

Daniel 2:1-23

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's pray together as we stand. O God of heaven, our great God, who reveals the deepest mysteries, we pray that you would! indeed reveal your mysteries to us this morning by your word, and that you would give us a sure! and perfect hope in the kingdom that stands forever, which is coming, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Now grab a seat. Good morning. It's good to see you all. Good to be here in this warm summer morning. Well, if you're sharp and up-to-date on current events, you know that the next big thing is AI.

And as its utility begins to skyrocket, so does speculation about what it all might mean. And the most common AI joke that I've heard is something like, it's so great, I won't even mind when it, you know, takes control as our robotic overlord, or takes all of our jobs, or wipes us all out. It's just so efficient and so great, I'm not even going to be bothered when it takes over.

Which is a fascinating cultural trope to have. Not for what it says about AI, but for what it says about us. We wonder at, we fear, this idea of a knowledge that sits beyond us, that sits outside of us.

And we kind of wonder, will we use it, or will it use us? Is it our salvation, or is it our downfall? Well, nearly 3,000 years ago, King Nebuchadnezzar mulled similar thoughts as he tugged on his beard in his opulent palace, ruling the greatest empire in the world.

[1 : 4 8] He'd had a dream. And as we read, it's not just any dream. He knew it to be a sign. He knew it to be a portent. It was knowledge from the outside. And he didn't understand it, but was troubled to know it.

He couldn't sleep. He had to know what it was about. We get this picture of the king that is destabilized and furious at his limitations. And he's wondering, is this dream my salvation, or is it my downfall?

What does it mean? What is it speaking? Daniel 2 reveals that there is a knowledge that comes from outside. From the living God, the King of Heaven, who speaks through his servants.

And what we see in this chapter is that God, the true sovereign, speaks to this temporary tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar, revealing the mystery in his mercy of his eternal purposes that cannot be thwarted.

The living God reveals himself to be sovereign king, bringing a kingdom that cannot stand. That's what we'll chase down today. The king who reveals and his kingdom that stands forever.

[3 : 0 0] The God of Heaven is the king who reveals. So Nebuchadnezzar, as I said, he's the tyrant that fears. Despite his apparent supremacy, everyone would have acknowledged that he was in charge, the biggest and most powerful empire anyone had ever seen.

And yet he throws this murderous temper tantrum in verses 1 to 16. And it reveals his fragility. He's the king of all, apparently, but he's still just a man.

And despite all this energy he's spent building this court of magicians and enchanters and sorcerers who specialize in arcane information technology and raising up captive intellectuals from across the known world and training them and housing them for exactly a moment like this, for this purpose, to reach beyond human power and knowledge and harness whatever's beyond and bring it into our control, despite all of that, he's still just a heartbeat away from becoming dust.

And so Nebuchadnezzar rages. And whether it was the ferocity of his dream or his doubt in this rabble of sycophants, he demands that they provide not just the interpretation, but also the dream itself.

It's helpful background to know that the Chaldeans had their own Freuds and Youngs. Archaeologists have found these books, ancient dream manuals for interpretation. So the king would tell them the dream, and then they'd run over and flip through all these manuals, and they'd analyze the symbolism, and they'd come back and say, well, this is what it all means.

[4 : 33] But the king wants more than that. He doesn't want dream manuals. He doesn't want psychology. He wants proof that they have true access to the knowledge that is outside. The same source as the dream.

Not something that humans can devise. But they don't. And they know it. And this is what verse 11 is about. It's just this fascinating kind of moment of insight from these pagan magicians.

The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. And this shows not just the failure of pagan information technology, but by extension, the limits of human knowledge and control.

It's ironic that this very dream that tantalizes the king, after all, is a gift to him by God, just as his kingdom is a gift and his very life is a gift.

It's all been given to him. And so neither the dream nor its meaning can be deduced or reasoned or divined by pagans or stormed by force and taken. It's knowledge that belongs to God, and it has to be revealed by God.

[5 : 49] Daniel and his friends show us another way. So, I mean, put yourself in Daniel's shoes. Despite not even being there for this ultimatum, because they've been trained as wise men, they stand under this same sentence.

It's just across the board. But they face up to their limits rather differently than the king and the magicians. If you look at verse 17, it says, Then Daniel went to his house, he made the matter known to his friends, and he told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. So Daniel and his friends, they go to the Lord seeking mercy.

You could just say they prayed. They prayed. Now, they could have railed at the injustice of their situation. It is an injustice, isn't it?

They could have railed at God who allowed the exile, placed them under this horrible king. What are you doing, God? Why would you put us in this situation? They could have tried to take matters into their own hands, trusting their own wisdom or power.

[7 : 14] They could have planned a daring escape. They could have done a lot of things. But they accept and demonstrate the reality that all God's people know, which is we are utterly reliant. We live by God's mercy.

We understand by his revelation. I've thought this week how much time I could save in my life if I just did what Daniel does.

Would I face the impossible problems of the world or problems in my own life? If I started with prayer and remembered that I was relying on God's mercy instead of worrying or doing other things, acknowledging the reality that we stand before God utterly needy, utterly ignorant, waiting for his hand to act and his world to reveal.

Well, God answers this prayer. And Daniel knows it immediately. The vision is revealed to him.

This kind of moment of special revelation to a prophet of God. And then we have this psalm of praise right in the middle of this chapter. One commentator I read called it the theological center of the chapter, which I thought was lovely.

[8 : 28] Because it means the center of the chapter is not, you know, furious Nebuchadnezzar and his servants or even faithful Daniel and how wisely he acts. But the very center of what all of this is about is the God that Daniel praises.

If you look at verses 20 to 23, they spell it out for us. Wisdom and might belong to God. They're like his possessions.

They belong to him. He knows all and he rules all. And anything that we know or any power that we exercise is granted to us as kind of a tendency.

It's limited and it's by his allowance. Every time and season is in his hands. He's eternal. He holds time within himself because he's so far beyond it.

As well as every king and ruler whom he is given credit for putting up and pulling down. So whatever wisdom or understanding we have, it's a gift from his hand.

[9 : 32] He is the one who reveals the deep and the hidden. The pagans believe that the gods hoard their knowledge. They hoard it.

They're in the realm of the gods. They don't share it with us. And so it has to be thieved or built or bought from them. Stolen. But the true God here from his treasure brings out deep mysteries to share freely with his people.

Not all things, but he shares abundantly all the things that we need to know to trust him and be saved by him. I think this is a thing to hold on to.

We throw ourselves on him in prayer, yes. And we also praise. And the reason we praise is because we remember who God is and we put ourselves in the right position to him.

We reorient where we line up in the kind of schema of the universe. We put God in our minds back in his seat. We remember who he is. And as we do that, we're able to trust again.

[10 : 35] We're able to once again remember, Oh yeah, the Lord is in charge. His word to us is enough. His word to us is sure. And so even in the face of death and distress, he is good.

He is king. And just as he revealed this knowledge to Daniel, he has revealed salvation to us by his son and through scripture. His deepest mysteries from his treasure of the word made flesh, dead and raised for you, given to you freely.

Given even to this pagan tyrant. He's given the insight into the mystery of God's salvation, Nebuchadnezzar himself. And it's to show God's utter power and his mercy.

And the king, I don't think he probably repents or really trust God yet in this chapter. But he does see that something's going on in verse 47. The king answered and said, Daniel, truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.

So that's the first point. He's the king that reveals. This is all well and good. This was supposed to be, we were supposed to just read that portion of the chapter.

[11 : 52] But as I looked at the chapter this week, I realized that if you just read the first half of chapter two, you kind of miss the punchline. I mean, you do get that beautiful kind of few verses of praise.

But in this dream, in the interpretation, God reveals a very particular mystery and promise, which is not just his character, who he is, is the God who answers prayer and deserves praise, but his promise to us of this kingdom that stands forever.

And so we're just going to briefly look at that. So as you saw, Nebuchadnezzar had this vision of the statue, and we discover that its successive kingdoms, following from Nebuchadnezzar, from the most powerful and precious Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head.

He must have been quite chuffed to hear that. All the way down to the strong but brittle feet of iron and clay. And there's this vision and interpretation of the kingdoms of humanity that will war and rise and fall for the centuries following, until the stone, not cut by a human hand in verse 34, just smashes into it and crushes it into dust.

And it's scattered across the face of the earth, all these kingdoms. And then we see that the stone is alive. It's living and thriving. And the stone begins to grow into a mountain that fills the entire earth.

[13 : 08] And this is how verse 44 interprets it to us. In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

Nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

Hopefully, it's not a mystery to you that the stone is Jesus Christ. He's uncut from human hands. God himself, the king of kings.

The stone that the builders rejected. Smashing through the empires of the world and becoming the cornerstone that God is going to build his future on. His kingdom is forever, and it grows to fill the earth even now.

His people thrive and triumph generation to generation. Even as the kings of earth rise and fall, in him we stand forever. His people, while Babylon and Persia and Rome, have crumbled to dust.

[14 : 17] Look at verse 45. This is the promise. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

So, while the world can feel wild and rudderless, and our leaders sometimes feel tyrannical and calamitous, and even comparatively simple situations in our lives seem intractable to us, we need not live like Nebuchadnezzar and his minions, railing to control, furious to know the unknown.

We can trust like Daniel. We can stand under the mercy of our loving God, knowing that he knows it all and controls it all, that he sets up these kings and removes them, that he holds all things in his hand.

And in his mercy, he's revealed the greatest mystery to us already. King Jesus, his kingdom that grows to fill the earth. So let's go to him in prayer and continue in praise this morning.

Amen. Amen.