

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018 – 11am

Daniel 5:1-31

“Those who are proud he is able to humble” (Part 2)

**Introduction**

Last time I preached here on a Sunday morning, was two weeks ago. Then we began to look at the stories or ‘testimonies’ of 2 kings who reigned in Babylon: **1. Nebuchadnezzar (ch.4) and 2. Belshazzar (ch.5).**

God took a dealing with both of these men: one repented, the other didn’t. One came to worship the Living and True God, as his God, the other didn’t. One found life, the other experienced death. One was saved; the other was lost!

I asked you that Sunday morning if you had a testimony?

- a story to tell of what you were like before God saved you?
- a story to tell of how God saved you – your conversion experience?
- a story to tell of what life has been like for you since God saved you?

I said, unless you have a testimony to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are lost!

As we looked at Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony in ch.4 we were reminded of the story of the Rich Farmer that Paul preached on at our Harvest services.

The rich, successful farmer who at the end of a great harvest could say to himself:

*‘I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones.’  
‘I have many goods laid up for many days.’  
‘Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.’*

But the words were no sooner on his lips than God said:

*‘This night your soul will be required of you! Then who’s going to get all this?’*

We saw something of that in Nebuchadnezzar’s story, but we’re going to see it even more clearly in Belshazzar’s story. So come with me and let’s take a look at King Belshazzar’s story in Daniel ch.5...

Just before we do, I want you to notice the last line of Daniel ch.4 – right at the end of the record of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign as king of the Babylonian Empire:

*‘Now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; (Listen...)  
**and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**’ (Daniel 4:37)*

With that Nebuchadnezzar walks off the page of history and in comes Belshazzar:

**1. Who was Belshazzar? (v.2)**

Well, we’re told in v.2 that Nebuchadnezzar was *‘his father’*.

Down in vs.10-12 when the Queen comes in, she seems to know about Daniel, and how he had been a great help during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, who she describes as *‘your father the king’* in v.11.

But how does the Queen know so much about Daniel, and Belshazzar doesn’t? How does she know that King Nebuchadnezzar had named Daniel ‘Belteshazzar’ and yet this King Belshazzar doesn’t seem to know him? Is she actually a much older lady, perhaps she’s the ‘King’s Mother’?

When Belshazzar speaks to Daniel from v.13 onwards he refers to Nebuchadnezzar as *‘my father’*.

But notice when King Belshazzar offers Daniel a reward for being able to explain the riddle of the hand writing on the wall, he offers Daniel the position of *‘Third ruler in the kingdom’* – not second in the kingdom. What’s going on here? Who are the two ahead of Daniel – it must be Belshazzar plus somebody else. Who’s that?

And then down in v.22 Daniel is speaking and he says:

*‘And you his son, Belshazzar have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.’*

Here we have a clue – that word for ‘son’ can also be translated ‘successor’. Not necessarily an immediate son, but someone further down the line of descent.

For example in the world of the Old Testament, David was often told that a descendant of his would reign on his throne in the future and he would be called *‘The Son of David’* – He wouldn’t necessarily be his immediate son, like Solomon, but someone descended from him who would one day sit on his throne. That title eventually came to apply to Jesus in the Gospels – he was **The Son of David**, the Messiah, who had come to reign on the throne of his father, David!

So we’re getting some clues here. Belshazzar is not an immediate son of Nebuchadnezzar, he is a descendant, a successor of King Nebuchadnezzar, and some years have passed by between the end of ch.4 and the beginning of ch.5.

This was confirmed by archaeology only 160 years ago. (See David Helm p.89) Four identical barrel-shaped cylinders containing cuneiform writing from the time of the Babylonian Empire, were found in the four corners of a tower near Babylon, that was excavated by an archaeologist from the British Museum. For the first time ever, the name *‘Belshazzar’* was found outside of the Bible, written inside each of those cylinders. They also gave a list of Babylonian kings.

It turns out that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus who was the rightful King of Babylon at the time of Daniel ch.5. But King Nabonidus was away on business in a distant land. He had left his son Belshazzar in charge while he was away. Working out the dates of Nabonidus' reign from Nebuchadnezzar's reign, we now know that 23 years have passed from the death of Nebuchadnezzar to the start of Daniel 5. In fact nearly 70 years have passed since Daniel was carried off from Jerusalem and brought to Babylon. Daniel ch.5 is going to record the downfall of Babylon, and the passing of the Babylonian Empire into the hands of the Medo-Persians (Daniel 5:31). So this is a very important turning-point of history here.

A bit like where we are at, on this very day, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, is in Brussels for a meeting with Jean Claude Juncker (European President) trying to finalise a deal that will not only bring the United Kingdom out of Europe, but will also affect this whole Continent and the European Union for the remaining 27 nations for the foreseeable future. We are living through a huge turning point in history!

The question is what thought had Belshazzar about God in his day?  
And what thought have the heads of Europe got about God in our day?  
What thought have you and I got about God today, and His place in all of this?

Because, remember the end of this story – that very night God said to Belshazzar, who thought he was so important: *'This very night your soul will be required of you, then who will get all this you have left behind?'* – Look at vs.30-31...

***'That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.  
And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.'***

**So that's who Belshazzar was** – he was the son of the man who was the fourth king to occupy the throne of Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar – and he wasn't even the rightful king. He had just been left in charge while the true king, his father, was away on business! That's why he could only offer Daniel *'3rd place in the kingdom'* (v.16) because he himself was only second in command to his father, Nabonidus!

## **2. What did Belshazzar do? (vs.1-4)**

Well, knowing all that, we have far less sympathy for this young up-start! He wasn't even the proper king of Babylon; he had only been left in charge while his father was away on business; and yet here he is at the beginning of ch.5, throwing a party while the parents are away – for a thousand of his lords – and the wine is flowing abundantly! It's free and it's on tap! He's having a house party!

When everyone is getting a bit tipsy, Belshazzar takes leave of his senses – *'When the drink's in, the wit's out'* – and he commands that the vessels of gold

and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the Temple in Jerusalem (all those 70 years ago) should be brought in, so that all these revellers could take a drink from them! – The king, his lords, his wives and his concubines!

(There's no mention of the Queen until v.10.

That's why I think she's the king's mother, not one of this man's wives in v.2.)

And that's exactly what happened (v.3). But worse still look at v.4:

***'They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver,  
bronze, iron, wood and stone.'***

And they used the goblets of the Living God, Yahweh, to do so! They were flying in the face of God! They thought they knew better than this God of the Jews. Belshazzar had gone too far. He might have impressed his friends at his party, but he didn't impress the Living and True God of heaven!

## **3. So what did God do? (vs.5-9)**

Even as Belshazzar's fingers grip the goblet of the Living God, as he raises a toast to the gods of gold and silver, in a drunken mess, the fingers of the Living God appear beside the lampstand and begin to write something on the wall. (Read v.5).

Look at the effect it had on Belshazzar as he watched this happening (v.6)

*'Then the king's colour changed, his thoughts alarmed him;  
his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.'*

There's no doubt about it, this man is terrified, to say the least!

Immediately he calls for his wise men – the enchanters, the Chaldeans, the astrologers. (They've been so helpful in the past...so let's give them another go!)

*'Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation,  
shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck  
and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom!'* (v.7)

And true to form, all the king's wise men came in - and were absolutely useless! Not one of them could even read the writing never mind say what it meant!

*'Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed,  
and his colour changed, and his lords were perplexed!'* (v.9)

They really are terrified! They just don't know which way to turn! What's going on?

It's at this point that 'The Queen' comes in. As I said, I think she's really the 'King's Mother' - probably the wife of Nabonidus, the one who's away on business. Because she has a bit of understanding of history. And that's what we need!

**Winston Churchill said in a speech in the House of Commons in 1948:**

***"Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it."***

So the Queen proceeds to give Belshazzar a short history lesson:

*'O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your colour change!'*

(Sounds like his mummy is talking now – not his wife, doesn't it? Calm down!)

*'There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father – your father the king – made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers, because an excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar.*

*Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.'* (vs.11-12)

#### **4. What does Daniel do? (vs.13-23)**

Well, Daniel was brought in before the king in v.13.

The king lets on he knows all about Daniel, but I don't think he had the first clue! He just rehearses all that the Queen has just told him!

He promises Daniel that if he can read the writing on the wall and then explain it to him, that he'll be clothed in purple, he'll have a gold chain put round his neck, and he can be the third ruler in the kingdom! (v.16).

Daniel makes it clear in v.17 that he's not interested in anything that Belshazzar has to offer:

*'Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another!'* (v.17)

But he was able to read the writing on the wall and give the king its interpretation. And now Daniel proceeds to give Belshazzar a history lesson about Nebuchadnezzar, his predecessor:

*'O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him.*

*Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive;*

*Whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.*

*But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys.*

*He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, Until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind And sets over it whom he will.'*

In other words, Daniel is reminding Belshazzar, he wasn't really the rightful king of Babylon, just a stand-in, that someone far more powerful than him used to sit on that throne, and God was able to bring him down, the Most High God was able to humble him, until he learned his lesson, that **'God rules'** - not the king of Babylon!

But, because Belshazzar didn't learn from history, he was destined to repeat it:

*(v.22) 'And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in 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, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honoured!'*

Let me ask you, does this apply to you this morning?

Have you known since you were knee-high that there is a God in heaven?

Have you known his power at work in the lives of others around you?

Have you seen him save people by his grace all around you?

And yet you thought all these years that it wasn't for you?

Have you turned your back on God? Have you just ignored God?

Have you thought that you're master of your own fate?

That you're in charge of your own life? That nobody's going to tell you what to do?

And today finds you a proud man, or a proud woman, far away from God?

Have you, in practice, been worshipping the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone? You might not be worshipping the Living and True God, but you are worshipping something! Whatever takes up most time in your life, whatever you put before God in your life – your career, your home, your farm, your car, even your family, that's become the god of your life!

*'...But the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honoured.'* (v.23)

That's a very dangerous position to be in. I heard this week of two men just dropping dead suddenly, as they went about their everyday routine. One on

Monday aged 46, one on Tuesday aged 80. One knew God, the other one quite possibly didn't. If so, today, one of them is safe in heaven; the other is lost in hell.

### **Q. Are you honouring the God who holds your next breath in his hand?**

If you're not, if you've no time for God, then you're just the same as Belshazzar. God could take your next breath, and not let you have it – so where would you be?

### **The writing was on the wall for Belshazzar!**

#### **5. What was the writing on the wall all about? (vs.24-28)**

(v.24) From the presence of the Living God, this hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. It was the finger of God writing on the wall that night!

And this is what was written (v.25) – just four words:

### **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.**

That's all that was written. But what did it mean? What did these 4 words mean!?

Well, Daniel tells us (v.26):

- MENE – Numbered** – God has **numbered** the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.
- TEKEL – Weighed** - You've been **weighed** in the balances and found wanting.
- PERES – Divided** – Your kingdom is **divided** and given to the Medes and Persians.

That was it. Nothing else. No discussion. No questioning from Belshazzar. It's as if Belshazzar, and the whole Babylonian kingdom, stood that night in God's Judgement Hall, and when their days were up, and they were weighed in the balances and found wanting, they had absolutely nothing to say!

And you know what? That's exactly how it's going to be for everyone of us! The Bible says (Romans 3:19) that on that day, the Day of Judgement, '*every mouth will be stopped*' before God. There's not one of us will have anything to say – not a word! Because God's judgement is absolutely right and just (Daniel 4:37)

You might think in your head right now, you'll have all kinds of things that you'll want to say to God on that day when you stand before him, when you meet him.

You might think you'll have a whole list of things you'd like to get sorted out with God, that you'd like a few answers to – Why did this happen? Why did you let that happen to me, or to my loved ones? Why do you treat me like that!?

**Listen:** You'll not be able to say a word! Your mouth will be stopped before his glorious presence. You'll not have a thing to say. His judgement will be just!

The only thing that Belshazzar could do was give the command for Daniel to be clothed with purple, a chain of gold put round his neck, and a proclamation made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. But it was so empty!

That very night Daniel might have been promoted but Belshazzar was demoted. That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean was killed (v.30). Even while he was partying, the Medes had come and surrounded the City. They diverted part of the river that fed the City with its water supply, and when the water was low enough two groups of soldiers one from the front, one from the back entered through the river bed, into the city, right up into where the party was going on, and put Belshazzar to death. It was the end of him, and it was the end of the Babylonian Empire that once ruled the world! - How the mighty have fallen!

The next day, Darius the Mede, at the age of 62, received the kingdom (v.31). Babylon, the golden Empire was gone, The Medo-Persian Silver Empire was here.

### **Conclusion**

We're meant to compare and contrast the testimonies of Nebuchadnezzar in ch.4 and Belshazzar in ch.5. The stories of these two Babylonian kings – one from the beginning of the Exile, one from the end of the Exile – are put side by side in God's Word for a reason.

God has every right to judge the lives of every human being – whether they're Christian or pagan, whether they're rich or poor, whether they're wise or foolish, whether they have responded to him, or whether they haven't.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful king, God humbled him, he came to his senses, repented of his sins, and ended up worshipping the Living and True God.

Belshazzar was a stand-in king, who wasn't really king at all. He got puffed up with pride in the heat of the moment, flew in the face of the Living and True God. Thought he was the big man. But that very night, it was too late. God said your time's up! And that night Belshazzar's soul was required of him: - He was lost!

Which one are you? Will you respond to God's offer of grace? Will you reject it? '*Behold **now** is the accepted time. **Now** is the day of salvation.*' - Don't miss it!