

June 24th, 2018

Deserted By God

Daniel 5

A gospel that has no bad news is not good news

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army was once asked by an American newspaper what he thought were the chief dangers of the twentieth century. He responded “Religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell.”¹ Booth believed that a church who preaches heaven without hell is a threat to the very existence of the church itself. It’s a threat to humanity. A gospel that has no bad news is not good news.

Let me say it differently. We sing songs like “Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound.” But if grace is so amazing, it must save us from something.² Hearts that are not stunned by the grace of Jesus Christ do not yet see the true horror of God’s wrath. The Biblical message always joins those two things together: kindness and severity. **Romans 11:32** “Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.”

The kindness and severity of God

That’s what we see in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 4 we saw God’s kindness in bringing Nebuchadnezzar to repentance. Nebuchadnezzar didn’t deserve this. He had earned the exact opposite. His resume was a resume of blood. Neb chopped off the heads of his servants (**Dan. 1:10**). He regularly

¹ Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. xi

² Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 94

threatened dismemberment (**Dan. 2:5**). He “ordered the live cremation”³ of anyone who would not bow down to his golden image (**Dan. 3:6**). He was a monster, only comparable in our day to Kim Jong-un. And yet, God’s kindness led him to repentance.

But here, in Daniel 5 we discover the severity of God. We know far less about Belshazzar than Nebuchadnezzar. But from what we do know, we can’t say that Belshazzar was a *worse* sinner. The indictment that Daniel brought against him is found in **v.23** “you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven...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 honored” Isn’t that what Nebuchadnezzar did in the first four chapters? And yet Nebuchadnezzar was shown kindness in Daniel 4, while Belshazzar was shown severity in Daniel 5. These two chapters illustrate what the Westminster Confession of Faith says in chapter three.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.⁴

Dear congregation, that’s why grace is amazing. God rescued Nebuchadnezzar from the very fires of hell. But He chose to pass by Belshazzar. God left Belshazzar in his sin. Belshazzar was deserted by God. That is the most awful thing that you could ever conceive: to be deserted by God. To be left to the

³ Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 71

⁴ Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace...The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. WCF III.3, 5, 7

rudder of your own unstable soul. Left to himself, Belshazzar refused to humble his heart. Left to himself, Belshazzar refused to honor the Most High God. And Daniel put all the blame on Belshazzar—v.22 “you...Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew.”

Now it’s entirely too late for Belshazzar. His eternity was sealed the night that Darius the Mede snuck into Babylon. Daniel 5 wasn’t written to rescue Belshazzar. It was written for our rescue. Daniel 5 was written so that you and I would humble our hearts before the Most High God.

The Big Idea...

Those who refuse to humble their heart and honor God will be deserted by God

- ☆ The Universal Sense of Guilt
- ☆ The Universal Source of Guilt
- ☆ The Universal Sentence of Guilt

I. The Universal Sense of Guilt

What happened to Nebuchadnezzar?

Let’s look at v.1 “King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.” This is very abrupt. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar?⁵ Nebuchadnezzar reigned forty-three years, the longest Babylonian monarch. His son Evil-Merodach his son reigned after him. We see mention of him in **2 Kings 25:27**. Then came King Nabonidus.

⁵ The historical information that follows was supplemented by Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 70-71 and Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 100

Nabonidus set up his residence in the North Arabian desert, about five hundred miles from Babylon, while his son Belshazzar resided in Babylon. They were co-regents, that is, they ruled Babylon together. We see a hint of this when Belshazzar promises that anyone who can interpret the writing on the wall would be the third ruler in his kingdom (**v.7, 16, 29**). His father and he held the first and second spots.

Now Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's father throughout this chapter (**v.2, 11, 13, 18, 22**). But this just simply means that Nebuchadnezzar was his ancestor, probably his grandfather. We saw this last week when Luke preached **John 8**. The Jews referred to Abraham as their father (**John 8:39**), though they were removed by hundreds of years.

Darius who?

So Belshazzar which means "Bel, protect the king"⁶ (an irony in this chapter), is throwing this huge party for all his royal officials. Meanwhile, Darius the Mede is outside laying siege to Babylon. Now the identity of Darius is not exactly clear.⁷ According to the Nabonidus Chronicle (an ancient Babylonian text that recorded the reign of Nabonidus), a man named Gubaru, who was the general of King Cyrus's army, captured the city. Cyrus appointed this man governor of Babylon. So it's believed that this man is Darius. Darius was used as a title, his name meaning "lord."⁸

Pride comes before the fall

So Darius was besieged the city at the very moment when Belshazzar was throwing this decadent and debaucherous party. And this reveals how secure

⁶ E.J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprinted 1980), pg. 115

⁷ The following historical information was supplemented by The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), pg. 1211 and ESV Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway Publishers, 2008), pg.1597

⁸ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H1868&t=KJV> accessed June 23, 2018

Belshazzar felt. And there was some justification for this. Babylon seemed impregnable. Her walls were 350 feet high and 87 feet wide,⁹ surrounded a broad and deep water-filled moat.¹⁰ The city was fed by the Euphrates River and inside there was plenty of space to grow their own food. In fact, they have been holding off the Persian army now for two and a half years.¹¹ So what did Belshazzar have to fear? Bryan Chapell says here “By hosting a feast the king dismissed the enemy as if to say, “You don’t worry us a bit. That’s because weaklings don’t worry us...you go ahead and have your little siege. We are going to party.”¹² Look with me a **v.2-4**

“Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. [3] Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. [4] They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.”

Contempt for God’s stuff is contempt for God

This is theatrical.¹³ In his drunkenness, Belshazzar has the vessels—the cups and bowls—brought so they could drink their wine out them. The message was clear “Behold the God that Babylon has conquered.” This was an absolute mocking of God. Any contempt of God’s stuff is a contempt of God Himself.

⁹ Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 95

¹⁰ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 64

¹¹ Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 95

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 102

When others trash your things, you take personal offense at it. Their lack of care for your stuff shows how little they have thought about you. But that's not all that is happening here. Belshazzar and his crew are praising their own false gods. Dale Davis puts this scene in the starkest of terms "By desecrating the temple vessels [Belshazzar] thumbed his nose at Israel's God and by singing doxologies to the sightless, heedless, witless bastard deities of Babylon he has denied honor to the God who gives him the breath to utter such damnable praises."¹⁴

We are functional Belshazzars

Dear congregation, how often do you do this very same thing? How often do you treat God's stuff with contempt while singing the praises of other things? Look closely at v.4—the things that they are worshipping are good things in themselves—gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. But they turned these good things into ultimate things. When good things become ultimate things, they control our allegiances. We Americans might be too sophisticated to worship gold coins, but we'll worship Bitcoin, or Visa or personal debt. We might be too sophisticated to worship iron, but we'll worship our iPhones. We might be too sophisticated to worship wood, but we'll worship Hollywood. We might be too sophisticated to worship at the altar of homosexuality like much of current Babylon, but we often worship the same root sin—radical individualism—"I'm free and I'm not accountable to anyone." And this often expresses itself in this sort of disinterested, distancing one's self from the local church. When good things become ultimate things, they control our allegiances, meaning, they control our worship. What controls how you spend your time? What controls how you spend your money? What controls what you worry about? What controls what you dream about? Whatever controls you *is* what you worship. We are called to be vessels for God—**2 Cor.4:7**—"But we have

¹⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 79

this treasure in earthen vessels”¹⁵ What are you filling your vessel with? What would the writing on the wall say to you? You see “we are all functional Belshazzars.”¹⁶ If we were cast into this story. We would not be playing the part of Daniel.

The writing on the wall

Belshazzar was at ease with all his blasphemous idolatry. And then he was stopped in his tracks. v.5 “Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. [6] Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.” How scared was Belshazzar? When it says “his limbs gave way”, the Aramaic is translated that the “knots of his joints were loosened,”¹⁷ which has led more than one commentator to conclude that Belshazzar peed himself. He was terrified. His color changed—he became the pale king. What happened? His terror sobered him. And he called out v.7 says *loudly*, for his religious advisers. This is a universal reflex. Belshazzar suddenly became religious. He called all those who traded in the supernatural to give him an answer. But these worldly advisors could offer him no help. The city of man cannot help you when you are face with the judgment of God, you may as well ask a grasshopper to pay your mortgage. So v.9 tells us again “Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.”

Why was the pale king terrified?

But my question here is: why was Belshazzar terrified? He didn't even know what the mysterious hand wrote. Why was he afraid? Why should he be

¹⁵ NASB

¹⁶ Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 86

¹⁷ *ibid*, pg. 80

afraid? John Whitecross recounts a conversation between some natives of South America and the missionaries who brought them the gospel. After listening for some time to the missionaries, the natives finally responded “You say that the God of Christians knows everything, that nothing is hidden from Him, that He is everywhere, that nothing is hidden from Him, and sees all that is done below. Now, we do not desire a God so sharp-sighted; we choose to live in the freedom of our woods, without having a perpetual observer of our actions over our heads.”¹⁸

Belshazzar was terrified because He came face to face with this God. He didn't know what the writing meant, but he knew unequivocally that he was guilty and that God had seen. **Romans 2:15-16** says “They (Gentiles) show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them [16] on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” Jonathan Edwards says here that “a guilty conscience is as it were the hand writing of God in a man's own soul against him showing him the vengeance that he is in danger of.”¹⁹

The universal sense of guilt

Which one of us has not experienced this? You indulge in one minute of sinful pleasure, and then you are plagued with many days of inward guilt and dread. The world suppresses this guilt by putting their reason to sleep. Distractions, amusement, endless social media, are the devil's best friend to keep this guilt from coming to the surface. Do you know how many suicides would take place in this country if suddenly all internet, smart phones, video games, and t.v. suddenly vanished? People would awaken as Belshazzar did to their guilt, and for some of them, it would simply be unbearable. Guilt is the universal

¹⁸ John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated From Christian Biography & History*, (London, Great Britain, : The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 34

¹⁹ Source: <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmpIY3QucGw/Yy40NDozNi53amVv> accessed June 23, 2018

experience of all mankind, because all are guilty.²⁰ **Romans 5:12** “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” That’s our **first point**, all mankind exists under a universal sense of guilt. Belshazzar gives us a vivid picture of a man who has become awakened to it.

II. The Universal Source of Guilt

Belshazzar finally calls Daniel forward

The story continues with the queen mother telling Belshazzar to inquire of Daniel. Apparently Belshazzar didn’t seek his help previously. His mother implicitly rebukes him for this. You can hear it in **v.11** when she says “King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—*your father the king*—made *him* chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, [12] *because* an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel.” So he calls on Daniel, but there is still no humility to be found in Belshazzar. He says to Daniel in **v.13** “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah.” He addresses Daniel not with the honor his father gave him, but as one of those puny slaves from Judah. But he gives him the same deal as the others. He says in **v.16** “...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.”

²⁰ “Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, after he had long been attended by armies and vast trains of courtiers, ordered this inscription to be engrave on his tome, as an admonition to all men of the approach of death, and the desolation that follows it: ‘O man, whosoever thou art, and whencesoever thou comest, I know thou wilt come to the same condition in which I now am. I am Cyrus, who brought the empire to the Persians: do not envy me, I beseech thee, this little piece of ground which covers my body.’” John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated From Christian Biography & History*, (London, Great Britain,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 32-33

The indictment against Belshazzar

Daniel refuses the gift. He works for God not for Belshazzar. But Daniel does do something that Belshazzar didn't ask for. All Belshazzar wanted was the interpretation. But Daniel gives him an explanation for why this judgment from God will be so severe. Focus on what God *did* during Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

v.18 The Most High God *gave* Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom

v.19 Because God *gave* him all his greatness, Nebuchadnezzar all people feared him, and he ruled however he wished.

v.20 But when he became proud, God *brought* him down and God *took* away his glory.

v.21 God *drove* him from among men, and God *gave* him the mind of a beast “until he knew that the Most High God *rules* the kingdom of mankind and *sets* over it whom he will.”

Now look at v.22-23 “And *you* his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, *though you knew all this*, [23] 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 honored*.”

Do you see the source of Belshazzar's guilt? He did not honor the Most High God, though v.22 says he knew all this—that is, he knew how God worked these wonders in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Fourteen times in v.23-24, Daniel used the word “you” and “your” accusing Belshazzar personally of this sin.²¹ Take that in. Belshazzar was not a Jew. He was the king of Babylon. He was not part of God's covenant people. He was an outsider, a pagan, a stranger, a foreigner, and yet God *required* His worship.

²¹ *ibid*, pg. 113

The indictment against the human race

How does this story play out today? Very straightforwardly. All peoples, church peoples, pagan peoples, poor peoples, noble peoples, prime ministers, chancellors, presidents, senators, republicans, democrats, the Barak Obamas, the Vladimir Putins, the Donald Trumps, the Theresa Mays, the Benjamin Netanyahus, all must bow to the Most High God or burn. There's not middle ground. God does not barter with His worship. Worshipping God is not optional. It's not something we can say "no" to with impunity. No one can say "That's just not whom I am...that's not my cup of tea." God made you with one express purpose, and that is to worship Him. And He threatens terrible things for those who will not. **Matthew 3:10** "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."²² Worship is the reason why God created humanity. And if they don't meet that end, they are being prepared for the furnace.

Is Calvinism Fatalistic?

Daniel is not pulling punches with Belshazzar: "You are blameworthy." However there is a theological tension here that we can't ignore. It is the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Daniel didn't take back anything that he said from chapter four. In fact, he increases the statements about God's absolute sovereignty over man and all his ways. He says at the end of v.23 "the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways." Belshazzar's ways were in God's hands. As we said two weeks ago "No one is truly in charge of his own destiny...We can never know enough, do enough, or have enough to have ultimate control over our lives."²³ God is in control. It is in God's power to humble men. That was the last thing that Nebuchadnezzar confessed. **Daniel 4:37** "those who walk in pride he [God] is able to humble."

²² See Hebrews 6:7-8; John 15:6

²³ Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 76-77

So the question is: If God is able to humble men, could He not have humbled Belshazzar? Yes. If God didn't humble him, how then is Belshazzar responsible for his not being humbled? If God is this sovereign, isn't this a fatalistic view of the universe? No. Reformed theology does not, nor has it ever taught fatalism. In fact, it categorically rejects it.²⁴ Fatalism does not hold to a personal God. As Loraine Boettner says "Fatalism holds that all events comes to pass through the working of a blind, unintelligent, impersonal, non-moral force which...carries us helplessly within its grasp as a mighty river carries a piece of wood."²⁵

God doesn't ordain the ends independent of the means

The Bible teaches that God is the ultimate or *efficient* cause of all things, but that we participate in *secondary* causes. An illustration of this is from Acts 27. (Please turn there with me). Paul was lost at sea for many days with a ship full of Romans. But God sent him an angel at night and told him that nobody would lose their life. **Acts 27:14** says "he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'" That's a picture of God's ultimate causation. But later Paul caught some of the men trying to escape in a life boat. He told them in **v.31** "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." That's a picture of our secondary causation. God does not ordain the ends independent of the means. The means are the secondary causes.

Reformed Theology vs. Islam

Now that may be unhelpful philosophical language to you. So consider the contrast between Reformed theology and Islam as an illustration. Islam

²⁴ God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. WCF III.1

²⁵ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing Company, 1932), pg. 205

holds Allah to be sovereign in such a way where it excludes the use of *means*. The end is determined with no reference to *means*. Imagine the following scenario that Boettner provides in which Muslims and Christians consistently act out their beliefs:

“A ship crowded with [Christians]²⁶ and [Muslim]²⁷ was ploughing through the waves. Accidentally one of the passengers fell overboard. The Muslims looked after him with indifference saying “If it is written in the book of destiny that he shall be saved, he shall be saved without us; and if it is written that he shall perish, we can do nothing”; and with that they left him. But the Christians said, “Perhaps it is written that we should save him.” They threw in a rope and he was saved.”²⁸

God is 100% sovereign, man is 100% responsible

Daniel upholds God’s sovereignty. But not at the expense of human responsibility. That’s why he brings blame to Belshazzar. It is 100% true that God passed by Belshazzar, leaving him in his sin, not giving him the grace that would have humbled his heart. But it is also 100% true that Belshazzar is the one to blame. When Belshazzar stands before God on the last day, his sentence will not be based on God’s deserting him, but on his refusal to repent.²⁹ Jesus Christ will not say to him “Depart, because I did not save you,” but “Depart,

²⁶ Original is “Englishmen”

²⁷ Original is “Mohammedans”

²⁸ *ibid*, pg. 320

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Boettner further points out that no one is a consistent fatalist: “No man can be a consistent fatalist. For to be consistent he would have to reason something like this: ‘If I am to die today, it will do me no good to eat, for I shall die anyway. Nor do I need to eat if I am to live many years yet, for I shall live anyway. Therefore I will not eat.’ Needless to say, if God has foreordained that a man shall live, He has also foreordained that he shall be kept from the suicidal folly of refusing to eat.” *ibid*, pg. 207

²⁹ “The resistance and abuse of common grace is followed by the desertion of God” W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology Third Edition*, Ed. Alan W. Gomes, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2003), pg. 337 — See page 336 for some qualifications on this statement

because you have sinned and you had no sorrow for it.”³⁰ Nobody on the final day of judgment will be able to blame God for not giving him or her more grace in order to repent. The wicked are not condemned because they lacked grace. They are condemned because they resisted and sinned against the grace they had. That’s how Jesus taught on the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14-30**. The man who received the one talent wasn’t condemned because he didn’t receive five talents like the other man. If he had but improved faithfully upon that one talent, he would have been rewarded with more. But he was slothful and ungrateful and he neglected his Master’s business, and so he justly was thrown into a dungeon of horror.³¹ That’s Daniel’s point against Belshazzar. ‘Belshazzar you saw God’s glory and grace in His dealings with your father, but you did not humble your heart’ (v.22).

God’s sovereignty and the universal source of sin

So if we put Daniel 4 and Daniel 5 together—how God dealt with Nebuchadnezzar and how God dealt with Belshazzar—we see two important truths.

³⁰ “The sentence of the last day will not be founded upon God’s negative act of saving, but upon the sinner’s positive act of sinning. Christ will not say to the impenitent, “Depart, because I did not save you,” but, “Depart, because you have sinned and have no sorrow for it.” Should John Doe throw himself into the water and be drowned, while Richard Roe stood upon the bank and did nothing, the verdict would be that the act was suicide, not homicide: “Drowned, not because Richard Roe did not pull him out, but because John Doe threw himself in.” It is true that Richard Roe, in this instance, would be guilty of a neglect of duty toward God in not saving the life of John Doe, but he would not be guilty of the murder of John Doe. Richard Roe’s nonperformance of his duty toward God would not transfer the guilt of John Doe’s act of self-murder to him. Were God under an obligation to save the sinner, the decree of preterition would be unjustifiable. It would be a neglect of duty. But salvation is grace, not debt; and therefore the decision not to bestow it is an act of justice without mercy: “On them that fell, severity” or exact justice is inflicted (Romans 11:22).” *ibid*, pg. 342

³¹ *ibid*, pg. 335

“A beggar who contemptuously rejects the five dollars offered by a benevolent man cannot charge stinginess upon him because after this rejection of the five dollars he does give him ten. A sinner who has repulsed the mercy of God in common grace and demands that God grant a yet larger degree virtually says to the infinite one: “You have tried once to convert me from sin; now try again and try harder.” *ibid*, pg. 337

Truth 1: God *alone* can bring sinners to repentance. There are only two wills—God’s will and man’s will. If God leaves you to our own will³² you are ruined because your will prevents self-recovery. **Romans 8:7** “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot not.” Only God can bring sinners to repentance through the new birth.³³

Truth 2: Every sinner is 100% *responsible* for his own damnation. When God chose to show mercy to Nebuchadnezzar but not Belshazzar, that did not make Belshazzar a sinner. God’s foreknowledge of Belshazzar’s sin did not make Belshazzar a sinner. God’s eternal decree to damn Belshazzar did not make Belshazzar a sinner. Belshazzar was a sinner precisely because he chose to be. **Ecclesiastes 7:29** “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” That’s our **second point**: the universal source of sin is not God, but man. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (**Romans 3:23**).

III. The Universal Sentence of Guilt

MENE, TEKEL, PERES

After Daniel spends all that time explaining why Belshazzar’s penalty is so severe, he then interprets the writing on the wall. He says in **v.24-28**

³² “The decree of preterition does not necessitate perdition, through it makes it certain. (a) It has not effect at all, in the order of decrees, until after the free will of man has originated sin. The decree of preterition supposes the voluntary fall of man. It succeeds, in the order of nature, the decree to permit Adam’s sin. Preterition, consequently, haas to do only with a creature who is already guilty by his own act and justly “condemned already” (John 3:18). (b) it is a permissive not an efficient act on the part of God that is exerted in preterition. In respect to regeneration, God decides to do nothing in the case of a non elect sinner. He leaves him severely alone. he permits him to have his already existing self-determination, his own voluntary inclination. This is not compulsion, but the farthest possible from it. Compulsion might with more color of reason be charged upon election, than preterition. For in this case, God works in the human will “to will.” *ibid*, pg. 341-342

³³ You are completely powerless to do so. You could no more cause the new birth in yourself than you could cause yourself to be born the first time. Your eternity rests not what you have done, are doing, or will do. Your eternity rests solely on the grace of God.

“Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. [25] And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. [26] This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; [27] Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; [28] Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Now if you were hearing this for the first time, it would be reasonable to assume that the next thing that happens is that Belshazzar repents. There is an information fallacy present in our Western culture. Dale Davis says here “Political and social gurus preach the information fallacy constantly...the knee-jerk reaction to any social problem seems to be, ‘Well, we must *educate* people...’ This often means we throw money at it, construct a bureaucracy to oversee it, and try to fund it in some budget. But it’s all built on the assumption that education will bring about transformation. ‘If people only know what happens when they don’t use seat belts, then...’ ‘If youth only know what drugs will do to them, then...’ But Daniel’s point is — Belshazzar knew and it didn’t matter.”³⁴

Not education, not history, not fear

Note the three things that didn’t persuade Belshazzar to repent. **First**, information or education is not enough. Even if this information is prophetic, uncovering mysteries and foretelling the future, like what happens here, it is not sufficient to convert the soul. **Second**, the terror of judgment didn’t move him to repent. Voltaire the French Enlightenment atheist of the 18th century carried his terror all the way to the grave refusing to repent. The attending nurse who cared for him in his last hours vowed to never again to see another unbeliever did. On one occasion she was solicited to nurse a dying patient. She asked if he was a Christian. The man wanted to know why that was relevant. She responded “I was the nurse that attended Voltaire in his last illness, and, for all

³⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 79

the wealth of Europe, I would never see another infidel die.”³⁵ Terror has never converted anyone. Although the church must preach the bad news as well as the good. **Third**, looking back at history and God’s past wonders among mankind, and mankind’s futile attempt to resist him—knowing all of this—thousands of years of God ruling among mankind will not convert the soul. “The nineteenth-century philosopher Hegel once said that the only thing we learn from history is that we have learned nothing from history.”³⁶

‘So passes Belshezzar, son of Nabonidus’

And this chapter ends as abruptly as it begins. Belshazzar is killed. The historian Herodotus records that the Persians found a way to “divert the course of the river into a basin by means of a canal and so lower its level to thigh-depth where it flowed through the city and allowed Persian commando units to enter under the walls and begin a surprise attack.”³⁷

This chapter ends with two startling truths. **Truth 1:** No one will escape the judgment of God. The indictment over all of mankind is “weighed and found wanting.” Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t run from God’s dealings. Belshazzar couldn’t escape from God’s grasp. And this is true for you and for me. **Hebrews 4:13** says “no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” **Truth 2:** Babylon, the city of man, has fallen once, and it will fall again. Here in Daniel 5, the city of Babylon fell just as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah said it would. And this is a sign of the final Babylon that will fall at the end of this age. Revelation 18:10 “Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

³⁵ John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated From Christian Biography & History*, (London, Great Britain,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 36

³⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 101

³⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 73

Application

Our Doctrine: The wicked are useful in their destruction only

Jonathan Edwards has a sermon by the same title where he examines a fruitless vine.³⁸ If a vine is fruitless, is it good for anything? Can its wood be used to build a house? Can it be made into pegs to hang pots and pans from? No a fruitless vine is only good for one thing: fuel for the fire. And the analogy is clear, if men don't bring forth any fruit to God, they are only good for one thing: destruction. He spends a lot of time developing the idea of ends. How everything in creation has an end. "Every created...thing must have a final end; a terminus. The mineral kingdom is made for the vegetable kingdom; the vegetable kingdom is made for the animal kingdom; the animal kingdom is made for man; and all of them together are made for God."³⁹ If anything fails to meet its end, it is vain. We throw away spent batteries. Clocks which don't tell time are trashed. The dump is full of things that are no longer useful, except to be consumed by maggots and worms and buried in the dirt.

In our text, Belshazzar failed to meet his end. The indictment against him was "you did not honor God" (v.23). He was useless in life just like a barren vine. Yet he will be useful in his destruction just like a vine is useful in its being burned. **Proverbs 16:4** "The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." Edwards gives a couple ways that unfruitful persons are useful in their destruction. **First**, they will show the glory of God's justice. God's justice is just as glorious of an attribute as His mercy. The saints in heaven will sing praises to God when they see Him pour out His righteous judgments on those who have spurned His glory. **Revelation 19:1-2** "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 125

³⁹ Edwards develops this idea on page 125, but this quote is from W.G.T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 81-82

corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” All allegiances will be perfectly clarified with no confusion. Even parents on that Day will rise in the judgment and sing to God if their children have refused to honor the king. We will see God for who He is and we will instantly know that anyone who has refused to worship Him is worthy of such a judgment. Perhaps some of you in this very room will be under the eternal wrath of God. How frightening! No one is secure because they come to this church, or because they are born to a certain family. I was just reading this week in the book of Judges about Micah, that wicked man who hired a Levite to be his personal priest. This Levite was just as wicked praising various gods as well as the idol that Micah made Do you know who that Levite was? His name was Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Moses. Moses’ grandson worshipped false gods. If he didn’t repent, Moses will not fail to worship God on that day.

Secondly, unfruitful persons are useful in their destruction because they will give the saints a greater sense of their own happiness. Edwards says here

“When the saints in heaven shall look upon the damned in hell (**Isaiah 66:24**), it will serve to give them a greater sense of their own happiness. When they shall see how dreadful the anger of God is, it will make them the more prize his love. They will rejoice the more, that they are not the objects of God’s anger, but of his favor...[they will have] a greater sense of the distinguishing grace and love of God to them, that he should from all eternity set his love on them, and make so great a difference between them and others who are of the same species, and have deserved no worse of God than they...And with how much greater enlargement of heart will they praise Jesus Christ, their Redeemer, that ever he was pleased to set his love upon them, his dying love!”⁴⁰

That’s our doctrine: the wicked are useful in their destruction only.

⁴⁰ i Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 127

Our Delight: Jesus was deserted by God

Our big idea was Those who refuse to humble their heart and honor God will be deserted by God. Here's the problem, this is all of us. We were born Belshazzars. The writing on the wall of your life declares "Weighed and found wanting." The gospel is *not* 'make yourself worthy so that God will accept you.' The gospel is *not* 'don't be a Belshazzar.' No matter what you do, you that handwriting on the wall cannot be erased. But it can be crucified. **Colossians 2:13-14** says "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,⁴¹ blotting out the **handwriting** of ordinances⁴² that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;⁴³ What was nailed to Jesus? The handwriting that stood against us. All of it. It was blotted out. Every accusation that has ever or will ever come against you, Jesus Christ has blotted it out with His own blood. The dread of this chapter is met with the dread of the cross. Belshazzar being deserted by God is the faintest picture of the horror that Jesus endured for you. God transferred the writing that stood against you to Jesus. And instead of deserting you because you did not honor him, he deserted Jesus Christ. And you can hear it on the cross. Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46**) Behold the kindness and severity of God for you beloved. severity toward Christ who took your place, but God's kindness to you who took his place. Now when you are weighed in the balances—the judgment is this "No condemnation" (**Romans 8:1**)—"There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." "No accusation" (**Romans 8:33**)—"Who shall

⁴¹ ESV

⁴² I don't disagree with Calvin here who says that Paul is not speaking of the moral law but the ceremonial law. But he rightly adds that the ceremonial law is an acknowledgement of guilt. "For example, what else were washings than an evidence of pollution? Whenever any victim was sacrifice, did not the people that stood by behold in it a representation of his death. For when person substituted in their place an innocent animal, they confessed that they were in themselves deserving of that death" Commentary on 2:14—App on iPhone

⁴³ KJV

bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" "No separation" (**Romans 8:39**)—not "anything..in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If you are an unbeliever this morning, the writing on the wall still stands against you "Weighed and found wanting." If you are unwilling to trust Jesus Christ, but you don't want to be damned, this is what you must do. Jesus said in **Matthew 19:17** "If you would enter life, keep the commandments."⁴⁴ But you must keep all of them. Perfectly. Without flaw, without lapse, without taint. If you do that, you will live. But dear friend, you know you have never done that, nor ever can. Why will you die?⁴⁵ Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and live. Ask Jesus to bear the accusation that you can't bear. Trust Jesus to blot out the charges against you.

Our Duty: Do you honor God?

Just as Daniel rehearsed all the things that God did for Nebuchadnezzar, consider all the things that God has done for you. He has given you the gift of reason and the gift of an eternal soul that will never die. You are not like the grass of the field that will wilt away in the fall. You will live forever. More so, your soul has become the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. You have a comforter, a counselor, a conqueror who accompanies you where-ever you go —"Where shall I go from your Spirit..where shall I flee from your presence?" (**Psalms 139:7**). Or think about how the Lord rescued you from every variety of ruin throughout your life. Or consider what advantages God has provided you with: you live in an age where you have the written word of God. You live in a country where you can freely worship. Or consider your future state: very soon your body will be glorified. All tears, all sorrow, all pain will melt away like an ice cube on a summer day. The pain in this life will be like a mist that vanishes. Very soon you will be face to face with your Savior—the

⁴⁴ cf. W.G.T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 21 where he develops the idea that every heathen is a legalist.

⁴⁵ Ezekiel 18:31

God-man who put on flesh and united Himself to human nature so that He could be with you. Whoever heard of a God who would do that? “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (**Psalm 8:4**). Because Jesus Christ is our inheritance, we have endless blessings.

The question is: do you honor Him? You have been freed to do so. Jesus has set your heart free to worship. Your worship does not earn merit. And your failures no longer earn death. Do you honor him? Are you meeting the end for which you have been created? Think about that this week. Pray, humble your heart, and ask God to reveal those areas in which you are still acting like a Belshezzar. Ask Him to grant you repentance. Ask Him to empower you by His Holy Spirit to honor Him in your home, at your job, in this church, in this city. Let's pray