

The sermon

Intro

Maybe you know this person. This person loves studying the end times, but they struggle to trust Jesus in their circumstances. They love talking about interesting Bible facts like what a satrap is, but they struggle to obey God's commands. The Bible just doesn't seem to be making a dent. Is the Bible defective? Does the problem lie elsewhere? How is this possible? They reject God's revelation without even knowing it.

By revelation I mean what God has revealed. Not just the book of Revelation. For us revelation is the entire Bible. For Belshazzar, God revealed himself in his dealings with Nebuchadnezzar.

BIG IDEA: Rejecting revelation has consequences.

Body

Point 1: A royal party (5:1-4)

READ 5:1-4

Background

Belshazzar is now king. Abruptly we jump from Nebuchadnezzar's repentance to Belshazzar's reign. We're in October 539 BC. 66 years after Daniel arrived. 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar died.

Things are going bad for Babylon. Cyrus of Persia is capturing cities and getting closer to the king's palace. A day or two earlier Cyrus defeated Babylon at Sippar, 50 miles north of the feast.

Great feast

While the losses are piling up, Belshazzar calls for a great feast in his palace (5:1).

Temple vessels

The cups used for the wine stand out. Belshazzar uses the vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem (5:2-3).

There was nothing inherently special about these vessels of gold and silver. However, these vessels became holy by virtue of their consecration for temple purposes.

Rampant sin

As they drank wine with God's vessels, they praised their false gods. The commentators are pretty much unanimous. The presence of alcohol and concubines indicates sexual immorality occurred. That's drunkenness, sexual immorality, common use of the Lord's vessels, and the praise of false gods. Sin overflowing.

These sins are all symptoms of failure to praise God. Sin exists because worship doesn't. Praising the wrong things affects practice!

Application

We celebrate the wrong things and long for the wrong things and do the wrong things because we fail to acknowledge and trust and delight in our Creator.

Why is alcohol a struggle? Why is sexual sin a struggle? Because God isn't functionally treasured. Promises aren't trusted. Lies are believed.

The apostle Paul speaks of Christians who were, in the past, before they believed, idolaters and drunkards and sexually immoral, but they aren't anymore (1 Cor 6:9-11). Their conduct changed.

How can this be?

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. – 1 Corinthians 6:11

Their sins were forgiven on account of Jesus' shed blood on the cross. That is, when they trusted Jesus, Jesus' death wiped away their guilt. And they were washed by the Holy Spirit. That is they were given a new heart to fight sin. God forgives and transforms sinners!

Point 2: God ruins the party (5:5-9)

READ 5:5-9

Background

Maybe they're partying because news had spread from Sippar and they know their doom is sure? One last hoorah. Maybe news hadn't reached them and they're caught unaware, unprepared. Like Pearl Harbor. We can't know for sure.

Event

Pure miracle. Angelic or divine manifestation. Fingers appear from nowhere and they're writing on the plaster wall (5:5).

Belshazzar's shaken with fear. Internal fright has outward effects. His color changed and he was losing control of his bodily functions (*"his limbs gave ways, and his knees knocked together"* – 5:6). Bad omen assumed.

He shouts for his wise men (5:7), the experts in the magic arts who allegedly contacted the dead and discovered people's fates. Glory and power are promised to anyone who can explain the meaning.

Again, the wise men are incapable (5:8). The picture is these guys are hapless and a sham. The futility of false religion. Babylon's gods and magic arts are useless.

God spoiled the party. God sobered the drunk. God frightened partiers.

When God ruins the party

When God ruined the party, Belshazzar was in shock. In hopes of relief he turned to his wise men. They couldn't relieve his distress. Looking in the wrong places for relief does nothing for us.

Fear, misery, confusion remains. Where should we turn?

Point 3: Daniel called on again (5:10-16)

READ 5:10-16

The queen

The queen, or queen mother, enters the banqueting hall (5:10). She wasn't in the hall, meaning she wasn't one of Belshazzar's wives (5:2). A distinguished, older woman. Nebuchadnezzar's wife, Belshazzar's grandmother, Belshazzar's mother have been suggested.

She's familiar with Daniel and counsels Belshazzar to bring in Daniel. Daniel still resides close by apparently.

"There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" (5:11). Daniel was known to possess divine, supernatural abilities.

Daniel's character

Let's consider Daniel's character since he's portrayed to us a model of faith in times of hostility and exile.

- 1) Spirit = inner-being, calm, self-control, kindness, mercy, respect.
- 2) Knowledge = knowing what's true.
- 3) Understanding/light = grasping the meaning of truths.
- 4) Wisdom/solving problems = skillful use of truth in daily life, navigating complex issues well, decision-making.
- 5) Dream interpretation
- 6) Explanation of riddles = figuring out what others can't.

These traits were acknowledged by Nebuchadnezzar. That's why Daniel supervised the wise men (5:11). Daniel attained a lasting reputation on account of God's help (miraculous revelation, favor given, wisdom given) and his faithfulness. We should long for a similar reputation. Not for our own glory. But so that our conduct might glorify God and cause others to glorify God themselves.

You may not be gifted in dream interpretation, but Scripture commends every believer to aspire to these other traits.

God calls us to be a learning people. God calls us to be a thinking people. God calls us to be a discerning people. God calls us to be a practicing people. God wants us to navigate life well for his glory.

Daniel before Belshazzar (5:13-16)

Belshazzar begins the conversation by putting Daniel in his place. Daniel's *"one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah"* (5:13).

The fact that he follows through on the queen's advice indicates he holds out hope Daniel might be able to solve the riddle. If Daniel can give the interpretation, he'll be 3rd in the kingdom and clothed with honor.

Point 4: Revelation rejected (5:17-23)

READ 5:17-23

Daniel's response

Daniel responds by rejecting the offer, assuring Belshazzar he has the interpretation, and contrasting Belshazzar with Nebuchadnezzar. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar is the positive model.

Nebuchadnezzar (5:18-21)

God gave Nebuchadnezzar authority to rule and a place of glory. But God's gifts resulted in pride. So God humbled him by removing his sanity and giving him the mind of an animal. Through divine humbling Nebuchadnezzar learned *"that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will"* (5:21).

Belshazzar (5:22-23)

Whereas Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before God, Belshazzar failed to humble himself. The indictment is threefold:

- 1) *"you...have not humbled your heart"* = failure to do what's right.

2) *"though you knew all this"* = rejection of revelation given.

Belshazzar knew better. He knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

3) *"but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven"* = doing what's forbidden.

Daniel notes Belshazzar paid no attention to *"the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways"* (5:23).

That phrase stands out to me. Daniel's saying that Belshazzar's breath is in God's hand. God gave him life. God sustains his life. And God can take it when he pleases. I'm guessing you already believed that.

There's another item that's in God's hand: Belshazzar's ways. That's God controls Belshazzar's every path or travel. Belshazzar cannot go where God forbids. Belshazzar can only go where God allows. Belshazzar thought he was in control of his life when in fact God is directing his paths.

Paul said I'll go to Corinth if the Lord wills (1 Cor 16:7). That's the attitude entrepreneurs should have in James 4:13-16.

Message to exiles

There's a message to Judah's exiles here. The God of Judah wasn't defeated by Babylon. No, Judah's defeat was an act of God (1:2). God is ruling while his people are in exile. God is ruling in Maine while abortion laws are being passed. God rules in every generation, in every place. God rules over life and death. God rules over our travels!

Application: rejecting revelation

Belshazzar's guilty of rejecting clear revelation: *"though you knew all this"* (5:22). He saw what God did to Nebuchadnezzar. And he went on living as if it never happened. He knew the truth. He ignored it.

Christian, we can do the same! We can be forgiven people who are trusting Jesus. At the same time, we can be rejecting truth we already know. How you ask?

1) We can exalt our opinion above God's word.

We might conclude our thoughts are wiser than God's. We may not frame it that way. But in the end, we really think what God says isn't right. We think we know better. This is an act of idolatry. We place ourselves above God.

2) We can rationalize.

God made me with this temper. So it's not my fault. If I cheat on my taxes I can give more to the church. We can find a thousand ways to convince ourselves that it's okay to disobey Scripture.

3) We can be driven by lust, passions.

We can know the right thing but our passions are out of whack. We can admit sexual sin is wrong while partaking in it. I've had friends who admitted their error while still doing the sin. They felt powerless. This is an act of idolatry. Our passions become our god.

4) We can be afraid of the consequences.

We can fear man rather than God. We could swear at work, tell dirty jokes to fit in with the guys. Or bash our husbands and men to fit in with the girls. We know it's wrong but we don't want people to think we're weird. So we talk like everyone else while knowing it's wrong. This is an act of idolatry. The opinions of men become our god.

5) We can forget.

We can discover a truth and implement it for a while. A husband knows the Bible says love your wife sacrificially, care for your wife like you care for your own body (e.g., spiritually), live with his wife in an understanding way and honor her so God won't reject your prayers. A husband can know these things and still speak harshly to his wife and neglect her. A man can learn things in pre-marital counseling and stop practicing those things 30 or three years later. I'm telling you it's possible. A wife can forget to respect her husband. Ever forgotten that "*a gentle answer turns away wrath*" (Prov 15:1 NASB)?

We can reject revelation and harden our hearts and become comfortable with sin without even knowing it. Not a good place to be. It ruins ourselves. It ruins those around us. And we can distance ourselves from God.

The **spiritual antidote** involves regular Bible intake.

- 1) Pray for understanding before you read.
- 2) Read a portion of Scripture.
- 3) Read multiple times if it's hard to understand.
- 4) Pray for understanding again as you struggle to understand.
- 5) Pray for help to obey when you're done reading.

This sort of Bible reading can foster reminders, self-examination, confession of sin, and calling on God to "*lead us not into temptation*" (Matt 6:13).

Point 5: Judgment revealed (5:24-31)

READ 5:24-31

God sent the fingers in response to Belshazzar's failure to honor God (5:24). Four words were written on the wall. The four words were like a riddle. Daniel gives the interpretation in three parts.

- 1) "*God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end*" – 5:26

God determined the number of days that Belshazzar ruled and personally brought his reign to an end.

- 2) "*you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting*" – 5:27

The picture's a scale. There's not enough weight on the scale. Belshazzar has been weighed morally. He doesn't measure up to God's standard. Judgment has arrived.

- 3) "*your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians*" – 5:28

God did the dividing and the giving. The kingdom now belongs to the Medes and Persians. God indeed rules over the affairs of men.

Belshazzar's response (5:29-31)

Belshazzar accepts the interpretation and gives the promised reward (5:29). Judgment is immediate. Belshazzar is killed that night. The kingdom is gone.

Conclusion

At the end of time, every one of us will be weighed like Belshazzar. And each of us will be found wanting, if left to ourselves.

Why? We won't measure up to God's perfect standard of righteousness. One sin is enough to disqualify us. And there's not one of us who hasn't sinned. Who among us can say I never dishonored my parent? I never hated anyone. I never looked at a man or a woman with lust. I never stole something. I never lied. I never coveted my neighbor's possessions. I never slandered someone. I never acted selfishly. If you understand yourself and you're honest, you know you don't measure up.

But there's one man who does measure up. Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly obeyed God's moral law, and being a perfect, sinless sacrifice, he offered himself on the cross for our sins. Jesus says repent and believe. And you'll receive mercy. Your sins will be forgiven. And you'll be heirs of the kingdom to come.

Christian, remember you don't measure up. You only stand before God justified because Jesus measured up and his righteousness, not your own, is credited to your account. Christian, you and me, we're people who are found wanting. Yet blessed by the righteousness of another. What reason to be merciful to sinners who haven't been washed and remain in their sins.

Daniel 5 encourages us to ask questions. Am I Belshazzar or am I Nebuchadnezzar? How am I responding to God today? Will God say "*though you knew all this*" to me? If you're concluding I'm Belshazzar, turn to Christ in humble trust. His work on the cross. His promise of forgiveness and eternal life. And you won't be found wanting on that day. God is merciful when we respond to his revelation. **Rejecting revelation has consequences.**