

Daniel 5:1-12 “The Handwriting on the Wall” 5/12/24

As we have discovered in previous messages in this Daniel sermon series, time flies between the chapters of this book - Today's passage takes place 66 years after the events of chapter 1 - Daniel is now a man in his early 80's

Last Sunday, we heard of Nebuchadnezzar's death, at the end of chapter 4 - Today's chapter takes place 24 years later and Belshazzar is now king - He is coregent with his father Nabonidus who ruled the Babylonian empire - Belshazzar was king of the city of Babylon

Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, but his father Nabonidus was not Nebuchadnezzar's son - Belshazzar's mother was thought to be Nebuchadnezzar's daughter - And she is the queen we meet in verse 10 of today's chapter

Because of these confusing family dynamics, Belshazzar was the 5th king after Nebuchadnezzar - And thanks to the last verse of Daniel 5, and historical records, we know the exact date of the handwriting on the wall - It was October 15, 539 BC

That night the Persian army conquered the city - Babylon had massive walls and huge gates - The Euphrates River flowed under those walls and provided water for the city - The invading Persians diverted the river and then came under the wall on the dry riverbed

The ruins of Babylon are located about 50 miles south of present-day Bagdad in Iraq - Some portions of the wall have been restored there

From 1899 to 1917 the Ishtar Gate, a beautiful and ornate entrance built by Nebuchadnezzar was excavated in Iraq and moved to Berlin, Germany - It was a huge project, but for about 100 years it has been that city's most popular museum exhibit

Many people who know little or nothing about the Babylonians, Belshazzar's feast, or Daniel's prophecies use the phrase "the handwriting on the wall" - The phrase comes from today's chapter and announces impending judgment

With each click of the clock, the return of our Lord and Savior draws near - Many of us are looking forward to this day and it will be a day of rejoicing - However, for others it will be a day of sorrow - The handwriting may be on the wall, but they are not heeding its warning

The imminent return of Christ will be sudden and without warning - Mark 13:32-33 record Jesus' words - He said, "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come"¹

The handwriting writing is on the wall today, but the end is not yet - And although the writing may be on the wall, many are not paying attention to its warning

Jesus states in Matthew 24:6, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet" - The end may not be upon us at this moment - But that's no guarantee that it isn't going to happen today

Jesus goes on to tell us what must happen before the end times begin - Matthew 24:7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places" - Wars between nations and kingdoms, famines, and earthquakes; it all sounds a lot like today

"All these are but the beginning of the birth pains"² said Jesus - But the handwriting on the wall still goes unheeded - Even in the Church, God is not pleased when our own agenda is more important than what God is calling us to do - God is not pleased in some Churches, because instead of being the focus of worship, He is left out entirely

¹ Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,
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² Matthew 24:8

In today's chapter, King Belshazzar was throwing a lavish party - Everybody that was anybody in the vast kingdom of Babylon was there - "King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand" says Daniel 5:1

This type of gathering was common with the rulers of the ancient world - In addition to this one, the book of Esther begins with Ahasuerus throwing a party where Queen Vasti was deposed - And Matthew, Mark, and Luke record a party Herod gave that cost John the Baptist his life

King Belshazzar made time for drinking and a party but did not make time for God - Some today view life as one big party - They are not interested in their salvation - We need to tell them that the handwriting is on the wall - Our Lord Jesus taught, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"³

King Belshazzar spent his time getting drunk and acting foolish - There are too many people today who spend their time getting intoxicated with the ways of the world, while not paying any attention to the handwriting that's on the wall

Proverbs 14:12 teaches "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" - God continuously sends the message, but as Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good"

As the king's party progressed, they brought in the golden vessels that had been stolen from the Lord's house; the golden goblets originally in Solomon's temple - And to make matters worse, they used these sacred vessels for drunkenness

Here we have unholy people using the holy things of God - That is an insult to God - One of my commentaries notes that, "When the profane drink from the profound, the after taste can be bitter"⁴

³ Mark 8:36

⁴ SermonCentral.com

We are to be careful when we handle the things of God - I doubt that any of us are at risk of taking the communion chalice home to use at a drunken party - But how are we doing on keeping the Sabbath day holy

Since Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, the Church observes the Sabbath on Sunday - But some of us need to work on Sunday - Imagine rushing to the hospital only to discover the doors are locked because the hospital is observing the Sabbath

Or calling 911 and a recording tells us the Sabbath is being observed - And then reassures us that the Police, EMTs and Firefighters will be sure to be back on the job Monday morning - If my kitchen is on fire, I want the fire department as soon as possible

Yet, even if we work on Sunday, observing the Sabbath day is not optional - Notice that Exodus 20:8-9 say, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work" - No exception is offered for those working on Sunday

We are called to set apart one day a week for rest - For worship - For spending time with the Lord - And enjoying the blessings God has given each us

How are we doing with tithing? - We may know that 10% of our income belongs to the Lord - Does it find its way into the offering plate? - If not, are we ready to explain what we have been doing with the Lord's money when we see Jesus face to face?

What about devotion time? - Are we faithful to spend time with the Lord every day - Or is devotion the first thing that gets cut when we get busy - But doesn't that time belong to the Lord too?

Because the king mocked God, and worshipped idols, God displayed His power by sending the king a message in the form of a hand that wrote on a wall - Not much has changed today - We still have plenty of people who mock God by their lifestyles

Little did the king know that this was to be his last night on earth - We are not to take God for granted, and think that God will never respond - Judgment may not come the instant we sin - But the handwriting is on the wall

In today's passage, the king could not understand the message that had miraculously appeared on the banquet's wall - King Belshazzar was terrified - Daniel 5:6 "Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together" - A day is coming when a whole lot of knees are going to shake at the presence of God

God passed judgment on King Belshazzar - God has also passed judgment on those who refuse to repent and accept Jesus as savior - John 3:18 teaches, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

As Christians, we need to pay more attention to the handwriting on the wall - God's Word says that we should love each other as Christ loves us - We need to forgive others as Christ forgives us

We need to be more understanding of others - We need to be patient with others - We need to exalt each other - We need to strengthen each other - We need to be prayer warriors

Then and only then, can we teach others the ways of the Lord - We are to tell them that the handwriting is still on the wall, that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life

We are to tell them that the handwriting is on the wall, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"⁵

We are to tell them that one day, maybe one day real soon, Jesus will return for those who are His - And those who have made fun of the need for salvation will face a terrible time of judgment

⁵ from John 3:16