

DANIEL – SECOND CHOICE

Telling the Truth

Daniel chapter five, stands in stark contrast to Daniel chapter four. As we saw last week, Daniel chapter four appears to have a good ending. King Nebuchadnezzar, after seven times, as long as it takes, humbles himself. King Nebuchadnezzar becomes a follower, a subject, a servant, of the Most-High God. That is a road that is open to us all: we can come humbly before the Most-High God.

How about you friends?

Daniel chapter 5, stands in stark contrast. As far as we can tell, it ends with King Belshazzar resisting the Most-High God. I'm wondering which road you will choose?

By the beginning of Daniel chapter 5, King Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and with his death any hope Daniel and the Jews had of reformation, is dead too. After what may have been a mini revival under King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is plunged once again deep into his second-choice world. He is now pushed out and forgotten by a new king. That is sometimes the truth of second-choice worlds, isn't it?

Perhaps you have felt like that has happened to you? Perhaps you know what that's like? Perhaps you have been passed over, pushed out, left to drift.

That's exactly where Daniel now finds himself. Verses 1-4 of chapter five give us an idea of the character of the new king, King Belshazzar.

The Writing on the Wall

5 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. (Daniel 5 v 1-4)

King Belshazzar is throwing a party! When you look at the details you get an idea of the kind of party it is. Five times in these four verses the verb, to drink, is used. It's a party with lots of wine. It's a party at which there were women present, in that day, that would have been unusual. They were most likely the king's wives and concubines. It gives a sense and impression that this was a party at which to indulge. To spice it up a little, King Belshazzar orders the goblets taken from Jerusalem to be brought, so they can drink from them. What is going on here is the mocking of the Most-High God, and in these verses, we get to see the kind of man King Belshazzar is, and his attitude towards the Most-High God.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

⁷ The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew paler. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰ The queen hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!" ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight,

intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom. (Daniel 5 v 5 -16)

King Belshazzar is rudely interrupted in the middle of his party. We've seen that somewhere before, haven't we? Another king who got interrupted. Friends, we sometimes would do well to take a look at life's interruptions. King Belshazzar sees the writing on the wall! Maybe at first, he ignores what he sees, because he's had a little too much wine, but then he realises that something important is going on in the middle of his party, and what he sees frightens him.

Seeing the fingers of a hand writing on a wall is frightening and unnerving, in itself but, what frightens him more, is that he simply cannot understand what is being written. So, the king gathers his wise men to come and interpret the writing but, with all their wisdom, they cannot! Now he's really scared – so much so, that his face turns pale.

Imagine the scene, the king – indulging with those he wants to impress – and his face turns pale. In this moment, it is the queen – probably the king's mother – who remembers something. She remembers Daniel. She remembers what Daniel has done in the past – she was there, she saw it. So, Daniel is brought before the king.

This is an extraordinary meeting with a powerful message, and here's why. About 60 years has now passed since Daniel was brought to Babylon and to King Nebuchadnezzar, that puts Daniel at somewhere near his 80's, if not in them. We know that in those early years, at least, Daniel had great influence in the king's court. But, after all his work and influence, he is now side lined and, in verse 13, King Belshazzar asks him: "Are you Daniel?" King Belshazzar, it seems, doesn't even know who Daniel is!

Perhaps King Belshazzar has simply not wanted to know the truth. Perhaps he hasn't wanted to know the truth about himself and certainly not wanted to know the truth about the Most-High God.

He has so blinded himself to the truth, that he doesn't even know who Daniel is, or remember what he has done. The king has only ever been concerned about serving himself. I'm wondering what that moment must have been like for Daniel. It would not have been lost on him. Here he is, summoned before the king, only to see the goblets from the temple in Jerusalem where he used to worship, and where he longed to be, being misused and abused. That would be a hard moment.

Moments like that happen all the time in second-choice worlds, don't they? And for Daniel, it is a stark reminder that he is living in a second-choice world. Perhaps it reminds him of shattered dreams. Perhaps it reminds him of where he'd much rather be. And yet, here again, he handles the situation with great wisdom and tact.

Friends, it is possible to live well in second-choice worlds. King Belshazzar, who doesn't remember Daniel, ask Daniel for a favour: interpret the writing for me! He offers Daniel presents, a sweetener, actually it is a way of exercising power. It is another way of saying "It will pay you to do this for me." That kind of thing happens in second-choice worlds. Second-choice worlds exercise their power over us by saying 'do this for me – it will pay to do it.'

Daniel, however, is only interested in telling the truth, and he is not fooled by the king's flattery. Friends, beware of flattery. Bowing to flattery may get you what you think you want, but it rarely has very much to do with telling the truth, power can offer rewards and punishments, but its influence can hold us back from telling or speaking the truth.

And it's a game Daniel refuses to play.

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and

stripped of his glory. ²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most-High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² “But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. (Daniel 5 v 17-23)

Daniel speaks two harrowing words of truth – “You knew!”

King Belshazzar had observed and watched all that had happened with King Nebuchadnezzar, his father, and he knew! And yet, he had stubbornly refused to do anything about it. Truth is, he didn't want to know the truth.

How are you doing, friends? With the truth, that is?

John Ortberg says it this way: “We avoid responsibility for knowing the truth, because we want to do what we want to do.”

King Belshazzar had thrown his parties – he'd lived how he had wanted to live, but he knew, deep down, he knew it wasn't right. He had preferred to believe that what had happened to King Nebuchadnezzar had nothing to do with him. He had chosen to live a life continually resisting the truth, that he knew!

How about you friends? How are you doing?

Years ago, I got a speeding ticket for going literally a couple of miles over the limit. It made me cross, so I phoned the DVLA to question my ticket. I had my arguments ready – and they were good, no they really were! Thing is, I was trying to avoid the truth, and the truth, however uncomfortable or inconvenient, was that I was driving too fast.

We try to avoid what we want to avoid. How are you doing, friends?

I'm wondering, is there some area in your life where you are, quite simply, closing your eyes to the truth, where deep down, you know? Maybe the best

thing you can do is to face the truth, admit it and seek help. How about you and God? Here's the rub, friends, you know! So, what are you doing about it?

Friends, this, I think, is a challenge that goes deep. Think about poverty for a moment. We know about poverty – we know about it in our own town. We, at this moment, are acutely aware of the issue of equality – We know! Increasingly, we live in a world where we know. The question becomes: “What are we going to do?” And we know the truth about God. So, what will we do?

Daniel interprets the words; all the words are words of measure. Here's the truth: The King has been measured or evaluated by God. He has been living in denial, he has been avoiding the truth, and now its time for him to be measured.

Mere means numbered. King Belshazzar had lived his life this way: “My life, I'm the king. I'll do what I want to do, I am responsible to no-one.”

God says: “I have numbered your days!”

Now what's important here is that this it is not so much a statement about the length of time... But a statement that it is God who is in control. It's a way of saying: ‘Actually King Belshazzar, you may be a king, but you are accountable to me, and I am calling you to account!’

The king lives the illusion: “It's my life, I'll do whatever I please.”

God says: “No! It's not your life and you are going to answer for it!”

The illusion the king is living is that he can get away with doing wrong. Here's a challenging question – ‘What's going on for you that you think you are getting away with?’ King Belshazzar had closed his eyes to the spiritual reality, but God, whose eyes are open, has weighed King Belshazzar and found him wanting.

Parsin means broken or divided. The message is: Your kingdom will be broken, divided, taken away. King Belshazzar is living in the illusion that – my life will go on as I want it to go on, as long as I want.

God says: “You fool, for this night your life will be taken.” And verse 29 & 30 tell us that, as far as we can tell, King Belshazzar dies without responding to God. It is a stark contrast to the end of Daniel, chapter 4. It seems to be a

sobering warning for anyone who refuses to come humbly before the Most High God.

If you are follower of Christ then your salvation is secure, but the question still remains – How will you choose to live the only life you've got? How much will you live trying to avoid what you know to be true, about you? How much will you choose to live in the best way you know how, in the light of what you know to be true?

Perhaps the challenge is like this:

- To deeply forgive the person who has hurt you
- To ask forgiveness for the regret you hold in your heart
- To change those patterns of behaviour in your marriage, with your children, in those relationships you deeply value.
- To honour God with your money, what you do with it or how you make it.
- To stop that habit, you know is destructive.
- To serve others rather than serving yourself.

If you would not describe yourself as a follower of Christ, perhaps the question is this: "How will you respond to the truth about the Most- High God?"

Friends, all of us, the deep and profound truth is that God is ready and waiting to welcome us, whenever we turn our hearts towards him. We only have one life, and as we are acutely aware at this time, that life is fragile. So, friends, in the light of the truth about the Most -High God, and the truth you know, how will you live?

Preached and live streamed at Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday..... by Rev. Ian Phillips