

God Will Not Be Mocked

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[0 : 00] Well, those of you who have been joining in with us through this study of Daniel, perhaps! you're wondering from that song that we just sang, which finishes with the words, 'Show us Christ! And maybe you're thinking, well, I guess we got that one wrong because we don't see Christ until the New Testament. Of course, Christ isn't in the Old Testament. But as we've come to understand from the ministry of Christ and through even Christ's words to His disciples on the night of His resurrection, Christ will tell them, and it says that Christ showed Himself, the testimony of Himself, from all the law of the prophets, from Moses all the way to the New Testament.

The scriptures from Genesis to Revelation bear testimony to the work of Christ, to the gospel of Christ, to the message of Christ, the example of Christ and the character of God that's written across the pages of the scriptures from start to finish. So we say, show us Christ because we know the scriptures are meant to the work that God intends or wants to do for us through the ministry of Christ in Christ alone. So we can say, show us Christ because the testimony of the scriptures is meant to point us to Him. And as you're familiar with the statement that preaching is meant to get us to the point of saying yes or no to Jesus Christ. That's the goal. That's the point of preaching, to lead us to the gospel, to help us to understand that there's a decision to be made. Whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, there's always a fresh walk of faith that we're called to live. This constant correction of heart in alignment to the things of the word to call us to Christ's standard, but also to call us to Christ's mercy and grace for our lives. We'll see that again this morning in Daniel chapter 5. I would encourage you please open up your Bibles to Daniel chapter 5. If you're using the Pew Bible, I would encourage you to turn there. It's on page 742, Daniel chapter 5. It opens with these words, King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of a thousand. It's there in Daniel chapter 5, verse 1. And if you've kind of tracking along with us in this series, you're like, uh, Belshazzar what?

Who is this guy? How do we get Belshazzar? What happened between Daniel chapter 4 and Daniel chapter 5? Who is this new guy? What happened to Nebuchadnezzar? Where are we in the timeline? And what in the world is taking place in Babylon? Well, let me try to catch you up real quick. For those of you who have not been a part of our series or maybe even missed a few of the sermons, let me just catch up to where we are in the timeline. We find ourselves in Babylon. We find ourselves about 540 years away from the time of Christ. About 540 BC here in Daniel chapter 5. You see, the people of Israel had been given some very clear commands, especially as it related to their worship. Worship God alone. Worship the one true God, the God of Israel.

And when they were to worship other gods, the consequence was, one of the many other consequences, is they would be exiled away from their land and they would be taken captive by a power greater than them.

So God used Babylon to discipline his people because they did that very thing. They chose to align their hearts to other gods, worshipped other gods, other idols, and so God sent them into captivity here in Babylon. Some of the stories that you are probably familiar with, the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. And next week we're going to turn the page and look at Daniel in the lion's den.

[4 : 27] But here we find Belshazzar, who happens to be the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. And I'm just going to walk through a bit of that history so that we can understand kind of how things happened and where we are now after Nebuchadnezzar has left the scene. In Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is on the roof of his house. And we saw that this house was significant.

Excavations have happened for about the last hundred years in Babylon and they've identified what they think to be this palace, which is in the southern part of the city of Babylon. It was 350 yards by 250 yards. And if my math is correct, that would have comprised about 14 and a half acres. One

palace, 14 and a half acres. It would have consumed this entire property that we're on right now. Significant. And the banquet hall that we're going to be studying about, reading about this morning was about 175 feet by 55 feet in kind of its dimensions.

This was a significant hall. Nebuchadnezzar, when he died, he turned the kingdom over to his son. His son's name was Amal Marduk. Amal Marduk was only able to reign for two years before his brother-in-law would assassinate him and take the throne. His brother-in-law's name was Neriglizar. Neriglizar was a prominent official in Nebuchadnezzar's army and married, of course, then to one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters. He assumed the throne and continued on a pretty successful campaign for the next four years.

Neriglizar, being a prominent official, he would lead a successful campaign against the kingdom of Cilicia, which is in kind of the southern, southeastern part, southeastern corner of modern-day Turkey. When he would return to Babylon, about four years of his reign, he would soon die. His son would take the throne and succeed him, but only reigned for about three months before he was beaten to death.

And the plotters behind this whole escapade, one of whom is thought to be no less than Belshazzar, who is the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, whose father is Nabonidus. Belshazzar and this group of plotters and schemers would hand the kingdom over to Nabonidus. Nabonidus, it's thought, has an Assyrian background. His mother is a prominent official, not only in Nebuchadnezzar's empire, but also in Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar. And she seems to wield a great deal of influence in the kingdom at that time. But Nabonidus, excuse me, Nabonidus, excuse me, lots of nabs. Nabonidus, his mother, because of the prominent position she had, probably worked a deal so that Nabonidus, who was also a great official in the kingdom, was able to marry another daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. And that's why Belshazzar would be a grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar. So lots is going on here. Nabonidus would reign for 17 years.

He would be self-exiled. He would move his way about 500 miles away from the city of Babylon down to the country of Arabia, or the region of Arabia. The reason is because he sought to shift the worship of Babylon away from Marduk, which was the principal god, and to an Assyrian god. And so that didn't seem to go over very well for those living in Babylon. So he exiled himself in Arabia, many, many miles away. And his son then would be the co-regent and would assume the leadership over the city of Babylon and over the empire itself. That's where we find ourselves now into our story about 23 years after the departure of Nebuchadnezzar and after Daniel chapter 4. Here we are at the tail end of the empire of Babylon in about 539 BC. What will stand out in our text today is Belshazzar's brazen defiance against God. He had no reservations to mock God. He had no reservations to defy God in a public way.

[9 : 19] And God will not be mocked. That's what we'll see in our passage today. And those who suppose that they can make a mockery of God in a public place will ultimately experience the consequences of their actions as God will bring judgment upon them. Of course, this is reminiscent of what we find in the New Testament where King Herod in Acts chapter 12 verses 20 to 23 will seek to do that kind of thing. He will appeal to the people of Tyre and Sidon who will come down and visit him.

Tyre and Sidon, which were a coastal region, coastal cities, they were depending upon Herod and the kind of this agricultural region, this agricultural center to provide them food. And so these people coming down from Tyre and Sidon are standing before King Herod and they need to make sure that King Herod is on their good side. So King Herod comes out in front of them. He makes this speech and the people of Tyre and Sidon say, the voice of a God and not of men. The voice of a God and not of men. And of course, Herod, accepting and receiving this defiled worship of himself, now will experience the judgment of God.

Immediately it says, an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God and he was eaten by worms and died. A tragic end that came because of unbridled pride in defiance against the Lord. The Apostle Paul will warn the church in Galatia about the same kind of thing, not mocking God.

And so while we can try to keep this a little distant from us and say, well, that's those kinds of people. It doesn't, it's not a problem that I will have. We need to make sure that through this passage of scripture that our hearts are tender to the things that God wants to teach us. In Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 and 8, Paul will warn the church. He says, do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that he will also reap. The one who sows to his flesh will from

the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. So the trajectory of the life of those who seek to humble themselves before the Lord will recognize the ways in which we either directly or indirectly, whether purposefully or inadvertently, will blaspheme God through our lives and there will be a growing tenderness in our hearts to keep from such activity.

As we walk through this text, I first want you to see Belshazzar's defiance against God. I want to just kind of draw that to our attention and help us understand the significance of what he did so we can then begin to appreciate the response that God will give later in this passage. First, Belshazzar's defiance against God in the first four verses. Notice, King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, his concubines drank from them. And they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

[13:11] So, at the very beginning of this, we recognize that there are some things that kind of led to Belshazzar's defiance. I think some attitudes that we see in him that come through in our text, and there are probably many others as well, but these couple that really stand out in our text, I think we can be informed by and warned by and recognize the same kinds of tendencies, perhaps, in our life, the same drift that may happen that may lead us to the same kinds of activities.

Belshazzar was defiant, yes, but his defiance was a result of his overconfidence. It was a result of his overconfidence, a symptom of what was going on inside his heart. Because as we know, it's the actions that we have are a reflection of what's going on in our heart. The beliefs, the convictions that we have inside are what manifest themselves in external actions. Belshazzar, yes, he defies the Lord, but I believe it was a result of his overconfidence, at least in one respect. Belshazzar makes this great feast for a thousand of his lords, and it was typical in that day, rather than to be in public view for the king to actually remain hidden on certain kinds of occasions. But here we find King Belshazzar, who is right out in front, in front of his lords. He is the center of attention, and essentially directing this drunken fest and these activities in celebration of himself.

While the timeline of history at this moment isn't as clear as it could be, one thing is abundantly clear, that at this point the city of Babylon will fall this very night. Daniel chapter 5 verse 30, just dropped down towards the end of this chapter. Notice, that very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean, was killed. Now, I know this is really obvious, but the only way for that to be true is that the Persian armies were camping around the city of Babylon during this drunken escapade.

He had the audacity to call all of his generals, all of his lords, to have this drunken fest on the very night that they should have been most alert. What was he thinking? And according to the Nabonidus chronicle, the Babylonians had just suffered a significant defeat just a couple of days before in a neighboring part of their region. So that the city of Babylon really was the only stronghold that was left untouched, and the Persian army, Cyrus, led by Cyrus the Great, had virtually destroyed and conquered the rest of Babylon up to this point, the empire of Babylon. This was not a time for a party. This was not a time to celebrate. This was not a time to divert attention of the military generals and essentially make them unfit for battle. This was a time for readiness, a time for alertness.

This was a time for strategic planning. But here they were, all absent from the walls, all dulling their senses. Their overconfidence in the defensive systems of Babylon made them absolutely vulnerable.

[16:58] Not only the elaborate structures that were in place to defend them, we talked a little bit last week about the walls, the system of walls, two walls that guarded the entire city, 15 miles square, towering at heights of four stories tall, 25 feet wide. In every 60 feet there was a defensive tower.

In their minds it was impenetrable. Nebuchadnezzar would later add, so later in his reign, but obviously before Belshazzar took reign, Nebuchadnezzar would add another double wall system to continue to guarantee the city of Babylon as being virtually impregnable. That coupled with the fact that they were prepared.

They had storehouses and food cash that would keep them for decades. Not to mention this fresh water supply of the Euphrates River running right through the city. This endless supply of fresh water. They were set.

In their minds, this feast was a defiant show of power. We are untouchable. Nothing, no power in heaven or on earth can take us away. And so here Belshazzar is in front of his generals, essentially saying and drawing attention to himself, don't worry guys, everything is under control. We're fine. This symbolic expression of Belshazzar's conviction that he was untouchable. It was Belshazzar's confidence. His faith in the stability of his defensive systems that led to his demise. His overconfidence, as it were, in proudly assuming that he was stronger than God. I wonder for us this morning, are there ever times where our overconfidence in the things that we, the systems that we have put together, our overconfidence begins to shift and divert our confidence away from God and focused on self. When we feel like, hey, we're set. Or when we feel like, hey, I can ride out this storm.

I can grit it out. Our family and our situation, we're going to be all right because of good financial planning or because of good networks that we've created. Maybe a resume that can open the door for any opportunity that you have. Perhaps a degree that makes you irresistible or a charismatic personality or that iron will that seems to be able to press through any obstacle or that positive outlook on life or that set of skills that are so versatile and valuable in the marketplace. Maybe your confidence is in all the wrong things and it's diverted your attention away from confidence in God.

[20 : 04] what gives you peace of mind this morning? What provides assurance and rest for your heart? When this thing is in place, then I know that we're okay. Or when this thing is not in place, perhaps that's a better question. When this thing is not in place, I know that I begin to be a little bit more anxious, a little bit more afraid, a little bit more concerned about the outcomes of the future.

I'm not sure the future is sure anymore if this thing is not in place. What gives us a sense that everything is going to be okay? Perhaps, perhaps our overconfidence is getting in the way and creating a vulnerability in our own heart that would shift the focus away from our faith in God to a confidence in self. The psalmist will put it well when he says in Psalm 20 verses 5 to 7, he says, may we shout for joy over your salvation. This should be the testimony of our heart.

We're looking to God for salvation, to God for deliverance, and in the name of God, we have set up our banners. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions. Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed. He will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. That's where our confidence should be in the strength of God, in the strength of God alone. So that we can say some trust in chariots, in some in horses, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God. That's the kind of confidence God has called us to have. And that kind of confidence will continue to tenderize our hearts to remain, to remain committed and submitted and humbled before the Lord. Belshazzar will blatantly defy God, and I believe that part of the problem is his overconfidence in the defensive structures which made him vulnerable. But in verses 2 to 4, we see it was also the result of empty worship. Empty worship. I'm not going to read through these verses again, but just to remind you that

Belshazzar in this drunken party decides, hey, things are really going well. The wine is flowing. We're having a good time. We're in this structure. Let's break out the holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Hey, by the way, remember how my grandpa got that from the God of Israel and brought them and put them here in the land of Shinar in the house of his God? Hey, let's testify to the fact that our gods are stronger than any other gods, and we're safe and secure here in this city. Belshazzar's confidence in the gods of Babylon and Assyria come right out into open view. In this decadent display of confidence, Belshazzar exposes his heart of empty worship.

Assuming that because Nabonidus is from kind of an Assyrian descent, that may be the reason why he tried to kind of shift the focus of worship away from Marduk and to the Assyrian god named Sin.

[23 : 29] Now, that should be a little appropriate. And because of this shift of worship to this foreign god, especially considering the fact that Babylon was initially at odds with Assyria and kind of broke away from them to establish their empire, there was a great deal of hostility, that being kind of fresh in the background against anything Assyrian. Likely was the reason why Nabonidus would then need to self-exile so far away from the center of Babylon's empire and spend the vast majority of the 17 years of his reign away from the city of Babylon. It looks as though that Belshazzar, during his reign, seeks to kind of cement his posture, his authority over the city of Babylon and over the people of Babylon by reintroducing worship to Marduk and the gods of Babylon. This being

preeminent in this instance here in our passage. The vessels that we find in our text this morning are the same vessels referred to in Daniel chapter 1 verse 2, where we find the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God and he brought them to the land of Shinar to the house of his God and placed the vessels in the treasury of his God. Idolatry, of course, is detestable to the Lord. And the key reason why the people of Israel and Judah were sent into exile because of their idolatry. Not only was idolatry and worship of foreign gods detestable to God, but the responsibility was given to the priests, the sons of Levi, and particularly the sons of Levi coming from the tribe of the, or the descendants of the Kohathites who were given the responsibility of tending to all of the holy vessels of the tabernacle as they were moving their way through the wilderness and transporting that thing from one place to the other, they were instructed in a very stern way in Numbers chapter 4, they must not touch the holy things lest they die. So they had to use cloths and coverings to ensure that they didn't touch those sacred vessels. Then in Numbers chapter 4 verse 20, we find this, but they shall not go in and even look on the holy things, even for a moment lest they die. And yet here, Belshazzar has the audacity not only to look on the holy things, not only to touch the holy things, but to introduce those holy things into pagan worship.

Daniel chapter 5 verse 4, they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze iron wood and stone. And Belshazzar's brazen defiance is here in the forefront. The result of his overconfidence, the result of his empty worship, it stands as a reminder to us of how important it is to keep our hearts tender, to keep our hearts humble, to keep our hearts receptive, because we have all, if we're honest with ourselves, have struggled with going through the motions in coming and being a part of a worship service or a worship gathering, and our heart isn't anywhere in the process of worship.

There's a number of ways we can apply this idea of empty worship, but as Paul says, we tend at times to have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. Meaning, we go through the motions, we have the right externals, we do the right things, we check the right boxes, but there's no change in our heart. There's no reverence real for God. We look godly, but we actually have been unchanged by the gospel. Christ consistently confronted the Pharisees about this very issue. Matthew chapter 15 verses 8 and 9, he says this, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. The truth of the matter is that God despises empty worship.

God despises when we just go through the motions, we just do the right things, but nothing is changed in our hearts. To the extent that the prophet Isaiah will say in Isaiah chapter 1 verses 11 to 17, this is a longer passage, but it's helpful for us this morning. It says, to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? This is God speaking to the children of Israel who are doing all the right things.

They're going through all the right motions. They were having all the right sacrifices. And he says, what to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or the lambs or goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand to trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices.

[29 : 13] Incense is an abomination to me. The moons, the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies. I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your new moons, your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They are a trouble to me. I am weary of burying them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Now that is a stern rebuke. So is there an answer? Is there a way out? Is there a way for us to correct the issue? And by God's grace, because of what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross, there is a way to make this right.

And it's only through Jesus Christ. He says in verse 16, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. In other words, come to a place of recognizing the extent of your sin and come to understand for us today because of now what Christ has accomplished for us that forgiveness is only possible through the payment of his sacrifice on the cross. His death, his resurrection has made a way for us to enjoy forgiveness and salvation and cleansing that is spoken about here in the book of Isaiah. Have you come to a place

of recognizing where you stand before God as a sinner? Have you come to a place of recognizing how despicable your empty worship is?

Have you come to a place of self-examination and asking God to change your heart, to change your life? You've bowed the knee. You've bowed the knee. You have repented from your sin. You've turned away.

You're demonstrating that there is a change of heart, not walking in the way of sin any longer, but now seeking as much as you're able with the power of God and the direction of his word to walk in the direction of obedience towards Christ. There's a noticeable change. There is a heart that reflects a submission to God himself. This confrontation or this characteristic of Belshazzar, his empty worship, his overconfidence are not isolated to him. We see these same tendencies in our own lives, even those of us who have given our lives to Christ. Now this finally leads us to the confrontation because God is faithful and gracious not to leave us in our sin. That there is this message. God sends this message to the king. He doesn't leave him where he is. He graciously sends a message. Notice there in verse 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. The king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's color changed and his thoughts alarmed him. His limbs gave way. His knees knocked together. The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, 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 their neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then all the king's wise men came in. They could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation.

[33 : 14] Then king Belshazzar was greatly alarmed and his color changed and his words were perplexed. This empty worship has led to a dramatic and public confrontation. We see first here a message from God, a message on the wall. God has graciously sent his word to Belshazzar.

Immediately God sends this message. He speaks now through this written word. Up to this point, God has used dreams to speak to Nebuchadnezzar. In speaking to Nebuchadnezzar through dreams, it's been private, it's been personal, and now this public display is met by a public confrontation.

Belshazzar has crossed the line. It was bad enough for Nebuchadnezzar to bring those holy vessels into his gods of Babylon, but now to actually employ these vessels in pagan worship was too far.

So God sends a word. Simply a man's hand that begins to write on the wall. And surprisingly, the words that were written are written in Aramaic. They're written in the very language that these wise men and officials and soothsayers are speaking every single day. And yet they come in, they read these words and have absolutely no idea what they mean.

His hand writing on the wall. The whole experience is overwhelming to Belshazzar. You've got to appreciate the physical reaction that is communicated here. He turns white as a ghost otherwise, in other words. He is scared to death. His joints are loosened and his knees knocked together. You've got to like that picture. We can all resonate and understand that picture. He is rightly terrified.

[35 : 10] He is finally in a place of seeing where he stands in relationship to the Most High. He finally at least sees and experiences that. It says here, the king called loudly, which in other words means he screamed at the top of his lungs to call in for the wise men. He is out of his mind. He is scared to death. He needs an answer immediately. But promising riches and position and bringing in all of his most gifted and intellectual men will not provide the answer that he is looking for. Of course, their failure was a testimony to the futility of Belshazzar's empty confidence and empty worship. And God will use again this moment to distinguish him and his message and his servant. All of this leaves Belshazzar baffled, overwhelmed and troubled. Again, he is overwhelmed and troubled. And we find in verse 4, he is greatly alarmed. His color changes again and his lords were perplexed. Now enter the queen mother. First, this message from God is a message from God. And now a message from the queen in verses 10 to 12. A message from the queen.

This queen, excuse me, the queen, because of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet hall. And the queen declared, O king, live forever. Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change.

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 your father, your father the king, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers.

Because of an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding, to interpret dreams, explain riddles, to solve problems, were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar.

Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation. It's not clear exactly who this queen mother is, but it's a good chance that this is actually Belshazzar's mom, who would have been a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and very acquainted with the story of Daniel, having spent a great deal of time observing how Daniel was influential in her father's kingdom, and especially recognizing and hearing the troubling dreams that her father had, and how Daniel was able to bring an answer.

[37 : 47] This queen mother comes in and offers a solution. All of your options are not spent. They're not all expended. There's one more person you can look to.

Twenty-three years have come and gone, and for whatever reason, Belshazzar is totally unfamiliar with Daniel.

But this queen mother, she understands the reputation of Daniel to be epic. It's legendary. And here she recounts the qualities that she will summarize here that are true about Daniel.

And the one recurring theme is that the spirit of the gods is in him. What he is able to do in terms of light and understanding and solving riddles and explaining dreams is not coming from him, but is coming from outside of him.

And he's able to do what no one else can do because he has a connection to God. And that's important. So let Daniel be called, she says, and he will show the interpretation in verse 12.

[38 : 51] It's not of him. All of this is going to be of God. Surprisingly, she uses his Judean name, the name Daniel.

Perhaps a direct rebuke to the king. What in the world are you doing using the Judean vessels in pagan worship? And the answer will only come from a Judean exile.

Bring him in. He'll give you the answer. Now we turn to God's messenger. God sends a messenger. Let me just walk through this briefly.

We see some qualities about this messenger, Daniel. We see some things about Daniel's life that has always put him in a spot of usefulness.

Always put him in a place of God's favor. Always has set him up to be at just the right place at just the right time because of his humble heart and his willingness to be used of God as a vessel.

[39 : 54] And that's what we see first in verses 13 to 16, that Daniel is a willing vessel. He's a willing vessel. Notice. Notice his heart.

Notice in these words that I'll read to you. A person who's ready to be called into action whenever the opportunity affords him.

Whenever God, through his providence, puts him to work. Notice. Notice. Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, who am the king, my father brought from Judah.

I have heard of you, that the spirit of God is in you, and the light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter.

But I've heard that you can give the interpretation and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be third ruler in the kingdom.

[41 : 07] Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another. Daniel as a willing vessel.

As I think and read about the life of Daniel, it's not only instructive to me, but it's a challenge to me as well. I never get the sense in reading through any parts of this account in the book of Daniel that Daniel is ever gunning for position.

He is never trying to vie for authority. He's never trying to jockey for position or to push himself forward or to gain access to the king or to do what he can do to make sure that he remains in power.

Daniel is so committed to who God is and God's plan for him as a servant of God, that he is totally convinced that if God puts him into action and God desires to use him, that God will do it at the right time in the right place.

And here Daniel has been in obscurity. He's been virtually anonymous. He's faded from existence. How did that happen? We don't know the back story, but we do know a testimony of this servant who is willing to do whatever God says whenever God puts him to work.

[42 : 32] He's not trying to compete. He's not trying to get his way. He's not trying to establish himself. He is so settled as a willing vessel to do what God says when God calls him to action.

We can learn from his example. Daniel as a willing vessel. We also see that Daniel is a courageous vessel. He's a courageous vessel.

Daniel is called in to provide an interpretation for these four words, really three words, one that's repeated, that are written on this wall. And so he's called in to interpret these words, but he begins with a confrontation of Belshazzar, who is in this imminent position, who can take Daniel's life at a moment's notice.

But Daniel, he's committed to the message that God has put in his heart. He's committed to the rebuke that God has given him to provide. And he will be courageous to represent God in a way that's faithful.

And he will share this message at the risk of losing his life. And we see this in the next several verses. Notice verse 17. Daniel answered and said before the king, Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another.

[43 : 53] Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, kingship, and greatness, and glory, and majesty.

And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, 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. 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. His glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of men. And his mind was made like that of a beast. His dwelling was with the wild donkeys.

He was fed like an ox. And his body was wet with the dew of the heaven. Until he knew the most high God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he wills.

[44 : 50] And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart. Though you knew all this, 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, 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.

Now, it should be abundantly clear to all of us in this room, this is not the message you send to a king who is in that position. But Daniel, because of his willingness to serve the Lord, his willingness to be courageous and bold with the message, is, I believe, compassionately and kindly sharing a message of truth to the king.

And as we saw last week, I don't believe that God's objective is any different than it was last week, in that God brings humility with the purpose of restoration.

That is God's heart, to bring restoration. So he sends a message to this king to humble him by his grace. He sends this word of warning so that Belshazzar might respond, but Belshazzar's heart is fixed.

[46 : 20] He will not listen. He will not submit himself to God. And Daniel boldly confronts this arrogant king.

In summary, all the peoples, of all peoples, Belshazzar, you should know the best. You've seen this for yourself.

You've recognized that it's God who raises up, God who puts down, God who restores. And in your arrogance, you have defiled the holy vessels, you have crossed the line, you have defied the Lord, and so God will judge you.

That's where we turn, finally, in verses 24 to 31. Daniel is a faithful vessel. Daniel is a faithful vessel. He has demonstrated his reliability up to this point, that God has worked through him to be able to answer dreams and riddles and hard sayings.

He has light and understanding the spirit of the gods, and we should say the spirit of the holy God is resting in him, empowering him. He is a faithful representative of the Most High.

[47 : 28] And notice what he says in conclusion. Verse 24, Then from his presence the hand was sent. This writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed.

Meany, Meany, Tekel, and Farsin. This is the interpretation, the matter. Meany, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and has brought it to an end. Tekel, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Perez, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. Then Belshazzar gave the command. Daniel was clothed with purple. A chain of gold was put around his neck. And the proclamation was made about him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Finally, Daniel interprets the writing on the wall. Four Aramaic words, literally numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. And that very night, Belshazzar was destroyed.

This impenetrable fortress was still left without a broken wall, without a gate that was smashed in, without bronze hinges that were destroyed.

[48 : 43] And so they couldn't go over the walls. They couldn't go around the walls. They couldn't go through the walls. I'm saying that as kind of a story rhyme we've told our kids.

Can't go around it. Can't go over it. So what did they do? They went under it. That's exactly what they did. They drained the river Euphrates. And the army of the Persians walked right under the walls in knee-deep water.

And they conquered Babylon that very night without ever a fight. Because all the lords and generals were toasted out of their minds, drunk because of this feast, all gathered together, all very convenient.

They could be slaughtered all at once. And that's exactly what happened. That very night, judgment would come. So we come to the end of this time together.

We have to remind ourselves that that same kind of judgment is the judgment that we all deserve. Because the offenses that King Belshazzar produced in his defiance against God are the same kinds of offenses that we produce day by day whenever we choose to stand aside and stand apart from the standards that God has set.

[50 : 01] But there is a way. There is a means of rescue. There is a means of salvation. A means of deliverance. It comes through Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Because the wage of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And so Jesus is the way for salvation. He is the way to overcome our defiant, brazen attempts to defy God day by day.

And Jesus paid it all. As the song says, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, but He's washed us white as snow.

That happens as we come to a place of recognizing our sin. We bow the knee, asking God for forgiveness, and turn our heart to Him and seek to walk in obedience to His commands.

I pray that this morning, if you do not know Jesus as your Savior, this is the moment, this is the opportunity, not to experience the judgment that Belshazzar experienced, but to experience the mercy, the restoration, the grace that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar experienced through his humiliation.

[51 : 15] May God be merciful to you by drawing you to himself in faith through Christ. God, we thank you for this testimony that you, by your grace, had sent a word and that you used your servant Daniel to make that word clear.

God, I pray that you would help us to be faithful representatives of your word to the world around us. That our lives would bear testimony of the work of Christ in us and that you would help us to be courageous in this venture of being the gospel hands and feet to bring it to the nations.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you. Hope you have a great day. Amen.