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DANIEL: The Writing on the Wall Daniel 5ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! For those of you that are guests, we want to say a special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. Whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are excited to have you with us today. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we say welcome you today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you. You can simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, you will be sent a reply text that will have a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with and to pray for you.

PRAYER MATTER:

Before we jump into our study this morning, I want to ask you to pray with me. We have heard from our Missions Partner in Honduras and there is a situation that has developed needing our fervent prayers. A self-proclaimed witch, that practices witchcraft, has long opposed our mission partner and their work. This person has now filed a lawsuit against Paul and Kay and has paid off the local judge. If the judge rules in this lady's favor, our missionaries will not only lose their ministry but also their home.

Not only do I want to spend time in prayer for this situation, I also want to invite you to join me in fasting and praying on February 23 from sunrise to sunset. This is the scheduled court date, and the hearing and judgment will take place on the same day. The lawyers representing our mission partners are working to get the case moved to another court where there is less corruption. So, let's pray together. Feel free to pray out loud even as I pray.

[PRAY]. Thank you. I mentioned this week in my email to the church, if you received that, that we are re-invigorating our prayer team. On the last Sunday of the month, folks will gather here at 8:30am and prayer walk our campus and pray for specific things on behalf of the church. I hope you will give consideration to joining us on those prayer days.

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Well, today, we continue our study in Daniel. So, I want to invite you to turn with me in your bibles to Daniel chapter 5 as we come to the famous story of the handwriting on the wall. We are going to work our way through the details of this event and then look at application for us today.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Wake Up Calls

I remember the day and time whenever you stayed in a hotel you could call the front desk and arrange a wake-up call. Anyone remember those days? Teenagers in the room are like, "You have a cell phone, set your own alarm." Students, there was a day when cell phones didn't exist.

But the phrase, "wake-up call," is an adage in our culture that has come to refer to an attention-getting event, a warning sign. Sometimes it is a negative event that calls us to a life-change. Recently, my dad suffered a mild heart-attack. While he is improving, it was a wake-up call to give attention to his health.

Well, in our text this morning, the king gets a wake-up call. A hand appears, writes on the wall, and delivers a sobering message. And in this passage, there are three major sections. We see deviancy, discipline, and demise. That is the outline of this story. I want to examine those and then look at four applications we can draw for our day and time.

MESSAGE:

So, let's first look at...

1) Deviancy.

The culture surrounding the events of Daniel 5 has continued down a deviant path. Further deviation from God's design. Look with me at verses 1-4 of Daniel 5.

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.** ² **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, and his concubines might drink from them.** ³ **Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.** ⁴ **They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

A couple of things regarding the background here and then I want to point out the deviancy that is taking place. First, we are introduced to king Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar died in 563 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach. He only reigned for two years because he was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar. Neriglissar ruled for 4 years and Labashi-Marduk took over, but only for 2 months. Finally, Nabonidus became king and reigned from 556 B.C. to the fall of Babylon, which occurs in Chapter 5, in 539 B.C.ⁱⁱ

Belshazzar is the son of Nabonidus. While we read in verse 2 that Nebuchadnezzar is his father, it is best understood that Nebuchadnezzar is his grandfather. In the original language, the term “son,” has a variety of meanings. One such meaning is that “father,” refers to a predecessor, “son” to a successor.ⁱⁱⁱ I believe this to be the case here.

If Belshazzar is Nabonidus’ son, why then is Belshazzar referred to as king? Well, Nabonidus spent most of his time in Arabia, 500 miles from Babylon.^{iv} So, being that far removed, he placed his son in charge of the kingdom.

Knowing the unfolding of the events that happen in Daniel 5, historians have verified this to be October 11 or 12, 539 B.C.^v That’s the night the Medo-Persian empire conquered Babylon. If Daniel was 15 in 605, when Jerusalem was conquered, he is now 81 years of age. Most scholars believe that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have died at this point, which would account for them not being mentioned in chapter 5.

That’s the history behind all this. But notice the deviancy going on here. This is a party. Think Super Bowl party. Red solo cups everywhere. Wardrobe malfunctions, the whole 9 yards. If not Super Bowl, think Mardi Gras.

I want you to consider the two components of deviancy happening here, immorality and irreverence. These are the very same components to deviancy in any culture. Let’s first consider the immorality.

The reference to drinking in front of this crowd and the specific mentioning in verse 2, “*when he **tasted the wine,***” is a reference to feeling the effects of drinking. In other words, Belshazzar is drunk. Most likely along with everyone else. Notice who is attending the party, “*the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines,*” verse 3. This is highlighting that there is way more going on at

this party than just drinking. You see the immorality. And quite frankly this isn’t different than our day and time. Immorality.

Secondly, consider the irreverence. Belshazzar gets drunk and that never leads to quality decision making. So, he remembers that his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels from the Jewish Temple when he conquered Jerusalem. So, he orders those to be retrieved. And he replaces the red solo cups with the vessels used to worship God Almighty. Blazon irreverence.

Furthermore, Belshazzar commits the sin of blasphemy. Instead of rightly worshiping Almighty God with the vessels, he worships the gods of money, building, and success. We see evidence of our culture doing this as well.

So, you see the deviancy fleshed out in immorality and irreverence. The second thing we see here is...

2) Discipline.

Listen, God will only take so much. He is a patient God, but He is also just. And deviancy will be judged. And that’s what happens in verses 5 to 29. I’m only going to read excerpts from that text for the sake of time. First, verses 5-9.

*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. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. ⁶ Then **the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.** ⁷ The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and 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 his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but **they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation.** ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.*

The party came to an abrupt stop. This was a record scratch kind of moment. A human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster wall. Archaeologist have unearthed what they believe to be this very room. It is the size of the main section of the White House.^{vi} They have also identified the wall as some of the plaster has been preserved. And the writing on the wall foretold of God’s judgment that we now know was executed that very night.

But the occurrences here sound oddly familiar. Belshazzar summons the wisemen, but they didn't know the interpretation. Most likely, they knew the words and their meaning as it was written in Aramaic. But what they didn't know was how to interpret the meaning. Then the queen comes in, most likely not Belshazzar's wife. His wives are already in the room. This queen would either be his mother or his grandmother. There are many theories on who this is, but I think it is his grandmother, Nebuchadnezzar's widow.

She comes in and says, listen, Belshazzar, there is a guy by the name of Daniel that can help you. He helped your grandfather in similar situations. While Belshazzar has heard of Daniel's involvement, he wouldn't know Daniel if he ran into him. Most likely, Daniel has retired. After all, he's 81 here.

So, Daniel comes in and interprets the writing. Look at verses 24 through 28.
²⁴ *"Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.*
²⁵ *And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin.*
²⁶ *This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end;* ²⁷ *Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting;* ²⁸ *Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

What is interesting about these words is that they are financial terms. God gets his attention by means of financial references. The term "Mene," can refer to a mina, or mint, and it is mentioned twice in a row. When you see repetition in Scripture, it is for emphasis. Daniel says the reference to Mene is that God has counted, numbered the days of the kingdom and it will be taken this evening.

Tekel can refer to a shekel. This was a type of coin. And Daniel said that this word meant that Belshazzar has been weighed, measured, and he doesn't measure up. He falls woefully short of God's standard.

Parsin can refer to a half shekel. And in Daniel's interpretation, it has a double meaning; divided and Persia.^{vii} The kingdom of Babylon was divided and ruled by the Medo-Persian empire. And as the party is going on, the Medes and the Persian armies were right outside the walls ready to invade. God's judgment.

So, we have seen the deviancy and the discipline. In verses 30 and 31, we see the...

3) Demise.

Read with me those two verses. ³⁰ ***That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.*** ³¹ *And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.* The time had come when political authority, wealth, power, and human wisdom could do nothing to solve the problem.^{viii}

You know, I don't always understand God's actions. Perhaps you don't either and you've questioned His ways. Scripture speaks to the fact that none of us, in our finite thinking, understand the thoughts and actions of God. And sometimes God demonstrates a great deal of patience while other times He acts swiftly. Daniel 5 is God acting swiftly. That very night, Belshazzar was killed, and the mighty kingdom of Babylon came to an end.

While you and I may not know when God will act with patience or act swiftly, the one thing we can know, with certainty, is that He will act according to His Word. Nothing escapes the view of God. He is just, and He disciplines. And sometimes the consequences of choices made demand that the discipline is demise. You see, it is not God's desire that people experience demise. Destruction comes by way of consequences of the individual's choices.

And as this relates to us, beloved, one thing we know. Jesus is coming. I believe soon, His return is immanent. And it is very important to know that when He returns, He will not come as a baby in a manger. It will be as the victorious conquering King. And the world will be judged, ultimately bringing the world to its demise. And Jesus will establish His kingdom forever.

And while this may seem ominous to us, this is something we ought to look forward to. Because when Jesus has had the ultimate victory, the new Heaven and the new Earth will be one of perfection. Brokenness in the world will be no more.

The book of Revelation, a book of which I am not a scholar, often describes a contrast between evil Babylon and holy Jerusalem. And while the mystery of Babylon continues to this very day, it will be destroyed. Revelation 21:1-8.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and*

they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore,** for the former things have passed away.” ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶And he said to me, **“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,** [What is that? Belshazzar and the ways of Babylon] **their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**” In other words, demise.

APPLICATION:

I realize this chapter is weighty, and it was very much so for Belshazzar. But I also think there is a challenge for us today. As we seek to be, like Daniel, influencers of our culture, we learn a few things here. 4 things. First, ...

1) Age is no concern for ministry.

When you survey Daniel from chapter 1 to chapter 5, it is obvious that age is not a condition by which God used him. Daniel was a teenager when he determined to live a life of conviction and proved God’s ways are better. He was a young man, barely able to vote, when he stepped in and used his spiritual giftings to point the king to the truth. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in their mid-30s when they held firmly to worshipping God alone. Daniel was in his early 50s when he purposed to love Nebuchadnezzar through a mental illness. And here, in his early 80s, Daniel stands firm, yet again, to lead a pagan country through its demise. Daniel had been retired in chapter 5, but he was available to God no matter the assignment.

The truth that age is not a condition by which God uses people confronts us, doesn’t it?! Regardless of your age, the question really is, “Are you available to God no matter what?”

And beyond Daniel, this point is proven throughout Scripture. Paul said to Timothy, **“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”**

What about Abraham? Genesis 21:1-2. **“The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.”** Age is not a condition considered by God.

Neither is personality type. Moses was a 4 on the Enneagram scale. Introverted, self-absorbed, temperamental, and dramatic. When he said, “Send Aaron,” God said, “It’s you, bro!” God used him to lead His people out of bondage. Peter was an 8 on the Enneagram scale. Self-confident, decisive, and confrontational. Jesus humbled him and used him to start this little thing called church.

I think you see the point. Nothing hinders God from using a life that is surrendered to Him. Secondly, we see the importance of...

2) Being rooted in God’s Word.

Look at verse 11 of Daniel 5. This is the queen speaking about Daniel. **“¹¹ 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 the gods were found in him.”**

Daniel’s wisdom and understanding did not come from reading the news headlines. It was supernatural. His wisdom came from his personal time with The Lord. The wisdom of God was in him.

Belshazzar on the other had placed his trust in the wealth and resources of his country. He knew the enemy was gathered outside the walls of Babylon, but he thought no one could take Babylon down because of its fortification and resources. Some trust in chariots, some horses, but Daniel in the name of Lord.

Beloved, like no other time, we need to be a people defined by having the wisdom of God in us, not the wisdom of this world. The headlines of our day is bait for bad thinking. It produces, in us, fear and anxiety. We tend to take our eyes off of the Lord and put them on the fear that news headlines produce. I feel that. But when we do this, we demonstrate a misplaced trust.

When political authority, wealth, power, and human wisdom come to an end, we are left with the unchanging truth of God’s Word. So, let’s be rooted in that from the get-go.

We see that age is no concern for ministry and the importance of being rooted in God's Word. Thirdly, ...

3) Resist the temptation for worldly acclaim.

Look at how Daniel did this. Verse 17. Once Daniel came in the room, Belshazzar repeated what he said to the other wisemen. That whoever can share the interpretation of the words would be clothed in purple, given a gold chain, made the third ruler in the kingdom. Look at what Daniel said to this offer. *17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation."*

Daniel was not swayed by temptations of worldly acclaim. Daniel served an audience of one. We are not to be tempted by the praise of man but rather seek obedience to God above all things.

Daniel sets an example for us in that age is no concern for ministry, being rooted in God's Word is essential, and to resist the temptation for worldly acclaim. Fourthly, ...

4) Trust God and Respect others.

The feel I get from reading Daniel thus far is that nothing seems to rattle him. He consistently displays a sense of calm in the midst of major crises. How does he do that? I think it is because He completely trusts God. He is more concerned about the spiritual than he is the political.

Daniel recognizes the sovereignty of God in such a way that he knows that God is in control. And God is in such control that He is controlling who's in control. Therefore, Daniel trusts God and respects others. We talked about how he respected King Nebuchadnezzar and I think he demonstrates respect for Belshazzar here. How? He serves him. *Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king [I will serve the king] and make known to him the interpretation.* That's verse 17 again. Daniel was respectful to the king and demonstrated a boldness in tell him the truth.

Even if Daniel didn't have respect for Belshazzar, he for sure respected the office of the king. Daniel and his friends showed humility and tact when dealing with the king, whoever the king was. And because of that, God blessed Daniel. Titus 2:7 and 8 says, *"Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good*

works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Trust God, respect others, and leave everything in God's hands.

So, age is no concern for ministry, being rooted in God's Word is essential, resist the temptation for worldly acclaim, and trust God and respect others.

CONCLUSION:

As we conclude here this morning, I want to ask the band to come back up and lead us in a time of response. As they come, I want to ask you to consider how The Lord is stirring in your heart.

Is this a wake-up call for you? Have you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Have you surrendered to Him? If not, today is the day. We will have elders here at the front ready to receive you. All you have to say is three words, "I need Jesus." And we would be happy to visit with you about what it means to surrender to Jesus.

Is The Lord stirring in your heart in another way? Is he dealing with your mindset about ministry? Is He convicting you about the need to be rooted in His Word? Is He challenging you to resist the temptation of worldly acclaim? I know God is stirring in my heart, I trust that He is in your heart as well. Simply be obedient to His stirring this morning.

I'm going to pray, we are going to stand and sing, but I want to urge you to respond according to the prompting of God on your heart. We will be here at the front ready to receive you. Let's pray.

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: Travis Agnew, “*Daniel [Series Overview]*”, article published on travisagnew.org on August 13, 2020; Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000; Mark Adams, “*Daniel Commentary: The Handwriting on the Wall*,” article written October 25, 2009; Troy Rackliffe, “*Daniel part 6*,” preached at Glade Community Church in Daniels, WV, October 2020; Mark Driscoll, “*Kingdom Down #5: Party Like It’s 539*” accessed at: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/kingdom-down/> February 8, 2022; Skip Heitzig, “*I Dare You: Wake Up!*,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, February 10, 2013. Gene Whitthurst, “*The Book of Daniel Commentary*,” document sent to me via Gene.

ⁱⁱ Taken from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000, pages 75-76.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994, page 149.

^{iv} *Ibid*, page 147.

^v P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), page 230.

^{vi} Mark Driscoll, “*Kingdom Down #5: Party Like It’s 539*” accessed at: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/kingdom-down/>

^{vii} Wiersbe, page 83.

^{viii} *Ibid*, page 79.