

### **Daniel 5:17–31 (ESV)**

**17** Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. **18** O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. **19** And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. **20** But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. **21** He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. **22** 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. **24** “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.” **29** Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. **30** That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. **31** And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

### **Only the scales of God matter in the end.**

Remember last week we saw the old man, Daniel, probably at least 80, brought before the king Belshazzar. The king did everything he could to demean Daniel while still holding out hope that Daniel could tell the king what the writing on the wall meant.

I pointed out how much of a failure this king was, and how unlike his grandfather he was. The last thing Belshazzar said was a **bribe** to get Daniel to perform this function for the king. He offered Daniel the third spot in the kingdom.

We are taking up from there this morning.

**17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.**

A guy named Oliver Anthony recently wrote a song called Rich Men North of Richmond. It seems like the powers that be are all trying to cater to him, to honor him, to use his influence, to reward him with a lot of money for doing things.

They are offering him all the things that those who are **trying to reach the top** live for. But from what I've seen, they have no power over him because he **does not care**. He has different motivations. So he will not allow himself to be **owned** by what they can **deliver to him**. He won't compromise because they don't have anything to offer him that he wants. It is interesting to watch because it **robs powerful people** of the **power** they are used to. I don't know if that is completely accurate of Oliver Anthony, but it is absolutely true of Daniel in our text.

The king had just offered Daniel the most prestigious position in the country, other than being king. This would have probably been what 1000 people at this party would have wanted. Many probably would have given anything for this opportunity.

Daniel looks at the King and says, **keep it**. I have no interest in serving you. I have no interest in your gifts. I have no interest in your compliments and flattery. Nothing you have appeals to me.

I doubt that the king had any idea what drove a man like Daniel. I would guess Belshazzar did not know how to deal with a man like that. Daniel was a man of principle. Belshazzar clearly was not.

You and I are called to be people of principle, people who cannot be owned by the world and its offerings. We might **enjoy** some of the **moral pleasures** of this world like the next guy. But they **do not own us**. We care first about **pleasing King Christ**. Everything else is a distant second. That kind of living, when done consistently, makes us un-seducable.

Then Daniel says **Nevertheless I will read the writing**. I will do it for different reasons than you think. But I will do it. And I will let you know what it means. But Daniel starts with a history lesson. The king wanted a job done. He did not ask for a history lesson. But Daniel was going to use this opportunity to speak to

the king about **Daniel's God**, king Nebuchadnezzar's **life**, king Belshazzar's **heart** and the **kingdom's future**.

**18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty.**

We have seen this before. It is very intentionally stated. The Most High God, and oh, by the way Belshazzar, that is the God that your grandfather identified as the God of the Jews, the God who owns those precious cups you are drinking out of. **THAT** Most High God gave King Nebuchadnezzar, your Grandfather, his kingship and everything that came with it. That did not just happen. It was ordained by a real God who moves in space and time.

**19 And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.**

I think Daniel might be rubbing in that Belshazzar's grandfather was a **real** king. The current king is **nothing** like his grandfather. Belshazzar probably had to run many of his decisions through his father, who tended to go on extended vacations. Nebuchadnezzar had **real** power and he wielded it at his will.

But even Nebuchadnezzar was under the thumb of **God's** power. So when he got too uppity, he had to be brought into check. It is interesting how this is stated.

**20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him.**

We see that the king had a heart condition. It was a proud heart and a hardened spirit. He was going in a bad **direction** and he was **locking** into it. He was hardening into the path of pride. And if God were not to have intervened in the King's life, he would have reached that end destination.

But God **did** intervene.

Do you ever look at a situation in your life, or a time in your life, and you know that, had God not caused a dramatic fall in your life, you probably would have locked into a bad path? We can be thankful that God is a God of **dramatic intrusions**, just when we need them.

Daniel states this in language that cannot be misunderstood. The king was **brought** down. Glory was **taken** from him. Daniel did not say he **lost** his glory. That could have implied the king had some **control** over his glory. No, it was **taken**. By an **external party**. This God who owns these sacred vessels that Belshazzar is desecrating.

**21 He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys.**

Again, he was **driven**. None of this was in the king's control. His mind was made like that of a beast. This stuff was **being done** to him. Intentionally. With a purpose.

**He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.**

Here again we see that King Nebuchadnezzars stay in **club beastly** was done with a specific purpose whose author was God. He was to get the point that this Jewish God is the **one true God** who absolutely controls everything. He gives kingdoms to whoever he chooses.

Now the history lesson is over and it begins to get personal.

**22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this,**

We remember again that this was actually king Nebuchadnezzars grandchild. The word for son was commonly used interchangeably for either.

God was weighing Belshazzar. That is what the writing on the wall was about.

We will get to that. But Belshazzar is **being weighed** by God.

And we will find four complaints. We will find four ways that Belshazzar fails miserably.

**The first** is that Belshazzar was given enough truth to lead him to the **one true God**, but he ignored it. Sometimes there are times when we are ignorant of truth because we truly never heard it. But when that truth is all around us in our environment and we still don't know it, ignorance is not the issue. Apathy is. We simply don't care enough about it to know it. That was Belshazzar. He had the truth right there. He should have considered it. He should have investigated it. But he was busy with other stuff. He was busy indulging himself.

Scripture says it is better not to know truth than to know it and disregard it.

**2 Peter 2: 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.**

There is a higher accountability for those who are surrounded by truth, for those who know it. We don't know exactly how that is implemented by God. But

**knowing** or having the **capacity to know** makes a person more accountable, more responsible for their **rejection** of God, than for those who have **never heard**.

You and I have **zero** excuse for our failures. We **know** the word of God.

Thankfully if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from unrighteousness. But Belshazzar had no intentions to repent. And for him that was very bad.

So Belshazzar avoided the truth.

**Second** he refused to humble himself like his grandfather eventually did.

**23 but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.**

Belshazzar knew the history of the vessels. He knew whose they were. He knew what they represented. But he said in his heart, I will do whatever I feel like doing. Have you ever caught yourself saying that to yourself. I know what God says, but **I don't care**. God can do to me whatever He wants. But I want to do **this thing** and no one is going to stop me. I want to **enjoy this experience**, and no one is going to stop me.

That is a **very scary attitude**. I suspect we have all had it. But it is really really dangerous. This is exactly what Belshazzar did. He didn't just lift himself up. He lifted himself up **against**. He was **against** the Lord of heaven. It was like he was tempting the Lord of heaven to do something. It was one thing for King Nebuchadnezzar to be confused about the **roll of man** and the **roll of God**. The King assigned attributes to himself that belonged to God. But I don't think we ever see that he intentionally picked a fight with Daniel's God. He never rose up against Him in such a blatant intentional fashion. He was not blatantly defiant like Belshazzar. He would not humble himself. Scripture has much to say about pride. Here are just a few quotes.

**Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.**

**James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

**Proverbs 29:23 One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.**

So Belshazzar was weighed and found wanting in his arrogance against God.

**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.**

Here Belshazzar was weighed and found wanting in a **third matter**. He was profaning of the sacred. These vessels were intended for one thing. They were intended to be used in the worship of God. They were for a sacred purpose. But

Belshazzar, fully knowing that, chose to use them for a very base purpose. They were given by God for the worship of God. Belshazzar gave them to his rulers to get drunk from. They were created for a lofty spiritual purpose and Belshazzar used them for a base purpose.

This was a brazen insult against the God of heaven.

Now we might think, I would never take anything that God clearly identified for one purpose and use it for a selfish purpose. We might think that, but it is very likely that we have done just that.

**1 Thes 4: 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;**

The actual word for Body in verse 4 is vessel. There is some lack of clarity as to whether it refers to a man's wife or his own body. But basically it is telling us our bodies have a sacred purpose by God, a sacred intention. We are commanded to use these vessels in a specific God ordained way. And when we do not, we are violating the sacred, every bit as much as Belshazzar did. God called us to holiness. Not to impurity. So if we have practiced sexual immorality, we have profaned the sacred.

Here is another reference.

**[Rom 12:1-2 ESV] 1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

Our bodies are intended for spiritual worship. They are intended to be used as an instrument of worship before God. When we do with our bodies whatever we want in opposition to what God clearly commanded, we are again profaning the sacred.

This is worthy of consideration and prayer this week. Lord how am I profaning the sacred? How am I not using my body according to your purposes? How am I using it for a pleasure that you have not designated it for?

**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.**

Here is the **fourth** and last way that Belshazzar was found wanting. Idolatry. We will often offer up that which we have of great value to that which we most cherish. It is one way to find our idols. **What can we not be happy without?**

What will we do almost anything to have? For **that thing** we will spend **many precious things**.

Isaiah took us through the school of spotting idolatry. Our hearts are idol factories. We can make idols of possessions, positions, privileges, people, pleasures, almost anything. But in the end we will spend that which is **designated only for God's use** and we will **sacrifice it** to **that** idol. Time, money, our bodies, attention, affection, on and on and on.

Now notice how Daniel described these idols against God.

The idols do not see or hear or know. He is saying these idols never have the **capacity** to **deliver** what you are **trusting them for**. They have no power. They are worthless and impotent.

Against what?

The God in whose hand is your breath.

It is like Daniel is saying, Belshazzar, do you really want to take that risk? Do you really want to cross **the God** who is **allowing you to breathe** for the gods whose power is just a figment of your imagination. After all, which of them have ever been able to interpret ANYTHING in the history of Babylon? Why do they ALWAYS need to call in Daniel?

We know one thing in this story. Daniel was not there to reconcile Belshazzar to God like he may have done with Nebuchadnezzar. No. He was there to pronounce judgment on Belshazzar. And by the end of this day the God who holds Belshazzar's breath will remove his breath.

**[Isa 42:8 ESV] 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.**

**[Psa 115:1 ESV] 1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!**

We continue.

**24 "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."**

Daniel is telling the King that the writing on the wall was Gods reaction to what Belshazzar had done.

The hand was **sent** and it was inscribing things in the plaster of the wall. This would have been exceedingly freaky.

From what I read these words are all **Aramaic**. It is interesting that God writes in our languages. He condescends to the vehicles of communication that we can understand.

Now the wise men must have understood the actual words. But they did not understand **what they meant**, what they were intended to say.

Can you imagine being Daniel at this point. He is probably asleep or preparing to be. He is living his quiet retired life. He is enjoying his last years as best he can. And he gets a knock at the door. The King needs you at his drunken party. Dress well. There will be over a thousand people there.

So Daniel goes there and he puts up with the belittling that this upstart pretend king brings him.

But when Daniel sees what is on the wall, he knows what it means. It means this punk king who thinks himself so great is going to lose his kingdom very very soon. So he delivers the message. I cannot help but believe, based on the context, that it is with great contempt, not the respect and concern that he showed for the king's grandfather.

Here is the deal king. This is what it means.

Mene Mene- Usually in the bible when something is said twice, it is for emphasis. Mene means numbered. God has essentially had enough. He has put up with as many numbers as he plans to. Your time is up. Your numbers are up. Your kingdom is over. You do not mess with God and get away with it forever. God has a limit. You reached it.

**27 TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting;**

Mene was about the kingdom. Tekel is not. Tekel is about Belshazzar. Think about this. What is there to weigh? What would happen if God were to weigh us outside of Christ. What if Christ were to weigh our life before Christ? What if Christ's sacrifice for our sins were removed. We would be right there with the arrogant king Belshazzar. Our scales would dip just as quickly and just as far. Belshazzar was **outside of** a relationship of faith in the true and living God, the most High God, the one true God. He could not help but be found wanting. And you and I would be right there with him if it were not for the completed work of Christ and Him drawing us to Himself.

**28 PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."**

Belshazzar, this is it. You are not getting a second chance. You are not going to have a chance to repent. Your kingdom is being given to the Medes and Persians. I wonder how many minutes it was before the enemy armies walked into the



banquet hall? I wonder if that had any life changing effects in drawing some of the crowd to the one true God.

**29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.**

We can almost see Daniel here saying, “I just want to go back to bed. I know my God enough to know that this promotion is a mute point, and a job I do not want. But let’s get this over with. And this is probably the last time this king will wake me up to come to a party.”

**30 That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.**

It is interesting what Revelations says about the fall of mystery Babylon in Rev 17 and 18. Those who shared in her sins and those who profited in her commerce are terribly upset. But the saints have a different response.

Chapter 19 says this

Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,  
for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute  
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

Again they shout:

Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.

And again,

Amen, Hallelujah!

Our God **vindicated Himself** on the arrogance of this **heathen kingdom** that he set up and he tore down. He displayed His glory in the presence of those who assumed to demean Him and His power and His wisdom. He put an end to a wickedness that lofted itself up against Him.

The end of King Belshazzar’s reign was worthy of a **great cheer** by the people who loved God.

This is what the end of time will be like. We will all be **so glad** for our God to be **vindicated**. We will be glad for all the **exploiters** to be eliminated, for all the **mockers** to be silenced, for all those who **glibly live** as if God does not exist to have their breath removed. That will be a glorious day for the kingdom of God.

But until then it is our job to love our enemies and reach out to them with the hope that our God may save them and allow them to taste the mercy and grace of God that we have tasted.

We would do well, after seeing Belshazzar's judgment, to make sure we are **not** living in a way where we are guilty of **Belshazzar's sins**. Do we have an attitude that says, in any area of our lives, "I don't care what God says. I am going to do this thing?" Are we treating our bodies like they are sacred vessels to be dedicated to God's purposes? Do we allow pride to drive any of our decisions? Do we do things with the intention to **gain glory for ourselves** instead of God? Do we **live out the truth** we know? And when we need to make a decision we are unsure of, do we **consult scripture**?

Another application could be, is there **anything so important** in my life that I can be owned? Is there anything that the world **can offer me**, or is there anything that the world can **threaten me with**, that would change my obedience to Christ? People who are free from the world's chains are remarkable people. They can deliver the truth from God without concern of the repercussions.