

# Sermon

Sunday 4 October 20

Daniel 5: 17 to 31

God's Dealing with Earthly Rulers.

## Introduction

Today we continue our sermon series on the book of Daniel.

I will not be covering the harvest theme.

I was hoping to have the passage on the three men in the furnace so I could do God of Bake Off as my theme.

## Daniel

You will have got the feel for the book now.

More theatrical than a history book. . An early Horrid Histories for the Babylonians maybe.

## Face Value

Thinking back over the past few Sundays, all I can remember are images and stories.

That is a good description.

Is it prophetic? Some scholars say not as much as you might assume. It might have been set in the Babylonian era in 530BC but it was written much later. What appears as prophesy was history when it was written.

Others believe it is was written in the time it was set.

As it is visions and stories, the historical setting is less important.

## The Message

The big message of Daniel is those living in momentous times are not living at the end of time. Those who endure to the end are saved.

It has been called a survival manual for saints.

## Look at our Passage

Look at verse 17.

“Daniel answered the King”. Nebuchadnezzar? No. King Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar has gone. Last seen eating grass at the end of chapter 4. Which is a relief because I find him hard to pronounce.

Proof Daniel is not a history book. There are gaps.

## The story so far

King Belshazzar had thrown a feast. Run out of cups. Used the goblets his father had taken from the temple.

His party is wrecked by the appearance of a ghostly hand which leaves a message on the wall. The King is scared silly. And at the advice of the Mother in law sends for Daniel to interpret the message.

By the way – another tip about reading Daniel. Every now and then one of the cast is given the job of narrator. In verse 11 and 12 the queen does a quick recap on who Daniel is in case we have forgotten.

## The Message

The hand has written. Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. This is what theologians call is in decipherable tosh. Imagine a ghostly hand, writing bits of a shopping list on your wall.

More like some random accounts. A possible translation might be one pound two and a half pence.

## Daniel Explains.

The two pence. Two. That is a number. God has numbered the days of your reign.

One pound. That not a pound in money that is in weight God has weighed you in the balance and found you wanting.

Half a pence. God has cut your Kingdom in half and given half to the Medes and half to the Persians.

Not much of a prophesy either because the Medes and Persians are camped outside the city wall.

And that very night King was slain.

If you remember the story of the rich man saving up earthly riches in Luke 12.

God said to him “this very night your life will be demanded from you”

Both show death as a sudden and dramatic removal from the love of God. God runs out of patience with Kings who do not respect him. The goblets from the temple.

But equally, Kings who get drunk while two hostile armies are camped outside the city are bringing about their own death.

This Daniel-logic. It occurs throughout the book.

## God and Authority

Think about God and those in authority.

Think back about the stories of Nebuchadnezzar. He did some pretty awful things – throwing men into a furnace – but he was aware of God. Kings have to do difficult things after all. God does not appear to be cross with him constantly.

What happens to him? He ends up outside the city wall eating grass.

What is the meaning? Do not overthink it.

God is constant, kings are not. Even great kings can end up looking like an ass.

More Daniel-logic.

Why does a ghostly hand write the message on the wall?

If the message only reads £1 and two and a half p it is not worth the whole ghost turning up. That is Daniel-logic.

Why does Belshazzar ask Daniel if he is “one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah”? The mother-in-law narrator has explained who he is.

He is putting Daniel down. Are you Daniel the loser? The folly of putting down the man who has yet to interpret the message. He is such an idiot he is unlikely to last the night. He does not. That is Daniel-logic.

## Soothsayers

What about God and the establishment?

We need to talk about the soothsayers.

They are not stupid. They simply cannot answer the questions God poses.

All over the world leaders are consulting soothsayers – scientists - about the pandemic. I have a scientific background. I am not knocking scientists.

God asks questions of us which cannot be answered by science.

The ghostly hand – if it were to appear today in Downing Street or The Whitehouse or any corridor of power – might write:

“How do you force the homeless to stay at home?”

“How can someone who is totally alone be part of a bubble?”

Good leaders must talk to more people than their special advisors or soothsayers.

Talking to God would be a good start.

## Tell us about God

Equally, these stories tell us so much about God.

- He is tenacious not overpowering. Events dethrone Kings. God remains unchanged.
- Disaster strikes when Kings take on God. It is a law of nature. God does not even need to intervene bring about the disaster.
- God asks questions and sends message which go clean over the heads of trusted instruments of power – soothsayers, special advisors. God thinks differently.

- Kings seek meaning. Evidence on which to make decisions. The Word of God needs interpretation. That was Daniel's job.
- God has ultimate authority. I believe God respects earthly authority in a loving way. Kings who do not know God do not know how to respond to the questions a loving God asks of them.
- God is lenient towards ignorance – intolerant to those who do not respect truth. When Belshazzar used the Temple goblets, he crossed the line from being a fool to a fool with no respect for God or the truth. He became irredeemable.

### Pull Together.

Daniel – a book of visions and stories. Treat it as complex and you will be mystified. Treat it simply and you will come away wise. That is Daniel logic.

We learn about God. God gives kings room to be kings. He is tenacious but not overpowering. He does not take power away from bad rulers.

It was King Darius the Mede who took over the Kingdom from Belshazzar (at the age of sixty-two!). That really is social death if you are a tear away young-turk who likes having orgies and defiling the temple.

### Suffering

The problem is that bad kings create enormous suffering. And so often when God's people are suffering, he appears not to intervene. Look at the countries of the world today with corrupt governments. The human rights violations. Suffering churches.

The book of Daniel may have soared in popularity during the Maccabean revolt 166BC. It was a time of loss of religious freedom – persecution – ethnic cleansing – huge suffering.

The message on Daniel is those living in momentous times are not living at the end of time. The end is not yet. Those who endure to the end are saved.

A survival manual for saints.

## About God

Part of having a faith is coming to terms with a God who does not act as we would like him to but instead acts as a constant loving God.

A God who has not yet acted in the way we would expect is not a God who has disengaged.

Millions of people suffering is not evidence of God having turned his back on them. God offers lesser ordeals so we can escape greater.

End



Looking back on this story you will see that the pivotal point is the arrival of Daniel.

God does intervene in the world through his obedient servants. He nurtures those who are loyal.

In hard times we should be praying for good leaders – and also praying for Daniels.

As we read on in Daniel the theme of God acting through his loyal servants is developed. No actors appear in the visions. A suffering servant. The Son of Man. A Messiah.

Daniel. A survival manual for lock-down.

Amen.