

Resistance

Message #5 in the series "Daniel – More than a Lion's Den"

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As we prepare our hearts for God's word, will you join with me in prayer?



Gracious, Lord, we give You thanks for Your word, open this up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Father, what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm a firm believer that behind every face, there's a story and behind every behavior is some act, some verbalizing that tells that story. I'm also a believer that behind every piece of tattoo or graffiti, either on the walls of our skin or on the walls of our buildings, it's our way in a sense of telling that story. Sometimes it is pretty crass. Any time you've ever walked into a public restroom, you could probably admit you can look on the walls and see things that you may not want to repeat in public. And there are other times when wall graffiti tells a story that we just don't want to see, and we don't want to look at. But there are also times when wall graffiti actually makes us laugh or inspires us. For example, these are actual statements on graffiti walls. How about "God is love, but Satan does that thing you like." "Can you imagine. There's also how about, "question everything." Somebody wrote that on a wall and somebody else handwrote right underneath of it, "why?" Think about that. Then there was, "silence is golden, but duct tape works better." Isn't that great? Just words of wisdom here. And then the one I really like, "Things I hate: 1- Vandalism. 2- Irony. And 3- lists." Isn't that great? I just I love that.

And then you can look on walls and see graffiti that actually is inspiring and encouraging. For example, when one person wrote, "You're never too young to dream big." You're never too young to dream big. Or someone wrote, "Never give up," as a word of encouragement to anybody who would read these walls. Someone else wrote, "Your fear of looking stupid is holding you back." Wow. Pretty direct and yet poignantly true. And then finally, someone wrote, "There's nothing more boring than a person with a perfect life." Doesn't it tell a story? You know, if you look at graffiti for what it is, sometimes we are repulsed by it and yet underneath the surface is an individual who is either trying to tell us something, some word of prophetic anticipation or an expression of anger or an expression of resistance. Or maybe, maybe there's a story of encouragement and courage and the individual may not know any other way to state it.

Or graffiti may not be your cup of tea, right? Maybe Facebook is, but the reality is Facebook and all of social media, it's just a modern way and a cleaner way, perhaps, of doing graffiti. It's telling a story. We can post whatever we want on our wall. That's what Facebook calls it. It's your wall. And what are you writing on your wall? In fact, in our present sermon series, I have a question for us. The question would be, what would God write on your wall? What would God write on your wall? I wondered that myself, what would I write if I were a graffiti person and I wanted to decorate somebody's wall? I think knowing me the first thing that I would put on somebody's wall would be, "Hey, sorry about your wall." All right. It tells a story. Hold on to that thought, just a brief moment.

We have been in the midst of a message series on the Old Testament book of Daniel, and what we have been learning is that Daniel and his three friends, the names we know of as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and that they're facing really significant trials in the midst of what was known as the Empire of Babylon. And what I've been suggesting is that the Old Testament book of Daniel and Daniel and his three friends have a lot to teach us because whether we know it or not and whether we feel comfortable or not, the reality is we are living in Babylon. No, it's not a particular nation. Reality tells us that Babylon exists because we, as followers of Jesus, are seeking to live faithfully to the message of the good news of the gospel in a season and in a time where maybe it's not comfortable to be a Christian, and maybe it's not politically correct to be a Christian, and more and more, it's getting more difficult to be a follower of Jesus.

We are living in a season that I'm calling Babylon. How do we live faithfully in Babylon? What we have been learning is that if we acknowledge the culture that exists as being partly our responsibility because culture is defined by the people who live within it, then the good news for those of us who are followers of Jesus is that culture shifts when people act differently than the way they used to. So as followers of Jesus, we can start living differently today than we lived yesterday. And by doing so, we bear testimony, we give witness to what God can accomplish in shifting that culture. "We can be the change that we want to see happen," to quote Gandhi. We also have been learning that in order for us to do that, we need to understand the way of the exile.

What I introduced weeks ago was that in the Old Testament, Daniel and his three friends, as well as many, many others who defined themselves as a part of the Promised Land in Israel, these individuals saw exile as a negative thing. They were uprooted. They were taken out of what they believed was the source of their identity, the Temple, Jerusalem and Israel. The land was important to them. And what they learned through exile is that God was calling them to do something and to be something different. In the New Testament, exile is actually a good thing. Where the Apostle Peter in particular, but also Paul and even Jesus teach us that being an exile is important. We are not rooting our identity in a location or in what we have, but in whose we are. And our relationship with Jesus does not know the boundaries of a location. What does it mean for us to thrive by living out the way of the exile? And throughout this series, we have been learning that in Daniel in particular, but also other Old and New Testament testimonies alike that there is a singular, important threat, something that we all need to remember, and that threat is that God will not share his glory with anyone or anything.

Hold on to that as we delve deeper into Daniel, because what we will see yet again play out is that God is God, and we are not. And when we confuse that, that's when problems begin to arise. And also what we learned in this series that bears repeating because we will see it again here today is that Daniel and his three friends are teaching us that a life of faithfulness is built one act of obedience at a time. It's something that in modern times we learned from individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr. One act of obedience at a time tells a story. A story of God's faithfulness, so to engage us a little bit further, I want to draw us to Daniel Chapter 5. This is a very interesting section of scripture. Most of us remember the stories of the lion's den, which will come next week, and also the fiery furnace which we learned about before. But this one, is rather unique. I want to draw you into it, and let's read together if you brought your Bible. Let's open the scriptures of the word of God. Daniel Chapter 5:1 says,

"King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so

that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So, they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them." [Daniel 5:1-3 NIV].

All right. Let me pause here and just give you a little bit of a historical background. We heard the phrase Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar, his father, need to clarify a few things, Nebuchadnezzar was the king when we introduced the book of Daniel. Roughly in the year 605 B.C, Nebuchadnezzar went in and began the process of conquering Judea and Jerusalem and started to take captive all of the best and perhaps the youngest of the potential leaders and he brought them into captivity in Babylon, 605 B.C., roughly. Now fast forward, we have the first four chapters of the Book of Daniel, all have Nebuchadnezzar as the king.

The start of Chapter 5, we have Belshazzar, and he identifies himself, at least in this passage of scripture as being related to Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, my father. In fact, that term, father here is honorific. It actually means "my predecessor." My predecessor. And if you push it a little bit more specifically, it's not the direct predecessor. It would be the equivalent of an individual saying, "I am connected to King David," and King David died like a thousand years before they were born. It's an honorific connection. And what Belshazzar, as best we know historically, is telling us in his presence here in this verse of scripture is that his father, Nabonidus, was put into the throne as a result of a coup.

So, what was leading to the coup? Nebuchadnezzar died roughly in the year 562 B.C., his son, Amel Marduk, I can't imagine what kind of ribbing he took in school, but his name, Amel Marduk, takes the throne and he's on the throne for a brief stint and a man named Belshazzar, he's probably connected in the royal line somewhere, establishes a coup and wins. He is victorious, and he puts his father, an aged man, into the role of King. That's Nabonidus. Nabonidus dies relatively quickly, and Belshazzar takes the throne. Now he's in position of leadership roughly about 17 years. The year right now, in verse 1 and 2 of Chapter 5 of Daniel is approximately the year 539 B.C.. Why is all of that important to you? Just to give you a historical context, what we are learning is that if Daniel came to Babylon in 605 B.C. and it is currently 539 B.C. at the moment of this account, Daniel has been in Babylon for 66 years. And assuming that he was roughly 15 when he arrived in Babylon, that means that at this moment he is a man of 81 years of age. When I first learned that years ago, it rocked me because for me in all of these stories, I saw Daniel as a young person, a young individual, engaging all of these facets of the storyline. At this moment, he is 81.

Next week, as we look at the next chapter, Chapter 6 and the lion's den story that many of us know, and we'll get to that. He's in his mid-80s. Keep that in mind. Those of you who think you're way too old for God to use. Hmm. So, the story continues. Verse 3,

"So, they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone." [Daniel 5:3-4 NIV].

This incredible verse of scripture there tells a poignant story about the depravity of this moment in time and of Belshazzar as a leader. You know, I've studied physics, it's been a long time. I was in AP physics, in high school and ever since I finished all of that hard work of learning physics, I really

wondered, "would I ever use this again?" This is an example of where one of the principles of physics really play itself out. You're ready for this? It is the principle of entropy. Do you know what entropy is? Those of you who are current students, this is a test, right? Entropy in simple language is the gradual decline into disorder. Entropy, the gradual decline into disorder. I see this entropy principle play itself out. Certainly, in this passage of scripture, but often in three distinct ways. First, I see it when leaders have lost their sense of true north, when they begin to believe that they are more important than anything that is setting the parameters above them, in particular in our context, when they begin to believe that they are more important than God. That their agendas are more important than God. The second place where I see entropy play itself out, is when people begin to believe that they are more important than God. They begin to set, God aside, even thumb their nose at God. God is not as important as their own rights, privileges, wants and desires, and dare anybody to challenge any of that. It is the clear, independent spirit, not the spirit of independence. But an independent spirit that balks at anything or anyone that expresses authority over any of us. And a third illustration of where I see entropy and that is every Friday and Saturday night in college fraternities. All right. That's a joke. You can laugh. Because that is actually an expression of what we have read in verses 3 and 4 of Daniel 5.

Belshazzar is basically throwing a frat party. A thousand people have gathered and they're drinking, but they crossed a line. In their drunken stupor and in his arrogance, he calls for his servants to gather all of the vessels, the precious vessels of religious importance that King Nebuchadnezzar had stolen out of the temple when they ransacked the temple and Jerusalem. According to Ezra Chapter 1, do you know how many vessels there were that were captured by Nebuchadnezzar? 5,400 and so what Belshazzar is telling us here is that he had his servants bring in all of these really important Jewish icons of worship and they used it arrogantly and sacrilegiously to party. Very, very important lesson that we learn. And for the people of faith, what's important for us, is that when we are in exile, exile ultimately teaches us about our dependance on God, exile exposes our dependance on God. Something that Belshazzar and the whole court is about to find out. Verse five,

"Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote." [Daniel 5:5 NIV].

Now you get my opening illustrations here.

"His face turned pale, and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking." [Daniel 5:6 NIV].

I love that. Certainly, tells a story, right? You know, the man and his entourage are all drunk. And they see this hand, a disembodied hand, come and start writing on the wall, and it's writing something very specific, something he cannot read. And so what happens is he calls all of the encounters, the mediums, the astrologers, the people who we have seen chapter after chapter in Daniel rank high in the court. And he says to them, "What's being said here? What's going on?" He's scared. And it doesn't know, but he's seen something clearly supernatural and none of the encounters and none of the astrologers, none of the mediums know exactly what is being said. And it raises his, Belshazzar's, anxiety even more. And so, he's panicked. He's crying out in the room. And what happens next is, it says, in many of our translations, the queen walked in. It's actually, according to the language of the Old Testament, it's more likely that this is the Queen Mother. If it were the Queen, she would have had to ask permission in order to enter into the king's presence. But no mother is going to ask permission

of their son. Right? And so, the Queen Mother comes in and she says to him, Hey, King, you remember your predecessor? She uses the term father as well, it's honorific. Do you remember your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar? He ran through some situations that were hard and in his care was one of the exiles named Daniel, and Daniel had the unique capacity to handle situations like this. Why don't you call Daniel? And so, Belshazzar calls Daniel, and he says to Daniel, "Hey, you one of the exiles," get the disrespect? He says, "you one of the exiles I understand from history that you had the unique ability with Nebuchadnezzar, my ancestor to interpret these kinds of situations. I'm going to give you a brand-new robe. I'm going to give you a brand-new necklace, and I'm going to give you the position of 3rd in charge of the entire empire, if you can tell me what is written on this wall." And Daniel says, I love this 81-year-old man, and he says to King Belshazzar, "you can keep your stuff. I don't need it, but I'm going to interpret this writing on the wall for you. But before I do," he says, "I want you to know that there's a history here. And the history is your father," honorific, "your ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar was given an entire empire by God. And every time he led by pushing God away, God interrupted his life and humbled him. And only to the point when Nebuchadnezzar, in his humility, looked up to God. An honored God was he restored." And then Daniel says, you know, verse 22.

**"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this."
[Daniel 5:22 NIV].**

It was not unfamiliar to Belshazzar, this history, he knew at all. Verse 23,

"Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heave. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. [Daniel 5:23 NIV].

That was Daniel's way of saying, "you're an arrogant fool." Verse 24,

"Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription." This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.

"Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Mendes and Persians." [Daniel 5:24-28 NIV].

In other words, what Daniels says is, "Oh king, you want the interpretation on the wall? It's basically saying that God has numbered your days. And he has numbered the days of your empire as well. Interestingly, in verse 29,

"Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom." [Daniel 5:29 NIV].

Belshazzar carried out his promise anyway. But notice the very next verse, verse 30,

"That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain," [Daniel 5:30 NIV].

As the year 539, and from what we understand, that was the time when the invasion of Babylon took place. He was killed by the next ruler, which we'll learn about next week. Interesting. So, the king had seen and known all that God had done, and he chose to ignore it and in fact, he couldn't read the writing on the wall. That, ironically, is one of the ways that we get that expression today. So, I wonder, as we begin to apply this chapter to us, to those of us who live in Babylon.

What's the writing on your wall? Maybe you've struggled to interpret it. Maybe you don't want to interpret it. Maybe you can't wait to interpret it. What's the writing on your wall? What's God trying to say to you to get your attention? Or perhaps what's God trying to say to us to get our attention? Whether individually or corporately as a church or corporately as a community or globally, what is it that God is saying to try to get our attention? That's a challenge for us today. If you're like me, I believe that there is writing on the wall and it's telling a story. And it's a story that begs us to pay attention. Ultimately, if we see that thread from the Old Testament through the New and throughout the history of the church, it's a message that reminds us that God is God, and we are not. And any time we think that we have nailed this thing called life without God, and even to the point of thumbing our nose at God, that writing will remind us at no point will God share his glory with anyone in spite of what we think we deserve. So, what's the writing on your wall? What's God trying to say to you to get your attention? What's God trying to say to us to get our attention? And what will we do with that information?

We have been ending each of these messages in this series with an invitation to go to our wall. The writing on our wall, our prayer wall outside, in our lobby is an invitation to see our lives and our journey together as a mosaic. That each and every one of us has a prayer on how to remain or be faithful in the midst of a season of Babylon. What does it look like for us as we cast our view on what is yet to come and the God who will see us through that? So, I have questions for you to consider. Feel free to respond to any of these three questions.

Number 1 - what graffiti phrase best describes what's going on in your life right now? You can be creative.

Number 2 - If God were to write a post on your Facebook wall today, or maybe even the wall of your home, what would he say? For example, a word of encouragement. I've got this. Don't worry. Maybe you would say, I hear you. Maybe he would write. Are you sure you want to do that?

And number 3 - a word or phrase that best expresses your prayer based on today's message. For example. Help me, Jesus. Or courage. Or forgive me.

What is God writing on your wall? What are you writing on your wall? Both tell a story and invite us to be faithful to the God who has called us and who will see us through Babylon.

Let's pray together.

God, we give You thanks in the midst of Babylon for the reminders that You never leave us, nor forsake us. Thank You for the challenges that You breathe into our day to remind us of that one act of obedience is all it takes. One act of obedience to begin a life of faithfulness. Lord, while we invite You every day to be Lord of our lives, invite us to draw into Your presence as we trust You. For we pray this in Your precious name. The name of Jesus. The name we love. It's in His name. Amen.