**The Writing on the Wall: Another Warning Against Pride**

**Daniel 5:1-9**

Good morning to you all. Please refer to your bulletins or open your Scriptures to Daniel 5:1-9. In our study today we will be looking at the new kingdom that has taken over Babylon. As we will soon see this new kingdom was having the same problems as the previous kingdom and that due to the sins of pride and arrogance a new king will have to learn a hard lesson. Before we begin reading the passage together let us take a few moments to set the stage for this new chapter in the book of Daniel.

As we begin, we need to first discuss King Nebuchadnezzar. He died in 562 BC and therefore his son inherited the throne. His name was Nabonidus who would rule the Babylonian Empire alongside his son Belshazzar. What was happening at this time was Belshazzar was placed in charge of the city of Babylon and served as its ruler while his father was out on conquest working to secure the kingdom. While these two men were working on establishing their rule the Persian Empire, located to the east of Babylon, was gaining power and influence by overtaking many other kingdoms in the world. Nabonidus was eventually defeated by the Persians who would invade the city of Babylon to take it over. As we said last week, the city of Babylon was quite impressive and a fortress that was almost impenetrable. However, as we will discuss in just a little bit the Persians will devise a way to invade the city and in so doing remove Belshazzar as king. Therefore, when this chapter begins a few years have passed since the death of Nebuchadnezzar and the new king as well as his son have taken over the kingdom.

Let’s read together the first nine verses of the 5th chapter of Daniel together: **5 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines could drink out of them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank out of them. 4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.**

**5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. 6 Then the king’s face became pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints loosened and his knees began knocking together. 7 The king called aloud to bring in the sorcerers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners. The king began speaking and said to the wise men of Babylon, “Anyone who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom.” 8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even more pale, and his nobles were perplexed.**

**1. The King Mocks the Holy Vessels (vv. 1-4)**

As we begin our study of the passage, we first see that we are in the presence of King Belshazzar who is having a rather wild party for the nobles in his kingdom. We are told at the outset in verse 1 that there was quite a lot of drinking going on at this party. When he was drinking his wine, he was doing this in the presence of thousands of people, so we can tell that this was a party that was beginning to spiral out of control. When someone begins to drink, especially at a party in the presence of so many other people, they eventually begin to lose control of their surroundings, their judgment falls into question and they begin to take severe actions that might not reflect their true character or who they are. This is what we see happening with the king. As he becomes more drunk, he begins to make decisions that are not wise and then he continues by taking the holy vessels of God so that he could use them to mock God. Before we continue, we need to take a few moments to discuss these vessels, what they were and why the actions taken by the king were so serious.

In the book of Exodus, we have provided for us a basic description of the tabernacle that the nation of Israel used to worship God as they were wandering in the wilderness. This tabernacle would eventually be replaced by the temple that King Solomon would build in Jerusalem. The purpose of both the Tabernacle as well as the temple was to be the place where God would dwell while in the presence of His people. Not only was the structure of the temple sacred, but all of the vessels used in the temple to worship God were considered holy as well, therefore they were to be used in the worship of God and God alone. The vessels were made of gold, silver and bronze and each one of them served a specific purpose. In the book of Ezra (1:9-11) we have provided for us an accounting of the vessels that were taken by Nebuchadnezzar and then taken back to Jerusalem by Zerubbabel. Here is a list of the vessels: **30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates, 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls as well as 1,000 other articles. In total we are told there was a total of 5400 items.** We can assume among these vessels there were chalices which to drink from. We need to repeat that each of these vessels taken from the temple were designed to be used in the worship of God in the temple and were therefore created for a specific purpose.

We need to discuss the importance of using the things that God has blessed us with in the way that he has intended. When we take the holy things of God and use them to worship according to our own way of living, we then we are guilty of taking the holy and making it the profane. One example is how we use Scripture in our worship as well as in our daily lives. God’s Holy Word has been provided for us to show us the truth about God, to guide us as we walk in His ways and to explain to us what God has done to save humanity from its sins. Scripture is not just a collection of wise sayings that can be used when convenient and then ignored when it is inconvenient. God’s Holy Word is to be studied as it has been provided for us so that we can learn what God desires us to know and so that we may bend our will to doing what He has commanded. We profane God’s Word when we attempt to change what it says to please sinful flesh or when we attempt to remove the parts of it that we think no longer apply to life today. Nankin Community Church stands solidly on the word of God. We believe that it is the truth provided to us directly from God. We also agree with the teaching of the Apostle Paul regarding the Word of God provided in **2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.**

King Belshazzar took the holy vessels of the temple and chose to use them to honor the false gods of Babylon. We see in this account that the true God does not accept this kind of mockery and He will not allow this to go unpunished. May we always fear God enough to take the holy things He has provided for us and use them for their intended purposes. We need to do this because, as we have learned from King Nebuchadnezzar’s experience, God is sovereign over all the affairs of men and His will is to be respected at all times. When we begin to think that our ways are better than God’s we need to remember that He is holy, we are not. His ways are always the best and we need to bend our will to His. Even though that is hard, we need to remember that He has promised us that if we follow His ways, He will be with us.

**2. God Gets the King’s Attention (vv. 5-6)**

At this point in our passage the king is witnessing the writing of the hand on the wall. God is using this very powerful image to make a clear statement to the king. He is not pleased that the king chose to defy the God of Israel by using the holy vessels to drink in honor of other false gods. This is showing us the attribute of God we know as His wrath. God does not tolerate His name being mocked nor does He allow those who misuse His name to go without punishment. Back in the 20th chapter of Exodus when God was giving the nation of Israel the Ten Commandments, He explained to the people in the 3rd commandment **“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (20:7).** Just as the Lord will not tolerate His name being misused, He also will not allow for His holy vessels to be misused in such a manner.

After the king witnesses the hand doing the writing on the wall, we are told in verse 6 that he became terrified at what he saw. His face turned pale and he began to tremble. It is at this time when the king transitions from a near drunk wild party animal to a man who begins to take seriously what the hand is writing. His entire countenance is changed in a single moment. What we are seeing here in this situation is that God is taking a rather extreme measure to catch the attention of the rebellious king. This is not the first time God has done this in the book of Daniel and we know that He has also done this with other leaders in history.

Sometimes the Lord has to do the same thing with us. He must get our attention in a way that will cause us to listen to Him rather than go our own way. In Romans chapter 1 Paul is summarizing the history of mankind and what happens when a nation refuses to follow the ways of God. For the sake of time I would like to draw your attention to what he says in verses 28-32 **“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper, 29 people having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.** When mankind refuses to acknowledge God or listen to His word He allows them to be given up to a depraved mind. They are allowed to continue down the path they have chosen. The path, in the end, leads to destruction and death. Since the king of Babylon has refused to acknowledge God or continue in the ways of Nebuchadnezzar God warns the king that his choices will result in a terrible punishment. God has done plenty to show the king His power, but because of pride the king is refusing to listen to reason. He, therefore, must have his attention gained through a very extreme measure.

**3. The King Looks for Answers in the Wrong Place (vv. 7-9)**

Now we arrive at the part of our passage where the king is desiring to know what the meaning is to the words written on the wall. Just like the men who have come before him the king chooses to place his trust in the magicians and wise men of the kingdom. When he does this, he receives the same answer in reply that his grandfather received, the wise men are unable to interpret what the writing on the wall says. I am not certain if you feel the same way I do, but are any of you getting a bit annoyed with these kings. They keep going to the same empty sources of information and keep leaving empty. This is the same way that people in the world today continue to place their hope in things other than God and also continue to get empty answers. In what ways do mankind today choose false sources of knowledge to find answers?

The first example I would like to provide is the fact that mankind chooses to listen to sources of knowledge that tickles their ears by telling them what they want to hear rather than sharing with them the truth that can only come from God’s Word. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that this would be a problem in the latter days. **“I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But as for you, use self-restraint in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).** We must not allow God’s Word to be cheapened so that it may be acceptable to sinful man. We must bend our will to the Scripture, not the other way around. The King of Babylon went to his usual sources because he thought they could give him the answer he desired. Only when he was willing to seek counsel from Daniel, who worshiped and honored the one true God, did the king receive the answer he needed to hear. As we already discussed, the Apostle Paul reminds us that Scripture gives us all we need to live a life pleasing to God. If we follow His Word there is a future reward for that faithfulness.

A second reason why mankind chooses to listen to false sources of wisdom rather than God is because of fear. There is a fear of change that comes with accepting the truth of God’s Word. When we read Scripture, it challenges us to change our way of life and begin accepting God as being the authority in our life, not ourselves. This is very intimidating for those who are not believers in God. One aspect of sharing the gospel with nonbelievers that is challenging is explain to them that accepting the truth of Scripture brings along with it the acceptance that we are no longer the final authority in our lives, God is. One apologist that I have studied from in the past made this argument that I feel is very powerful. He would begin his conversation with an atheist with this question “If Christianity is true would you become a Christian?” Now, before we continue, I would like to open this up to the congregation. What are the possible answers you might get to this question? One possible answer is yes. There are some who have a softer heart and are willing to take into account all of the evidence. If it can be proven to them that Christianity is true then they would go with the evidence and become a Christian. The other possible answer to this question is no. There are some people who have a very hard heart and say that even if Christianity is proven to be true, they would not become a Christian. Why would someone have such an attitude toward Christianity? I will argue that for someone to resist the truth means that they do not want that to be true. They rather want to be their own god and live in the way they want to live. At this point they are having a heart problem, not an intellectual problem. No matter how much truth is given they will reject it because of pride and the desire to live the way they want to live. This mentality is well described by the teacher of wisdom in **Proverbs 18:1-2 “One who separates himself seeks his own desire; He quarrels against all sound wisdom. 2 A fool does not delight in understanding, but in revealing his own mind.”** This brings us back to the problem of human pride. We must not allow our desire to be in control to cloud our judgment and keep us from accepting the life-giving truth found in Scripture. Submitting to God’s authority removes pride and allows us to enjoy the life that God has designed for us to have in His name.

Now that we see the dangers of relying on our own judgment rather than the truth of God, we need to conclude our time together by looking at the results of seeking wisdom from man rather than God. In verse 9 the king becomes more afraid as he realizes that his wise men are unable to interpret the message for him. If we continue to see wisdom from sources based upon man we will always be found to be lacking. True wisdom only comes from God and we will only be fulfilled when we rest in His wisdom. As Job was facing his suffering he was told by God where wisdom comes from. **“And to mankind He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to turn away from evil is understanding’” (28:28).**

This leads us to our application from the passage today. God’s sovereignty and holiness demand our respect, and any attempt to mock or undermine His authority results in serious consequences. The king of Babylon learns this lesson the hard way just like his grandfather had learned years before. Rather than relying on our own wisdom may we give God the proper honor and respect that He deserves. When we humble ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit as well as His Word to guide us, we will glorify Him and allow others to learn of the salvation that can only be found in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.