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MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE

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**“Two Sides to the Scroll of History”
Daniel 1:1-2; 2 Chronicles 36:5-23**

Perhaps no more terrifying force exists in our world today than ISIS. Their cruelty is well known and is often beyond our comprehension to grasp. Although they have caused great damage and heartbreak around the world, they are not yet fully unified. They appear to be working on a more unified attack against world powers, including our own nation.

Now imagine, if you will for a moment this morning, that the forces of ISIS, or Russia, China, North Korea, or other hostile nation attacked the United States. Imagine it being a broad scale attack, an attack that made 911 seem minuscule by comparison. Imagine the forces of ISIS coming into Washington DC, taking over our capitol, taking over the White House.

Imagine further, unbearable as it may be, that hostile forces would kill thousands upon thousands of people while taking the cream of the crop – the best scholars, inventors, CEO’s and corporate leaders – back to Mid-eastern countries to serve ISIS there.

Imagine furthermore, that the forces of ISIS destroyed all churches, that their troops would come to our church and remove the symbols of Christianity that we hold dear: the signs of the sacrament, the table for the Lord’s Supper, the baptismal font, the large Bible and the cross. Imagine their troops bringing these articles, and Christian symbols from all the other churches in our land, back to Iraq, Iran, and other nations hostile to us.

Imagine the terrorists of ISIS putting those articles into their mosques and declaring, “Allah is far superior to Christ. Look at what he has done. Allah has given us the United States of America. We have their leaders in subjection, we have their best scholars, inventors, CEO’s and corporate leaders, we have all their religious symbols. Praise Allah!”

That is not a pretty scenario, is it?

But that is exactly the type of scenario Daniel is describing in Daniel 1:1 and 2. He is describing how Nebuchadnezzar came in and besieged Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had a reputation for being one of the cruelest kings on earth. Every nation trembled at the thought of Nebuchadnezzar and his feared Babylonian troops. And now they were here, in Jerusalem, ransacking the city.

Imagine how that felt to the people of Judah; put yourself in their shoes. What was it like for King Jehoiakim? What was it like for people like Daniel who were captured? How intense was the sorrow of those who lost their loved ones as thousands were slain, young and old, male and female? In every part of their society, all that they could see was the power of Nebuchadnezzar and the dominance of his Babylonian army as they advanced in three separate attacks on Jerusalem.

Yet, whenever we see these traumatic events in human history, whether they took place centuries ago in Jerusalem or unfold in our lifetime, we need to remember that all history is written on *“two sides of the scroll.”* There is the side which we see, described in verse 1: *“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.”* And then there is that side of history that we cannot see, that which is written by the Lord, *“behind the scenes”* out of our sight. Verse 2: *“And*

the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..."

There are two sides to the scroll of all history. We see the human events, but invisible to the human eye, behind the scenes, God is at work, writing the other side to the scroll of history. Not only is this truth taught in the opening verses of Daniel, but it is also a truth taught throughout the pages of Scripture.

For instance, in Revelation 5:1 the Apostle John writes: *"Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals."* The scroll represents God's eternal plan, and all of history is in that plan of God. The scroll, writes the late William Hendriksen, *"symbolizes God's purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history."* (More Than Conquerors, pg. 89)

Psalm 33:10-11 also declares God as the Lord of all history: *"The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."*

And Romans 11:33 exclaims: *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"*

Scripture makes it clear that history is in God's hands. We see only one side of the scroll of history, and it may terrify us. But the Bible reassures us repeatedly that God is in control of history. His plans will prevail, not the plans of Jehoiakim or Nebuchadnezzar, or the plans of world leaders today, but God's plans will prevail.

So often this prophecy of Daniel is viewed as a puzzle that we are to put together as we read the book of Revelation along with Daniel. Daniel does write about the

end times, about the reality of the return of Christ, about the resurrection of the dead, about glory for those whose names are written in The Lamb's Book of Life. He also describes a time when knowledge will increase, something that we see in our day – an increase in knowledge but not in wisdom. (Daniel 12:1-4)

But Daniel, along with almost all the books of the Bible, clearly tells us what the purpose is for the prophecy. In fact, we are told three times over why Daniel was written, and none of those reasons have to do with putting together an eschatological puzzle. Rather, we read the purpose for Daniel's prophecy three times over in chapter 4:17, 25, and chapter 5:21. Each of those three verses describes *"how the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."*

As Proverbs 21:1 points out, *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* And as Paul wrote in Romans 13:1, *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."*

We see only one side of the scroll of history. And often it is very perplexing to us. Why does God allow what he allows? How can God allow cruel King Nebuchadnezzar to invade the capitol city of his people? Why would he allow the destruction of Jerusalem? Or the destruction of any other city or nation?

Yet from Scripture, we know that God is in control. He is indeed sovereign over all of history, even when we cannot understand the meaning of it. The tangled threads that we see on this side of the tapestry of history yet declare the sovereign rule of our omniscient God from the glory of heaven. As we sang earlier:

**This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.**

**This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad! (*This Is My Father's
World*, stanza 3, Maltbie D. Babcock)**

History Marked by Two Cities

It is interesting that Jerusalem and Babylon are both mentioned in the same breath here in Daniel 1:1 and 2. It is worth noting because all history, including the history being made today, revolves around these two cities: Jerusalem and Babylon.

Figuratively, all humanity lives in one of these two cities: Either you and I live in Jerusalem, which in the Scripture refers to the heavenly city of our God. Or we reside in Babylon, which in Scripture has always represented those in hostile opposition to God and his people. It was the early church father Augustine, who spelled this out clearly in his classic work *The City of God*, where he wrote: "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."

There is no in-between place to live. You either live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, having salvation from sin through his precious sacrifice, or you live in hostility to him. All those who by God's grace have saving faith in his Son look ahead, as Abraham, the "father of the faithful" did, to the heavenly Jerusalem, "*The city having*

***foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*" (Heb. 11:10)**

Those who are not living by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are by necessity, then, residents of Babylon. Babylon represents this world in all its sin and hostility to God. We see it in Genesis 11 where the Tower of Babel is built in Babylon (Shinar) because the people wanted a name for themselves, apart from God. In Revelation 18 we read of the fall of Babylon, of how everyone in this world who is opposed to God and his people will be judged and found guilty; they will be consigned to the lake of burning fire, condemned to an eternity in hell.

All people, figuratively and Scripturally, belong to one of those two cities. May you and I, by God's grace through saving faith in Jesus Christ alone, truly be citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem!

Through the Lens of 2 Chronicles 36

From the background to Daniel 1:1-2, which is recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 36 (as well as 2 Kings 24), we see several important truths about our Lord. We see, first, that the Lord is compassionate, having pity on his people even in their darkest hour, even amid the greatest hardships and heartbreaks of life. 2 Chronicles 36:15: "*The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.*"

The Lord doesn't take delight in the suffering of his people. Likewise, he takes no delight in the death of the wicked. In fact, precisely because God is the God of great compassion, he has given us his Word. He did not need to reveal himself to us. He had every right to leave us in our sinful rebellion. Yet he has revealed himself to us; he has shown us the way of salvation through faith in

his Son. He has taken pity upon us and demonstrated great compassion to sinners like ourselves.

Verse 15 describes how he sent messengers to his people *“again and again.”* You and I should be well aware that God has done the same for us as individuals, and for our nation. The United States began as a nation where people had the freedom to worship the Lord without the dictates or coercion of governmental authorities. God has certainly shown his compassion to our nation and to us as individuals.

Yet there is a time when God’s compassion gives way to righteous, proper wrath. 2 Chronicles 36:16 describes how the people *“mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.”*

I wish that there were no striking parallels between Judah and the United States today. We recognize that Israel and Judah in the Old Testament were unique; they were God’s chosen people in a special way that no other nation shares in. The United States, along with all nations, is described in Isaiah 40:15 as *“a drop in a bucket”* before Almighty God.

Yet there are striking parallels with Old Testament Israel and Judah. You can draw the parallels as well as I can: Removal of the ten commandments from public places, the Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage, a health care bill that forces payments for abortion, the constant denigration of Biblical truths and values, and the ridicule of people who still believe in those Biblical truths and values. Yet our coins still say, *“In God we trust.”* The United States has become a nation of hypocrites. And the Lord, speaking through his servant Jeremiah, warns, *“If any nation will not listen,*

then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the LORD.” (Jer. 12:1)

As we see the rebellion of our society against God and his Word, we cannot help but be reminded that God is true to his promises, both to punish and to restore. Verse 17 speaks of God being true to his warning to punish as it declares: *“He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man or young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.”*

But God, in grace, also restores his people. This sad 36th chapter of 2 Chronicles yet ends on a wonderful note as it stresses the faithfulness of God. Verse 22 and 23:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

“The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the Lord their God be with them.”

The Lord restored his people. After 70 years of captivity, the Lord used King Cyrus of Persia to release the captives, to allow them to return to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple, and to rebuild their homes and their lives.

Two Views of History, Two Paths, Two Destinies

How are we to apply the historical record of 2 Chronicles 36, along with the first two verses of Daniel 1? In the turbulence of national and world events, know that God is working behind the scenes. We read the newspaper, the Internet, or watch the news; we don't understand how it all fits together. But from Scripture we know that God is at work behind the scenes, that all of history is "His story".

When we look at history it often seems cyclical. The rise and fall of nations have marked the history of the world from ancient times. The average world power, when we look at history, is only 250 years. Consequently, it may seem, from our perspective, as if history is nothing more than a never ending series of circles; it seems to repeat itself time and again.

But from the viewpoint of heaven – the viewpoint of the Bible – history is not cyclical, but teleological. That means history is a straight line, and that the straight line of history leads to the final day of history. On that final day, the Lord of all history will usher in eternity. As Jesus said, in Matthew 24:30, *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."*

And 2 Peter 3:10 adds, *"The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."*

Revelation 6:15 -17 describes how *"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from*

the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!' For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

And that is why it is so crucial that you and I take to heart the offer of salvation through saving faith in Christ alone. When he returns all humanity will be divided into two groups. Those who have rejected the Lord and live in Babylon, and those who by God's grace have saving faith in Jesus Christ alone and are citizens of heaven, the eternal Jerusalem, the city foursquare so beautiful and majestic that Scripture assures us –

*No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him –*

but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:9, 10)

We read of two eternal destinies throughout Scripture. Psalm 1 summarizes Scripture in a nutshell as it describes two paths: the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked; the path of those who repent of their sin, focusing with saving faith in Christ alone, and those who in hardness of heart persist in their sin, rejecting Christ and the free offer of the gospel.

Likewise, the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:13 and 14 are spoken with great urgency: *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,*

*'In the time of my favor I heard you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you.'*

*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day
of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:1, 2)*

I pray that the scenario described in the beginning of this message never becomes our reality. But it could, not only with ISIS but China, Russia, North Korea, or any number of other adversaries who would love to demolish the United States. The world that you young people are inheriting is filled with uncertainties, violence, stained with sin, and seemingly ready to topple at any time. And our own nation appears to be unraveling from the inside out to the point where it could disintegrate all on its own.

But even so, regardless of what happens in the electoral process of any nation, regardless of what happens in the future, you can know that since God is at work behind the scenes, he will be our ever-present strength in times of trouble, for God is our refuge and our strength, a very certain help in times of trouble, just as we read in our call to worship from Psalm 46:1-7.

Take comfort that in all the uncertainty of our national and international scene, God's purposes will prevail. Take comfort in the truth of Psalm 33:10-11: *"The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."* And those plans center on the glorious return of his Son, Jesus Christ, who declares in Revelation 21:5, *"Behold, I make all things new."*

The Lord willing, when we read the rest of Daniel chapter 1, we will see how Daniel and his three friends found

strength from God to live out their faith in a hostile, secular society. But in the meantime, may you and I also turn in faith to that same eternal God, knowing that he will always be our refuge and strength, an ever-present help, to those who trust in him through saving faith in Christ alone. Amen.

Sermon Outline:

*...Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.
And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand... - Daniel 1:1b-2a*

**"Two Sides to the Scroll of History"
Daniel 1:1-2; 2 Chronicles 36:5-23**

I. All history is written on "two sides of the scroll" (Rev. 5:1):

1) That which we see (Daniel 1:1)

2) That which is written by God, "behind the scenes" out of our sight (Daniel 1:2), reinforcing to us that:
a) History is in God's hands (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:17, 25b; 5:21b)

b) All history, including that which is being made today, revolves around these two cities: Jerusalem and Babylon (Daniel 1:1-2; Revelation 18; Revelation 21)

II. The background to Daniel 1, recorded in 2 Chronicles 36, shows us:

1) The Lord is compassionate; He has pity on His people (15)

2) There is a time when God's compassion gives way to righteous and proper wrath (16)

3) God is true to His promises, both to punish (17) and to restore (22-23)

III. Application: In the turbulence of world events know that the Lord is at work; know that His purposes will prevail (Psalm 33:10-11) and that He is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46)