rights and power that are due to God alone. We all idolize ourselves more than anything else.

And as pride seeps out from our heart, we need help. We need help to keep from becoming blinded ourselves.

We need help from

- Godly brothers and sisters. James says, confess your sins one to another and help restore the brother from their sin. We need each other.

We need help from

- God's piercing Word. **Heb. 4:12¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

We need help from

- God's Spirit through prayer. To be repentant.

Can I just say, if repentance isn't a common thing in your life, pride may be blinding you.

When was the last time you knelt before God and asked him to reveal any pride in your life? I mean really work at it. Take your time. To allow the HS to bring to mind sin.

And apply **1 John 1:9** to your life.

It's the only way to come to your senses and have the eyes of your heart restored.

But it starts by being honest.

Let's finish the story. Read and explain **24-31**

24 "Then from his (God's) presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.

25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: Many, Many, Tekel, Upharsin.

26 This is the interpretation of the matter(he doesn't just read it, he gives the meaning and who its directed at): **Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; 27 Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians"**

29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. (Not sure why. Terrible news for the king--perhaps a way to appease God by exalting his Prophet, didn't work. He was foolish and prideful)

30 That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. (The kingdom and Belshazzar were no more-- fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel)

Are you blinded by pride or

...or humbled by God's Word? (24-31)

Once again, God wasn't going to be mocked. And instead of speaking through his prophets. God chose to write. No fanfare. No trumpets. Stunning for sure. But just four words. God's written word was the response to Belshazzar's arrogance.

God's Word has the power to humble—if we let it.

Translation overview: Many, Many, Tekel, Pharsin. Simple Aramaic words. Nouns describing decreasing weights—like pound, pound, ounce, half-ounce.

But Daniel, with the wisdom and might God has provided, inserts certain vowels and changes them into less common verbs. And in doing so he explains what God has and is going to do.

- *Many, Many:* God is sovereign. God sets up and takes down. As in kings and kingdoms. No exceptions. Not even Belshazzar **"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."** Proverbs 21:1

Just like our life. Our breathe is in his God's hand, just like Belshazzar's was.

- *Tekel:* God's standard is what matters. Belshazzar has been weighed by the Divine scale and found deficient. He doesn't add up.

He miserably falls short of God's standard. His good works are not good. And his body of work is really bad. He may think he has everything, but in reality he has nothing. Now or later.

Without Christ, same with us. we all are found wanting. We all fall short of the glory of God. All our good works are like filthy rags compared to God's holy standard.

- *Peres/Upharsin:* God will bring judgment in the way of the Persians (who are literally laying siege to the city as this scene is unfolding) Belshazzar's kingdom will end along with his life. God judges the proud. Judgment is coming.

It is appointed unto man to die once and after that comes judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

Everyone will stand before God and give an account for their lives.

Are you humbled by God's Word? Do you have a greater view of God? Do you have a realistic view of yourself?

Daniel is an amazing example for us. A man of great character; deep wisdom; high integrity; profound trust in God; steadfastness and faithfulness that are truly remarkable.

Great principles can be drawn from his life. But emulating his positives traits is all we can really do. Other than studying Daniel, we can draw no help from him to live like him.

In fact, none of the characters within our Bibles, are able to help us live faithfully all the days of our life.

But thank God it's not dependent on them or even us, and we have his Spirit and his Word.

In fact, we have even more than what Daniel had. We have Jesus.

The point of Jesus is not to simply follow his example.

The point of Jesus is Jesus.

He says believe in me, and then gives us the faith to believe.

He says follows me then takes our burden so we can walk with him.

He says produce fruit, and then he attaches us to himself, apart from him we can do nothing.

He says, die to yourself, then gives us abundant life.

He says live for me, and then gives us the HS to lead us.

Thank God for being a New Testament believer. Let's pray.