

The Writing is on the Wall

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles back to Daniel chapter 5, 887 is the page, lost it. I want to begin today by asking you to think of a father-son combination, where the father's fame or fortune meant the son had to grow up in his shadow.

So, father-son combination, father's famous, son has to grow up in his shadow. Of course, the son would still be relatively famous for you to know who he is, but what he does is try to shake off the reputation of being solely known as his father-son.

Alright, so you can either think by yourself or if you want to discuss it with the person next to you, you can do so. I'm going to then get some ideas or suggestions from you. Alright, go.

Okay. Who's going to start us off? And don't say me, alright, if you've got a famous father. Anyone? Alex? LeBron James and Rony James. Okay, I didn't know that one, but anyway, good. Who's the older? Who's the father? LeBron James and Rony James. I thought he was still playing.

[1 : 31] No, he's still playing. Okay, so the son is old enough to play. No. I think he's like five years old. Oh, okay. Okay, cool, cool. Yep. Ben? Michael Sheen and Tariq.

Oh, yes. Yes. Bevan? Gary Apple and Gary Apple Jr. Yes. Yes, very good, that one. Yep. Closer to home. Jillian?

Oh, Kerry and Jaden Packer. Yep. Yep. Does anyone know Kerry Packer? Yeah. Okay. Susan and Vincent? Oh, Bill and Nick.

Jaden. Okay. I think Jaden's... Anyway. Alright, Vincent? Vincent? It's actually the same one. Oh, same one. Okay. Okay, Brandon, you?

Last one. Who? Ridley Scott and Tony's class. Ridley Scott and Tony's class. Oh, that one. You have to tell me later who that...

[2 : 27] Do you guys know who he's talking about? Producer. Ah, okay. Movies. Brandon, I should have known. Okay. There are lots of examples, aren't there?

And you've named some of them. Media moguls, sporting icons, politicians. The ones I had in mind are dictators. The Kims of North Korea.

There you go. Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-il. And the current Kim Jong-un. In fact, the present day Kim is literally in the shadows of his father and grandfather because there's actually a huge statue of the two of them built.

So if Kim Jong-un stood under that, he'll be literally in their shadows. Well, there's a long pattern, isn't there, of these sort of combinations in history.

And today, here in Chapter 5, we actually find the same, a famous father-son combination. Now, we're told a bit later on that King Belshazzar, whom we haven't met before, is actually King Nebuchadnezzar's son.

[3 : 39] And history has it that actually while King Nebi, or as my daughter says, he's got to be King Neb, not Nebi. Show him some respect. So King Neb was out to war, expanding the empire, building his reputation, getting his achievements, the list of his achievements growing longer.

His son, King Belshazzar, was left at home to rule in Babylon. So it's like the family business has gone global. And the son is left at home to look after the local arm.

Not as exciting as, you know, going out and ruling the world, conquering it, but still pretty prestigious. But that's also why I think Belshazzar did what he did here.

He wanted to bolster his own reputation, get the loyalty of the nobles on his side, you know, up his credentials. So he throws a banquet to impress them. So we read in verse 1, King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles.

And drank wine with them. While Belshazzar 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.

[4 : 59] So it's a bit like raiding your father's wine cabinet, drinking the most expensive wine with his finest silverware. Except the goblets are not really his father's anyway, were they?

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.

Now, I was bad enough, I think, to be taking God's goblets. But I suppose in their drunkenness, they went one step too far. One further step.

Not only drinking from them, but praising and worshipping idols. They were toasting almost, the idols and all the other gods in the world, except the one that really matters.

The one true God of Israel. He was the one who forbade any image or statue to be made of him. And so suddenly, verse 5, The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the lampstand in the royal palace.

[6 : 11] The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking. The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck. And he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

Now, here is another piece of good storytelling. Because we're kept in suspense, aren't we? As to what is written. And we wouldn't find out until the very end.

But, just as with Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Belshazzar is terrified at the writing. It's almost like a cartoon, isn't it?

The face turning pale, the knees are knocking. His pompous confidence has just evaporated, hasn't it? And again, as with the father, we see events repeating itself.

[7 : 14] Wanting to know what the writing meant, he calls for the enchanters and magicians, diviners. He then offers an enticing reward, third in the kingdom, because, you know, he's number two, isn't he?

Number one is his father, he's number two, so he can only offer number three. And again, verse 8, When all the wise men came in, they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

So, King Belshazzar became even more terrified, and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. Then the queen, and this is not Belshazzar's wife, but more likely King Nebuchadnezzar's wife, who wasn't at the party, she comes in and offers Belshazzar some helpful advice.

Don't be alarmed. Don't look pale. There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. And if you recall from last week, that was exactly what Nebuchadnezzar said of Daniel, isn't it?

The spirit of the holy gods was in him. In the time of your father, he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners.

[8 : 28] He did this because Daniel, whom the king also 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.

Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means. And so we see Daniel's reputation again preceding him. His fame of what he's capable of doing because of God is being widely known.

He's offered the same reward for interpreting the writing. And so in verse 16, Belshazzar says, If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made third highest ruler in the kingdom.

Well, Daniel isn't interested. He said, You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to somebody else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

My services to you are free of charge because I'm serving God, not you. And as his messenger, this is what he wants me to inform you. Verse 18, Your majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory, and splendor.

[9 : 46] Because of his high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death.

Those he wanted to spare, he spared. Those he wanted to promote, he promoted. Those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox. And his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

So this is essentially the same lesson or the repeat of the lesson from last week, isn't it? King Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the goat, greatest of all time.

Instead, God turned him into an ox. He killed or spared at will. He promoted or humbled as he saw fit.

[11:00] But being arrogant and proud, God humbled him, so he would realize that it's actually the Most High God who is sovereign over all. And then Daniel says of Belshazzar, You, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

Of all people, Belshazzar, you should have known, because you witnessed it living under his shadows. You would have read the open letter. You would have witnessed him becoming like an ox.

You would have known that the goblets were from God's temple. And so Daniel rightly concludes that Belshazzar did not act out of ignorance, but arrogance.

And so he goes on in verse 23. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives, your concubines, drank from them.

You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hands your life and all your ways.

[12:19] You see, Belshazzar's error wasn't just that he failed to see the father's humiliation and then, you know, should have been motivated by fear so that, you know, I better not do the same thing, otherwise I'm going to suffer the same fate as my father.

No, I mean, God is not, you know, he's not a bully, is he? He's not like the godfather of the mafia standing over humans and saying, look, look at what I did to King Nebuchadnezzar.

If you don't follow, if you, you know, don't submit to me and, you know, I will do as to you what I did to him. He didn't make Nebuchadnezzar just to be an example, did he?

Instead, what Belshazzar should have learned was the futility of worshipping other gods. He should have realized, seen all that and realized that they were worthless because these gods cannot see or hear or understand.

They were hopeless, weren't they, to help the enchanters or magicians when Nebuchadnezzar needed them. Whereas on the other hand, God has shown his wisdom and power, helping Daniel interpret the dreams which came true, saving Daniel's friends from the fiery furnace.

[13:33] It's almost as though Belshazzar found it expedient to worship idols because then he didn't have to humble himself before the Most High God.

And all the while, Daniel now adds, when the true God held Belshazzar's life in his hand, all the life that he's been given, all that he needs, all the luxury that he's been enjoying has all been provided by God.

And he failed to recognize any of this or acknowledged any of this. And so finally, the writing on the wall is revealed to him and to us. And it's the verdict that for Belshazzar, the writing is on the wall. That's where we get the saying from, verse 24. Therefore, he sent the hand that wrote this inscription. This is the inscription that was written.

Mene, Mene, tackle, passing. And these four words are really words describing currency or coinage. Mene, or if another way, it's mina, M-I-N-A, which we're more familiar with because that's from the New Testament.

[14:47] Tackle, I think there's another slide for this. Tackle is the equivalent of shekel. Again, another currency we find in the New Testament. And then passing is half a mina, 30 shekels.

And so a mina is 60 times the value of a shekel and a passing, 30 shekels. So the ratios, if your math's pretty good, 60, actually you don't have to be really good.

The ratios, 60 to 1 to 30, isn't it? Or if you read Andrew Reid's commentary and he describes it in today's currency, the writing on the wall would be something like dollar, dollar, two cents, 50 cents.

That's sort of, you know, equivalent. And here is what these words mean. Mene, God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tackle, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Perez, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. So the word mene is repeated as though like it's counting, you know, one dollar, one dollar, that kind of thing.

[15:52] And then it stops. Because the next thing is not another dollar or mene, but tackle. That is, if Belshazzar's life was being weighed in the scales, instead of mene being added to the balance, you know, it's a shekel, a tackle, that's all.

And then it was in balance already. His life, in other words, has come up short. He's a lightweight. And so finally, Perez, half a mene to signify that his kingdom then, the mene being the kingdom, will be split in two and given half to the Medes and half to the Persians.

Well, we don't really know what happened to Belshazzar after that, what was going on in his mind, because he still proceeds to give Daniel his reward. He was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

But to no avail to himself, because that very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

Belshazzar had been tried and found wanting, and God's judgment on him has been swift. Now you might think, this is all a bit sudden, one indiscretion over a drunken night, and that's all happened to him.

[17:17] But as I've already explained, and Daniel has said, Belshazzar should have known better. Living in his father's shadow, he would have seen all the warnings.

He should have known better. Now I don't know about you, but I'm a bit of a slow learner myself. A bit stubborn, set in my ways. And you know, for years I was told I needed to keep up my fluids. You know, you all don't have that problem, because you've always been carrying a water bottle, one liter around. But it wasn't until I had kidney stones, who laughed, that I learned the painful lesson of not drinking that one and a half liters of water a day.

Now before that I thought, you know, everyone else can do it, but I'm the exception to the rule. I don't need it. That's the way with our pride, isn't it?

And sometimes, like Nebuchadnezzar, we have to be humble, don't we, to learn our lesson. But you know, there's also another way in which God warns us through the example of others.

[18:29] And sometimes, in his kindness, we're taught by seeing what God does with others. And often, you know, sometimes we can go, oh, got what he deserved, didn't he?

Thankfully, I, not like him. But that's not the way we should be responding, should we? The Apostle Paul writes in our other reading today in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 1, occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

And for us, we don't only have Nebuchadnezzar's example, we also have Belshazzar's example, don't we? One is a picture of redemption through repentance, the other of judgment from pride and arrogance.

And Paul says, both are examples from Scripture for our benefit, for us to learn, so that it doesn't apply or doesn't come true for us.

And then Paul continues at the end, verse 11, a few verses later, these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

[20:14] So if you think you are standing, be careful that you don't fall. You see, there are a number of ways, aren't there, for pride to rear its ugly head in us.

You know, we can do it by just rejecting the good news of Jesus. We've been told that, you know, we have forgiveness of sins if we humbly repent because Jesus died in our place, we will be forgiven.

But no, we can reject that often and think, no, I don't need Jesus, I don't need his help. But pride can also occur even when we profess to be Christians, can't we?

Paul said here that the Israelites drank from the same rock, that of Christ. They were all baptized under the cloud. They were all rescued through the parting of the Red Sea.

They were saved, supposedly, weren't they? And yet, they continued to sin even though they knew better. They did not humble themselves to submit to God's will.

[21 : 13] And this we can do as Christians too, can't we? Call ourselves Christians and yet harbor pride. Live disobediently as though God's word doesn't matter.

You see, God has not warned us by putting the writing on the wall, but he's put it in his word, hasn't he? Paul says these examples are written down for us as warnings because the culmination of the ages has come.

In other words, Paul is saying with the culmination of the ages that we're at the closing stages of history because Jesus, God's Son, has already come into the world. Judgment, just as it was for Belshazzar, can suddenly come at any time.

One minute, the world is drinking and making merry, chasing the idols of our age, whether it's fame or fortune, the next minute, it can all just come to an end, suddenly, right now, even as I'm speaking.

And of course, it doesn't have to be even apocalyptic, does it? Because, I'm sure many of you will realize, the circumstances of our own personal lives can just change in a flash, can't it?

[22 : 29] One moment, things are going fine and then suddenly, something can happen. Our lives, literally, are in God's hand, isn't it?

Day by day, moment by moment, our lives, are literally, every breath we take, we are in God's hands. But of course, when we live sober and humble lives, in obedience, in dependence, to God, then this fact, that our lives, are in His hands, is not one of terror.

It shouldn't make our knees knock, our faces pale, because, that fact, that truth, actually, is a great comfort to us. To have, our lives, in God's hand, when we are in Christ Jesus, means, we are safe. We don't need to fear death, or disease, pressure, or persecution, because we are in the hands, of a loving, and powerful creator, who knows, every detail, in our lives, and understands us, intimately, and has ordained, the course, of our lives, for His purpose.

And there is no more judgment, because Jesus, has taken that for us. And so for us, when we put our trust in Jesus, and we obey, and follow Him, the writing, is not on the wall.

[23 : 59] Instead, what is written, is our names, in the book of life, for eternity. And that is a great comfort. That should not terrify us, even though the world around us, might be a dangerous, and terrifying place.

So let's hold fast to that. Let's live humbly, for the sake of Jesus, but let's live secure, in the hope, of glory, having our names written, in the book of life.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you, for the numerous warnings, that you have given to us, as examples in the Bible. But also, I guess, as we look around, examples, in our circumstances, and life in this society.

Thank you for giving us, multiple chances, because, particularly for me, we are slow learners. But help us not to presume, on your patience, and forbearance.

Lord, for those of us, who are far away, from you at this time, please give us the courage, and faith, to turn around, before it's too late. For those of us, who are overconfident, in thinking we are standing, please, wake us up, to our pride and error.

[25 : 13] Keep all of us faithful, so that, what we will find, is that, our names are written, in the book, of the Lamb. Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.

In his precious name, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.