

Daniel 5

When God crashes the party!

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

“He was an incredibly able businessman. Beginning as a driver for a road construction company, he saved every spare penny... Before he was twenty-five he had saved enough to buy his own dump truck and become his own boss. He kept on saving. He bought another dump truck and then another. By the time he was thirty he owned a truck line. His business went so well that eventually he bought the road construction company that first hired him as a driver. With a virtual monopoly on road construction and trucking services in his rural Tennessee community, the man became wealthy beyond his dreams.

He was a Christian man.... But he was also a man under pressure. Rumors began to circulate in town about shady business deals... His anger boiled more quickly. He began to drink more. The tension between the man and his wife became common gossip.... He borrowed money from friends in his church.

Late one night the youngest son was involved in a severe car crash... He lay in intensive care for nine months... The family was charged \$750,000 in medical bills. The man lost his struggling road construction business.... In the second year he lost his truck line. In the third year he filed for bankruptcy.

Today the once-wealthy businessman pumps gas at a service station in his hometown under the scorn of former investors and the ridicule of former friends. The trek from truck driver to millionaire took about forty years... The accident that caused the empire to fall took about three seconds.” (Chapell, 96-98)

This man was humbled very quickly.

Since God reigns over all things, He is able to use a variety of circumstances to humble us in a matter of seconds. This brings us to Daniel 5. God humbled the mighty King Belshazzar in a matter of seconds. He was able to do this because he controls all things... (theme of the book)

King Belshazzar needed to be humbled. We often need to be humbled. Since God controls all things he is able to humble us.

But God is not out to get us. He is not on the prowl, looking for ways to make our lives miserable. In fact, the opposite is true. He wants us to live for his glory which leads to our joy. To make sure that we live for his glory he often humbles us.

To help us understand the significance of this story, we will look at the four acts of this story.

Act 1- The party (5:1-7)

Daniel 5:1 (ESV) — 1 King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

The year is 539 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar is dead. King Belshazzar rules the kingdom of Babylon with his father, King Nabonidus. It is a very dysfunctional family filled with murder, betrayal, and intrigue. King B is distantly related to King Nebuchadnezzar which is why King N is referred to as his father later on in this story. The word for father also meant grandfather or great grandfather.

Back to our story... King B is having a huge party. Our text mentions twice that there were a thousand people present. The kings of Babylon were known for throwing huge parties.

But they were not known for drinking in front of their guests. At one point during the party King B stands up, raises his glass, and says “Dilly, Dilly.” Then he drains his mug in front of everyone. According to one commentator, “He is showing off.” More than likely he is drunk.

After a few bud lights he does something very foolish...

Daniel 5:2–4 (ESV) — 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.

Seventy years earlier King N stole the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. They have been in storage ever since. Inebriated, King B calls for them. He wants everyone to drink from them to mock the God of Israel. To make matters worse, as they drink from the goblets of Israel they praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Through his actions King B was saying, “The god of Israel is a joke, his people are nothing, and we have nothing to fear.”

It is hard to think of something more disrespectful and sacrilegious. I was angry when I first heard about the work of art known as the “piss Christ”. It is a picture of a crucifix in a jar of urine. This is how the people of God probably felt when they heard about this brazen act.

King B was directly challenging God... how does God respond???

God responds immediately...

Daniel 5:5–6 (ESV) — 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.

All of a sudden, the king sees a large hand writing on the wall.

Instantly, the blood drains from the king’s face. The text says that, “his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.” Literally... the knots of his loins were loosened. In other words, he lost control of his bowels and soiled himself.

He was being humbled in front of thousands.

As a result, he does the only thing he can think of... This brings us to the next act.

Act 1- the party...

Act 2- The interpreter (5:7-16)

According to verse 7 the king cried out in a loud voice for help. He offered his counselors, astrologers, and wise men new clothes, a gold necklace, and great power if they could help him. None of them could... things get worse.

Daniel 5:9–10 (ESV) — 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

Why??? No one can interpret the writing for him! The religion of his culture failed him miserably. All false religions will fail you miserably. Only God can give us the answers we need.

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, “O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change.

Most scholars think this is the queen mother. Why? Because the text says that his wives were already present. The queen mother remembers how Daniel helped King N... so she encourages King B to call Daniel out of retirement. Daniel is probably in his late 80s.

Daniel 5:13–14 (ESV) — 13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. **14** I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.

The king is so arrogant that he does not even call Daniel by his Babylonian name or his Babylonian title. Instead he reminds everyone that Daniel is still an exile and a prisoner. He wants Daniel to know who is in charge. Then he offers Daniel clothing, a gold chain, and a title if he can interpret the hand writing on the wall.

How does Daniel respond? This brings us to Act 3.

Act 1- The party

Act 2- The interpreter

Act 3- The interpretation (17-29)

Daniel 5:17 (ESV) — 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 has lived a long life and he has learned to trust God. He is clearly not afraid of the king. At this point he does not have much to lose. He says to the king, “you can keep your clothes, gold chains, and titles, I don’t need them. Yes, I will tell you what the writing means, but only after I give you a history lesson.”

King N. had a vast kingdom, vast wealth, and vast power. He was a great man. Every nation feared him. He controlled the fate of millions of people, but he was arrogant. He took credit for his success. God humbled him by driving him from his palace to live with the wild animals. He had the mind of a beast, he ate grass, he lived with the cows for years. God drove him to madness to humble him. God can do this because God controls all things, including the kingdoms of men. He makes one man rise and another man fall.

Then he turns to King B and says, “you should have learned from King N.”

Daniel 5:22–23 (ESV) — 22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, **23** but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from

them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

Verse 22 is the key... you... have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this...

Daniel drives home King B's guilt by saying "you" or "your" 14 times in these two verses. King B is in deep deep trouble. He is exceedingly proud. He has not humbled himself before God's mighty hand like King N.

He did not learn from history...

19th century philosopher G.W.F Hegel said, "the only thing we learn from history is that we have learned nothing from history." Unfortunately, King Belshazzar learned nothing from history.

What are the consequences?

Daniel 5:25–28 (ESV) — 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."

Mene meant numbered... the days of the Babylonian empire were numbered.

Tekel meant weighed... Belshazzar had been weighed by God scales of justice and found wanting.

Parsin meant divided... your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians

Daniele said to King B., "you have been numbered, weighed, and divided."

Was this an empty threat? No!!!

This brings us to the final act.

Act 1- The party

Act 2- The interpreter

Act 3- The interpretation

Act 4- The fulfillment! (30-31)

Daniel 5:30–31 (ESV) — 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 walls of Babylon were 40 feet tall and 25 feet wide, wide enough for chariots to ride on top of. They were thought to be unassailable. Not even the most sophisticated war machines of the day could break through these walls.

Furthermore, the city was so large that there was enough space to grow crops inside the city walls. Plus, the mighty Euphrates river ran right through the city, supplying water for crops and cattle. Babylon could not be starved into submission.

King B was so confident of his safety that he threw a party for thousands, knowing that the Persians were outside his city gates. In his arrogance, he thought he was invincible.

But during the party (literally), the Persian army broke through Belshazzar's defenses.

One Scholar writes,

“They diverted water from the Euphrates River (which ran under the walls of Babylon) into a marsh. With the level of the water lowered, the soldiers were able to wade the river under the walls and enter the city. Xenophon added that the city was invaded while the Babylonians were feasting in a time of drunken revelry. . . . As a matter of fact, Xenophon cited the festival as the reason the Persians chose to attack Babylon on that particular night. (Miller, Daniel, 167) The dates were October 11– 12, 539 BC (ibid.). (Akin, 1588-1593)

Darius the Mede conquered Belshazzar the proud.

BTW... Most scholars think that Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian were the same person. He probably had a Median name and Persian name since his mother was Median and his father was Persian.

Here is the point...

Since God is sovereign he was able to humble one of the mightiest kings from one of the mightiest empires...

Walls will not protect you from being humbled.

Wealth will not protect you from being humbled.

Power will not protect you from being humbled.

Health will not protect you from being humbled.

Don't be fooled, anyone can be humbled...

I often think of how easy it would be for God to humble our nation... We think we are so strong. True, we are the wealthiest country in the world, we have the mightiest military in the world, and some of the brightest leaders in the world, but we could be brought to our knees in seconds. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that a rogue nation could get a hold of a few nuclear war heads and decide to blow up DC and LA. Within seconds we would plunge into a global recession.

Again, here is the point of this story... since God is sovereign, he can humble the mightiest of kings.

Let's make some application...

Three application comes to mind...

BTW... Daniel repeats itself... that is ok.... God is a good father... Good father's often repeat themselves.

First, when God humbles kings, we can rejoice.

How did the original audience respond to this story?

The humbling of King B. probably brought them great comfort. They were living under dictators. Men who abused power and abused the weak.

If God can bring down this mighty king, then he can take care of them. Furthermore, He can raise up another king to send them back to the promised land. Which he does...

God controls the kings and kingdoms of this world.

This brings hope to the Christians in China, Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

First, when God humbles kings we can rejoice.

Second, when God humbles kings, we can learn.

King B. should have learned from King N.

Will we learn from these stories? We must learn from these stories...

Proverbs 16:18 (ESV) — 18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 29:1 (ESV) — 1 He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

James 4:6–7 (ESV) — 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” **7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

How do we humble ourselves???

We start by looking to the cross.

We admit that everything we have comes from God.

We pray for God to saturate us in spiritual reality.

We repent every time we are made aware of our pride.

First, when God humbles kings, we can rejoice.

Second, when God humbles kings, we can learn.

Third, since God humbles kings, we can be saved.

God reigns over world history.

Back in Daniel chapter 2 we learned about the four kingdoms.

Daniel 2:32–35 (ESV) — 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, **33** its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. **34** As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. **35** Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

This kingdom, the kingdom of Babylon had to fall. King B's arrogance was the means that God used to bring it down. It had to fall to make way for the other kingdoms. It had to fall so that a new kingdom could take its place.

The ruler of the new kingdom sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

2 Chronicles 36:23 (ESV) — 23 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’”

If the Jews were not sent back to Jerusalem there would be no temple, no people of God, and no nation from which a new king would come.

The new king was King Jesus.

Mark 1:14–15 (ESV) — **14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, **15** and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

All of this happened because of the way that God orchestrated things 600 years beforehand.

God sovereignly placed King N in power.

God sovereignly humbled King B.

God sovereignly placed King Cyrus of Persia in power.

God sovereignly put it on the heart of King Cyrus send the Jews back to Jerusalem.

Since the Jews were sent back to Jerusalem, they were protected from being assimilated into Persian culture.

All of this was to fulfill a variety of promises that Jesus would be born in Palestine in the line of the tribe of Judah 600 years later.

Jesus was the stone cut “not by human hands” (Dan. 2:34,45)... Jesus was the king promised in Daniel 2 that would crush every other king and kingdom.

All of this was set in motion when God humbled King B before the Persians.

Yes, because God is sovereign he is able to humble the mightiest of kings, which implies that he can humble us. But because God is sovereign he is able to save us. He has worked out all the details of human history to bring us King Jesus. The suffering servant. The stone the builders rejected that has become the mighty stone.

Proud people need to be forgiven.

God has sovereignly provided a way.

If you do not humble yourself before Jesus, he will crush you.

If you humble yourself before Jesus, he will forgive you.

Which will it be this morning? I hope the choice is obvious. Humble people are very happy people.

Lets pray...