

True Power and Wisdom in a Crisis

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[0 : 00] Welcome back to our service this evening as we continue to look at the book of Daniel and especially we're going to see how the crisis, the personal crisis of King Nebuchadnezzar provides an opportunity for God to receive glorious, his greater power and wisdom this evening.

And I hope that will encourage us as we think about the crises that we face in our lives. Let me also encourage us from God's word with our call to worship.

Jesus speaking to the crowds in Matthew chapter 11. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

May each one of us come to know true rest from Jesus as we find that our lives are connected to him, that we receive strength and love and grace from him.

[1 : 20] Now, let's read together from Daniel chapter 2. Now, we're going to read the first 23 verses, but we'll be thinking about the whole chapter together.

So here's Daniel chapter 2 at verse 1. In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed.

When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, I have had a dream that troubles me, and I want to know what it means. Then the astrologers answered the king, May the king live forever.

Tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it. The king replied to the astrologers, This is what I have firmly decided. If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.

But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.

[2 : 27] Once more, they replied, Let the king tell his servants the dream and we will interpret it. Then the king answered, I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realise that this is what I have firmly decided.

If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream and I will know that you can interpret it for me.

The astrologers answered the king, There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks. No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult.

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods. And they do not live among humans. This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death. And men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. When Ariach, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.

[3 : 33] He asked the king's officer, Why did the king issue such a harsh decree? Ariach then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time so that he might interpret the dream for him.

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said, I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors.

You have given me wisdom and power. You have made known to me what we asked of you. You have made known to us the dream of the king. So Daniel chapter 2, we're going to see one king's crisis reveals the true king's glory.

And again, I really hope that this encourages us today. Because we stand as a world in need of hope, don't we? We're together in this global crisis. And we really feel especially a sense of concern for those who are seeking to lead us through it.

[5 : 14] We're praying for wisdom for our politicians and our leaders. But I think too, we probably recognise, especially perhaps in the church, that we need more than simply a timetable for ending lockdown to give us a hope that lasts.

We need something bigger than a plan for economic recovery. We need more than simply a return to normal. What we need is a hope that comes from the word of God and the God of the word.

For us as Christians, for the people of God, we have great hope. Even in this chapter, we've been reminded that the Lord who sits on the throne of the universe, loves his people, he loves us.

That the almighty Lord has not stayed distant from us, rather he has revealed himself to us. And we see him in creation. And we see him in his word. And especially in Jesus, the word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us so that we would see the glory of God in the face of Jesus. And we understand that the Lord is building his church. He is establishing a kingdom that is extensive, that is enduring, that is eternal, that is hope.

[6 : 30] And we see it all in Daniel chapter 2. So my prayer for you and for me, for all of us this evening, is that we take hope as we behold our God.

But we begin with the king's personal crisis in the first 11 verses. Dreams are funny things, aren't they?

Some are very vivid, some are just plain bizarre, some are quite unsettling. Some, the first thing when you wake up, you want to share it with somebody else. Others, you're trying to grab hold of the details because you know there was something exciting or interesting you want to share and you can't quite get there.

Well, Nebuchadnezzar, he has a forgotten dream. And effectively, he says to his advisors, tell me my dream and what it means and I'll make you rich and give you glory or I'll burn your house down. It's very extreme for a forgotten dream. Why? Well, in his culture, dreams were often regarded as signs pointing towards the future.

[7 : 35] But for Nebuchadnezzar, he can't remember this dream. He doesn't know whether his future looks good or whether his future looks bad. So he calls in the gurus of verse 2, the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers.

So the interesting thing about these guys is that they used dream manuals. So, OK, tell us your dream. Ah, OK. So like 150 years ago, another king, he had a dream that was similar.

And if you look at his history, these events happened. So I think the dream means this. That's how it worked for them. But if they get no knowledge, they get no hope.

And they're honest about that. Verse 10. There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks. I love verse 11. God's always looking for opportunities to reveal his glory.

And don't we see here, verse 11, what the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they do not live among the humans. Their experience of the gods, the false gods of Babylon, our gods are distant.

[8 : 40] Our gods don't speak. Our gods are not going to be able to offer any help. We can't help. So there's no prospect of help. In this crisis, a contest is going to develop.

A contest because it's so one-sided. But we're being invited to ask the question, whose wisdom is greater? The wise men or Daniel and the gods of Babylon or the true God that they represent?

Whose God is the true God? And chapter 2 of Daniel, the whole story of Daniel, really, and indeed the whole Bible shows, for the one true God, nothing is impossible.

The one true God is a God who reveals himself. He speaks. He speaks. He acts. He demonstrates his saving power and grace towards his people.

He is available for them. And of course for us, we know that in Jesus he becomes one of us and we see his glory in their most remarkable way.

[9 : 47] I also find it encouraging to recognise that in God's providence, the crisis of the king becomes a chance for Daniel to do gospel ministry, to speak the truth to King Nebuchadnezzar, and to show where true glory and honour lies, to point to the power and wisdom of the one true God rather than the false gods.

God is working. God is always working for his glory. He is still looking to, as it were, lift the roof off, to remind people to look up, to show the limits of the gods that we make compared to the one true God.

And so maybe even here there is an encouragement for us in our gospel ministry. No crisis quarantines the gospel. I find it really encouraging this week to read about the church in Iran.

So Iran, which is part of where the Babylonian Empire would be, the people who are still around today, and in Iran, the church is persecuted. The church is under attack.

It faces a crisis. But they have learned to do effective gospel ministry. They've used technology. So there are many stories of people going on to Facebook and finding Christian groups that they can sensitively connect with and have their questions asked and answered and people coming to faith in Jesus through the internet and through social media.

[11 : 34] And I think that's an encouragement for us as we think about our ongoing ministry of looking to show our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues the wonder of Jesus.

That's the king's personal crisis. And that, of course, then leads us on to Daniel's response. So if you remember, if you were with us last week, Daniel's crisis of conscience, would he eat the king's diet or not?

This is a more significant crisis for Daniel in terms of his life or death because Daniel and his three friends are told in verse 13 that they are also on the king's death list, part of his royal advisors.

So they're all due to be killed. Now, how do we see Daniel's faith in this crisis? Well, first of all, we see that he keeps calm. He goes to speak to Ariah, who's responsible for bringing the message.

And then in verse 16, he goes to face the angry king Nebuchadnezzar to ask for more time. And God gives him favour and he gets the chance for more time.

[12 : 43] And what does he do with his time? And this is what his faith really shines. He prays. He calls his three friends and say, let's pray, let's pray for God's mercy. So verse 18, he urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

He's concerned not just for himself, but for everybody else that's part of the death list. But what does he pray for? He prays that the true God would reveal the mystery to Daniel.

Daniel. And that night, the answer comes. And again, how does Daniel respond in the morning? In verse 19, we're told that he praised God.

When we pray and God answers, we should be thankful. We should pray to him and we should give him thanks. We should praise him. And then Daniel gives us a reminder of that. And as we look at Daniel's prayer, what does he focus on?

He praises God because God is on the throne. Because God sits over all history, deposing some kings, raising others up.

[13 : 55] Because God has wisdom and power. But not only that, this God who has wisdom and power, verse 23, I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors, you have given me wisdom and power.

God who makes himself available for the needs of his people. God who gives that wisdom and power to Daniel when he needs it.

So again, the crisis is showing really powerfully the true God versus counterfeit gods. And maybe today, you're sitting at home and you realise, do you know, I've been planning and been pursuing goals without really thinking about God.

I'm not sure that he would really be the centre of my identity. Perhaps you're thinking, I need more than this.

I need more than those foundations that I had built my life on before this crisis. I see that they are weak and God is strong. Well, here is an invitation to turn or return to God through faith in Jesus.

[15 : 11] To recognise that he is the one who is powerful for you, who will be your strength and weakness. To recognise that he is all wisdom and he can be your wisdom in times of confusion.

So turn to him, return to him with all your heart and keep pursuing Jesus who is the wisdom of God, who is the power of God.

Read your Bible, pray to enjoy fellowship with him, make him your treasure and delight. Because we have the one true God revealed to us in the Bible and revealed to us in Jesus, the Son. And we need to trust him to have a hope that lasts. After praising God, Daniel then goes to the king's court.

So he gives the king his dream and its meaning in verse 25 to 45. And what we see here again is more parallels to the story of Joseph. Another king, the Pharaoh, had a dream.

[16:23] Nobody could interpret it except for Joseph. Joseph is brought in, it reveals the dream and he has raised a place of honour. Same story for Daniel.

And again also, when the king speaks to Daniel at first and he says, are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret? Daniel obviously, like Joseph, had the chance to claim some personal glory and honour for himself, but doesn't take it.

Rather, he honours God. No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mystery.

You want revelation? You want wisdom? Don't look to me, Daniel says. Look to my God. There is no contest in this wisdom contest. The true God is the only one who reveals mysteries.

And perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was so anxious because he really wanted to hold on to power.

Perhaps he was afraid and wondering whether his latest conquest would succeed.

[17:28] And what he needs to understand is that the answer to his anxiety and the answer to all our anxieties is to recognise there is a greater king. There is one far greater than him. Maybe one of the struggles that you have with lockdown is that sense of loss of control where we want to know the plan and we want to know the timetable and we want to know it will be successful because we want to make our own plans and we want to know what our timetable is going to look like and it can be desperately hard to live day by day when every day feels the same and it seems there's no end in sight.

Well, one answer to that anxiety is certainly to behold our God. to recognise here is the God who's in control.

Here is the God who is working all things for good for those who love him. Here is the God whose love for his people remains constant and in a crisis he has wisdom and power that is for you.

Now we get to the dream. Let me read this. We didn't read it earlier. Let me read the dream. Your majesty looked and there before you stood a large statue an enormous dazzling statue awesome in appearance.

The head of the statue was made of pure gold its chest and arms of silver its belly and thighs of bronze its legs of iron its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching a rock was cut out but not by human hands.

[19:05] It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them and then we're told the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

So there's this statue with four levels and it's top heavy because the top level is made in gold but it doesn't topple in and of itself rather it is smashed by a rock a rock not cut by human hands and that rock then becomes a universal mountain.

So what's going on in that dream? well Nebuchadnezzar is told in verse 37 that he was the head of gold you are the king of kings the God of heaven has given you a dominion and power and glory God has given it to Nebuchadnezzar but as the dream makes clear that will not last his empire will not last neither will the other empires there is one that will last and that's God's verse 44 in the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed nor will it be left to another people it will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end but it will itself endure forever this is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain but not by human hands God will set up his kingdom and that kingdom will never end that kingdom will never be overtaken that kingdom will not be small but will be universal in scope and that kingdom will be built on God's rock and the New Testament picks that up and says the rock is Christ for the exiles in Daniel's generation and for those in later generations who suffer persecution and opposition there is hope this will not last

God's king and God's kingdom will the Messiah of the line of David would come as promised and his kingdom would endure so hold on and take heart for the persecuted church in the world today for the persecuted church in the region of Babylon here is hope that to trust in Jesus as God's king is to place our hope and identity and security in a kingdom that is eternal and enduring for you and me today here is living hope because the rock is Christ Jesus came and he preached the kingdom

of God is near because he is the king who is drawn near those miracles that we spent so much time focusing on are signs of signpost to the kingdom of glory a kingdom without illness and suffering and death and disease and virus and despair a kingdom marked by love and joy and peace and fellowship with God forever and then there's the promise of Jesus that he would build his church on the gates of hell no opposition no foreign empire would ever be able to destroy that church and that church would be built on his words the gospel message the message that comes from Jesus and that's about Jesus that centres on his death and resurrection is where the foundation of the church the kingdom of God the eternal extensive enduring kingdom is built for you and I when we don't know what institutions in our country will survive what savings will be left in our bank accounts what shape our nation will be in here is encouragement to invest our energy and find our joy in a kingdom that lasts to live as a citizen of heaven even as we seek the welfare of Babylon as we seek the welfare of Edinburgh and Scotland and beyond our hope lies in an eternal enduring extensive kingdom when our hope is in Jesus the eternal son of God our king and our saviour the chapter ends with the king's gratitude it's no surprise really that he's so pleased he discovers that he's the head of gold and he's going to have a secure and glorious empire for his lifetime and what he does verse 46 to 49 is he praises

[23 : 16] Daniel and he raises him to a place of honour again just like Pharaoh did with Joseph and what we need to understand is that God is behind all of this God is working so that his glory will be seen even in the suffering of exile God is working so he will have glory among the nations of the world even in this king's personal crisis God is working so that he will have glory God's desire is that he would be glorified we are made to give God glory to live for his glory so we find our great joy when we see and delight in the glory of God and books like Daniel can really help us to see that so that we might praise God just as Daniel did and it's interesting we said this in our overview and we'll see it time and again here is king nebuchadnezzar a pagan king praising

Daniel's God verse 47 the king said to Daniel surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries a pagan king is used to speak the truth probably speaking more truth than he realised but here is that reminder in the context of the gods only one God has true and absolute power only one God has wisdom and graciously reveals who is available to us who is strong and mighty to save so this king's crisis in the end of the day led him to praise give glory to the true king may may that be true for us whoever we are and whatever our circumstances however we're finding lockdown may it be true for us that this crisis would lead us to praise to trust to show loyalty and dependence on our God and king on Jesus our king that we would look to him the wisdom of God the power of God that in our weakness with our burdens we would come to him and find rest so that we might just like

Daniel give God praise and glory a day he he he he he he he he