

The Night Of Retribution

Daniel 5

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First we're going to read Daniel 5:30-31, then we'll go back to verse 1. It says, "That very night..."—there's our night scene—"...Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old."

We learn from history and from Scripture that there is a last night for every nation and a last night for every individual. One of the reasons why this chapter is so sobering is that it is a wake-up call, a reminder that there is a last night for every nation. When I think about the United States of America and how young it is, I think that America is too young to die. But there will be a last night for our nation, and there will be a last night for every individual. So this is a very sobering, wake-up story in the Bible where we see that actually there was a last night for the nation of Babylon and the last night for the individual, the King of Babylon. His name was Belshazzar. The last night for both of these happened in one night.

The Bible is giving us this story to wake us up. If you're not a believer, it's a wake-up call to you. If you are a believer, it's an assurance that God is in control. God sets up kings and He takes down kings.

There are three characteristics of this night scene. We will see the night of revelry, the night of revelation and the night of retribution.

First we'll look at the night of revelry, verses 1-4. "Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand." So this was a massive party in the big banquet hall in the splendid palace of Babylon. "While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone."

Every time you see a drunken king in a big debauched party like this and they're committing sacrilege by worshipping gods of gold and silver, you can bet that God is not far off. The God, in whose very hand the king's breath is held, is taking notice of this drunken, debauched party. This is a classic example of wine, women and song. The king is throwing a big bash for a thousand of his lords, and they drank wine.

Now let me set the context for this big party and make a few preliminary remarks before we dissect this text. The chronology is 539 BC. It takes place 30 years after chapter 4. One of the challenges we have in reading the Bible in its historical setting is that there are big gaps between chapters.

At the close of chapter 4, there is the story of the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who is humbled by God and, I believe, converted. And there is a very good chance we'll see King Nebuchadnezzar in heaven. That will be mind blowing. He actually worshipped the God of heaven, because he was humbled. So this gap between chapters is about 30-40 years, going from Nebuchadnezzar being king and Belshazzar being king.

What we're going to see in chapter 5 is not only God's retribution on this wicked king, but we're going to see fulfilled Bible prophecy.

One of the reasons why critics attack the book of Daniel is because it is full of prophecy. Prophecy is evidence that it is a divine book. The Bible is the only book that has 100% accuracy in predicting the future. Prophecy is all through the Bible, from the book of Genesis and fulfilled in the book of Revelation and there is even future prophecy in Revelation that is yet to be fulfilled. The Bible is unique in religious writings in that it predicts the future, indicating it is from God. So the critics of the Bible, those who don't believe in God or the supernatural, want to undermine the message of the book of Daniel because it is prophetic, which is evidence of the hand of God. Everything God has prophesized is fulfilled and will yet be fulfilled.

Another reason why they attack the book of Daniel is because this book has miracles in it. We see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown into a fiery furnace in chapter 3. We're going to see, in chapter 5, a disembodied hand with fingers show up that writes on the wall in the banquet hall, giving a message of judgment to the king in the middle of a party. We see Daniel thrown into a lion's den but was sustained and protected by God in chapter 6. Daniel is the book of miracles, and the critics can't have that, so they deny that the book of Daniel is real; they just think it's fictitious or made-up stories.

A third reason they attack the book of Daniel is that in chapter 5, verse 1, they say that Belshazzar was not the king of Babylon when it fell. They say that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. They said that up until 1854, when archeologists in modern Iraq were digging and unearthed a cylinder. On that cylinder was a reference to King Nabonidus and his son, King Belshazzar. So all the critics of the Bible had to be silenced, because archeology had proven that there was a King Belshazzar.

Then we also discovered on this cylinder that had a lot of writing on it, that King Nabonidus was king for 17 years but was not in Babylon. He actually lived outside of Babylon, and his son, Belshazzar, was co-regent with him at the same time. So there were two kings.

This explains why, in the story, when Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall that Belshazzar said, "I will make him third ruler in my kingdom," not the second ruler. There was Nabonidus, Belshazzar and then Daniel would have been the third ruler. So all of this is consistent with Scripture, but the critics of the Bible don't believe the Bible is inspired by God or that it is the Word of God.

All the concerns we have about the historicity, accuracy, infallibility of Scripture—if you were to

draw it in a line on a blackboard, over the years when the archeological digs were done, the line does not increase but decreases. Yes, there are some things that concern some people, but over the years it has been discovered that all we need to do is keep digging, keep searching, and archeology will validate the Bible.

But I don't need archeology to substantiate for me that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe the Bible is God's Word. I believe God has used His Word by His Spirit to transform lives, and it is evidenced today. And it has fulfilled prophecy, as well. But archeology has never disproved the Bible; it has always proven the Bible. Or you might say the Bible has proven archeology to be true, because our authority lies not in archeology but in the Scriptures. But the archeologists were silenced when that cylinder was discovered.

In Daniel 2:21, it says that God "removes kings and raises up kings." So what we're going to see is this prophecy of chapter 2 fulfilled in chapter 5. The background for this is that in chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great image, a great statue. It had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet and toes of iron and clay. Then a rock came from heaven and smote this statue on the feet and it fell. The rock then grew and became an everlasting kingdom.

This statue was a picture of all the Gentile ruling empires of the world from the time of Babylon until the end of time when Jesus Christ returns. That stone in the dream was cut without hands from heaven. It was a reference to Jesus Christ and the Second Coming. It is establishing His eternal kingdom on earth. It will be the millennium flowing into the eternal state.

The king had the dream, he couldn't interpret it, his wise men couldn't interpret it, then Daniel was called in and he interpreted the dream. The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon, the breast and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire, the belly and thighs of brass represented the Grecian Empire, the legs of iron represented the Roman Empire and the feet and toes of iron and clay represented the revived Roman Empire, which is still future to us.

All these other kingdoms have come and gone as God predicted, so that's why the critics have said that this couldn't have been written beforehand but after it happened. They think it was being written as history but was posing as prophecy. But the truth is that it was written years before any of these kingdoms came to be.

And we're going to see the change from the head of gold as Babylon to the breast and arms of silver as the Medo-Persian Empire in our story.

Belshazzar had this great feast, chapter 5, verse 1. It was a night of debauchery and partying. It was a wicked party. The fact that women were involved—wives and concubines—means that it was a big, drunken orgy. It was a wild, crazy, fearless party where they were getting drunk. Verse 2, in the middle of this feast, Belshazzar "gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in

Jerusalem.” These items were taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar 70 years before this story.

In this text, it says “father Nebuchadnezzar.” In the Hebrew culture in their language at this time, they had no word for “grandfather.” They used “father” to speak of their heritage, but it wasn’t really a father but a grandfather. They had no word to convey the concept of grandfather.

So it was Belshazzar’s grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, 70 years before during the captivity of the people of Judah by Babylon, who carried them away into captivity as slaves. That’s when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were taken into captivity. They were all transported to Babylon.

Verse 3, “Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.”

So this is sacrilege. The party goes from debauchery to sacrilege. They were actually doing it in defiance of the God of Israel. “Hey, let’s mock the God of Israel! Let’s mock the God of the Hebrews! Let’s get these holy, temple cups and trays my grandfather brought and fill them with wine and let’s worship the gods of gold and silver!” They were mocking the God of Israel.

They were also committing idolatry. It says they “praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.” We will see that these gods do not see, hear and do not know. So they turned to idolatry.

This is just a picture of what we see going on today in our culture. Man hasn’t changed. This is a just a crazy, wild party, and man’s heart has not changed.

Now all of this was taking place while the city was surrounded by the Medo-Persian Empire. While this party was going on, the Medo-Persian army was outside the city of Babylon trying to break into the city.

You say, “Why would the king throw a party with the enemy outside the city walls?! They’re going to attack them, and the king says, ‘Let’s party!’”

Let me give you a couple of reasons why he would do this. Number one, he had a false confidence in the strength of the city. Many of the sins committed by the king and Babylon are being committed by America today. We have a false sense of security. “We’re America. We’re strong. We’re the greatest nation on earth. Nothing could ever happen to us!” We’re foolish to think that.

The walls of Babylon were a circumference of 17 miles. They were 22 feet thick, so you could put four chariots abreast and ride them around the top of the walls. They were 90 feet high. They had over 100 guard towers that rose another 30 feet higher than the 90 feet. Inside the walls was a moat and two more walls. There were gates to the city made out of bronze. The

city was seemingly impregnable.

So no doubt the king was thinking that no one could take Babylon. No one was stronger than them. "So let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we do not die. We're going to party hardy and have a great time!" He was being foolish by having a false sense of security.

Many people have the same concept today. "It can't happen to me. I'm healthy, young and strong. I have wealth. I have a good job. I have a healthy family. I have my religion. I go to church. I'm a good person. I won't be judged. I won't die."

A couple of lessons we'll learn from the story are the brevity of life and the certainty of death. The Bible teaches that life is short and death is certain. It says, "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Don't just live your life and then wake up and realize you've wasted it. You haven't had the right priorities, haven't glorified God and you will be judged for your sin. Wake up before it's too late.

Many people have a false sense of security. They think they're going to heaven because they're good, they're religious, they're baptized or they've led a good life. They don't realize that's a false hope.

"My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame

But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand."

So make sure you're not trusting your religion or your wealth or your health; put your trust in Jesus Christ.

A second reason why Belshazzar was partying that night, even with the enemy outside the walls, might have been because the sinful tendency we all have to distract ourselves in times of danger and difficulty. When we don't want to think, we go to a party and get drunk. Or we might go to an amusement park. I discovered this week that Disneyworld in Orlando, Florida was celebrating its 50th anniversary.

The word "amusement" means "not to think." The word "muse" means "think" and the negative prefix "amuse" means "don't think." When you go to Disneyworld it means you forget all your problems and sorrows and have a great time until all the bills come due to pay for it. You have to mortgage your home just to get tickets to get in. It's a time not to think and to drown your

sorrows in having a good time. So we try to escape from our problems with alcohol or drinking or entertainment.

One of the themes in this story is alcohol—wine was flowing. And there was debauchery. The Bible warns of the danger of drink. Proverbs 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” That’s a nice way of the Proverbs to say, “You’re stupid!” There’s no need for you to have alcohol.

“Well, I have the liberty.”

“Be careful you’re not brought into bondage. Be careful that you don’t stumble a weaker brother or sister. Be careful that it doesn’t take control of your life.” Paul says, “I will not be brought under the power of anything.” Alcohol has ruined marriages, families, homes and lives. It has brought death and destruction. It’s a wicked drug, and I think you’d do well without it.

You say, “I don’t think you should tell us what to do!” But the Bible says that you’re a fool to be drunk. If you drink alcohol and get intoxicated, you’re a fool. The Bible warns us over and over about its dangers.

This king was doing things and saying things that would be judged by God. Because of the alcohol in his system, he was doing foolish things. This also was sacrilegious. It means that it was against God, against religion or against holy things. So Belshazzar was purposefully defying God. It was also idolatrous; they worshipped gods of gold and silver.

This is a description of the United States of America: intoxicated, sacrilegious and idolatrous. We’ll see that as a nation we’re sinning against the light that we’ve had from God’s Word. Remember that God will bring retribution. “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” It is true of a nation and it is true of an individual.

Now, secondly, we move to the night of revelation. It was a night of revelry and partying, and it was also a night of revelation, verses 5-29. The night of revelry became the night of revelation. The folly and the feast brought forth the finger of God writing on the wall.

It first starts with God crashing the party, in verse 5, with the finger of God. “In the same hour....” That’s thrown in there on purpose. In the middle of this drunken, debauched feast, “The fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace...”—so it was on the banquet wall—“...and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.”

It’s doesn’t tell us this, but Belshazzar sobered up real fast. If there was a Guinness Book of World Records of the drunkest guy sobering up the fastest, it would be Belshazzar. This is another reason why the critics say the book of Daniel isn’t true. It’s because of what was on the wall of the banquet hall was a hand.

The king didn’t know what the handwriting said and his wise men didn’t know what it said.

Because it was written in Hebrew and they were Chaldeans, they didn't understand the language, so they didn't know what it said. They didn't know how to interpret it. But they knew it was a bad sign.

Now why didn't the king think it was a good sign? Because his conscience was bothering him. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." This finger of God caused him to fear.

There are several references to the finger of God in the Bible. Exodus 8:19 is a reference to the finger of God when the plague of lice was brought upon the Egyptian nation. Pharaoh's magicians said that they couldn't duplicate the plague because, "This is the finger of God." In Exodus 31:18, when God gave us the Ten Commandments, it was "written with the finger of God." So there was the finger of God writing the Commandments of God. In Luke 11:20, Jesus said, "I cast out demons with the finger of God." "The finger of God" speaks of God's power.

My favorite reference is John 8:6, when they brought the woman before Jesus condemned for adultery. They said that Moses, in the Law, condemns her, so she should be stoned. Then they asked Jesus, "But what do You say?" Jesus stooped down, took His finger and wrote on the ground. He probably was writing their names and their sins after their names. "Rabbi Hallel—adultery." Then Rabbi Hallel saw his name written and said, "I have a dental appointment right now," and he took off. They all began to slither away like snakes into the crowd, until it was only Jesus and the woman there. He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord."

So Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

I believe this message written on the palace wall was actually the Word of God, a message from God. So they would have to bring in the man of God, Daniel, to be able to read it and interpret it.

So we move from the finger of God, in verse 5, to the fear of the king, in verses 6-9. This is so graphic. "Then the king's countenance changed..."—you betcha it did—"...and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.' Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing..."—I like that—"...or make known to the king its interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished."

So all this takes place in the middle of this drunken feast. The king called all his wise men in, but they couldn't read what was on the wall and the king was completely freaked out. And he was freaked out because of his guilty conscience. "Conscience makes cowards of us all."

Conscience is a God-given thing. But it only works to your good as it is educated by the light of God's Word. You must feed the conscience information. It must have the standards of God's Word, because you could have a seared conscience, you could have an evil conscience, you could have a lied-to conscience.

It's kind of like a sun dial. A sun dial can only tell time when the sun is hitting it. A sun dial can't tell time at night. A sun dial needs light to be able to work. And your conscience needs the light of God's Word to be able to discern good from evil.

Even without the light of God's Word, He has given us a conscience, so the king was freaking out, even though he didn't know what it said or what it meant. Because of his sinful life, it made him a coward, as it so often does with us. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they hid themselves because they heard God's voice. God hadn't said anything to them about sinning yet, but they knew they had sinned and were afraid.

When Herod Antipas killed John the Baptist and then heard about Jesus' ministry, he immediately said about Jesus that "John the Baptist is risen from the dead....This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" He said this because "Conscience makes cowards of us all." It's so very true.

Maybe you're living with a guilty conscience, and when something goes wrong, you're fearful.

I remember before I came to the Lord when I was driving and I saw a policeman, I was freaking out. You don't want to get pulled over and get arrested, because you have things in your car you shouldn't have in your car. So you're always looking in your rearview mirror. You're always paranoid thinking you're going to get busted.

How wonderful it was to become a Christian and not be afraid anymore! Not live in fear anymore! Not be concerned about those things or have a guilty conscience.

So I like in verse 6 where it says that "His thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other." This guy was in bad shape. How sad to see the wickedness of the king.

Then we move to the faithfulness of Daniel, verses 10-29. I like this section. Now before Daniel comes on the scene, we see the queen come into the banquet hall. This queen is not the queen of Belshazzar; she's the mother of Belshazzar, so she is the queen mother. So the king is having this big, drunken, debauched orgy or party, God shows up and writes on the wall and his grandmother shows up. So he is totally sobered up now.

Belshazzar listens to his grandmother, who says, basically, "You should have learned your lesson, young man! Remember your grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar? He walked in pride and God humbled him. But he did have some dreams—I just remembered. I came to tell you that there was a man in his kingdom named Daniel. In Daniel, the Spirit of God dwelt. He had the wisdom and understanding to interpret dreams and reveal hidden secrets. So you need to call

for Daniel.” So Belshazzar agreed to call Daniel, who was then called into the banquet hall.

Isn't it interesting that we can disregard God, we can blaspheme Him, we can turn to idolatry and sacrilege, have a big, drunken party, but when things fall apart in our lives, we say, “I need God! I need to go to church! I need a minister!”

The king called for Daniel, and Daniel came in, verse 13. The king turns to the man of God at this time, and Daniel begins to speak, in verse 17. “Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, ‘Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.’”

I like to look at Daniel in this section as a faithful man of God and as a faithful preacher, prophet or herald of God's Word. He didn't compromise. He didn't water it down. He didn't avoid the issue. He spoke boldly before the king. And in verse 17, he rejected the king's gifts. He could have gotten a beautiful, new robe.

By the way, Daniel was probably in his 80s, and he's still going strong. I like that. Daniel was offered a new robe, a gold chain and the position of third ruler in the kingdom. But Daniel refused them. “Keep your gifts. Give them to someone else.” The New Testament is very clear that we're not to preach the Word for gain. But we're to do it as a calling from God, and we're to do it faithfully to God. Daniel said that he would do two things: He would read the handwriting and he would interpret it. And, again, that's what a faithful pastor is to do: read the text, explain the text and apply the text to God's people. The Bible says that's what a pastor is to do. So Daniel said he would faithfully do that.

Then Daniel rehearses the king's history for him. “O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father...”—so this was actually his grandfather—“...a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.”

“But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.” The Bible says that “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Verse 21, “Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.” That's a summary of the book of Daniel. God rules from heaven and appoints over the earth whom He will.

Verse 22, “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house 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, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.”

So Daniel speaks to the king, rejects his gifts and then rehearses the king’s history. The king should have learned. What a great point: we should learn by other’s mistakes. We shouldn’t duplicate the sins and mistakes of other people. One of the benefits of reading the Bible is that we can learn about the sins of others so we don’t do them ourselves.

David committed adultery. Don’t do that. It’s not a good idea. Peter denied his Lord. Don’t do that. Abraham fell in his faith. Don’t do that. Trust the Lord. You can even take the mistakes of godly people and say, “I don’t want to do those things.”

So Daniel told the king that he should have learned from his grandfather’s mistakes. He was lifted up with pride, and he had to be abased.

Then Daniel rebukes the king in four areas. In verse 22, he said that Belshazzar sinned against the light. He said, “You knew all this.” Belshazzar knew all these things. He sinned with his eyes wide open.

When I think of America, that there are churches on every corner, there is Christian television, there is Christian radio, there are Bibles galore—in almost every home in America—yet we sin against the light of God’s Word. In Romans 1:17-19—what a great cross reference—it says that God has revealed Himself, yet we “suppress the truth.” We push down the truth. We “worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever,” verse 25. So “God gave them over to a debased mind,” verse 28.

I believe that’s where we are in America right now. I believe we are a nation of debased people or reprobates. We have leadership in America that is reprobate. The word “reprobate” means “does not work.” It means that it’s broken. As I listen to some of our politicians I think, They’re broken. Their minds don’t work. They can’t reason right from wrong. They’re reprobate. That’s because we’ve suppressed the truth. We’ve pushed down the light of God’s Word, sinning against the light.

When Jesus was speaking woes against Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, where all His miracles were performed, He said that “It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you,” because they had the greater light. This is where His Galilean ministry took place. These two pagan cities would repent, but these three would not, even though they had all this revelation.

Then, in verse 23, they deliberately defied the God of heaven by worshipping with these vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem. They also committed idolatry by worshipping “the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know.” We also are idolatrous in America.

And in verse 23, “And the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.” God’s hand is holding your breath, and God has all your ways, but you haven’t glorified Him. The chief goal or great purpose of life is to glorify God. And when you’re debauched, you’re not glorifying God. When you’re being sacrilegious, you’re not glorifying God. When you’re being idolatrous, you’re not glorifying God. When you’re materialistic, you’re not glorifying God.

So we are sinning in America against the light, both nationally and individually. We have not glorified the very God in whose hand our breath is held. This is illogical; God keeps you alive, and God keeps you breathing at night when you’re sound asleep and you’re not awake to know that you have to keep breathing involuntarily. God sustains you in bed. When you go to bed at night and wake up in the morning, you should have a praise service. “Praise God, I made it through the night! Praise God, I’m still breathing! Praise God for His goodness to me.” Glorify God, because that’s the purpose for which we were created.

Then, in verses 25-29, Daniel interprets the writing. “Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: ‘MENE, MENE...’”—that was given twice for emphasis—“...TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’ This is the interpretation of each word.” So Daniel reads the inscription and then he interprets it.

“Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it.” In other words, Belshazzar’s number is up. His days are over.

“Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.” God has put him in the scales, and he’s a light-weight. He doesn’t measure up. He falls “short of the glory of God.”

“Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” That’s why the word is “divided.”

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

So number one, you’ve been numbered. The Bible teaches that life is very short compared with eternity. It’s like a vapor of smoke that appears and vanishes away. It’s like a flower that springs up fresh in the morning and then is withered with the noon heat. “So teach us to number our days.” The Bible also teaches that death is universal; we cannot escape death. I believe that God knows the exact day when we will die.

Sometimes that thought comes to my mind. If I’m doing something a little dangerous where I could get hurt I think, God, I don’t know if it is Your plan for me to die today. The Lord can take me home anytime He wants. No one has a guarantee that they’ll be here tomorrow. But if you’re going to die tonight, don’t go home and eat, drink and be merry. Get on your knees and worship God. Get your priorities straight.

So our days are numbered by God. Read Psalm 139. They were numbered before we were ever born. You can rest in that.

And then when we've been put on the scales, we're all lightweights; we've all sinned and fallen short. If you put me on the scale and God's Ten Commandments on the other side of the scale, then I don't measure up. But aren't you glad that when Jesus died on the Cross, He gave us His righteousness? So then He tips the scales in our favor. Having His righteousness, then we are accepted by God. It's called justified before a holy God.

Then the word "divided" means it was God's plan and purpose to remove the head of gold from the statue and to replace it with the breast and arms of silver, the Medo-Persian Empire.

I almost chuckle because Belshazzar, in verse 29, "clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom." But Daniel knew that the king was only going to last for a few more minutes. Big deal! I put in the margin of my Bible right there, "Take the whole world, but give me Jesus!" I don't need your clothes, your chain or status.

Now notice the closing, verses 30-31, the night of retribution. "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old." So the head of gold has now been replaced by the breast and arms of silver, as God said it would.

This is a long story, but basically it is telling us that God holds our breath in His hand, that God has our ways all planned out, that God is the giver of life and the taker of life and we should live for the glory of God and not for our sinful lusts.

It could be that the king heard Daniel interpret the handwriting and said, "Ah, I don't believe it! It's not going to happen!" Or he may have believed it but thought he had more time. "My father had seven years of insanity eating grass in the field. Maybe God will give me seven years. Maybe I'll be crazy for a while. Maybe when I'm old, I'll give my heart to Jesus. Maybe when I'm really old, I'll give my life to God. I'm young, having fun; I don't want to be hampered."

We always think tomorrow. We like to procrastinate. The Bible says, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

If only the king had fallen to his knees and cried out, "Lord, save me! God, forgive me!" God would then have shown mercy to the king and spared his life. But God said that He will judge the wicked. God is righteous. When God weighs us, He weighs us righteously, appropriately and fairly. And we need the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account in order to be saved.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:37-38, "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be....They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will

the coming of the Son of Man be.” It was God’s judgment on the wicked.

I think of the rich fool who had the bumper crop. He said, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?...I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Take your ease.’”

But when he went to bed that night, God said, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?”

If you were to die right now, would you go to heaven? Or would you go to hell? There are only two destinations after death: heaven or hell. So you must trust Christ right now with your salvation, because you don’t know what a day might bring forth. “Now is the accepted time; behold; now is the day of salvation.” Don’t be a fool; trust Christ immediately.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you’re not sure you’re a child of God—maybe you don’t know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you’ve never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let’s pray.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for my sin. I pray that You’ll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We’d like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we’d like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, “I prayed to accept Christ.” We’ll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.