

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups Aug 19th 2007

Dare to be Daniel – The Writing on the Wall

Daniel Chapter 5



Word : Key points from Sunday's Sermon **(Opening prayer : Daniel 10.12)**

1. Background : Events have moved on since chapter 4 when Nebuchadnezzar was wonderfully and powerfully brought to acknowledge that all his power came from Almighty God, when he humbled himself before Him and was restored to greater power and his advisers and nobles were impressed by the change in him (chapter 4.36) and Daniel's ministry had been greatly used and blessed. Now Nebuchadnezzar has died and Belshazzar, probably a kind of prince regent – i.e. “acting king” while the real king had absented himself (note that Daniel is offered the third highest position in the land and not the second!). Daniel is nowhere to be seen and during the 17 odd years of Belshazzar's reign, he appears to have been living in obscurity. Daniel would have probably been in his late 70's by the time of the events of Daniel 5.

2. There would appear to be two particular lessons for us to learn from this chapter as follows :-

1. The lesson of Belshazzar is **DON'T BE DECEIVED**. What is striking about this chapter is that a pagan king is being denounced, not one who had had the special blessings and responsibilities of being a king of Judah or Israel. Daniel 2.4b – 7.28 is in Aramaic which was the official language of the Persian Empire. This shows that these chapters (including chapter 5) were written for a wider audience than simply God's special covenant people. Belshazzar appears to be a man in total denial drowning his fears in wine women and song, misusing God's special treasurers (see I. Kings 7 for their original dedication) and leading many others astray in the process. They all gave their allegiance to material things of no eternal value and then suddenly that night the game is up and all elusion of power is gone and his life is shown to be in the hands of the Living God and he is terrified. It is noticeable that only he is described as being terrified which may mean that only he could see the writing on the wall. He turns not to the Lord but to useless “experts” who can't help. As the chapter unfolds, it transpires that Belshazzar, pagan king though he was, had wasted the opportunities that God had given him. He had ignored the witness of his powerful predecessor and indeed the testimony of the queen mother and had totally ignored Daniel's ministry. Thus it is that when Daniel appears, he hears God's verdict. Note the emphasis in vv22 – 23 on “you” and the fact that his ultimate sin was not so much his debauchery as his deliberate defiance of the Living God by the misuse of his treasurers and by giving allegiance to worthless things that should have been God's alone. Again, there is an underlying theme of his having lead others astray. His offer of apparently powerful office does him no good at all and he is told, in the language of material things which was dear to his heart, that his reign and his life had been brought to an end and that everything that he valued would be taken away. This chapter illustrates in graphic form what happens when folk deliberately defy Almighty God and misuse His “treasurers” and find one day that all their power and money is gone because we can't take any of it with us! (I Timothy 6.7). In that respect the queen mother's “live forever” is particularly ironic. Belshazzar lived only for this life and defied the only One who could grant eternal life (John 17.3).

The challenge is for us to consider the dangers of us tampering with God's treasures (for example the Gospel about the person and work of Our Lord Jesus Christ and one another as siblings in Christ) and giving way to a corrosive self indulgence which suddenly or gradually crowds out the Lord. See the excellent poster outside St Paul's (“whatever you get up to, make time for Jesus”).

2. **DON'T BE DISCOURAGED.** If anyone had cause to be discouraged, it was Daniel. He had personally become a marginalised forgotten figure of whom Belshazzar had not even heard. All the effect of his ministry appeared to have been completely reversed and he spent most of his 60's and 70's in obscurity. It is easy for us to feel like this in which case, take heart from Daniel! Note chapters 7 and 8 (particularly the beginning of each chapter) to see that in those wilderness years the Lord was speaking to Daniel in a deep and difficult way (note the end of each chapter) and which was equipping him for the task that lay ahead and yet he was still fulfilling the advice of Jeremiah to serve the Lord even in obscurity (Daniel 8.17 – Jeremiah 29.7).

Notice too that Daniel's work has not been wasted since his ministry clearly had a profound affect on the queen mother even though her words do not suggest a fully developed faith.

Notice in Daniel's response to the king that he shows respect for the king's position if not for his person and that whilst making it clear he has no time for the king's rewards, he "nevertheless" (v.17) ministers to the king albeit in words of judgment and he surprisingly appears to accept the office bestowed upon him in v.29. Daniel offers us a marvellous pattern of service to the Lord wherever He has put us, taking the opportunity He gives us but doing so in such a way that makes it clear that his greater loyalty is to the Lord who holds all power in the palm of His hand.



Witness: questions to discuss

1. Why is chapter 5 sandwiched between chapters 6 and 4 (could Luke 23.39-43 – the contrast between the two thieves – be a clue?)
2. Nebuchadnezzar brought about the deaths of many people. We don't read that that was true of Belshazzar, so why is Belshazzar singled out for special condemnation?
3. What would be the equivalent now (the far side of the cross and resurrection and Pentecost) of the misuse of God's treasures?
4. What would be the equivalent for us of God's gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone?
5. What can we learn from the way that Daniel spent his wilderness years?
6. Why did Daniel apparently accept office in v.29 having apparently declined it in v.17?
7. Daniel does not invite Belshazzar to repent but could he still have done so? (compare Jonah 3. where words exclusively at judgment had a striking effect).
8. (a) How can we bring home to our neighbours the message of Belshazzar's fate?
(b) How can we make sure that we don't share that fate? (See John 17 e.g. v.15)
(c) How can we follow Daniel's example, even though our vindication may be deferred a lot longer than Daniel's?! (Philippians 2.5-11).