

## Bold as Lions, Daniel 5 “The Writing on the Wall” 3/31/19

### Skeptical Series- Text Your Questions

**Title Slide** One of my favorite movies is Monty Python and the Holy Grail. There is a scene in the movie where they are trying to determine whether this woman in the village is a witch. They determine that because witches are made out of wood, they float in water and what else floats in water? Ducks of course...so if the woman and a duck weigh the **same amount on the scales** that she must be a witch and therefore they must burn her. And so they bring the woman to the scales and of course she weighs the same as a duck...and so off she goes.

We might not be using scales to measure ducks and witches these days, but we all have a scale in our mind to weigh and measure the significance of one another and ourselves. And that scale is calibrated to whatever we find most valuable or worthy. For many it is net worth... that was all the talk in sports with how much is Bryce Harper going to sign for 330mill. For others, our scale is calibrated based on how successful someone is in their field. Fitness junkies value muscle tone or how many pull-ups someone can do. Others how much change for good one made in their community or in politics how popular some can get. How about one of the most influential people that you don't know.... Richard Tyler Blevins, AKA “Ninja.” 98% of you don't know him but for millions of Millennials and Gen Z gamers he tips the scales of significance. Makes somewhere around 6-10 mill a year as a professional gamer and has over 20M subscribers to his Youtube page... thought you couldn't make money off of those games? Think again!

Ok, more important question: What about God? **How does God measure significance? What does God use to calibrate his scale?** Most people you encounter, when they picture entrance into heaven think Peter is there at the pearly gates and he has divine scales. And your life is going to be measured. On one side is how much good we have done and on the other side a duck... no all the bad things you have done, and we generally think he grades on a curve...

Daniel 5 we are going to encounter a man who suddenly and terrifyingly realizes that God calibrates his scale much differently than humans. Let's find out what happens in the story and then ask why this matters for us today.

#### Daniel 5:1-4

<sup>1</sup>King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.

<sup>2</sup> While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

<sup>3</sup> So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Context:

Roughly 30 years pass again from Daniel 4 to 5. King Neb has passed away, Daniel is now about 80 years old and still going strong... Must have been that vegan diet with all the kale. Now Neb. is called King Belshazzar's father is was really his grandfather. In Aramaic there is no word for grandfather. Whoever the most important king was in your lineage was called your father and you were their son.

What do we find King Belshazzar doing? He is partying hard. I thought some of the parties at UD were big, 1000 of his nobles...wine is flowing, and the picture of excess is given here... of course all the best decisions are made impaired right? He decides to get out sacred temple cups that King Neb. pulled out of the temple in Jerusalem and toast with them to their gods. Given what we have learned so far in Daniel about the sovereign power of God over kings, especially proud, mocking kings, you can suspect this isn't the best decision.

Now we happen to know the exact date of this party. October 11, 539 BC. Because at the very same time they are partying, the Medo-Persian army had surrounded the city and King Cyrus the Mede was about to take over the city. They had been steadily conquering other territory, including their strongholds in Egypt...but apparently Belshazzar was not too worried. In fact, I think this party was kind of a taunt to say...a way of saying, we are so confident that we can celebrate. Why, what would make him believe this? Remember the double wall system around Babylon I talked about last week? 400 ft. high walls, 80 ft thick outer wall. Virtually impenetrable with the weaponry in 500BC... He was right, they couldn't go through the walls or over the walls...However, Xenophon the historian tells us the brilliant strategy of the Medo-Persian army. They figured out that a portion of the Euphrates river flowed under wall, and so the dammed up a portion of the river farther up and diverting it elsewhere so that the water level lowered enough for them to slowly but assuredly walk through under the wall, taking them by surprise. While all this is happening, Belshazzar is partying in the banquet hall.

Daniel 5:5-7

*<sup>5</sup> Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. <sup>6</sup> His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking. <sup>7</sup> The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners.*

This of course is where we get the saying "the writing on the wall." I can't imagine how freaky this would have been...Steven King movie...Notice the contrast in Belshazzar... formerly confident, carefree king...all the blood ran from his face, knees knocking... literally "joints of his loins became unloosened." Bible wants us to see that this powerful king suddenly turns spineless and terrified.

Now I know people sometimes see things when they are drunk... but apparently it wasn't just Belshazzar because he calls in the enchanters, astrologers...who you gonna call? ghostbusters... but if he knew his history, we know what's going to happened. They are dumbfounded and baffled as usual.

And so we find out that the queen...most likely the queen mother, Nitocris, encourages her son, Belshazzar to summon Daniel and reminds him all that Daniel had done for Neb and she describes him in verse 11 as having the spirit of the gods in him. Which is the pagan description of filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. God's hand has been on this man in a remarkable way that gave him a divine boldness and godly reputation for 65 years.

Belshazzar calls him in and says, **Daniel 5:16**

*Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."*

An important side point I need to make. King Belshazzar tells him he will make him third highest ruler in the kingdom, and I want to tell you why that is significant. For years people taught that Daniel 5 is a reason that you can't trust the Bible and was ridiculed in "Religion 101 Courses" in universities. "Because", they'd say, "we know from history that there were three kings after Neb and the last king of Babylon before they were conquered by Cyrus was Nabonidus, not Belshazzar...and his name doesn't appear anywhere in history, so the Bible is wrong and you can't trust these legends." I wonder how many college freshmen over the years sat and listened to that. And many of them...wanting to justify living a certain lifestyle that goes against Scripture anyway, said... "Yeah ok, I'll go with that prof." Forget everything my parents, pastors, Sunday school teachers said, he has a Ph.D. so he must be right..." And they say, "There's lots of good things we like in the Bible...Love thy neighbor, be kind, be generous...but stuff I don't like in the Bible, so I'll keep the stuff I like and forget what I don't like." But not too long ago in history they dug up what is called the **Nabonidus Cylinder** and found out something quite interesting. King Nabonidus moved out to Egypt where he reigned over that portion of his kingdom because he worshipped an Egyptian sun god. And left Babylon under the regency of his son, guess who? Belshazzar. That's why Belshazzar could only make Daniel 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in the kingdom. Imagine that, the writer of Daniel knew a whole lot more about the history of Babylon than the so called "Ph.D. of Religion" whatever that even means. The more you dig out of the ground the more the Bible proves to be right. And we have only about 1% of ancient history dug out...so there is so much more to come.

Let me give you a suggestion for why you should not pick and chose what you want in the Bible...Unless you take the Bible seriously and trust it completely, even the parts that are hard to understand or you don't like, you can't have a god that isn't an idol of your own making. I can't believe in a god that would do that and that...but I believe God over here and here. How do you know you have a real god and not just an idol? Aren't you just making God into what you want? How can you have a God that never makes you mad? If you are in a marriage with a person that never makes you mad, then you don't know that person yet. They are not showing you their real self yet...because there will be things about them that you don't necessarily like. Do you want a real God or your own idol?

Back to the story- notice what Belshazzar offers him in a grasping attempt to save his life or give him hope- he offers him the things that he had used to measure his life. "Clothed in purple and given a gold chain." Wealth and possessions. And "3<sup>rd</sup> highest position"- power and influence. He is saying, I will give you the things that have made me significant, Daniel. You no longer need to be just one of the exiles my grandfather took years ago, or just another enchanter, I can elevate your worth, your measure and status! It's clear to see what Belshazzar considered the measure of his life and what he thought was significant. It was what the world measures- wealth, possessions, power and influence.

Daniel responds with three indictments:

- 1- I have a different scale than you. v. 17
- 2- You have weighed the wrong things. v.18-24
- 3- God has weighed you and you don't tip the scales. v.25-28

Daniel 5:26-28

<sup>26</sup> "Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. <sup>27</sup> Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. <sup>28</sup> Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Everything that Belshazzar had been counting on to measure himself were like stacking feathers on the scale. And it was all coming to an end because before the night is over he was assassinated.

What about us today? I haven't seen literal writing on the wall, but God is writing on the wall of each of our hearts this morning so that we would know that God will weigh every one of our lives. If this is true, **How does God calibrate his scale?** In other words, what is the standard by which we are being measured? **How can we be sure we tip the scale?**

Daniel hints at the answers in verses 18-25 when he speaks of the lesson that Neb learned the hard way that Belshazzar failed to grasp.

Daniel 5:22-24

<sup>22</sup> "But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. <sup>23</sup> Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven...<sup>24</sup> But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

Those who try to make themselves heavy ("set yourself up against") will be too light. Belshazzar attempted to measure himself up against the Lord of Heaven by the weight of his own accomplishments, his own ability, his own acts, his own gods, but Daniel tells essentially tells him the way to tip the scales is by becoming light, through humility. In fact it is nothing that you can do. Now this passage doesn't really answer the question, it just hints at it, but elsewhere Scripture answers this question.

There is a story in Matthew 19 about a young rich ruler who asked Jesus a similar question. This was a rich ruler, who unlike Belshazzar, was not very bad...but in many ways, very good. He

asked the question like this- **Matthew 19:16** *What must I DO to inherit eternal life?* How do I tip the divine scales? Jesus answered by repeating what the Scriptures say, you want to try to tip the scales, fulfill the righteous requirement of God's divine law, keep the 10 commandments...I have done that! Jesus says, You sure you measure up? Sell all your possessions and follow... actually was breaking the first commandment, have no other gods before me, but money and possessions were his real god. And the young man was unwilling to do this. The disciples are discouraged because they think, well if that guy doesn't measure up, if he doesn't tip the divine scales, what chance to we have?

What was Jesus saying? If you want to try to tip the scales, **Only those who can fulfill the righteous requirements of the law perfectly will tip the divine scales.** See, we measure goodness and righteousness on a curve, looking everyone else. But God measures against perfection. **The first key to tipping the scales: Humility- Realize you can't do it.** Anyone of you want to be first to hop up on that scale? And so, like the disciples shouldn't we ask, what hope is there for us?

Ahhh...but there is the Good News. **The Second Key to Tipping the Scales: Trust Jesus did do it.** Because what the Bible tells us that there is one man who did fulfill the righteous requirements of the law perfectly, who did measure up and tip the scales, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Let me explain the significance of this as it relates to us with a story. When my kids were little sometimes I would trick them. They would get on the scale and then I would put my foot on the back of the scale and it said they weight 150 lbs. Wow, it's those strong muscles, you gained 100lbs! Well Jesus doesn't just step on the back of the divine scales of heaven, **he stepped on the scale in our place.** And when Jesus was weighed and measured, he was found to be righteous. When God weighs those who have trusted Jesus as their substitute on the scales, he weighs us as if we are Jesus. This is how he sees us- righteous, not lacking anything in Christ.

Hotels offer wake up call... "wake up call" is kind of an adage, like a warning sign. 9/11- Wake up call to the threat of terrorism. In 1912, Titanic, many surrounding ships sent message to be careful about all the ice bergs... Titanic sent back a message...Shut up! You're jamming my signal. I'm busy...

Belshazzar was offered a wake up call. He had the information, but he chose to ignore it. Belshazzar, for all his fame, fortune, success, pleasure...at the end of his life found that it all was like stacking feathers on a scale.

Some of us today are being offered a wake up call...maybe there is writing on the wall. If you took an honest evaluation of your life today, what would it say about what you are measuring? What are you relying on? Are you hoping that you have done enough good things to outweigh your bad? Are you hoping that your influence or your status or your religious affiliations are enough to tip the scales? If so, I have bad news. Mene, mene, tekel, uparsin...But if you are trusting Jesus' perfect life and death on the cross in your place to be your substitute on the scale, you can have the assurance of eternal life. It's that simple. Salvation Invitation.

