

Message #1065
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"HANDWRITING ON THE WALL"

{Daniel 5}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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INTRODUCTION

Peter Marshall {former Chaplain of the United States Senate--about whom the movie, "A Man Called Peter" was made} referred to the Religion Section of the Saturday newspaper as the "Pastor's Misery Page!" He was referring to the sermon topics selected for the next day by pastors throughout the Washington, D.C. Area.

...how to be creative?

...how to make it inviting?

...how to make it original?

I recall some years ago when we were residing in Portland, Oregon, when I was asked to preach at a German Congregational Church. My text for the morning was the same as this morning's--Daniel 5.

The church had an outdoor sign where sermon topics were listed weekly.

I can still see it in big letters...

"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPARSIN"

I'm not sure that too many passing by the church were impressed; however, it was original...that you must admit!

BABYLON

The setting of our scripture lesson of the morning is the ancient city of Babylon.

Just 50 miles south of Baghdad, on the banks of the Euphrates River, lays the ruins of one of the greatest cities of the ancient world.

...one of the oldest cities of history

...the first city mentioned after the flood in Genesis

...Babylon was the New York City of the world

...renown for its commerce and for its greatness

...the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

This great city was thought to be impregnable--

...the walls were 300 feet high

...80 feet wide

...4 chariots could travel side-by-side at the top

...it had over 100 towers along the walls for defense

...it was over 60 miles in circumference.

...it had enough food in storage to last for 20 years in case of a siege

...the Euphrates River flowed through it under the walls with an endless supply of water.

Babylon was magnificent and invincible!

{Three years ago when Irma and I were in Berlin we visited the Pergamum Museum. They have an entire section of the museum dedicated to ancient Babylon where they have rebuilt a portion of the walls as they were originally.}

The days of this great ancient empire were numbered.

...nearly 70 years before the incident described in our text, King Nebuchadnezzar and his armies destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple.

...he took all the valuable items from the city

...gold...silver...all its riches...everything of value

...sacred vessels from the temple
...he took the people captive
...he chose the "cream of the crop" to educate in the ways of the Chaldeans
{including Daniel,
Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah}

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH NEBUCHADNEZZAR

In the first four chapters of the Book of Daniel we read of how God through Daniel and his three friends dealt with King Nebuchadnezzar.

In chapter 1 we have Daniel and his three friends refusing to eat the food and drink the wine from the king's table. After three years of their training the Bible says that Nebuchadnezzar...

"...talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

In Chapter, 2 Daniel interprets a dream concerning the future for King Nebuchadnezzar--one which none of his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers could interpret. In the end, the king said to Daniel...

"Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

...note, Nebuchadnezzar did not embrace Daniel's God

...he refers to Him as "your God!"

...God still had work to do on Nebuchadnezzar

In Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar challenges Daniel's interpretation of the dream and has a 90 x 9 foot statue made of solid gold placed in the Plain of Dura and commands all inhabiting the land to bow and worship the image. All bow but Daniel's three friends who are then tossed into a fiery furnace for their refusal to obey the king's orders.

To Nebuchadnezzar's amazement, not a hair on their head was singed and a fourth man is seen with them "walking around the fire, unbound and unharmed...the fourth looking like a son of the gods." To all this he says...

"Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants. They trusted in Him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

Note: again, it's the "God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," not "My God!"

Then in chapter 4, as we saw last Sunday, following his refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, Nebuchadnezzar is forced to live like a wild animal totally out of touch with reality for seven years.

But, in the end, Nebuchadnezzar gave a testimony of his own personal faith...

"I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.

Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever....I

praise and exalt and glorify the King of Heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just. And those who walk in pride He is able to humble!"

BELSHAZZAR DOESN'T LEARN FROM NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S EXPERIENCE

That brings us to chapter 5--and what transpired in the first four chapters in basic to our understanding of the events in today's lesson.

The Feast {5: 1-4}

Belshazzar hosts a great banquet with over a thousand guests.

"While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them....{and}...as they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone!"

...these vessels were dedicated to the Lord

...this was a deliberate act of sacrilege against Almighty God

...these vessels had been set-aside and were regarded as holy {just as we take the bread and wine during the sacrament of holy communion and set the element aside from their common use}

...these vessels were consecrated ONLY for worship of God--and for that use exclusively!

To treat these vessels with contempt was a defiance of the third commandment:

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

{Exodus 20: 7}

...He insulted Almighty God

...He challenged the Sovereign God of the universe!

...then he blasphemed God!

Mind you, Belshazzar was not ignorant of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar. Note Daniel's remarks to him...

"O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position He gave him, all the peoples and nations and men 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. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most high God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone He wishes.

"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, THOUGH YOU KNEW ALL THIS. 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 honor the God who holds in His hand your life in all your ways."

The Handwriting on the Wall {5: 5-9}

"Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall...and the king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together."

Belshazzar was not ignorant.

Belshazzar knew exactly what he was doing

Belshazzar has too much to drink and he defies the Lord--and he will pay for it

The Bible says: "Anyone who knows the good they ought to do and don't do it, sins!"

{James 4: 17}

Belshazzar knew right from wrong

Belshazzar knew the history behind those vessels
Belshazzar...and the people of Babylon...were
to pay for this deliberate act of sacrilege!

DANIEL COMES FORTH...GIVES MEANING.

You may recall how sensitive Daniel was with Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. Here is is abrupt...

"Keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else!"

...to the point

...disgusted with Belshazzar

...merciless.

"This is the inscription that was written: 'Mene, mene, tekel, uparsin.'

"This is what the words mean: 'Mene'--God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end; 'Tekel'--You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; 'Peres/Uparsin'--Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

CONCLUSION--BELSHAZZAR'S DEMISE

Belshazzar didn't know that the Persians had been secretly building a canal that would divert the flow of the Euphrates River so that the waters could be diverted into a marsh. He also didn't know that that very day they had completed the job. They had diverted the waters of the Euphrates. The level of the water of the Euphrates that went under the wall had gone down. The armies of Persia silently marched into Babylon UNDER the mighty walls on the bed of water.

And...the Persian army walked right into the banquet hall of Belshazzar and "that very night the king of the Babylonians was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom...!"

The lessons for us--

1. You cannot defy God and get away with it!

2. God has put all our lives on the balances

...he has weighed us carefully

...what would He say about you and your relationship with Him?

3. You cannot harbor your sin and get away with it.

"Be sure your sin will find out you!"

"By Him, our actions are weighed!"

"The wages of sin is death...God's gift--eternal life!"

4. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "we are the temple of God!"

...our bodies are His abode--CHRIST IS IN YOU!

...defile it--you defile Almighty God.

Daniel called upon Nebuchadnezzar to "renounce" his ways...Jesus calls upon us to "repent...or we will perish!"

Belshazzar's insistence of rewarding Daniel and refusing to repent cost him his life and the Kingdom of Babylon.

As God weighs you this morning on His scales--where are you?