

Daniel: The Ultimate Party Pooper

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[0 : 00] Nebuchadnezzar prays and exult and glorify the King of Heaven because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Start chapter 5 verse 1. King Balthazar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Balthazar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, might drink from them.

So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, drank from them.

As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Suddenly, the finger of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the lampstand in the royal palace.

The king watched the hand as it wrote. And then moving down to verse 25 over the page. This is the inscription that was written.

[1 : 27] Meany, Meany, Tekel, Parson. This is what these words mean. Meany, God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Perseus, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

Then at Balthazar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night, Balthazar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

Thanks. Thanks, Nick. Well, we've been looking at the book of Daniel, which in the context of what Phil has just been sharing is very relevant in a nation, an empire like Babylon with a dictatorial ruler such as Nebuchadnezzar.

Very difficult to live as a Christian, somebody who followed God, but yet God used those people to bring about his purposes in that place.

[2 : 47] No king was greater than God. Kirsty's just handing around sheets there if you want to take notes this morning. And we're going to be following along from chapter five.

As we start into our study this morning, let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this together. Amen. Those who walk in pride, God is able to humble.

Father, we come before you this morning in humility because we are, as we sung earlier, just a vapor.

We are here a moment. But you are the God who reigns from before time begun and time eternity. As your creation, as your people, we bow before you and ask that you would speak to us and you would cause us to understand what it is to live before a mighty king such as you.

[4 : 13] Humble us and lead us in your ways. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, keep your Bibles, please.

Follow along. Chapter five. It all happened so quickly. He suddenly appears on the scene and then he disappears from the story.

Look at verse one. King Belshazzar gave a banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. And then go to the end of the story, verse 30.

That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

One moment he's drinking and dancing, the next he's defeated and dead. A king in his kingdom has come crashing down.

[5 : 15] Now there's about 25 years between the end of chapter 24 and the beginning of chapter 5. Sorry, the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5.

King Nebuchadnezzar has died. Babylon is still the mighty empire. He's still ruling with an iron fist. And the succession of kings from Nebuchadnezzar onwards has been a bit unstable.

There's been lots of family feuds. There's been an assassination. The usual goings-on when a leader of such popularity as Nebuchadnezzar has died. But now as we get to chapter 25, we're introduced to Belshazzar.

It's his time to rule. Time for another great king. But chapter 5 is not just a lesson in Babylonian kings. This is a warning about the dangers of pride.

Belshazzar's life can be summed up with this proverb from Proverb chapter 16, verse 5. The Lord detests the proud of heart.

[6 : 23] Be sure of this. They will not go unpunished. A summary of his life. The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this.

They will not go unpunished. So what do we learn from chapter 5? Well, three things we're going to look at together this morning. First, God is dead, so let's party.

The story begins with a great party. Verse 1, let's read together. King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.

This is the party of all parties. Invite only. The who's who of the Babylonian empire. The movers and shakers. The planners and developers. The celebrities.

The socialites. They're all there. Not forgetting the king's wives and the concubines that he's provided for the occasion. And the wine is flowing.

[7 : 23] But the king wants to do more than just throw a party. He wants to show off to these guests his great power. Look at verse 2.

While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, or predecessor, had taken from the temple in Jerusalem so that the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

Well, what's all that about? Well, when a king went and conquered another nation, what they would do is they would take items that represented the nation's god and then place them before their own god as a sign of victory.

We're actually told this in chapter 1. If you flick back to chapter 1 of Daniel, it's the way the book is introduced to us. Chapter 1, verse 1. So, verse 1 says, In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, who was king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, who was king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

So he attacked it. Verse 2, when the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

[8 : 46] These Nebuchadnezzar carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put them in the treasure house of his god. You see, not only is the king of Judah defeated, but the temple, which was the very symbol of God's presence and power, has been pilfered.

The articles, in this case, the gold and silver goblets, have been taken from the temple, which represented or symbolised God's presence with his people, and they've now become trophies in the treasure house of the Babylon's god.

So we can imagine the headline in the Babylonian times after that battle. Judah's god defeated, dead, and buried.

Back to chapter 5. So when Belshazzar, in the middle of his party, orders for the gold and silver goblets to be brought, which came from the temple, you remember, he's making a very, very proud statement.

He's basically saying to all his guests that have gathered, I'm king. I'm the one in charge. I'm in power. God is dead.

[10 : 05] So let's party. Verse 4. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold, silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Now isn't that just a little picture of how the world lives? worship what you like. Do whatever satisfies you. If it brings you pleasure, enjoy it.

After all, it's your life. You're answerable to no one. You're not bound by any morals. You do what you like. After all, God is dead, isn't he?

So let's live life as a party. But God's not going to allow people to carry on presuming he's dead or assuming he has no power.

The consequences are far too serious. Look at verse 5. In the middle of this party, suddenly, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the lampstand in the royal palace.

[11 : 13] The king watched as the hand watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale, and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

Now the NIV, the translation that we're using here is a little bit too polite here. Literally, it's saying he pooped his pants. He's lost control of his bladder.

The dancing stops. The music fades. The laughter and the singing are replaced by this deathly fear as they watch this hand on the wall. How does he respond?

Well, in his foolish ignorance, verse 7, the king called out to the enchanters, the astrologers, and the diviners to be brought to him.

Remember, these are the ones we've seen all the way through chapters 1 to 4, and every time they failed. But yet, he turns to them again. And he said to the wise men of Babylon, whoever reads the writing and tells me what it means, will be clothed in purple, will have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made third highest ruler in the kingdom.

[12 : 27] Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. Isn't it ironic that the gods he was just praising back in verse 4 are now deaf and dumb to his cry for help?

The gods that supposedly gave Babylon their great victories in battle and made them such an enormous and great empire are hopeless and helpless to do anything?

Verse 9, So the king, Belshazzar, became even more terrified and his face grew more pale.

Another change of trousers for the king. His nobles were baffled. The most powerful king in the world is paralysed with fear and there's nothing that he can do about it.

He's hopeless and he's helpless. And the question is, why is he reduced to such a cowering mess?

Well, I think the purpose is so that he would cry out to God something he fails to do.

[13 : 48] And sometimes that's the case for us. Life leaves us hopeless and helpless. The gods that we trust in fail us. People that we depend on leave us.

Jobs that give us security are lost. Things that gave us pleasure are stripped away. Our health fades. Our mental abilities deteriorate. We're left afraid and fearful.

And why? Well, maybe it's so that we will cry out to an all-powerful, all-loving God.

God. The God who is not dead, but the God who lives and reigns forevermore. So, the first thing, God is dead, let's party.

Second, God has spoken, so listen up. Living our life as if God is dead is serious, so God speaks into the situation.

[14 : 53] It starts off with an idea from the Queen. Look at verse 10. The Queen, hearing the voices of the King and his nobles, came into the banquet hall.

Oh King, live forever, she said. Don't be alarmed, don't look so pale. She's got an answer, verse 11. There's a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him.

In the time of your father, he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. This was their way of explaining God's divine interventions.

King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father, the king. Remember Nebuchadnezzar, that all-powerful, great, ruling king? I say, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners.

This man, Daniel, whom the king called Belshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems.

[15 : 56] Call for Daniel. Go and get Daniel. He's the one who can tell you what the writing means. You see, from the very beginning of Daniel, we've seen that Daniel has been God's voice to the king of Babylon.

God has spoken through the man that he has placed at the very heart of the kingdom. And he can speak straight into the king's life. The so-called wise men, the enchanters, the astrologers, they've all consistently failed.

They've had nothing to be able to say. Man-made religion is always empty. But Daniel delivered every single time with absolute clarity because God was speaking through his man to the king. The question here is, is Belshazzar going to listen to what Daniel has to say? Well, with some reluctance, it seems that the king does call for Daniel.

Verse 13, So Daniel was brought before the king and the king said to him, Are you Daniel? One of the exiles that my father, the king, brought from Judah?

[17:09] I've heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight and intelligence and outstanding wisdom. Well, if he thinks that Daniel does have outstanding wisdom, why has Daniel been discharged from being ruler over all of Babylon and demoted from being chief of all the wise men, a position that King Nebuchadnezzar has given him?

He's not in that position any longer under Belshazzar. It seems that Belshazzar has removed anyone to do with God from his presence. He's making a clear statement.

We don't want any God talk around here. We don't want this religious business in the palace. To the king, Daniel was, as we read in verse 13, just an exile from Judah.

He's a conquered slave. He's despised. He's rejected. He's a nothing. He's a nobody. He's not worth listening to. We don't need Daniel.

But Daniel is God's voice to the king. God has something to say. And God intervenes into the king's life and brings Daniel yet again right to the very heart of power so he can speak to the king.

[18:29] Verse 17. Then Daniel answered the king, You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. You're not going to bribe me or tempt me or make me a little puppet.

Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and I'll tell him what it means. God spoke to Belshazzar through Daniel and God also speaks to you and to me.

His word is crystal clear but it seems sometimes that the world does not want to listen to God. We have despised and rejected God's voice to us, the one we call Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah spoke about Jesus who was to come. Listen to these words from Isaiah 53. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hide their faces.

He was despised and we esteemed him not. That's about Jesus. You want us to listen to Jesus? That despised, rejected, that crucified loser?

[19:57] You can't expect us to take seriously what Jesus has to say, can you? He's outdated. He's old-fashioned. Times have moved on. We don't need Jesus anymore.

And so the world in its arrogant sophistication has demoted Jesus to the ranks of myth and lies, just as Belshazzar had demoted Daniel to a nobody and a nothing.

God's not worth listening to anymore. We don't want this God talk around here. We don't want you talking about God in your school or in your college.

Keep your religion to yourself. You've come here to work. Don't bring religion into the conversation. What's he got to do with it? Jesus. But let's give Jesus the last word on this.

As Jesus faced his own trial before Pilate, another king, listen to what Jesus had to say in John 18 verse 37.

[21:07] This is Pilate speaking to Jesus. He says, you are a king then, said Pilate. Jesus answered, you are right in saying I am a king.

In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to Jesus. Jesus is God's king.

He is God's voice. Do not close your ear to what he has to say. Listen to him. So God has spoken. Listen up. God, thirdly, will judge. Be humble. The sad reality is because Belshazzar had silenced Daniel and pushed him away, he's actually removed God's voice from his ears.

[22:19] The very word that could save Belshazzar's life, he's rejected it. So all that is left for Belshazzar to hear and listen to is a word of judgment.

There are four things we need to listen to if we want to avoid the same fate. I haven't got them, so listen up. Here we go. Know your place before God.

Know your place before God. Verse 18. This is Daniel speaking to Belshazzar. O King, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position God gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Did you see what it says there?

God gave Nebuchadnezzar his position and power and God could take it from him as he pleased. And it's no different for us in our lives.

[23 : 33] All that we have, our work, our families, our joys, our pleasures, everything we love and enjoy comes from God who's given it to us.

In fact, look at the end of verse 23. This is the God who holds in his hand our life and all our ways. From the moment we are born to the second we die, everything in our life is ruled and controlled by God. So lesson number one, know your place before God.

Lesson two, be careful of arrogant pride. Be careful of arrogant pride. King Nebuchadnezzar had become proud of his position.

Look at verse 20. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was disposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

[24 : 40] He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal. The point is simple. God will humble the arrogant God.

And he will humble us unless we acknowledge that he is the most high God, the one who rules over our life, who rules over every king and over every nation.

Remember the testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar? The first verse in our reading this morning comes at the end of chapter 4 verse 37. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

So, number two, be careful of arrogant pride. Number three, learn humility before it's too late.

Learn humility before it's too late. Here's the tragedy of this story. Verse 22. This is a great tragedy. Verse 22.

[25 : 48] But you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all of this. Though you knew all of this.

Belshazzar was not without excuse. He knew all about Nebuchadnezzar. He had heard how God had humbled him and how God had restored him. He had heard the stories of what God had done. He knew all of this. But, verse 23, instead you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from the temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives, and your concubines drank wine from them.

you praised the gods of silver, of gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. God is so gracious to us. The very fact that we are here this morning means that we have heard the voice of God through his word and none of us here today are without excuse.

[27 : 04] Do not refuse to be humble or honour God. Learn humility before it is too late. And then last, we will all stand before God as judge.

We will all stand before God as judge. Belshazzar's fate, well it was revealed to him in the writing on the wall, verse 25.

This is the inscription that was written. Meenie, meenie, tekel, parson. This is what the words mean. God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. And then it seems as if Belshazzar has made some last desperate attempt to gain approval with Daniel and some kind of acceptance with God.

This is desperate, desperate measures. Verse 29. Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

[28 : 19] Maybe in his thinking, if I do this for Daniel, maybe this isn't going to happen to me. But it's too late. It's too late.

God's judgment has already been spoken. His word can't be reversed. Verse 30. That very night, that very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

The Babylonian empire was wiped away, never to be back again. in power. One moment, drinking and dancing.

A few hours later, defeated and dead. A king and his kingdom came crashing down. You know what, as we finish, we're all going to face God's judgment one day.

Every one of us here, myself included. And we will have to give an account for our life. But you know what?

[29 : 43] We can do it with absolute confidence and assurance. Flick with me, if you like, to Hebrews chapter 9.

These are the words we started with at the very beginning this morning. Hebrews chapter 9. 9. What's the page number? 1206.

1206. Hebrews chapter 9. Verse 27. Read these words with me.

Just follow along. Hebrews 9 verse 27. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face the judgment.

That's the reality. It will all happen one day. What are we going to say? What will be our answer? But here's the confidence that comes in verse 28.

[30 : 50] Just as we die once, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, people like you and me. And he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him or those who are trusting in him.

One day the party of our life is going to be interrupted just as abruptly as it was for Belshazzar. One day our life will come to a close.

We will breathe our last. The days of our life will end. We will stand before God. We will be weighed on the scales of justice. But don't leave it till it's too late.

God is graciously patient, longing and waiting for all to turn to him. If on the other hand you are trusting and you are assured of meeting God and you're looking forward to his salvation to come, don't leave it till it's too late before you share this message with those who are walking in pride today and do not know of the salvation that is to be found in Christ.

Do not leave it till it is too late with your colleagues at work, your friends, your family. The writing is on the wall.

[32 : 28] Do not ignore what God has said. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you that you are a living God.

We thank you that you are a speaking God. We thank you that you are a judging God. Thank you that in your judgments you will put everything right.

And we thank you that because of Jesus we can stand before you with confidence, assurance, unashamed because Christ has forgiven us.

Please help us to walk humbly before you. Help us to do that well this week as we seek to share the good news of Christ with others.

[33 : 42] we ask for your help to do this. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.