

The Strut Stops Here!

Daniel 5:1-31



Although the attribution of the quote (the one who said it) is in question, whoever did say it was spot on: “The only thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn anything from history.” Even eyewitness history. Belshazzar had seen the power of God expressed in judgment on his Grandfather Nebuchadnezzar (he was driven from his throne through loss of reason and then restored to the throne), he obviously didn’t learn anything from history’s classroom. Rather than being

humbled before God, Belshazzar is revealed to be a proud, arrogant, unrepentant man.

So HOW does this story give us hope?

**** By revealing a God who is The JUDGE of the whole WORLD and who will one day SET the world to RIGHTS again – and yet, this God extends GRACE to the HUMBLE. ****

Arrogance, insolence, and injustice WILL be judged one day and only GOD’S justice will hold sway in the New Heavens & the New earth. And yet, for those who humble themselves, even rulers, there is HOPE b/c God extends GRACE to the HUMBLE.

WE WANT JUSTICE! Imagine living in a world where evil is not punished. Imagine living in a world where justice is not administered. Imagine living in a world where murder, rape, violent abuse, embezzlement, and a host of other wrongdoings goes unpunished. Who would want to live in a world without justice? No one. That’s who!

We are all hardwired for justice, with a longing for everything to be set to rights planted deep in our hearts. We believe the world should be a just place in which to live; we believe wrongdoing should be punished. So Daniel begins with a revelation of wine, women, and worship displaying the pride and arrogance of Belshazzar and ends with a revelation of him being punished by God. And this story gives us both hope and cause for concern. What lessons do we learn about how God levels human arrogance and gives hope to the humble?

1. **We learn a lesson about what God does with human DEFIANCE.**

- **What does Vs 23 tell us about Vs 2?** One Vs interprets another. Not just history, facts, but INTERPRETATION of the facts matters. [Nothing unusual about this; News interprets facts all the time . . . Init 42, what poll #s mean for the candidates, what a poor showing @ the box offices means for this celebrity . . .] Facts & interpretation together spell this out: Bel-SHAZ-Zar is an arrogant, sacrilegious man who praises “gods” of his own making & believes he’s secure behind the man-made walls of his palace. Bel trusts in the works of his hands to protect him.

In fact, Bel is using items from the Temple of *the Living & True God* to hold a party praising and singing doxologies to **NON-gods** who cannot see him & his fellow “animal housers” nor hear their praises. By using the items from the Temple of Jerusalem, Bel was saying, “This God is OUT, my god’s are IN!” It would be like someone from LSU stealing the razorback mascot and roasting that razorback and having a barbeque. It would be an INSULT to the U of Arkansas b/c the razorback represents the university. Or like another religion (Islam) stealing the pews out of this sanctuary and having a bonfire to celebrate THEIR religion (which is one of the reasons ISIS destroys religious sites . . . as in insult to the “loser god” their enemies worship! & they celebrate their victory as a victory for the “Allah” they worship.

**** Contempt for God’s STUFF is the same as contempt for God HIMSELF! ****

People who insult the church and hold genuine Xns in contempt are showing contempt NOT just for the church / people; but for the GOD our church represents. People who ridicule Xny & Xn leaders are showing contempt for GOD! Bel was a drunken, profane slob.

- What happens to Belshazzar and where does he turn in this situation? Bel. LOSES it, literally. The ESV cleans up the language considerably. Literally, it’s “the knots of his loins were loosed.” I ask for forgiveness in advance if this offends you, but this man was so scared that he “did something” in his pants . . . this apparition literally scared it out of him!

Vs 8 . . . Bel turns to RELIGION, but RELIGION fails him. As it always does. FALSE RELIGION does not help. Not now, not ever.

- What is God's intention in this affliction? It's to bring this man to an end of himself and to show him his "gods" cannot help him (false "religion" cannot help); nor is this man secure behind the walls of his city. Sometimes God smashes all our "props" and throws us in the "ditch" of our own bad decisions to bring us to a low point in our lives where we will look UP to HIM and cry out for mercy! The cry for mercy is a cry THIS GOD always hears and responds to w/grace; but where there's no crying out to this God, there's no mercy!

2. We learn a lesson about what God does with human DESPERATION.

- Where is the hope for Belshazzar's desperation? The Queen Mother, Vs 10, a lady who's been around awhile, tells Bel of someone who can help. She points to someone OUTSIDE, not someone who is a mover and shaker w/in the corrupt political-religious system of Babylon. HELP must come from OUTSIDE the man-made systems of this fallen world.
- How are we no different from Belshazzar? Vs. 13 reveals how Daniel is being mocked by the King, even DESPISED. His status is demeaned. This LOSER is the only solution to our problems? An OUTCAST OBSCURE JEW is going to be the ANSWER? Are you KIDDING?!? This MUST be a JOKE! How can someone from a DESPISED race, an OUTCAST, someone DESPISED and REJECTED by men be someone who can DELIVER us?!? Sound like anyone you've heard of in the Bible?

**** OUR only HOPE is found in a cast-off JEW of the GOD we have all @ various times in our life DESPISED! **** (cf 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-24; Deuteronomy 21:23)
What GOD intends for us here is to see in symbol what actually happens in fact through the coming of Jesus. OUR hope, and the ONLY hope for this fallen world, comes from a lowly Jew whose GOD is despised all around the world.

When you combine the message of Deut 21:23 with 1 Cor. That someone hanging on a tree would be the Savior of the World, to speak of a crucified Messiah would be like speaking of “CLEAN FILTH” or worse, “DELICIOUS VOMIT”. A CURSED Messiah just COULDN’T be a SAVING Messiah. Why, OUR Messiah must be MIGHTY, not mangled! & the GREEKS basically said, “God must fit MY expectations to win my vote!” For the JEWS, the MESSIAH must be mighty, strong, powerful, and forceful. For the GREEKS, the MESSIAH must be slick, stylish, attractively packaged, and full of finesse. As far as the JEWS were concerned, Jesus lacked PUNCH; as far as the GREEKS were concerned, Jesus lacked good sense; as far as most Americans are concerned, Jesus lacks “tolerance” and He’s not “therapeutic” enough to make them feel good about whatever they are into. But WE preach CHRIST and HIM CRUCIFIED for our sins to RESCUE us from divine judgment and bring us into a FOREVER FELLOWSHIP w/this God who we have despised & rejected. Indeed, what seems like divine FOOLISHNESS is our ONLY HOPE in ALL our times of DESPERATION!

3. We learn a lesson about what God does with human DENSENESS.

Yes, it IS possible to be DESPERATE and DENSE @ the same time! [Jack Benny, “Your \$\$ or your life!” “I’m thinking, I’m thinking!”] Sometimes we’re too dense to find the most obvious way out of our desperate condition. [“Mow the lawn, and you’ll get to go to the game . . . “]

➤ What is the message to Belshazzar (and to many more, including us)?

- Vs 26 . . . GOD has your # / my #
- Vs 27 . . . WE are lightweights / Only God is heavy. We will NEVER be able to DO enough to MEASURE UP!
- Vs 28 . . . OUR kingdoms will be divided. The objects of our trust will fail us [other people, government, \$\$, investments, reputation, being in a place of power, home security systems [lights out, Ted Koppel . . .] And even if we BUILD a little “kingdom” here on this earth, it will be fought over and divided by those who follow us . . . “will wars . . . “

There's a history lesson here for the learning. What is it? **Vs 18** . . . Learn from Nebby. Nebby finally humbled himself, and acknowledged God, but 1st God had to take an arrogant ruler and essentially make an ass out of him first. Seems like the ONLY thing we learn from History is that we do NOT learn from History! We need to LISTEN TO and READ all the warning signs God gives us about how GOD brings down PRIDEFUL people but raises up HUMBLE people!

Truth is important, but . . . What is even more important? And for US?? **Vs 22** . . . Just to KNOW something does NOTHING. Having good data does not necessarily bring about the CHANGES that must be made.

Our WESTERN CIVILIZATION assumes that more information is all we need. It's called the "information fallacy". Take any social problem in America. The knee-jerk reaction seems to be something like this: "We must EDUCATE people about" [name the issue from prop 42 to the flag to whatever . . .] & the ASSUMPTION behind that statement is that EDUCATION = TRANSFORMATION. ["If people only know what happens when you don't use seat belts . . ." "If youth only know what drugs will do to them . . ." "WE NEED to EDUCATE people about . . ." Daniel 5 is a stark reminder to us: BELSHAZZAR KNEW, & IT DID NOT MATTER!

[Perhaps you've heard of what happened the older brother of JFK, Joe Kennedy Jr, on August 12, 1944. Joe Jr. was to fly a PB-24 liberator, a plane loaded w/high explosives, into a locked-in target. Just before impact, actually several hundred yards from impact, the pilot JKK and his co-pilot were to parachute from the plane and detonate the explosives by using a remote control device. BEFORE DEPARTING, an electronics expert said the detonation device was faulty and that almost anything could set off the explosives. "Joe, it's too risky. You need to ABORT the mission." Kennedy ignored the warning and flew the mission anyway. @ 6:20 PM over England, both Kennedy AND his co-pilot were blown out of the sky. Kennedy knew. He was told. But it made no difference B/C he did NOT act on the information he was given.

[Koppel book . . .] Our government today KNOWS our electrical grids are vulnerable to computer cyber-terrorists. Our government KNOWS our electrical grids are vulnerable to EMP attacks. They've done NOTHING with the information they have.

When it comes to our knowledge of the BIBLE,

**** We must be awake to the PERIL of having the WORD without the SPIRIT. When Truth does not HUMBLE us (Vs 21) or lead us to WORSHIP 23b), we are simply Belshazzar CLONES! **** Bible Knowledge – application & change = NOTHING = a recipe for DISASTER!

The warning of 4:37, and the abruptness of Vs 30-31... The transition from Belshazzar the Chaldean to Darius the Mede took only one night. What should haunt us is that 1 phrase “that very night”. Just ask Belshazzar. Just ask the rich young ruler “that very night . . . “ It’s a short, sudden, and unexpected step from hearing and rejecting God’s message and heading into an eternity of darkness. Let us learn from the bad example of a man, Belshazzar, who IS the poster child for

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images... (Romans 1:21-23 ESV)

******** Let’s listen and learn and DO what Daniel 5 teaches us! Namely, to turn FROM our idols and to trust IN the Lord Jesus Christ. HE is worthy of our trust & love; and HE will protect us from the upcoming judgment! ********