

“The Revealer of Mysteries”

Daniel 2:1-23

If you have your Bible, I invite you to find your place with me in the Old Testament book of Daniel, where in just a minute we will read from the second chapter. A couple of weeks ago, I brought up the question, “What is the balance between our Christianity and our politics?” How do we as Christians take our faith into the ballot box? In contentious times such as these, you and I must be well informed about the issues which are at stake in our nation. We understand that politics and politicians could never be our savior, but they most certainly can be our downfall. Good government can never save us, but bad government can destroy us. It is like the nursery rhyme ‘Humpty Dumpty.’ You remember the story? It’s about an egg who sat on a wall, but he had a great fall. We don’t know what happened, we don’t know any of the particulars. It could be that he was pushed, or that a gust of wind came along. Maybe he got distracted and lost his balance. But what we do know is who he went to for help to try to get his life back together. He didn’t turn to his family. He didn’t go to church. No, he looked to the government. The king got involved. All the king’s men got involved. They tried to pass a stimulus package. But all the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put him together again. In other words, the most powerful people in the land, as those who had access to the halls of power, could not fix the egg once it had been scrambled.

Psalm 20:7—“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”

The book of Daniel gives the meaning of history more clearly than any other portion of the Bible and it tells us how to live out our faith in a hostile environment. I don’t know of any other message more timely and valuable for

Christians living in our own secular times. I think that is one of the reasons why I love the book of Daniel so much. Of all the books of the Old Testament, I would venture to say that Daniel is my favorite. This is true for me for at least several reasons:

- it provides us a prophetic framework for understanding the course of world history (forms our faith)
- it presents Jesus Christ as the coming King who reigns over an everlasting kingdom (fosters our hope)
- it paints a picture of what it truly looks like to walk with God in a counter-cultural way (fuels our love)

In Daniel, we find a powerful example of someone who not only lived through chaotic times and survived them but who triumphed in them and thrived spiritually as he lived in obedience to Almighty God. He didn't compromise when it would have been so easy to do so. He didn't bow down to the world's agenda. He didn't cave in to cultural pressures that Babylon exerted on him, but neither did he withdraw from engagement. Daniel sought the welfare of the city in which he was an exile. He was despised, accused, and plotted against. Yet he was triumphant over all of that because he knew God and trusted Him to do with his life whatever was best.

In these opening chapters of the book, Daniel is a young captive in Babylon. The book follows the deportation of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took many Jews captive and carried them away to Babylon. Daniel is one of these captives, a young man of royal blood who, as a young man, was taken away from his home in Jerusalem and is forced live out the remainder of his days in a strange and foreign place. In the first chapter, Daniel and his three friends

are faced with indoctrination from the culture of the Babylonians. It involved a three year education program in which they were taught the literature and language of the Babylonians. They were put on a dietary regiment by order of the king. However, verse 8 says Daniel resolved that he would defile himself with the king's food. When faced with indoctrination, Daniel chose separation from Babylon. He vowed to not compromise his faith and convictions. And in that way, he became a model of representation in Babylon.

In Babylon, Daniel is sovereignly placed in a position of influence. And his life wonderfully illustrates how believers are in the world, though we are not of the world. We've been set apart as salt and light in a dark and tasteless world. By the time we reach the conclusion of the book, Daniel is an old man and a distinguished leader who has served a succession of kings in both the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. Most important of all, he faithfully serves God, the one true King, throughout his life. When faced with a choice of whether to serve a human king and conform to Babylon's worldview, or obey the King of the universe and submit to His Word, Daniel always chose the latter—obedience to God. (Read)

The theme of the book of Daniel is the sovereignty of God over the lives of individuals, nations, and kings. As those who trust in such a God, we fully recognize that the earth belongs to Him. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. All of earth's citizens are subject to Him, whether they recognize it or not. (defiance of men in 1:1-2)

The second chapter of Daniel shows that the Lord God is sovereign over nations and He is in perfect control of world history. It begins with the dreams of a pagan king, dreams which troubled him, dreams which could not be interpreted by any of Babylon's wise men. In other words, there was a problem and no man had

any answers. The answer to the dilemma could not be solved. It had to be revealed. Which means only God could sort the situation out. And so you'll notice that the word 'reveal' is used around seven times in the chapter. The point being made is that God is the only One who has the answers that you and I need. He alone is the Revealer of mysteries. Notice first of all:

1—The INSUFFICIENCY of Babylon's wisdom (2:1-12)

"In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king..."

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was powerful and successful and was the leader of the most powerful nation on earth for 43 years. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote of how impressive Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was. Situated on the Euphrates River, the city was a perfect square with each side spanning 14 miles. It had a walled enclosure that was some 56 miles long, anchored by 250 watchtowers, each one 450 feet tall. The wall itself was 300 feet high and 25 feet thick, backed up by another wall of 75 feet. A moat surrounded the entire complex. Eight massive gates, including the Ishtar Gate, were embedded in the walls. Nebuchadnezzar's famous hanging gardens bloomed lavishly, irrigated by hydraulic pumps that brought water up from the river.

History reveals him to have been a proud and cruel man who crushed his enemies with a vengeance. He was an egotistical maniac who had appeared to arrived at the apex of power. You would think that he would sleep easy with all the accomplishments under his belt, but the text tells us that was certainly not the

case. Shakespeare once wrote, “Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” There’s a lot of pressures associated with leadership. It is not often that we are given a glimpse into the private thoughts of such a man, but that is exactly what happens here.

The king’s dream

The chapter begins by telling us that King Nebuchadnezzar had been having dreams that deeply troubled him. The wording is such that there were recurring dreams. His spirit was so bothered by it one night that he found himself unable to go back to sleep.

“Troubled” — *the word means to be greatly disturbed*

In the ancient world, dreams were often seen as being very significant. They were viewed as predictions of future events. When it was the dream of a king, the future of his kingdom could be in view. If he understood its meaning, the king could take action and prepare for what was just over the horizon.

Nebuchadnezzar had been having these dreams that he knew were significant, but he was totally incapable of understanding it. In spite of his worldly power and possessions, he found himself unable to soothe his own soul. This is not the first time in Scripture that we are told God communicated to pagan leaders in the form of a dream. Other passages that come to mind are:

- Abimelech, king of Gerar (Genesis 20)
- Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Genesis 41)
- Magi, warned by God in a dream (Matthew 2)

Think of the irony! Though Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world, a man who had conquered nations and peoples, he was helpless when it

came to mastering himself. We find out later on that the dreams he had been having were from God as he was being shown what would happen on the world stage. It is God's way of showing this proud politician who is really in charge.

Psalm 127:1-2—“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to His beloved sleep.”

Before I move on, it is important to emphasize that the sovereign power of God extends to the dream patterns of pagan kings. That is how much control our God has over the universe. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He will.” When you scroll through your news feed or watch the news and read the latest headlines, you need to remember this. This reassurance is precisely what the exiles needed to know. The forces of Babylon had invaded and decimated everything they knew about true worship, and their security had been shattered. Yet in exile they are making the discovery that God is in control of the kingdoms of this world. He sets them up and takes them down, and things are proceeding as planned in His eternal counsels.

The king's demand

Unable to sleep, the king calls for his cabinet. He sends for the wise men of Babylon and demands that they explain to him the dream. He summons all four classes of Babylon's leading wise men—magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans. Surely, they had the ability to interpret dreams and tell the king what it all meant. After all, this is why they were on the king's payroll to begin with. Daniel and his three friends were not among them, even though they had

graduated at the top of their class. They were excluded because they would have been among the lower class of royal advisers due to their young age.

There is an interesting thing that happens in the text. From verse 4 through the end of chapter 7, the language of the text moves from Hebrew to Aramaic. Some scholars have suggested that one of the reasons is that this involves a prophecy that deals with the Gentiles, and Aramaic was the international language of the day. It is yet further evidence in the Scripture of God's intention to reveal His truth even to Gentile nations.

So the king sends for his advisers. He demands them to tell him both the dream and its interpretation. And in verse 5 he says, "Tell me the dream, or else!" He then threatens to have them torn limb from limb and turn their houses into refuse heaps. On the other hand, if they tell him the dream and its meaning, they'll be honored. At this point, the wise men of Babylon are scared to death at the king's request. Trying to buy themselves some time, they ask the king to tell them the dream and they will offer their interpretation. Well, this only infuriates him. In his mind, they were the ones paid to study the stars and have insight into the mysteries of life. Yet here they are standing before the most powerful man on earth at the time and are forced to admit that there was not a man on earth who could meet the king's demand. Notice what they say in verse 11:

"The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

Despite all of their Babylonian wisdom and knowledge of their world, despite being among the power brokers of the day, the king's wisest men were but helpless fools who had no real knowledge of what was going on. Babylon's wisest and brightest were incapable of seeing and discerning this dream that had

come from God. It is a vivid illustration of how the wisdom of the world is nothing but foolishness to God.

1 Corinthians 2:14—“The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The best that his kingdom had to offer were no help to King Nebuchadnezzar. When it came to solving his problems, they couldn't get the job done. When it came to providing solutions, Babylon's wisdom is insufficient. It is mere proof that the world, with all of its astrology and pseudo-science and false religion and political theory, it cannot unlock the mysteries of life and its meaning apart from the truth that is only revealed by the Spirit of God. Jesus prayed:

Matthew 11:25—“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.”

To have a true understanding of life, you can't be spiritually and intellectually proud. You've got to humble yourself like a little child and put all of your faith in the Lord Jesus. For it is Christ who is the key to unlocking the meaning of life in the universe.

The king's decree

Notice that verse 12 goes to say, “Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out.” Recognizing that his royal advisers could offer him no solutions, he gives the executive order to have them all put to death. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed. Older translations

say that they ‘began killing the wise men.’ The idea is that they were in the process of being rounded up for the purpose of being executed. And verse 13 says that they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Even though they were lower in the ranks at this point, their lives were also on the line. It was a political decision from the top that had personal repercussions and consequences. Their very lives were at stake.

2—The IMPORTANCE of Daniel’s faith (2:13-18)

“So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king’s captain, ‘Why is the decree of the king so urgent?’ Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king. Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

None of Nebuchadnezzar’s royal advisers were able to give him insight, so he issues the decree to have them all put to death. And it included Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Once again, these four young men find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Through no fault of their own, they learn they’ve been sentenced die. We might could say that it is a prime example of the bottom falling out of life. But rather than resorting to panic and self preservation, it becomes an opportunity for their faith in the Lord. Notice how Daniel’s faith is on display:

Composure in a crisis

Verse 14 says, “Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.”

The idea is that his reaction wasn’t knee jerk, but level headed and calm. He had composure that came from a mind that was informed by truth and a heart that looked to the Lord God as the One who was in perfect control of his situation.

2 Timothy 1:7—“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Such poise under pressure is the same attitude and Spirit of the Lord Jesus:

Isaiah 53:7—“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”

Stephen demonstrated such an attitude when standing before the Sanhedrin about to be stoned for his faith:

Acts 6:15—“And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”

It is basic human nature to want to defend ourselves, to try and take matters into our own hands when we experience crisis, whether it be false accusation, feeling mistreated, or an injustice of some kind. We can allow the fear of not being in control of our situation lead us to say and do things that are not in keeping with our Christian testimony. Daniel doesn’t do that. Instead, he is a man with poise and composure though under fire. Faith, not fear, is driving his decisions and reactions.

Courage before the king

In verse 15, Daniel makes a bold move. He calmly asked the king's captain why the king's decree was so urgent. So Arioch explains the matter to Daniel, who then goes in and requests the king to appoint him a time where he himself will make the interpretation of the dream known to the king. That's a bold move because no person ever went into the king's presence without an invitation. And for the king to give him time was unusual because he had condemned his cabinet for asking the same thing. Keep in mind, however, what was said of Daniel in the first chapter:

Daniel 1:17—“As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Daniel's faith in God leads to favor from God who arranged the circumstances of his life for such a time as this. He was in Babylon for this very moment!

Confidence on his knees

Notice the first thing that Daniel does in verse 17. It says that he “went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.” In other words, he got together with fellow believers and had a prayer meeting.

David Jeremiah—*“Daniel needed time, not to look up answers in a dream manual, consult the stars or the nearest psychoanalyst, but to do what all of us should do in tense situations, and that is to pray.”*

God had given Daniel the gift of understanding dreams and visions, but his confidence is not in his gifts; his confidence is in his God! His confidence is seen

through his actions of taking the matter directly to God in prayer. And that's what faith does. It is what Paul writes about when he says:

Philippians 4:6-7—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus said:

Matthew 6:25—“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

With all the craziness of our culture, you and I can end up worried and frustrated by it all. Or, we can calmly take up the situation on our knees in prayer and confident trust. It is far more productive to talk to God about it all than it is to worry ourselves into a pitiful state. Regardless of how an election might go this year, no matter who is in the White House, I know who is on the throne! And so we've seen the insufficiency of Babylon's wisdom and the importance of Daniel's faith. Notice one final thing:

3—The INSIGHT of God's Word (2:19-23)

“Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; He reveals deep and hidden

things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for 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 matter."

Daniel takes the matter to God in prayer, and the Lord then supplies him with spiritual insight into his situation. The wise men of Babylon thought they could get the answer from the stars. Daniel knows the One who sits above the stars. Babylon's wise men thought that they could serve the king by their own wisdom. Daniel knows that it is only the fear of God that leads to wisdom and knowledge. The Bible says of the Lord Jesus:

Colossians 2:3—“In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

What was shown to Daniel

Verse 19 says, “Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.” The word ‘mystery’ there or secret is used eight times in chapter 2. It refers to a hidden truth that is revealed. The idea is that God had hidden prophetic truth in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and enabled only Daniel to both know the dream and its interpretation. It had to do with God’s future plan concerning the nations. So that in an act of prophetic revelation, the Holy Spirit reveals to Daniel what the king had dreamed and what it all meant. Upon receiving such insight, Daniel blessed the God of heaven. He worships the Lord.

What was shared by Daniel

From his prayer seen in verses 20-23, we see how Daniel praises God for the truth of who He is and what He does. And he makes some powerful statements

about God's attributes that will greatly encourage the heart of any believer.

Notice how he praises:

- God's wisdom

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might." Daniel worships the Lord in recognition of His wisdom and power.

Wisdom and might don't belong to the world. They belong to God and can only be found in relationship to Him. He's the One with all the answers! Unbelief looks to all the king's horses and all the king's men. Faith looks to God. For those who want to keep God out of politics, who claim that Jesus isn't Lord at their political rallies, you better think again. You can't read the Bible and ignore the political realm. Scripture is packed with political concerns including laws, statutes, ordinances, kingdoms, empires, judges, courts, kings, and taxes. And God is active on every page engaging in the political affairs of mankind in both blessing and judgment. He establishes governments and dismantles them. He places people in strategic political places while removing others from their political perch.

Tony Evans — *"Given this reality, it is unfortunate that God and politics are far too often disconnected from each other as those connecting them too closely is anathema. The failure to properly connect God's relationship to politics based on His Word has left individuals, political leaders, and nations void of the knowledge needed to govern society as the Creator intended."*

- God's ways

"He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells

with Him.” Daniel is expressing his confidence that no matter how powerful a ruler might be, God is still sovereign over the affairs of life. Whether it be through national elections or military conquest:

Psalm 75:6-7—“Promotion comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another.”

- God’s willingness

“To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for 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 matter.” Daniel worships as he sees how his own life had been touched by the grace of God. The Lord was the source of his wisdom, strength, and salvation.

Now, as I close, let me give you some simple truths for you and I to remember...

- God speaks into our situations by His prophetic Word
- God supplies His servants with strength to meet life’s pressures
- God is sovereign over kings and nations

Our God is the sovereign Lord over the nations, and there is nothing that will keep the kingdom of His Son from coming to pass. That is something that you and I can be absolutely certain of. He is the One who puts kings on the throne and presidents in office, and He takes them down. He is the One who raises up nations and empires, and He takes them down. Folks, you and I can’t help but look at the history of this nation and see that the hand of God has been all over it from its very beginning. I read a book not too long ago by Michael Medved entitled, “The American Miracle: Divine Providence In the Rise of the Republic.”

Through use of stories from America's history, he makes the point that the history of the United States displays an uncanny pattern. At moments of crisis, when the odds against success seem overwhelming and disaster looks imminent, an Unseen Hand intervenes. He shows story after story of how this is the case.

The reason I tell you that is to remind you that nations and kings are raised up by the Lord, and they are taken down by Him. When nations and individuals find themselves in a mess all the king's horses and all the king's men can never unscramble the egg. The Lord God of Israel is the God of nations and the One who reveals mysteries. He is the only One with the answers that you and I need. History is in His omnipotent hand, and He is bringing human history to a climactic moment when all the kingdoms of men come to an end, and the kingdom of Christ is established forever and ever. What matters is whether or not you have surrendered your life to Him in faith. And at this hour in our own nation, there is nothing more important than whether or not you have repented of your sins and trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.