

Daniel 2:1-23

Man's Foolishness and God's Wisdom

NKJ Daniel 2:1 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 a 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.

19 Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His.

21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding.

22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.

23 "I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand."

Someone in the congregation today is having problems with aches and pains, sometimes so bad that they keep you up at night. Someone is struggling with secret sin, that you don't feel you can be free of, someone here is having troubles in your marriage...

Ok now, you don't have to indicate it, but I am sure someone here thought I was talking about them, right? Well, what was I doing, *prophesying*? No.

I used examples of painful problems that are general to mankind living as we do in a fallen world, and which I can reasonably expect to be present in a group of people this size. The televangelists often employ a similar methodology, as Jim Bakker, for instance, admitted after he fell from power.

But the first time, I saw that kind of thing at work wasn't amongst the televangelists. I actually saw it first a long time *before* I got saved. As a child growing up in New Jersey, on Saturdays my mother, who considered herself a *Spiritist* at the time, would take me to meetings of the Jersey Society of Parapsychology, which was made up of psychics, mediums, astrologers, palm readers, tarot card readers, wiccans, what have you. The modern day equivalent of the magicians and sorcerers of King Nebuchadnezzar. And so I was always having my palm read, and they were always telling me about "*my past lives*" because, of course, they firmly believed in reincarnation.

Now, even as a child, I began to notice a couple of things about what they told me and other people.

- 1) In all of these "past lives" - and incidentally, you don't have any to worry about, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27) - but in all of them I was always someone important or special - a king, a knight, a mighty warrior. It was never a ditch digger or a factory worker, it was also something that would appeal to the imagination of a young boy. I noticed they did the same thing with other people depending upon what would appeal to them. If you listened to these guys, everyone in the past was a Nubian princess, or an Indian Chief, or a great Artist or Musician. I began to wonder who dug the ditches and cleaned the lavatory in the past.
- 2) Whenever they told me about my future, it was something I wanted to hear. Incidentally, not surprisingly I was NEVER ONCE told "*you are going to become an Evangelical Pastor.*" I think back then I would have been horrified by the very idea, it was always stuff that appealed to my itching ears. And they never agreed.

What they made their living doing, was telling people what they *wanted to hear* or working with what they already knew about someone. Their rate of success was astoundingly low, but people never seemed to remember that and kept coming back to get pumped up.

Every Eastern Potentate and King's court in the ancient world was full of those kinds of people, and the same is in some senses true of Rulers and Corporate Leaders today, they are the proverbial "yes men" people surround themselves with. Ancient Israel had them, false prophets who always told the rulers and the people what they wanted to hear, the Lord despised them.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel are full of condemnation for them, because even though the people were doing wickedly, the prophets pretended to deliver messages of comfort and assurance from the Lord:

“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land' -- 'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed!’” (Jer. 14:5)

Clearly that kind of prophet, and not the kind that tell the rulers and the people the hard truth are the ones who are generally preferred. There is an almost amusing example of that in **2 Chron. 18**. There the good king of Judah Jehoshaphat and the evil King of Israel Ahab were trying to decide whether to attack a city. ***“But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of Him?"***

7 So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD; but I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. He is Micaiah the son of Imla."”

So they are useful when you want to hear what you want to hear. But in these verses Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon has had a dream, that he knows is important. This dream has terrified him, it is a dream that he knows was not natural, not the result of a partially digested potato, he obviously has had an insight that it is a message, and he is desperate to know what it means.

Now Nebuchadnezzar is superstitious, but clearly not stupid. He doesn't want be placated by his magicians, he doesn't want his ears to be tickled. He wants the truth this time. So before they even come before him he determines that he will ask them not only to tell him the meaning of the dream, but the dream itself. Nebuchadnezzar at this point in his life doesn't acknowledge that there is only one God, in heaven, but he knows that this dream is a message from heaven and he wants an interpretation from the same source.

To encourage his Magicians to get this right, he tells them either tell me or I will have you cut into little pieces and probably not quickly, and I will have your houses (and there the word is *bayith* – *its the same word Joshua uses when he says “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”*) by which he means not the building but the family all your relatives and possessions utterly destroyed. If they get it right though, they will be exceedingly honored.

Now, the magicians are not so cocky, they can't do what the king is asking. So they go back to the traditional methodology, look king, you tell us what you dreamt we'll tell you what it means, ***that's the way this arrangement has worked for centuries***. That answer doesn't satisfy Nebuchadnezzar, he figures they are stalling for time, hoping he'll change his mind. Nebuchadnezzar has had an insight, ***if you can't tell me the dream, it will prove that you are nothing but charlatans using me as a meal ticket***. Which is of course true. You are just hoping to fob me off with *comforting lies*.

At that point the Magicians, speak the truth, which is that only God can do what the king is asking. The king is asking for something utterly beyond the scope of worldly wisdom, which is what they deal in, and they view it as unreasonable. They point out that no mere man can really know the spirit of another man.

You yourselves will have encountered that, you can guess what someone is thinking some of the time, but you can never actually know what someone is thinking or feeling. You don't live in their hearts as Paul puts it in the verses in 1 Corinthians we will be going over tonight “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him”

To cut through all the chaff and get down to the heart of the problem. What frustrates Nebuchadnezzar so much is that he knows no one in his Kingdom can know his dream except God, and he's just discovered that none of his Senior Magicians really knows God.

So the decree goes out to kill all the so-called wise men. But God has preserved a remnant even in Babylon of at least four men who really do know and love Him - Daniel and his companions. Now it looks like they are in terrible danger, because they have been trained to be wise men as well. But we know that God is behind all of this. He has made Daniel well thought of by the men who served the king including Arioch, and thus Daniel this junior wise man is able to arrange an interview with the king and he tells the king, not *tell me your dream* like the other so-called wise men so I can give you some comforting lies - but *give me time, and I will tell you your dream*.

Now what is Daniel going to do in the meantime? Try to guess what the king dreamt using what he knows about him? ask the king's friends? Read some of the better books on dream interpretation? No, that would be worldly wisdom. It would be useless.

Daniel, knew what Joseph knew, that the interpretation of dreams belongs to God. Therefore he is going to do the only thing he can: he is going to PRAY, and he is not going to pray by himself, he is going to pray with some other faithful friends. He is going to beg the mercies of the Lord in prayer.

And the Lord who is directing all of these events blesses his prayers, and gives Daniel the dream and its meaning in a vision, and Daniel replies with blessing and thanksgiving that acknowledges the mercy and the sovereignty, and the omniscience of God. God is the one who *knows* all things because he is the one who has *ordained* all things.

So I want to give you two applications of what we have read:

1) *Uselessness of Man's "Wisdom" in the Spiritual Realm:* We live in an age that is glutted with the spiritual. Go into any bookstore, and you will see row on row of books dealing with "spirituality" whether it be self-help, or new age, or mysticism. And what is all of that stuff? In the end, its just worldly wisdom. Mans attempt to climb up into heaven by his own power. But friends, we need to realize what Nebuchadnezzar realized. *That is if we are to know anything of God and of His Will, it can only come by God revealing it to us.*

Now I won't lie to you, a lot of that worldly wisdom will claim to be the words of god or gods, *I had a vision* the modern day prophets will tell us. But you know, their advice inevitably is the same kind what people want to hear, pleasing itching ears stuff that I encountered as a child. That's why it sells and takes up so much of the bookstore, while the orthodox Christian stuff usually takes up a space this big (teeny) if you can find it at all. But brothers and sisters, that shouldn't surprise you, as Jesus Christ told us *"Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."*

Of all the books out there, only in one, the Bible, did God reveal himself, and His will, and tell us how to be saved, and that is the Bible. Now how can you know that? Well as we confessed you will only really be assured of that if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in your hearts, but two things that show us that this word is authentic is that unlike all of these magicians and worldly prophets, the things that the Prophets sent by the Lord prophesied came to pass, and the great thing that they all pointed towards of course was the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who forever proved the truth of this word, by His dying for our Sins and rising again on the Third day.

False prophets are nothing new, and unfortunately you can even find it in the church as Paul warned - **2 Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**

But friends, if I can give you any advice it would be not to seek that kind of teacher. You can go to liberal churches, and find teachers who will contradict God's revelation and approve of your sins, and tell you what you want to hear, but those men and women are not the friends of your soul. If you went to a doctor suffering from a potentially fatal disease, and he told you you were fine, and gave you medicine that would make you feel a little better but do nothing to cure you, would that doctor be doing you good? **Not at all. Brothers and Sisters, as you grow in grace you will find that you will love nothing quite so much as the truth, even when it hurts, and hate nothing so much as lies even when they are pleasant:**

**Prov. 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
7 A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, But to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.**

2) **I hope you see the amazing power of prayer:** By the means of prayer, a Sovereign God can take even something evil, and use it for your good just as by prayer a dream that could have spelled the death of Daniel becomes the means by which he is exalted. I hope you also see the huge value of having friends who are men and women of prayer – *“Note, Praying friends are valuable friends; it is good to have an intimacy with and an interest in those that have fellowship with God and an interest at the throne of grace; and it well becomes the greatest and best of men to desire the assistance of the prayers of others for them.”*

Kids, as you are growing up, choose friends like Daniel's friends. Friends who know the Lord Jesus Christ, and pray to Him. Because those are the people who will lift you up, and go to God on your behalf, and who will truly help you. People who don't know the Lord can't do that, and 9 times out of 10, they'll be no help to you.

Brothers and Sisters, let me close on this contemplation, if we served a God who was all powerful, but not merciful, it would do us no good to pray, because while he could help he would have no reason to do so. We serve a God though, who is not only all powerful, but all merciful, and he has shown that by sending His Son Jesus, that by Faith in Christ, we might be united to him and forgiven of sin and enabled to call upon Him as our father in heaven 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the **throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy and find **grace** to help in time of need.