

Session 3

September 17, 2023

SPEAK TRUTH BOLDLY

Daniel 5:13-17; 22-28

The rise of Belshazzar as king of Babylon is a bit mysterious. He was the son of Nabonidus but is referred to as a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar as well (Dan. 5:11). His entire story is contained in a single chapter of the Bible. While Nebuchadnezzar had his share of self-centered sins—and their subsequent consequences—he ultimately humbled himself and acknowledged the One true God. He is a great example of the fact that “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will” (Prov. 21:1). But Belshazzar had none of Nebuchadnezzar’s humility. In fact, his actions were arrogant displays of rebellion.

The Bible says the event that prompted his brief encounter with Daniel was a great feast thrown for 1000 of the king’s noblemen. What the Bible does not say, is that apparently, the city of Babylon was under siege by the Medes at the time. As they waited outside the city, the king partied within.

A blatant desecration (vv. 1-4). As if the audacity of the event itself was not enough, at some point in the drunken feast the drunken king ordered the consecrated vessels from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem brought in. These had been dedicated to the house of God (v. 3) but pilfered by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Now they were desecrated by King Belshazzar, his royal court, all their wives and their prostitutes. Then to make matters worse, they worshipped their pagan gods “made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” while drinking from the sacred cups (v. 4).

A terrifying inscription (vv. 5-9). Here we see the origin of the phrase, “I saw the writing on the wall.” Belshazzar certainly did! First, the writing on the wall terrified him *physically*...to the point of shaking hips and knocking knees (v. 6). Second, it terrified him *spiritually*, to the point of calling in his advisors and offering a prestigious reward to anyone who could read the inscription and interpret it (v. 7). Third, it terrified him *publicly*, to the point that an outcry erupted that prompted the intervention by his queen (v. 10). Finally, it terrified him *utterly*, to the point that he was willing to call in a young Jewish man; a person who would have been enraged by the desecration that took place against his God (v. 13).

A noble reputation (vv. 13-16). It should be noted that Daniel was both flattered by the king and challenged by him. The flattery was prompted by Daniel’s solid reputation, built over time with the previous king, and presented confidently by the king’s queen (v. 14). The challenge is veiled by the declaration that the king’s own advisors were unable to interpret the writing, and therefore Daniel would likely not be able to as well. It is also noteworthy that the same rewards would be afforded Daniel as those offered to the others (v. 16); *if* he was successful.

A godly confrontation (vv. 17-24). Daniel’s reply to the king was terse: he would give the king the proper interpretation, but not because of any reward he might receive (v. 17). Rather, the king needed to know what a godless disgrace he really was. He demonstrated all this by comparing king Belshazzar to his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. To make a long story short, the previous king had been blessed by the One True God. But his pride had been judged by God and he was—

for a period of time—quite crazy. But he was brought back to reality when he had acknowledged the sovereignty of God. Belshazzar, on the other hand, had also become arrogant. But his condemnation was worse for two reasons. First, he had not learned from his predecessor a lesson that was both obvious and well known. Second, rather than acknowledge the One True God, Belshazzar had desecrated the temple's wares by using them for debauchery. Now God had pronounced his judgement. The writing was on the wall.

A troubling interpretation (vv. 25-31). The Aramaic words, *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN* is translated as “numbered, numbered, weighed, divided.” The repetition of “numbered” was meant to either be emphatic or apply to two aspects of the king's demise. Likely, Daniel suggested that both Babylon's days were numbered as well as those of Belshazzar the king. “Weighed” indicates that God had applied His standard of judgment and found the king's character as “lacking.” And “divided” was the end product. By the end of the night, the king was dead and the kingdom divided.

Questions for reflection:

- *Why do you think the king held such an extravagant feast while an enemy army was encamped around his city?*
- *Do you think Daniel was rude in the way he spoke to the king? Why do you think he was so direct?*
- *Hearing that the end was near, why do you think the king still rewarded Daniel even though the news was bad?*