

WEIGHT WATCHER

DANIEL 5:13-31 DECEMBER 5, 2018

Cash rewards for information in criminal investigations are pretty common. The federal government has their *Reward For Justice* program, offering rewards as high as 5, 10 or even 25 million dollars for information leading to arrests of certain terrorists.¹ On the smaller end of the spectrum is Crime Stoppers, which offers a few thousand dollars for anonymous tips. The individual payouts may be smaller, but I was surprised to learn that Crime Stoppers USA reported as of December, 2018, the following statistics related to their work: 712,000 arrests, \$1.15 billion in property recovered and \$106 million paid out to tipsters.² That's a ton of reward cash, but it's estimated that, at least in some regions, almost *half* of the reward money goes unclaimed.³

When we last left off in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, was ruling in Babylon. Though the Medo-Persian armies had gathered at the city walls, the king threw a wild, drunken party for his court and 1,000 of his nobles. After bringing out the sacred vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem and using them to guzzle their booze and praise pagan idols, a hand appeared, writing a message in the plaster on the wall. In response, Belshazzar offered a huge reward to anyone who could read and interpret the message.

The whole thing was a party killer. The king was particularly freaked out by it. None of the so-called wise men of Babylon were any help. At that point, the Queen Mother came in and told him that there was a man in the city who could be counted on to make sense of the message. And so the call went out to Daniel, who was probably in his 80s at the time, no longer employed in the palace.

When Daniel gets on the scene, he has no interest in the king's rewards, but he's ready to preach the truth about God and the coming judgment of the nation and Belshazzar himself.

We begin at verse 13, as Daniel enters the great hall full of drunk, terrified party guests.

Daniel 5:13 - ¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"

We don't get much in the Biblical record about King Belshazzar, just this one story. But the testimony of Scripture is clear and compelling: His was a sad, worthless life from the perspective of heaven. He may have been ruler of the most powerful empire on the planet at the time. He may have had fabulous wealth, luxury, an impressive pedigree, but in the ways that actually mattered, it was all a waste. Here he is, enemies at the gate, making their way under the walls and he's busy blaspheming. Spending his last few breaths mocking his Creator.

In verse 13, he reveals he wasn't just wasteful in his personal life, but in the way he ruled as well. He doesn't even know who Daniel is! Now think about that for a minute: Daniel had been prime minister, maybe for *decades*. He was, by all accounts, the smartest guy in the government, not by a little but by a *long shot*. His fame had spread throughout the empire. After all, this was a man who could tell you what you had dreamed and what that dream meant. He was personal friends with Belshazzar's

¹ <https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/most-wanted/all-regions.html>

² <https://www.crimestoppersusa.org/total-stats/>

³ https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/01/19/why_millions_in_crime_stoppers_rewards_go_unclaimed.html

grandfather. And now? Well, the first time Belshazzar heard of him was a few minutes ago. What a waste of an incredible resource! But that's the kind of king this guy was.

Now, for Daniel's part we notice this: Despite all he had done and accomplished, the high rank the Lord set him up in, he was *still* seen as "one of those captives from Judah." "Excuse me, but I ran this country while your dad was in diapers." That's what *I'd* want to say. But no, Daniel doesn't complain. He doesn't protest. He doesn't get offended and say, "Don't you know who I am?!?" I think he's fine with forever being seen as one of the captives from Judah, because, in reality, he *wasn't* a Babylonian. And this is a great reminder to us as we live out our lives here on the earth. We're *not* citizens of this world, we're citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And, because of that, there should always be something *other* about us, where we never quite fully belong to this world. We should let go of any desire we have to demand worldly recognition. The Godly look to heaven.

Daniel 5:14 - ¹⁴I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.

Twice Belshazzar is going to say, "I have heard of you." And what he had heard was significant. Most of us have neighbors and even if you haven't met some of them, their reputation precedes them. The people in the apartment above you or that weird house across the street. If those neighbors came knocking on your door, you'd have some sort of opinion about them. What was Daniel's reputation? That he was full of the Spirit of God. And, that because of that, he was a man of uncommon wisdom.

This is what we are to be defined as Christians. Not by what we have achieved or acquired, but by the filling of God the Holy Spirit and by heavenly wisdom. That's exactly what was needed and what the Church looked for when selecting the first deacons.

Acts 6:3a - brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...

Godly people, like those first deacons or like Daniel, are people full of the Spirit *and* full of God's wisdom. Christians who don't know what to do or don't know what to say as their go through life aren't really Biblical. God says He *gives* us wisdom, and we're told to *ask* for it. And, if we do find ourselves in a situation where we really don't know how to respond, as Spirit-filled believers, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will *tell* us what to say and how to say it.

Daniel 5:15-16 - ¹⁵Now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. ¹⁶And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

So, again, there in verse 16, we see that Daniel wasn't just some spiritual mystic. His religion wasn't just theoretical. There was a real-world activity to his faith. "You are filled with the Spirit of God *and so you give interpretations and explain enigmas!*" His faith had legs. He could actually operate and help. So many philosophies and worldviews out there are just *theoretical*. You hear sometimes, "Well, communism works *in theory*." Yeah, well, it doesn't work in real life. Sometimes "theory" is just another name for make believe. Daniel's faith wasn't just a philosophy, it was *power*. And he was able to do jobs others could not do.

This is the kind of life the Apostles had and the kind of experience they preached about. When we're in Christ, we're able to experience a life of invincible faith and impossible power.

Daniel 5:17 - ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

A servant of God doesn't hide the truth behind a pay wall. We see here Daniel wasn't greedy. But he also wasn't afraid. This is a great attribute we consistently see in stories about his life. Daniel was not frightened because he trusted the Lord. This would *not* have been an easy situation in which to speak the truth. He's there, in a hostile environment, with a *tough* message to deliver. Definitely not a warm and fuzzy. But Daniel doesn't shrink or take advantage. And his example reminds us that we are *commanded* to speak the truth and to do so with boldness and love.

Daniel 5:18-21 - ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. ¹⁹ And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. ²¹ Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

We saw all of this in detail in previous passages. Tonight we note that, before Daniel shares the message of judgment, he gives *context* to the ways and works of God. In this short sermon, he revealed that there *is* a true and living God, that this God is gracious, generous and long-suffering, even toward His enemies, but that God is the One in charge of all things, and that He is paying close attention to the lives of nations and of men and He *will not* be mocked.

Daniel 5:22-23a - ²² “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house 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, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know...

Belshazzar couldn't plead ignorance about these things. Daniel said, “Hey, you *know* these things.” I imagine his grandfather had preached to him as a boy, or he had (at least) been exposed to the evangelistic tract that we took a look at back in chapter 5. But, having heard, Belshazzar rejected the message. He hardened his heart with pride.

One of the big subjects of this book is the terrible sinfulness of pride. God *hates* it and He will not stand for it. We should take His view of pride very seriously. Because, as seen in this book, God will topple an entire *nation* because of this sin. And, the problem is, it's intrinsic to all of our hearts. We're all infected with pride. The cure to this infection is *humility*. This isn't only brought out in these passages of Daniel, but *throughout* the Bible. This is a big deal to God, so it should be a big deal to us. We're told God *resists* the proud, but gives grace to the humble. We're told by both Peter and

Paul that we're to *clothe* ourselves with humility. We're told that it's *required* of us by God. But that, when we humble ourselves, the Lord will lift us up - that He'll guide the humble and that through humility comes wisdom. For example:

Proverbs 11:2 - ²When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.

So, all these things we're reading about are connected. Being spiritual, being wise, being used by God, contrasted with wasting your life and having it spoiled by pride. Daniel and Belshazzar example for us these truths and show what a difference there is between the proud and the humble. Which reveals the fact that you can't be Spirit-filled *and* be proud at the same time.

Daniel 5:23b - ...and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

This is a great description of the work of God in our lives. It wasn't just Belshazzar's breath and ways that belonged to the Lord, it's ours too. Our part is to glorify God. Meaning we are to honor Him and magnify Him with our lives. With whatever breath we have and in whatever ways He's led us down, we are to shine His glory, magnify His greatness.

Daniel 5:24-25 - ²⁴ Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. ²⁵ "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

God was *personally* judging Belshazzar. Whether you're a believer or not, God knows you *individually*. You will either be *personally* saved or *personally* judged. No one skates by.

Daniel 5:26-28 - ²⁶ This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

In the message, God gives Belshazzar the *what* that's going to happen, *why* it's happening and by *whose* hand it will happen. The word Mene, repeated twice, has to do with a certain weight of shekels. Bible scholars convert it over for us and, all told, it's about two and a half pounds. God looked at all Belshazzar's life and said, "On the scales of heaven, it weighs less than 1 red brick." In ancient times, before machines could make things uniform, payments would often have to be rendered by *weight*. *This* many pounds of gold or silver. The kind of payments that Belshazzar, no doubt, received as ransom and tribute from many nations across his empire. But when the time came to pay his Creator, he was *more* than short, he had *nothing* with which to ransom his life.

At the end of human history, all those who don't have saving faith in Christ will stand before God's Great White Throne. Books will be opened, lives will be measured, and each one will be found insufficient.

In the mean time, as believers we're told the Christian life works in us an "eternal weight of glory." That when we stand before the Bema of Christ we'll be shone not as less than one red brick, but as gold, silver and costly stones because of the greatness of Christ working in us.

Without Christ, life is wasted. In this passage, the most powerful man in all the world is shown to be like weightless chaff in the light of eternity.

A secondary lesson here is to notice how fast God can move and change the course of history. In a *day* He took Nebuchadnezzar off the throne. In *one night*, not only would Belshazzar be gone, but the whole Babylonian empire! So, we must not put the hope of our hearts in a leader or a nation or a system, but in the *Lord*, who rules of all kings and all nations and all generations.

Daniel 5:29 - ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Maybe Belshazzar was trying to put some positive spin. Maybe he just laughed and didn't believe. Either way, these worldly treasures were as worthless as his life had been. What good is being 3rd ruler in a kingdom that doesn't exist? Daniel was wise to not be enamored of these things.

Daniel 5:30-31 - ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Daniel foretold this. So did Isaiah. It happened *just* as God said it would. As predicted, the head of gold from Nebuchadnezzar's vision gave way to the chest and arms of silver. The Medo-Persians were now the ruling world empire. Let God be true and every man a liar.

As we close tonight I'd like us to take one more look at the end of verse 23.

Daniel 5:23b - ...the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

That word glorified, meaning to magnify or honor, can also mean to "adorn." *Your life* can be spent *adorning* the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways. And this text demonstrates that you don't have to be wealthy and powerful to do it. In fact, the *captive* was the one who brought God glory, not the *king*.

The question is: How am I adorning my God in my life? It reminds me of the end of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. They've got that little tree, barely strong enough to stand up on its own. At first it seems like it can't really be a beautiful tree. But what happens at the end? The Peanuts gang simply *decide* it just needs a little love. Then they take the ornaments and decorations that were available to them and put their hands to the work and, suddenly, that little, insignificant tree is *impossibly* ornate and glorious. It's a great moment. I can't help but see some similarities between that and how we, weak as we may be, can allow God to work in us, and as we cooperate with Him, our lives become glorifications of His power and person. The Bible gives us some instruction about how we adorn the Lord: Through humility. By living with a gentle and quiet spirit. By responding to God with trust and obedience. And then we see living examples of how a person can wonderfully glorify and magnify and adorn the Lord in characters like Daniel. He glorified God through faithfulness. Through willingness to speak the truth. By being full of the Spirit. We don't have to come up with the strategies ourselves, because, *remember*: It is *God* who owns our ways and gives us life that we might walk in the good works that He has prepared beforehand. And as we walk in His wisdom, by His Spirit, keeping heaven in the forefront and remembering who we are in Christ, then our lives will magnify the Lord, adorning Him, working in us an *eternal* weight of glory. But it is a work we must submit to and participate in. Lucy and the kids mocked the Christmas tree at first. But then they humbled themselves and accomplished something great. Let's decide to adorn the Lord with whatever breath we have.