

The Writing on the Wall

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you continue to teach us through it. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to have minds that understand your word and hearts that would live in light of it.
- We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, am I on? Am I okay, Andre? Yep, great. Terrific. Some years ago, one of our girls was in a newspaper.
- She had a photograph taken and she was in a newspaper when a petting zoo came to our church playgroup. And then about a month ago, I think it was, she was also on TV. She submitted a little short video to an ABC Kids program and the program selected hers to show it on TV.
- And then just last week, I think it was, the program, the ABC program, repeated the episode. So she was on TV again. And we didn't see it, but some friends from this church told us about it.
- And when she heard that she'd been in a newspaper and then TV twice, she said to her siblings, she said, oh, I've been on newspaper and TV twice.
- [1 : 1 2] Well, I love the spotlight. And the spotlight loves me. Now, I think she was joking.
- Although when I asked permission, her permission to tell you this story this morning, she was very happy for me to tell you. So perhaps I should be worried about her pride. But more seriously, what are we to do when our leaders of the world show real pride and arrogance?
- What are we to do when their pride and arrogance is particularly directed in defiance against God, whether consciously or subconsciously? And yet, God does not humble them.
- He doesn't seem to do anything about them. You see, last week, we were reminded that God rules and restores the humble like Nebuchadnezzar. Do you remember? Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and then he acknowledged God's rule.
- And so God restored him to chapter 4, verse 36, to become even greater than he was before. But what are we to do, though, when God does not seem to humble the proud?
- [2 : 2 2] For example, President Trump is a pretty proud man. Earlier this year in March, he refused to shake hands with Germany's Prime Minister, Angela Merkel. And then at the NATO summit, he pushes past the Prime Minister of Montenegro, which doesn't sound bad until you see it.
- So have a look at this slide, the next slide from BBC News. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- It's incredible, isn't it? It's not very humble, is it? And then there's his ongoing comments to North Korea, which, to quote the North Korean news agency, said, I quote, his comments are driving the situation on the Korean peninsula to the brink of nuclear war.

And if it wasn't for the North Korean Prime Minister standing down and deciding not to shoot missiles at Guam, who knows where we'd be? Or take Robert Mugabe, Prime Minister of Zimbabwe.

You'll need to go, not to the next slide, then we'll go to the slide after. So thanks, Sujen. Next slide. Yeah, next one again. So here's Robert Mugabe.

[3 : 41] And last year, he celebrated his 92nd birthday, which cost the people \$800,000. And he had a big birthday cake. And he held it in a drought-stricken part of his country in front of everyone.

There he is eating it in front of everyone. And his press secretary defended the party, saying on the next slide, this is what the press secretary said, the birthday is important. And it is like the birth of Jesus, who was born to rescue us the same way President Mugabe was born in 1924 to free all of us, including you, journalists.

And Mugabe accepts all this, such is his pride and arrogance, despite being responsible for an estimate of 50,000 deaths during his reign. And so, on online news program from Zimbabwe, on the next slide, it says, of course, the headline is, Mugabe should be jailed for his murderous crimes.

And then under the headline, which he can't see, so let me read it to you, the journalist says, this is from Zimbabwe, Mugabe is 93 years old now, so this is just recently, last month, in fact, and one cannot help wondering whether he will ever face justice for all his murderous crimes.

So, why hasn't God humbled him? I mean, what do you say to a Christian living in Zimbabwe? How do you encourage them? Or, closer to home, an article in The Age, on the next slide, earlier this year, commented on our own Victorian government's tendency towards arrogance.

[5 : 10] And the article says, Daniel Andrews' approach is, and I quote, announce now and consult later. Or another quote, my way or the highway. So, you think of the CFA, if you remember that, or the announcement of the Sky Rail from Cranbourne to Pakenham, or the announcement of the new youth jail planned for Melbourne's West.

Now, we probably need these things. But the article is commenting on his leadership style, which is, well, we politely say confident. And it's also contrary to God.

I mean, just think of SRI being taken out of the school time frame. It's now only allowed in lunch times, which means the numbers have plummeted. Or in 2015, there was a ban on Christmas carols in schools.

At the end of last year, 2016, they reversed that and they said, oh no, there was some confusion about that. But even though some schools had cancelled their festivities. Or the recent bill that targeted Christian groups from hiring Christians that was only just defeated.

Or the euthanasia bill this year. You see, last week, we were reminded that God rules, yes. Christ restores the humble, like Nebuchadnezzar, whom he humbled.

[6 : 25] But what are we to do when God does not seem to humble the proud? I mean, all those people I just mentioned are still ruling. What are we to say as Christians?

Is God ruling or not? Well, today's chapter helps us to answer those questions. For today, we meet another king who also rules arrogantly against God. So we're at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles.

It'd be really helpful if you did follow along in the Bible. If you're visiting here, our practice is always to see what God says, not what just Andrew Price says. So you need to check up on me and have a look at the Bible.

Verse one. King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. So here in verse one, we meet a new king in Babylon.

Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar has died and it's now 23 years later. And this new king is called Belshazzar, which sounds very much like Daniel's Babylonian name.

[7 : 30] So just so you don't get confused on the next slide, I'll put the two names up there. One is Belshazzar and Daniel's name is Belteshazzar. So there's a T-E in the middle there, just so you know the difference.

But Belshazzar was actually a vice regent. He was ruling for his dad, Nabonidus. You see on the next slide, one of many stone tablets that are in the British Museum called the Babylonian Chronicles.

And so we know from this Babylonian history and other history around the time, like on the next slide, this is a cylinder with again Babylonian history on it in the British Museum. We know that Nabonidus was actually the king, but he had left Babylon, the capital, and was in another place in Arabia, we think, for 10 years.

And so he left his son, Belshazzar, to rule. What's more, we know that the empire of the Persians and Medes was knocking at the door of Babylon.

In fact, a few days before chapter 5 of Daniel, this event here, King Cyrus had defeated King Nabonidus of Babylon and his army only 80 kilometers from the capital of Babylon.

[8 : 41] And so, you know, an attack was imminent. So what does Belshazzar, the acting king, do with the Persians and Medes knocking on the door? He throws a huge party.

Talk about overconfidence. There's no preparations for battle. But not only does he show off his confidence in the face of the attack, he shows off his wealth, as the text tells us.

He puts on a huge banquet for a thousand of his nobles. And in verse 2, he brings in all his wives and his concubines. And at the end of verse 1, it's better translated, he drank wine in front of them, the nobles.

Now, I'm sure they were all drinking, but the narrator is trying to show us that Belshazzar is showing off his wealth, you know, and drinking in front of them with all his wives and concubines.

It's arrogance, you see. But it's not just a show of arrogance. It's also a show of defiance against God. Do you see verse 2? 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.

[9 : 55] 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. And as they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

And now here it says that Nebuchadnezzar was his father, but in verse 2, there's a little footnote next to the word father. And down the bottom of your Bibles, it says that the word can also be used in terms of a predecessor, a royal predecessor.

And so Belshazzar's biological father was Nabonidus. Nebuchadnezzar was like the royal grandfather. They weren't actually from the same family, but it was like a royal grandfather.

But the very mention of Nebuchadnezzar's name here means that Belshazzar would have remembered that Nebuchadnezzar not only took the goblets from God's temple in Jerusalem, but by the end of his life, Nebuchadnezzar had some sort of faith in that God of Jerusalem.

Do you remember how chapter 4 ended last week? It ended with Nebuchadnezzar proclaiming to everyone in his kingdom that Daniel's got our God ruled. Belshazzar knew that, and yet he deliberately does the opposite to that.

[11 : 13] He gets the goblets from the temple in Jerusalem, which is mentioned twice, just so we don't miss the point. And he doesn't just drink wine from them in an act of blasphemy.

He does so while committing idolatry, worshipping idols. It's as though he deliberately spits in the face of God, whom Nebuchadnezzar worshipped.

You see, it's an act of defiance. On the next slide, Karl Marx, one of the fathers of communism, famously once said, I wish to avenge myself against the one who rules above.

And part of his teaching was to get rid of all religion. Or more recently, do you remember in 2008, on the next slide, the bus campaign by Richard Dawkins? You know, there's probably no God, so just be happy.

See, it's as though God was a big joke. See, here are people spitting in the face of God, like Belshazzar is doing here, acting as though God is just a joke in a show of arrogance and defiance.

[12 : 13] But then suddenly something happens. Point two, verse five. Suddenly the fingers 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 his face turned pale. And he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

On the next slide is an artist's interpretation of what the scene might have looked like. Can you imagine seeing this hand without a body just appearing in midair and riding on the wall?

In fact, this was so scary for the king that in verse six, where it says his legs became weak. It is literally in the Aramaic, his loins were loosened, which could mean his hips or his.

Yeah, that's you got it. And in an instant, this king's arrogance and defiance is brought to a halt, isn't it? And the king understandably now wants to know what this writing means.

[13 : 16] See verse seven. 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. Then all the king's wise men came in, but 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 and his nobles were baffled.

Here the king uses all he has at his disposal, all his wise men and throws all his wealth at it to try and interpret the writing. By the way, the reference to making someone the third highest was again because he wasn't the true king.

And Nabonidus, his father, was ranked one. Belshazzar, the vice regent, was ranked two. So he could only offer rank number three in the kingdom. But you see, for all his power, he's actually powerless, isn't he?

In other words, it's a reminder that he does not really rule. I mean, just picture him as this king reduced to a pale mess with loosened loins and knocking knees. It's not particularly a picture of power and rule, is it?

[14 : 31] And so when the queen enters, she tells him to pull it together. See verse 10. The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, comes into the banquet hall. May the king live forever, she said.

Don't be alarmed. Don't look so pale, she says. Now, the queen is probably not Belshazzar's wife because in verse 2, we were already told that all his wives and concubines were already at the banquet, do you remember?

Rather, again, as your footnote says next to the word queen, it can refer to the queen mother or even the queen grandmother. Perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar's wife, who would be in her late 80s, which is conceivable since Daniel himself would have been in his early 80s.

Either way, she tells Belshazzar to stop being alarmed and stop looking so pale. In other words, pull yourself together. Why? Well, verse 11. There is 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. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

[15 : 41] He did this because 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.

Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means. The queen responds by telling Belshazzar about Daniel. And notice how she refers to Daniel by his Hebrew name, Daniel.

He doesn't actually, she doesn't call him by his Babylonian name, Belshazzar. That's another reason why this could actually be Nebuchadnezzar's wife, who perhaps came to the same faith in Daniel's God as her husband Nebuchadnezzar did last week.

And so out of respect, calls Daniel by his Hebrew name. Either way, Daniel is summoned and gives the meaning for the writing. So we're at point three in your outline and verse 13 in your Bibles.

So Daniel was brought before the king and the king said to him, are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father, the king brought from Judah? I've heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.

[16 : 53] The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read the writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I've heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and given a gold chain placed around your neck and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

And then Daniel answered the king, you can keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

He didn't love Daniel's rebuke there. He also chides Belshazzar like a child. It's almost as though he says, look, you can keep your dress up clothes and your gold jewelry, makeup jewelry.

But by doing so, he also highlights where his confidence is compared to Belshazzar's. You see, Belshazzar still finds his confidence in his wealth that he was showing off before, such that he is still trying to use it to solve his problems.

And yet Daniel rejects it because his confidence is in God, as we've seen in earlier chapters. And now he reminds Belshazzar about this God who really rules. You see verse 18?

[18 : 07] Your majesty, the most high God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the 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. And 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.

Chapter four last week, do you remember? 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 the earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

Here Daniel refers to chapter four last week. In fact, these two chapters are meant to be read together. And do you notice verse 21? He uses exactly the same phrase that he used three times in chapter four.

That Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge that the most high God is sovereign or literally rules over the kingdoms of the earth and gives them to whomever he pleases.

[19 : 30] Exactly the same phrase as last week. Three times. You see, these chapters go together and both remind us that God rules. Yet while Nebuchadnezzar learnt his lesson in chapter four, Belshazzar does not.

It's as though, and it's not as though Belshazzar forgot what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He knew it. See verse 22? But you, Belshazzar his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You have brought the goblets from his temple brought to you, and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them.

You praise the gods of silver and 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.

You see, Belshazzar knew what he was doing. Grabbing the goblets and toasting to idols was a deliberate choice to defy God, the God his royal grandfather came to believe in.

[20 : 47] It was an act of hubris, not humility. An act of arrogance, setting himself against the Lord of heaven, even though God rules and holds his life in his hands.

And again, we've seen leaders and institutions in history do this, have we not? During the reign of the Soviet Union, there was a deliberate attempt to stamp out religion.

The government seized churches and turned them into science academies because science was to be the new God. They even built science academies to resemble churches. So, like this one on the next slide.

This one is still in Latvia today. And you can see the spire going up, like a cathedral spire. There's a clear setting themselves against the Lord of heaven.

Or closer to home, take the ABC. Last time the same-sex marriage vote came up, the ABC aired ads in favour of same-sex marriage, but refused to air ads in favour of traditional or biblical marriage.

[21 : 50] In fact, it was so bad that one of its own programs on the next slide, Media Watch, it's a bit hard to read all the writing, it's not there, it's just to show you this is a real episode, you can still go online and watch today.

And Media Watch actually had to highlight the clear bias of the ABC. It's been helpful to hear though, recently the editorial manager of ABC, Mark Maley, told his staff not to advocate for same-sex marriage on social media, but to simply report the facts.

It would be nice, wouldn't it? And though, if you've seen some recent articles on the issue, it's clear that there's still a push to set themselves against God's view. You see, here are rulers and institutions who, like Belshazzar, oppose and defy God's rule in God's world.

And for Belshazzar, well, the writing is on the wall. See verse 24? Therefore, he sent the hand that wrote the inscription, and this is what the inscription that was written, mean, mean, tickle, passen.

Here's what these words mean. God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. You've been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

[23 : 07] Again, in your Bibles, there's footnotes next to each of those words to tell you what they mean. They can mean an amount of money, or they can mean numbered, weighed, and divided.

And that's what is going to happen to Belshazzar. In fact, a number of these phrases have actually made their way into our own language today, haven't they? So we use phrases like, your days are numbered.

I nearly used that phrase with one of my kids the other day. We use phrases like, you've been weighed and found wanting. And of course, the writing is on the wall. And so we all know what they mean, don't we?

They all mean your time is up. Your goose is cooked. Judgment is coming. Now, if you were Belshazzar, how would you respond at this point? Would you plead for mercy or humble yourself like your royal grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, did?

Well, point four, verse 29. Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, and a gold chain was placed around his neck, even though he didn't ask for it.

[24 : 11] And he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. And so that very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius Amid took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

Darius Amid was probably another name for Cyrus, and we'll see more of him next week. But for now, given what we've seen, I think it's quite clear that the message of this chapter is, God rules and will judge those who arrogantly set themselves against him.

Just like we heard in our second reading about the rich fool. And this chapter is meant to complement last week's chapter. In fact, on the back of your outlines, if you've got your outlines there, you just turn them over to the back, I've got an outline of the structure from chapters 2 to 7.

All these chapters are written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. And so the Aramaic language groups chapters 2 to 7 together into like a sandwich. And so the top and bottom, like the bread, if you like, is a dream about an everlasting king and kingdom.

Then as you work your way into the middle of the sandwich, we have two examples of God's people standing firm. So chapter 3, the fiery furnace, and next week, chapter 6, the lion's den. And then in the middle of the sandwich, the meat of the sandwich, the big point are chapters 4 and 5, where there are two kings, Nebuchadnezzar last week, and Belshazzar this week, who are taught that God rules.

[25 : 34] He will restore the humble, but he will judge the arrogant. This was the big message of encouragement for Israel, who were living under foreign kings who opposed their God.

And so the message is similar to last week, really. That is, when we see our rulers or our institutions ruling in ways that are arrogant and contrary to God, and still not being humbled, don't worry.

For God does rule, and he will humble them. If not in this life, then the life to come. The writing is on the wall. But this writing on the wall for modern-day Belshazzars doesn't take the form of actual words on an actual wall.

It takes the form of a risen Savior. You see, Jesus came to earth to die for us, so that we could be forgiven for all the times we've set ourselves against God. You know, lived our lives without submitting to God's rule.

Christ died to pay for our sins for all those times so that we could be forgiven. But what's more, God raised him from the dead, for which we have evidence. In fact, on the next slide, I just hired this movie from iTunes called The Case for Christ, based on a book by Lee Strobel.

[26 : 51] You remember, he was a legal editor of the Chicago Tribune who set out to disprove the resurrection and Christianity and then realized there's so much evidence for it, he became a Christian.

You've got evidence for the resurrection. And because of the resurrection of Jesus, it proves he is the king who will judge. So on the next slide, Paul puts it like this in Acts 17.

He says, God commands all people everywhere to repent. Why? Well, for or because he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

How do we know this is for real? Well, he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. You see, Christ's resurrection proves he is the king who will one day judge.

The resurrection of Jesus is like God's new writing on the wall. God has set a day when he will judge all who have set themselves against him by the one man he has appointed.

[27 : 54] And the resurrection proves that that one man is Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and judge of all. So if you are here today and you're continuing to set yourself against Christ, the Lord of heaven, then I'm afraid the writing is on the wall.

Jesus has been raised from the dead and so your days are numbered. Our days are numbered. So please repent. Turn around. Believe in Jesus Christ.

Ask God for forgiveness and he will forgive. Follow Christ as your king who loves you deeply. So deeply he died for you. And for us who have already put our trust in Christ, then two things.

First, like last week, are there areas of our lives where God does not rule? Where we continue to set ourselves against him and live our own way instead of his way?

I mean, I know there are some things in the Bible that we may not like, like, you know, perhaps the Bible's teaching on sexuality. Yet do we humbly admit that God knows better than we do and submit to him?

[28 : 59] Or do we set ourselves against him? Or when suffering comes, do we rail against him and humbly trust or humbly trust him? Some friends of ours last week just found out that their third child has Down syndrome.

And despite pressure from doctors to abort the baby, they've had lots of pressure actually, they are keeping it. Now, I don't know why God has allowed this to happen to them, nor do they.

But they're not going to now set themselves against God and become bitter towards him. After all, they know God knows suffering himself in Christ.

Instead, they're going to humbly trust him. I don't know what it might be for you. It could be the way you use your time or money or speech, which shows that God does not rule that part of life. If that's the case, then you're setting yourself against him.

We are to repent and ask for forgiveness and he will forgive. When it comes to life and God, our attitude is to be one of humility like Nebuchadnezzar ended with last week, not one of hubris like Belshazzar ended with this week.

[30 : 06] But the second thing for us, and this is really the big point of application, is when we see rulers still ruling arrogantly and not being humbled, then again, don't worry for God still rules and he will one day judge them, hold them accountable.

It may not be in this life, but it will be in the life to come. For he has raised Christ from the dead, which is proof Jesus is king. It's the new writing on the wall.

He will one day judge all. So when we see Mugabe still ruling arrogantly and wonder why God has not humbled him and can't figure out what to say to Christians living there, well, we're to say, don't worry, God still rules and he will one day judge him, hold him accountable.

When we see Trump continuing to rule arrogantly and not yet being humble, then don't worry, for God rules and he will one day judge him. Or when we see the ABC or the Victorian government continue to set themselves against God and his people, don't worry, for God rules and he will one day judge them.

Indeed, if that's the case, we ought to pray for them, oughtn't we? And we ought to do all we can, as Gaylene said before, to use the J word, Jesus, to those we know.

[31 : 29] For Christ has risen, which means the writing is on the wall.