

Only God Knows

Daniel 2:1-16

2 Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. ² Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. ³ And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."

⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. ⁶ However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation."

⁷ They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

⁸ The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: ⁹ if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."

¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. ¹¹ It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

¹² For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

¹⁴ Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; ¹⁵ he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

¹⁶ So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

As we left off last week we saw Daniel standing before the King and being examined. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were all examined and they very clearly passed their examination. They had gone through the three year intensive training program in the ways of the Chaldeans and now they were accepted into the council of wisemen. And we have to remember that going into this Daniel specifically had purposed in his heart that he would do nothing to defile himself.

In many stories this would be the end. In many stories this is where we hear that after his first trial that Daniel and his friends lived happily ever after. However, as we have already briefly discussed this is only the beginning of the trials that were to face Daniel and his friends. In fact, if we look at what happened here, we can say that Daniel was thrown from the frying pan straight into the fire, and yet, we also see that no matter the trial, no matter the circumstance, Daniel remains faithful to the God who purchased him.

The first thing that we need to notice about this trial in the life of Daniel is that it came about through precisely zero fault of Daniel's. It all began when king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream or as some have read it, a series of dreams which bothered him so much that he could not sleep. So the king called his advisors to tell him the interpretation of his dreams. what he had dreamed.

Something we have to understand is that Kings and rulers in the ancient world had a person or several persons where this was their job. Of course the way this usually worked, was the King would tell his advisors exactly what he had dreamed and they would then give the interpretation or the meaning of the dream. Not surprisingly, the dream usually had a meaning that made the king or the ruler feel good about himself. The more things change, the more people really remain the same.

The advisors asked the king to tell them the dream. But the king had already decided he was not going to tell them his dream this time. Anybody could give any interpretation of a dream, but Nebuchadnezzar was so troubled by this dream that he figured that if someone was wise enough to interpret the dream they could also tell him what it was that he had dreamed. Why, he was so insistent that this was the way this dream would be interpreted is not known. Perhaps this dream was more troubling than some of his other dreams. Perhaps, he was tired of feeling like his advisors only have interpretations that made him look good. Instead, the king decided to put these men to the test. He wanted them to draw on all their own magical and spiritual resources and actually tell him his dream first, and then interpret it.

The penalty if they could not do this was that he would have them cut into pieces.

The advisors and all of the wise men believed this to be not possible to do. Think about it. If your job was to be the dream interpreter for the King, once you heard the dream you could say virtually anything you wanted and as people are fond of saying, is that everyone has opinions. Oh sure, I am sure there were penalties if it was so obvious you had got it wrong, but truly if you have a dream about a water buffalo terrorizing a village, it is not too difficult to tell the King, you are the water buffalo and the villagers are the neighboring nations, and your dominion is one that will never be stopped, Oh king live forever. But perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was tired of being lied to. Perhaps he knew that this dream was different, and if his wise men were truly wise they would not only know the meaning of the dream they would know the dream itself.

The wisemen, of course though that Nebuchadnezzar was being extremely unreasonable, after all it was their heads on the line and their response to him was that “only the gods could know what

it was that he dreamed, but Nebuchadnezzar would not budge. He insisted that they tell him the dream as well as the interpretation, or they would die.

Listen to this section of the text carefully:

⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. ⁶ However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation."

⁷ They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

⁸ The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: ⁹ if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."

They had previously had a great state job and now their trickery and their deceit was being exposed. You may agree that Nebuchadnezzar was being unreasonable, but he was the King, and so unreasonable or not, this was what was going to happen. The pleading of the wise men brought forth Nebuchadnezzar's honest opinion about the wise men. He believed that all along they were just "gaining time" and conspiring with one another to tell him what they believed the king wanted to hear. But this dream was different. We read that it made the king anxious, and he had only one way he knew of to find the true meaning.

With their inability to discover the king's dream now exposed, they began trying to defend themselves saying that no-one could do what the king asked. The king became so furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. I think this is one of those events that should bring to mind Proverbs 21:1 which says *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD,*

Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes. It is absolutely important to remember that all of these events. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar and his over-reaching reaction were all ordered and directed by God and His purpose would prevail.

Daniel was one of the wise men of Babylon at this time. What that means is that after his first trials, after he had purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself, and after he had been examined and found to be more excellent than all of the other wise men by a factor of ten, he was now going to be put to death because of the shenanigans of the wise men previously, and you might argue the unreasonable request of Nebuchadnezzar.

Arioch, who was the commander of the king's guard came and seized Daniel. They are not mentioned in this passage, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were soon to be captured as well. As Daniel was being carried away to their execution. Daniel, who I am sure was surprised, asked what was going on and why the king had issued such a harsh decree. After Arioch had described what was to happen Daniel asked for an audience with King Nebuchadnezzar.

Line Daniel we all have had those times in our lives where we are hit suddenly and staggeringly hard by unexpected news. Trials, difficulties that seem to come out of left field. Things seem to be going well, you are finally getting ahead, and you lose a job. Your doctor gives you a staggering medical diagnosis, or that phone call or message in the middle of the night that a friend or family member has been tragically killed.

The Bible tells us that it rains on the just and the unjust. And it is times like these, these times of trial and or testing where we must learn what it means to trust in God. It is easy to trust God when all is going well, but when you do not understand the how and the why, and you are hanging by a thread, these are the times when knowing God is in control and learning to trust him are oh so important.

How did Daniel respond? We will see part of Daniel's reaction today, but notice that the first thing he did was seek an audience with the King. I find this passage interesting. Daniel, had a strong view of God and of God's providence. Where the other wisemen had answered King Nebuchadnezzar that only the God's could know what it was that he had dreamed. Daniel knew

exactly where the dream and its interpretation could be found. It was not from the god's, but from God the creator of heaven and earth.

In verses 17 and 18 we read that ¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise *men* of Babylon.

Notice when things got bad the first thing Daniel did after speaking to the King is he went to his friends, and he did not name them after their new Babylonian names he instead refers to them as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and they began to seek God's wisdom. While they had been through trials before they had learned to place their trust in God.

Daniel, in his meeting with the King had bought extra time, but he himself did not have the answer. But he understood in a powerful way that when things are the darkest it is important to get together with the people of God and to seek God's face. Let's be honest, the situation that Nebuchadnezzar had put them in did not have a human solution that was possible. In the Bible we see a few people who have interpreted dreams. Joseph being perhaps the most well known, but nowhere do we see people telling a person what it was that they dreamed.

Many of us are stopped by the idea of impossibility. I am not saying we should act foolishly, but very often what is happening is God is telling us to trust in Him. And where we see only dead ends and executions, God is wanting us to trust in him. Daniel and his friends saw not impossibility but opportunity. I am reminded of the story of Gideon in the Book of Judges. Gideon and Israel were being plagued by the Midianites with their army of 135,000. Gideon mustered the armies of Israel and they managed to find 32,000 men to fight against Midian. They were outnumbered 4 to 1. This is a near impossible task. When Gideon went to God about it, the Lord's response was that you have too many men. Gideon then sent 22,000 of them home. He told them that anyone who was afraid could leave and 22,000 of them left. Left with 10,000 men the Lord told him again that he still had too many men. After another trial the number of men was down to 300. Impossible, and yet now their only hope was to trust in God. And thus the victory was won.

When things are impossible to man, this is when God is beginning His great work. When we are without hope, this is when God's glory begins to shine through. It is difficult for us to think this way. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, had already seen God make a way for them when things were bleak, and now they would implore him to act on their behalf once again. When we have problems, our tendency is to take care of things ourselves, but what do we do, when the trial or the problem is beyond us?

I have an answer. Generally, we lose sleep, we worry, which does us no good, and we fret. Maybe we pray, but is our prayer a genuine prayer to see God work His mighty hand, or are we praying for merely our own ease and comfort.

I have mentioned that Daniel goes to his friends and they pray about the task that is before them. Something else that is interesting about the way Daniel responds to this impossible situation is that he goes to his companions, and tells them of the direness of the situation, but the word that is translated as companions here is the word *Khabar*. This word is from the Hebrew and it means "to tie a knot or to join together." Daniel's heart was tied in a knot with his three friends. They were united in purpose and in mission.

A church or a congregation that is united in prayer before God will be able to stand in the face of great opposition. I remember hearing a story from a missionary to China. He told me how the Chinese church had undergone years of violent opposition. It had been illegal for them to gather and yet the church continued to thrive. Several of their leaders had been taken and arrested and many had been executed. The Church continued to thrive. I remember the missionary telling me that in their prayers, they always prayed for the church in America. You see they had learned to rely on God, but they were concerned for their American brothers and sisters because they did not know how the American Church could thrive when they relied upon themselves instead of trusting in God.

Daniel and his companions laid everything else aside and in verse 18 we read that they sought God. They sought for mercies from heaven. They understood that salvation could come from no one but God. At risk was their very lives. There was no human solution possible, and so they sought mercy from heaven.

Daniel, this great hero of the faith, along with his companions, his Khabar, were united in purpose and they sought mercies from heaven. Daniel, who according to the end of chapter 1, in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of him, he was found to be 10 times better than all the magicians and astrologers of the went straight to God.

He chose prayer before he did anything else. We neglect prayer, and I would say we neglect prayer and seeking the mercy of God with others to our great harm.

Daniel understood that all things that were happening were being done for and toward the glory of God. Yes, he was in captivity, yes he was at this time under penalty of death, and yet Daniel had learned to trust God. Daniel did not know the end. He did not even know what was going to happen to him, but he never neglected to seek the mercies of God.

It is often said that God's ways are above our ways. This is of course true. God's abilities are beyond our imagining. Also true, and yet often our first reaction is to "go it alone."

Why do we find it so difficult to go to the Lord in prayer? Why do we think we can handle impossible situations by ourselves? I am tempted to say the reason is pride, but more often than not, I think we are just plain stupid. Our biggest problem is that we often forget how truly helpless we are apart from God.

We continue to believe that our own efforts are what really make things happen. In the business world, in our families, even in the church, we believe our activities and programs and planning are the cause of successes or of failure. So, when things get tough, when the road gets hard, we all instinctively turn to ourselves. We're so accustomed to depending on our own resources that we neglect seeking God's supply when we need it the most. Truly great men and women through history have always understood that one of the greatest temptations is to go it alone. To lean on your own strength. This is a weakness we all must learn to identify and do away with it.

I heard it said that "The reason we don't pray is that it costs. It costs honesty. You have to be honest with God and say, "I am inadequate. I need your help in this situation." As long as you feel self-sufficient, prayer will have no meaning for you because you think you've got it all together."

Today is the 4th of July, It is 245 years from the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But prayer is a declaration of dependence before God. I do not mean by this that we become foolish and irresponsible, we of course have duties and responsibilities. But as Christians we must also acknowledge our dependence on God the creator of the heavens and the earth.

He knows the end from the beginning, He knows the way through our problems and our difficulties, and when all of the world is saying it is impossible or that only the gods know, we know that our God truly does know. Let us learn to seek His face. Let us learn to find His will.

Let us Pray

“God, apart from you, all of our actions and our plans mean nothing. Let us learn that On our own we are lost and alone. We do not have the ability to put things together. We do not have the ability to fix past hurts. But lord let us learn to trust in you and in you alone in all things. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.