

“Sinning Against Knowledge”
Daniel 5:1-23
(Preached at Trinity, May 4, 2014)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Chapter 5** there is a sudden change in our Babylonian tour. Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the king. The last we read of him are his excellent words at the end of **Chapter 4:**
Daniel 4:37 NAU - "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."
2. Without explanation, we enter **Chapter 5** and find Nebuchadnezzar’s son, Belshazzar reigning as king. Belshazzar was actually the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Following the Biblical account Nebuchadnezzar’s reign was followed by Evil-Merodach which was followed by Nabonidus. Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. Belshazzar reigned alongside his father who was often away on other pursuits.
3. According to Herodotus, the Greek historian, Nabonidus had left Babylon to fight against the Persian King Darius, who was advancing against Babylon where Belshazzar was reigning in the place of his father. Daniel 5 records the night of Babylon’s fall. This explains why Belshazzar in **Verse 16** offered Daniel the third highest place in Babylon. This is because Belshazzar held the second position behind his father.
4. **Chapter 5** opens with Belshazzar conducting a party and what a party it was. It seems strange that he would be holding a party while his father was defending the city against the advance of the Persians. While Babylon was being threatened with defeat Belshazzar was holding a drunken party. It should have been a time of prayer and fasting before God Most High. Instead it was a time of drunken partying.
5. Proudful people often act unreasonably and blindly.
As our own nation sinks deeper and deeper in our own personal destruction Americans are blindly continuing to disregard God’s Law and bow to the gods of pleasure and materialism. Like a powerful drug we are intoxicated by our own desires and blinded against the danger of our own demise.
6. This fabulous party was attended by a thousand nobles along with his wives and concubines. The wine was flowing freely and you can imagine the sounds of frolic and enjoyment among all.
At the peak of the festivities Belshazzar commanded that they bring in the holy vessels that his grandfather had captured from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. As they drank from the golden cups they shouted the praises of the gods of silver and gold.
 - A. It could be that in the crisis of the assault upon Babylon Belshazzar ordered these vessels to be brought forth in an effort to insult the Hebrew God in order to gain the favor of his gods.
 - B. Or it could have been an audacious assault against God as a token to his own greatness and the greatness of his gods. Facing the danger of the Persians it was meant to demonstrate to his nobles that they had nothing to fear.

7. Suddenly a hand appears and begins writing on the wall. Belshazzar became terrified. Tonight I want to consider the foolish behavior of Belshazzar in treating the holy vessels of God with disdain; of treating the holy things of God as common and robbing Him of His glory.
- I. First, consider the sin of ignorance
- A. This party was attended by over 1000 people who may have never heard of the one true God.
1. There seems to be a contrast here between the nobles and Belshazzar
Daniel 5:18 NAU - "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father."
Daniel 5:20-22 NAU - "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and *his* glory was taken away from him. ²¹ "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of* beasts, and his dwelling place *was* with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes. ²² "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this"
 2. It had been 20-30 years since the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps they knew nothing of the Hebrew God as God Most High. Perhaps they only saw Him as the defeated God of the Jews. Perhaps they didn't know He was worthy of all worship and praise.
 - a. Although they should have known:
Daniel 4:1-2 NAU - " Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! ² "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me."
 - b. But this was not an age of information. Perhaps some hadn't heard of God Most High.
- B. According to God's sovereignty and purpose there are millions of people who live and die and never hear the gospel.
1. For 2000 years before Christ the heathen nations never had access to the Word of God.
 2. There are still many in the far reaches of the world today who have never heard the gospel.
 3. Does God judge men who live in ignorance? He certainly does. They are sinful and under God's wrath and condemnation.

Romans 1:18-20 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

- a. Cain committed murder before the revelation of the Law upon Sinai. He was judged by the Law
 - b. The world was destroyed in the flood for their wickedness, even if the fullness of God's revelation was not yet known
 - c. The Amorites were destroyed, even if they did not have God's full revelation commanding righteousness.
4. They all had God's Law written upon their hearts and they will be judged by the Law.
 5. But on the Day of Judgment God will judge men according to the light they had. There will be those who never heard the Word of God. They've never been exposed to Biblical worship. They've never heard of the Sabbath, of living holy lives to the praise and honor of God.

Luke 12:47-48 NAU - "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, ⁴⁸ but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

Matthew 11:21-22 NAU - "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you."

C. Sins of ignorance are less heinous than open rebellious disobedience against knowledge. The Bible frequently makes this distinction

1. Peter describes a believer's former sins as sins of "ignorance"
1 Peter 1:13-16 KJV – "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: ¹⁵ But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."
2. Even Paul, though admitting to the vileness of his sin, states that he sinned in ignorance.
1 Timothy 1:12-13 NAU - " I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief"

3. As Jesus suffered upon the cross He asked God's mercy upon those who crucified Him because they did not understand that He was the Christ, that He was dying for sinners.
Luke 23:34 – "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

II. There is a great danger of sinning against knowledge. The striking thing about this passage is what Belshazzar knew.

- A. Belshazzar knew of God Most High – His was a sin against knowledge
 1. Belshazzar knew all about what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. It was most likely a family story told often.
Daniel 5:21-22 NAU - "He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes. ²² "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,"
 2. He knew of Nebuchadnezzar's sin of pride and of God's judgment
Daniel 5:20 NAU - "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and *his* glory was taken away from him."
Daniel 5:21 NAU - "He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes."
 3. He knew of Nebuchadnezzar's great declaration after he came to his senses
Daniel 4:2-3 NAU - "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³ "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation."
 4. Belshazzar knew of God Most High and yet refused to acknowledge Him and bow before Him
Daniel 5:22-23 NAU - "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, ²³ but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven"
 5. God's judgment came quickly upon Belshazzar
Daniel 5:30 NAU - "That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain."
 6. We must not completely erase the possibility that all of the nobles knew about God Most High. All of them drank from the cups and praised the false gods. And all of Babylon was judged by God. All of Babylon stands as an example of arrogant pride and persistent wicked rebellion against God.
 7. But the sin of Belshazzar is referred to specifically
Daniel 5:22 NAU - "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this"

B. The Bible warns against sinning against knowledge

1. Old Testament sacrifices were always made for sins of ignorance, not for open rebellion
Numbers 15:29-31 NAU - "You shall have one law for him who does *anything* unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. ³⁰ 'But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ 'Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *will be* on him."
2. We see the same thing in the New Testament
Hebrews 10:26-29 NAS - "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. ²⁹ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"
 - a. It should be noted here that the writer is speaking of apostasy. Of turning away from the truth after having heard and understood it
 - b. This same truth is taught in **Heb. 6**
Hebrews 6:4-6 NAS - "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame."

III. This clearly presents the danger of turning away from the demands of the Gospel

- A. First, there is great danger in hearing the Gospel and rejecting it
 1. Today we must hear and repent
Hebrews 3:7-8 NAS - "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness"
Hebrews 3:12-13 NAS - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."
 2. We must carefully apply the Word as it is preached
James 1:23-24 NAS - "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

- B. Second, it is a dangerous thing to hear the Gospel and then give it only superficial attention
1. Like the seed sown on the poor soil that fails to bear fruit
Matthew 13:20-22 NAS - "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."
 2. It would be better to have continued in ignorance than to have knowledge and reject it.
2 Peter 2:21-22 NAS - "For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire.""
 3. Open rebellion against clear knowledge is a dangerous thing

Conclusion:

1. There is great hope for the poor wretched sinner who comes to Christ crying, "Have mercy on me a sinner." According to God's infallible Word, he shall not go away condemned.
 Nebuchadnezzar was condemned in his pride and the Scripture says he came to his senses and repented and praised the name of God Most High.
 Belshazzar was judged for his pride but we have no indication he repented
Daniel 5:30 NAU - "That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain."
2. God forgives those who repent and turn to Christ.
Romans 10:9-10 NAU - "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."