

Daniel - Folly of a Sinner

by William Fitch

The sermon teaches that sin is the ultimate foolishness and that holiness is the only wisdom to walk in the ways of God, using the story of Belshazzar as an example.

Duration: 40:50

Topics: "Sinner"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Belshazzar from the book of Daniel. The sermon emphasizes the folly of sin and the importance of walking in the ways of God. Belshazzar is portrayed as a sinner who ignores the voice of God and continues in his sinful ways. However, God intervenes in a mysterious way by writing a judgment on the wall during a feast. The sermon encourages listeners to remember the lessons of God and to live in obedience to Him.

Transcript

Speak to me by name, O Master. Let me know it is to me. Speak that I may follow faster in obedience, glad and free.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee. What hast Thou to say to me? And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, for Thy great love's sake. Amen.

I want to think with you this morning about this great fifth chapter of the Book of Daniel. In Daniel chapter 5 and at verse 1 we read, Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine with them. In verse 5 we read, in the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace.

In verse 25 we read, and this is the writing that was written, mene, mene, teke lefasen. And then in verses 26, 28, we have the interpretation given, God has numbered thy kingdom. Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.

The kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. Thy kingdom is divided. Now, as you well know, the first part of the Book of Daniel deals very largely with the story of King Nebuchadnezzar, a most extraordinary man with a most extraordinary kingdom, a man who came to the very highest heights of power and could look over his palace wall and say, this is great Babylon which I have built.

And there wasn't a corner of the earth in which he did not feel his might was known. But God came to King Nebuchadnezzar, as you will recall, and brought him very low. And God at the last, having brought him very low, brought him to himself.

And one of the greatest conversion stories in all the Bible is the story of the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded in the first four chapters of the Book of Daniel. It's a story to which we should continue to return, a story demonstrating the sovereignty of God in the history of man, demonstrating the security of the people of God at every level of experience, and demonstrating and showing to us so clearly the salvation of God, the kind of salvation that God works for his own. God would not let Nebuchadnezzar go, and ultimately he brought him to himself.

It's a strange and mysterious and wonderful story of a love that passes knowledge, and of a sovereignty that is absolute. Above all the sovereignty of King Nebuchadnezzar, there was the sovereignty of the throne of God, and this at last he came to understand. Now in chapter 5 we come to the record of another king, the story of another monarch, who, though he had seen so much of God's hand and God's blessing, was not saved at the last.

Because the story of Belshazzar is not a story of conversion. It's a story of a man who flouted God to the last moment, a man who, though blessed with so many great and precious things, was nonetheless careless of the things that matter most. And ultimately when the hour of destiny struck for him, was found wanting, and God's judgment fell upon him.

I want to think with you this morning about this man, and in particular about the balances of God, because as you will recall, we read, thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. The story of Belshazzar is the story of the folly of a sinner. I don't know if there is any clearer indication or instance of this in all the Bible.

The utter folly of sin. Thirty years lie between chapters 4 and chapters 5 of the book of Daniel. During these thirty years, a full generation of men, a little more at that time, the power of Babylon has been slipping and the empire has been crumbling.

And Cyrus the Mede has been growing in strength, because God was with him and God was lifting up Cyrus the Mede, as we read in the book of Isaiah, I girded thee, though thou hast not known me. And God says to Cyrus, I have raised thee up in order that thou might come to my people and say, let my people go. I girded thee.

And at this moment, in the beginning of chapter 5, the armies of King Cyrus are outside Babylon. They are investing the city. Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and Belshazzar is king, or at least acting as king.

It would appear that Belshazzar acted as regent for his father for some time, but he was a disreared man. Even Xenophon, the Greek historian, calls him an impious man. A man with no thought of God.

And this night, when the enemy was at the gate, disaster overhanging the city and its king, instead of seeking refuge in the everlasting refuge that God had showed to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar ordered a great feast to a thousand of his lords. And we are told that he, on that night, indulged in wine, women, and song, with the barriers all done. If ever there was an orgy, there was an orgy that night, where sin roamed uninhibited across the palace floors, where sin dripped from the palace walls, where sin flooded through the palace gates, while the cup of the wrath of God filled to the very full upon this people and nation.

The kingdom is ripe for the overthrow. The king is ready to be cast down. But in spite of all this, the thoughts of this man, Belshazzar, are still set only on dissipation and right as living.

Over the banquet there hangs the damp and sultry atmosphere that hung over Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot, and over the flood generation in the days of Noah. But the king makes nothing of this. This is the occasion for the final throw on his part.

And in an unprecedented act of impiety, he ordered that the vessels of silver and gold that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, that they should be brought. And we read that in that sinful, or geostic mob, they drank from these holy vessels. They drank wine, we read, and they praised the gods of gold and silver and brass and iron and wood and stone.

Now this is the ultimate of evil, the absolute end of folly and of sin. Because we must never forget that Belshazzar knew so much. Belshazzar was a man to whom God had revealed himself.

He had seen God demonstrate his sovereignty in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. He had seen God at work. He was no ignorant man concerning the ways of God, and all that God had done unto and for Nebuchadnezzar, this was well known to Belshazzar.

But he hadn't profited from that experience. We might have imagined that so striking had been the dealings of God with Nebuchadnezzar, the king, that no subsequent ruler could ever forget. But we so easily forget.

It's part of ourselves, it's part of our sinful nature, it's part of our sinful upbringing, that forgetfulness of the ways of God is native to our hearts. And Belshazzar forgot, despising the lessons of the past and flouting God to his face, untrue to the light that he had been given, and acting as though God had never spoken. This is Belshazzar, and in all this we see the folly of the sinner.

And this is still the folly of sin. This is the folly of the sinner, the man who having heard the voice of God, can continue as though that voice had never been spoken. The man to whom God has whispered, walking out as though God had never addressed him.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, night unto night shows knowledge. But the sinner can look up into these heavens and see no trace or tracery of the footprints of God.

So it was with Belshazzar, we forget so soon. The tidings that have come to us at a Christmas season, they pass so quickly, and we forget. The lessons that we learn as little children, we forget so soon.

Perhaps you're wondering why we're having the children of the junior and primary and intermediate coming in, Sunday by Sunday. Well, we felt as we considered it, it was just a shame that these children should never have the opportunity of sitting within this gracious and lovely sanctuary at any point. And so we resolved that midway between their course, commencing at quarter to ten and going on until the end of our church service, now they should have this little island of time in which they come here, in which impressions, we pray, will be made upon their young hearts, and in which they will learn things that they could not otherwise learn.

I can recall so vividly being taken into church. I cannot recall what age I was, but I certainly was very, very young. And I remember when the minister said, let us pray, and I saw other people bow their heads, I

naturally bowed my head.

These things are instinctive. We learn the lessons so easily when we are young. And this is part of the reason why we have the children with us.

Oh, your parents see to it that your children see you bow your heads in prayer, and see to it that these lessons, so far as you are able, are imprinted and impressed deep upon their hearts and upon their young minds. But here is Belshazzar acting as though God had never spoken, and closing his eyes and ears to the verdicts of the past. And this we all do.

This we all do. And then God, in strange and mysterious ways at times, breaks into a man's life, in altogether unexpected ways, as he did that dreadful night when they were holding reverie together. For the thousand lords, with their wives and with their concubines, as they drank from their holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem, were shudderingly startled to behold over there upon the wall the fingers of a man's hand writing.

That was wrong. But God was writing the verdict of history, and God was writing the judgment upon the life of this king, Belshazzar. Thou art weighed in the balances, and thou art found wanting.

It never pays to trifle with God. Somewhere along the line, finality is reached. And every day, in a sense, is judgment day for us.

Every day is a gift of God in which we can repent. And this is the first lesson that we should learn from the story of Belshazzar today, the folly of a sinner. Sin is the ultimate foolishness.

Holiness is the only wisdom to walk in the ways of God and to follow in the path that God has appointed. This is the only wisdom. In what way are you walking today? Are you walking in the way of sin, like Belshazzar? What is God's verdict over your life this morning? Weighed in the balances, found wanting? Let's move on through the story just for a little.

We see here not only the folly of a sinner, but we see also the faithfulness of a mother. Now, this is very significant, and it's a part of the story that very often we forget. But in verse 9 we read, Then was the king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

And no wonder, but in verse 10 we read, Now the queen came into the banquet house, and she spake. Now who is this queen? Why is she not there? Why is she not present? Why is she, as one of the leaders surely of the land, not present when all the other mighty are gathered together? She is the queen's mother. Some suppose her to have been Nicolaus, a woman of great wisdom, of whom Herodotus speaks in his history, the daughter of King Nebuchadnezzar, and the child of his late repentance.

She wasn't at the feast, and she obviously disapproved of it. She comes in after this handwriting has appeared. She knew that there are certain things a child of God does, and there are certain things that a child of God does not do.

She knew only too well that there are certain places to which a child of God will go, and that there are other places to which a child of God will not go. No matter how great the persuasion, no matter how marked it makes her or him not to go, the child of God will not go to certain places. To be seen in certain places in this city would be the stamp of indelible shame forever.

And I tell you, some of you have been playing fast and loose with this kind of thing, forgetting that there are bounds beyond which a Christian may not go, forgetting that if we are to know the great and everlasting positives of the love of God, then there are negatives that must be obeyed, that there are areas into which we will not go, that there are points across which we will not step. The Queen Mother understood this. The tidings have come to her that God has spoken, and with complete integrity and serenity of heart she addressed the King.

She entered into that great company. It must have taken tremendous courage on her part to enter, but she came and she addressed the King, and she reminded him of a certain man. She reminded him of a prophet of God.

She reminded him of a man who had spoken the word of God to Nebuchadnezzar, and she spoke of his ministry, and she spoke of his help to Nebuchadnezzar, and she tells how Nebuchadnezzar promoted him, and she suggests that Belshazzar now call for this man. What is this? It is the courage of true piety, and it is the unassailable true piety of a godly mother. It is a mother who is persuaded that she must speak when the moment comes, and the moment has come, and she speaks.

O King, there is a man in thy kingdom. His name is Daniel. She pointed to the bearer of the divine word, and she was faithful in her testimony, the piety of a godly mother, giving herself in this moment to remind Belshazzar of his sin and folly, but that still within his kingdom there was a man who could speak to him the word of God, and who could interpret this writing of God upon the history of this hour.

I never cease to marvel at the contemporaneousness of the word of God, because this isn't ancient history. This is as modern as today. And thank God that we are still godly mothers amongst us.

Thank God that their tribe has not completely failed from the earth. Thank God that there are still mothers amongst us who are prepared to speak the word in love and in grace and with courage. I hope that they speak with restraint.

I hope you understand that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. I hope you realize that there are moments when it is unwise to speak, when it is so necessary to let your children go, if ever you're going to possess them truly. But there comes the moment, and that moment, if it is said of God, then God will whisper within your heart, and he will say to you, now is the moment, now is the day, now is the hour.

Speak! Speak now! Speak. It may seem as though I talk sentimentally when I say that one of the greatest needs of the day is for praying mothers, and yet I'm not talking sentimentally. I'm speaking sober, straightforward Christian truth, and I'm speaking to you mothers of Knox this morning, and I know that my heart is communicating with your heart and you with your children, and you're thinking of your children now as I speak to you, and your children are growing up.

What are they going to think? How are they going to follow? What is the future before them? What are you planning for them? What are you, above all other things, coveting for them? Are you coveting for them nothing else but the grace and glory of the will of God, that your children will rise up and do God's will? Is that your hope and prayer today? Then are you praying to that end? Are you praying to that end, praying mothers and praying fathers? Oh, we need them. We need them. I've told you before, and I'll tell you again, and I tell you today once more, in order that it might sink in, because I will not cease to put you in remembrance of those things, even though you know them.

During the 11 years that I was privileged to be pastor of the church in Springburn Hill, there were three of us met every Monday morning, three ministers, and we met for one purpose only, really, and that was to pray for our children, to pray for our children. God gave to us an hour on the Monday morning when we were able to get together, and at 11 o'clock we would drink a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, and then we would just talk and we would share the problems, and we would talk about our children, and we prayed for them. I thank God, as I look back across these years, for the way in which he guided us to do that, and I thank God for the way in which, as I see what has happened to these children, where they are today, there isn't one of them that isn't involved in depth, in God's service, not one of them, and yet I can recall days when some of us were just literally broken down in heart and tears were flowing freely as we spoke about the need of our homes and the need of our children, and there were real problems and there were real crises.

These are the moments when you must stand together. Oh, parents of Knox, understand. Get together.

Pray with one another for your children. Pray. Pray.

The devil is going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Never forget that, and your children are needing the defenses that you alone can give. Here in this drunken mob, a heartbroken mother comes, and she speaks.

She will yet speak. If God has still a voice amongst men, here it is. He will never lack a voice where there is a praying mother or a praying father at his feet.

What about your children? I get greatly concerned sometimes when I think about teaching and training of our children. I believe it's perfectly possible that we've been neglecting this here in Knox in a way in which we--in many ways. And yet I believe that there are being given to us facilities as a result of what is happening with our 150 renovations, facilities that are quite unique.

We're going to have facilities that will be as good as anything in Ontario at the end of this coming month, and these facilities are being presented to us in order that our children might be taught in the things of God. Are we going to leave them a third or a quarter or a half or three quarters empty? Or are we going to see to it that our children are brought under the sound of the word of God? Are we going to see to it that our children are taught not only at home, but here in Bible school? Or do you find it difficult to get up in time on a Sunday morning in order to bring your children here for quarter to ten? Can you tell me, can you look me square in the eye and say, I honest, I can't make it? I can't make it. Never forget, the victory of Sunday morning is won the night before.

You have to prepare for the Sabbath day from six o'clock on on the Saturday night. The whole of the Bible is eloquent in its testimony concerning this, the beginning of the preparation of the Sabbath. Ah, we've forgotten this, that the Sabbath preparation begins on the eve of the Sabbath.

Yet, if you're really going to bring your children, you've got to prepare, you've got to think ahead, you've got to plan, and then you have to bring your children. Not just send them, you have to bring them. And you take them to their class, and then you move along to your class.

And in this way, church is being strengthened, and we're being taught in Christian truth. This is the meaning of it all. And this is the reason why we do certain things.

And this is why we're going to stress and keep on stressing the need for Christian education. We must teach our children. This mother spoke for God.

The folly of a sinner, the faithfulness of a mother. I want you to not hear the fearlessness of a preacher. Through these wonderful verses, verses 17 to 24, Daniel speaks.

Fearlessness surely is the supreme characteristic of a great preacher. He has no regard for what men think. He doesn't set his sails by the whims and moods of members of his congregation.

God help if he does. Fearlessness, fearlessness. Preaching begins as the feasting ends, and Daniel is here.

He's been offered reward, and he scorns it. Some think every man has his price, but men of Daniel's mood scorn traffic of this kind. And then he recalls the past and rehearses all that God had done for Nebuchadnezzar.

Though it was 40 years ago, Daniel hasn't forgotten, nor can he, nor will he ever. Because the story of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar will be told throughout all eternity. His greatness of glory, his pride, and his chastening, his repentance, and his restoration.

This is the illustration that he uses. I wish that preachers would use more and more God's own illustrations. There is nothing better than the illustrations that are given to us in holy scripture.

And then he accuses the king of stubbornness and rebellion. Thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this. Thou hast not humbled thine heart.

And then he pinpoints the sin. He indicates the true nature of the sin of that night. The sin of pride, the sin of sacrilege, the sin of profanity, the sin of forgetfulness of God, the sin of impiety.

Thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, and there brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, thy lord, thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them. And thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, and brass, and iron, and wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know. And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.

The fearlessness of the preacher reaches its consummation when he comes to the final verdict, and announces the verdict of God. Ultimately all will hear. There are no pious platitudes being declared here.

No, every one of these words has blood upon them. Everyone, everyone. This is what we covered above all else, and this is what Canada needs in this day of apostasy and uncertainty.

And there is great uncertainty in so many areas. There are great questionings. There is so much questioning of the word of God itself, and there is so much uncertainty as to the nature of divine revelation and inspiration.

And there are so many pulpits that have completely abandoned this book as the final authority of God, behind which the preacher stands and expounds the word of God. We've forgotten in such a large part. We must pray for a revival of biblical preaching, this kind of preaching, which is always fearless preaching.

Daniel, amongst the thousand lords, wives, and concubines, denouncing sin and reminding what God had done in the past. We've spoken of the folly of a sinner and the faithfulness of a mother, and we've spoken

of the fearlessness of a preacher. Now let me speak just in these last moments of the finality of God's finger.

Four times in the Bible we read about the finger of God. The plagues of Egypt, this is the finger of God. The Ten Commandments written with the finger of God.

Our Lord said, if I by the finger of God cast out demons, no doubt the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. And then our Lord, he stooped, and with his finger he wrote on the ground. And in every single case there is finality.

Judgment in Egypt, commandment on Sinai, the casting out of demons, the reading of the heart of man. For they all went out, and there was no one left to accuse the woman taken in adultery. And that's what we see here, the fingers of a man's hand, declaring that the days of the king and the kingdom are numbered, declaring that the king has been weighed in the balances and found wanting, declaring the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persian.

What does this say to us today? Just this, the days of man's probation are limited. The worth of every life is estimated, and the opportunity we abuse is forfeited. All this, the finger of God, though it weighed in the balances and found wanting, what contrasts there are in the scripture.

Nebuchadnezzar raised to the highest, a king saved at the last saws by fire. And Belshazzar, a king lost in spite of all that God attempted to do. What shall we do? There is only one thing I counsel.

I planned that this was the message that I should preach on the first Sunday of the year, and then the influenza got me, and I had no voice at all. And so it's two weeks late, but perhaps God has his reasons for this. What shall we do? I tell you, men and women, turn and seek the Lord.

Turn and walk in his ways. Make a new beginning with God this year of 1969. Make a new beginning with God.

Plead his blessing upon your heart and upon your home. Begin to pray for your children as you have never prayed before, and seek that his power will be known in them and through them, and in you and through you. If you will do that, I promise you that when the balances are struck through grace divine, you will not be found wanting, but by the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, you will be found acceptable and bid to enter into the kingdom, into the everlasting city of God.

Shall we pray? O Lord, in mercy great and mighty thou art. God infinite and glorious, we worship thee. Speak to our hearts the day we pray.

Let not the word fall lightly. Grant that there may be nothing obliterated that thou wouldst indelibly stamp upon our lives. O spirit of God, move in our midst.

Revive thy work again here in Knox. Give to us all thirst after thee. Bless us, our children and our homes forever.

Lord, hear our prayer In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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