

## INTRODUCTION

Dandy Don Meredith (from Mt. Vernon, Texas) used to be on Monday Night football with Howard Cosell. When a game was already decided, he would start to sing the old country song, “Turn out the Lights, the Party’s Over.” Well, 2,600 years ago, there was a party in Babylon, and God said, “Turn on the lights—and read this—the party’s over.”

So far in our study of the book of Daniel, we have seen in chapter 1 the faith of young Daniel, who made the commitment not to defile himself. In chapter 2 we saw Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the multi-metallic statue interpreted by Daniel. He prophesied the rise and fall of four world empires and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. In chapter 3 we observed the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who discovered it’s cool in the furnace when Jesus is walking with you. Then last week we saw Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream, a great tree was cut down. We learned of the amazing conversion of Nebuchadnezzar from a man of pride to a man of praise.

Before we begin our text for today, we must understand the historical setting of chapter 5. There is a great deal of historical information outside the Bible about these events. Particularly, the Greek historian Herodotus (500 B.C.) writes about these events. He even dates the fall of the Babylonian Empire on October 12, 539 B.C.

When chapter 5 opens, Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for about 25 years; and several of his relatives who spent a little time on the throne of Babylon. By now, Daniel is probably in his seventies and he is living in semi-retirement. He is no longer a VIP, because he was Nebuchadnezzar’s friend, and Nebuchadnezzar is long gone.

One of Nebuchadnezzar’s sons-in-law (he had many, because he had many wives and children) is the official king. His name is Nabonidus—he doesn’t appear in this chapter—his son Belshazzar appears as king (he is actually co-regent with his father). History tells us Nabonidus was a wicked, but shrewd king, and by now he has left the city of Babylon and is living in what we would now call Saudi Arabia.

When Chapter 5 begins, the mighty army of the Medes and Persians had conquered all of the territory of Babylon except for the city of Babylon itself. This huge army of Cyrus the Great is camped outside the great city. At the time of these events, the city of Babylon is under siege by the Persian army. It is fully surrounded. All the gates are locked and barred, though the massive wall surrounding the city provides state-of-the-art security. It is impossible for an army to break through.

With a twenty-year food supply laid up and the Euphrates River running right through the city, Belshazzar is confident he can simply wait out the siege. So secure is he that the walls are virtually unguarded. All that is needed is to rally the morale of the people, so he put on a huge banquet, probably with the intent of putting a good spin on this recent turn of events.

Daniel 5:

Daniel 5:1-9. “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. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lamp stand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, ‘Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.’ [His father, Nabonidus was number one, he was only number two, so number three was as good as he could offer]. Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.”

First, there was a:

### **I. SHALLOW CELEBRATION (vs. 1-9)**

Archaeologists have excavated much of ancient Babylon, uncovering banquet halls capable of seating between 5,000 and 10,000 people at a time. Belshazzar throws a real wingding. He invites a thousand lords, (that means men) and they surely brought their wives and concubines, too. Wine was flowing like water. There was music and entertainment. It was *party time*. But wait ... what’s wrong with this picture? Their enemies were camped outside their gates: the Persian army surrounded them. It may be they were “rocking out” to simply forget they were surrounded by a terrible enemy and they had nowhere to go, so hey, you only go around once in life—so let’s party hard!

Or it could be they were having a party for another reason. Even in the face of an army laying siege to their city, Belshazzar was confident. After all, Herodotus tells us they had a twenty-year supply of food stored up, and there was plenty of seed and arable land within the city walls. What about water? The city had been built around a part of the Euphrates River. It flowed under the city wall in the north, then out under the south wall, so they had plenty of food and water. They thought they were invincible. Who’s afraid of the big, bad Persian army? Not us! Let’s party. For whatever reason, they were celebrating. But it was a shallow celebration because the smoke from a thousand Persian campfires still filtered into the palace. Obviously, the king consumed too much of his wine and his judgement was clouded. He did a stupid thing. He said, “Remember those golden goblets King Nebuchadnezzar took from the Hebrew Temple? They are over in the museum. Go get ‘em and let’s drink out of ‘em. We’ll show that puny Hebrew God who is in charge around here.”

So they got the sacred goblets God had reserved for a unique purpose and they poured another round. To add insult to injury, they used the implements of God to toast the gods of gold and silver. Belshazzar was really spitting in God’s face.

Suddenly this hand appeared out of thin air and wrote some words on the wall of the great banquet hall. If you had been there, you would have thought the king was having a heart attack. Barely able to stand, his face was ashen and seized with terror. The raucous laughter turned to deafening silence with all eyes on the king. The king’s eyes were fixed upon the hand as it wrote. As a sense of foreboding and panic fell on the crowd, all eyes turned to the mysterious writing on the wall.

Everyone there recognized something supernatural was happening. It was God crashing the king’s party to say “TURN ON THE LIGHTS—READ THIS—THE PARTY’S OVER.” Can you imagine the scene? Already affected by too much wine, the king’s terror robbed his legs of all strength. The lower part of his body seems to have lost control. Crying aloud in fear, his speech probably slurred, his face is white as a ghost. This is a good time to ask a question: “Why didn’t the king assume the message was a message of victory? Why was he immediately terrified? Because his conscience knew he was doing wrong and that he wasn’t right before the Living God.

So he immediately summoned his wise men to the banquet hall. What did these words on the wall mean? They were three simple words in Aramaic. Anyone could read them—but what did they mean? The king offered a lavish reward to anyone who could interpret the meaning of the handwriting on the wall. But once again, the “experts” were unable to come through (a clear pattern in the Book of Daniel).

Here’s what we can glean from this scene in terms of a modern **Life Application**:

**1) Without Jesus: You may party hard—but judgement is near!**

The enemy was right outside the walls of the capitol city, and inside the people were partying! The tone of the nation was to have all the fun you can while you can, forget the problems, forget responsibilities! Sound familiar? That is the mood of most Americans: live it up! Let’s have fun. Forget God, forget eternity let’s live for *now*!

A few years ago, there was a terrible movie called “Animal House.” It was about a group of college guys who lived to party. They were totally out of control, and that was the point, no rules, no fear, no limits. The movie starred John Belushi, who really did party himself to death with a drug overdose. When teenagers see a movie like that they say, “Yeah, man, let’s do it! Let’s party!” That attitude isn’t new. That’s exactly what Belshazzar was doing. He was drunk. And too many mistakes are made when a person is drunk. In case you need to hear it again, let me say it loudly and let me say it clearly: The Bible condemns drunkenness.

Ephesians 5:18 makes it crystal clear: “Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery,” which means wild thoughts lead to uncontrolled behavior which leads to trouble. I see teenagers and adults today who seem to live to party. The just endure the week so they can live it up on the

weekend, party time! And the whole time there is a God in heaven who at any moment can break in and say, “TURN ON THE LIGHTS THE PARTY’S OVER.”

You say, “Pastor, are you against having fun? Every party has a pooper. That’s why we invited you, party pooper.” I’m not against having fun. It’s just I believe in good, clean fun. In fact, I don’t believe you have to party like Animal House to have fun.

## **2) *In Christ: You have a reason to celebrate!***

One of the sad misconceptions non-Christians have about us who are Christians is we never have any fun. They get the idea that in order to become a Christian they must give up the hope of ever having fun again. Where did they get that idea? From sad sack, joyless Christians who look like they’ve been weaned on dill pickle juice!

In Luke 10:20 Jesus said, “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” The Christian faith is an experience of utter and boundless joy! The world tries to party and they have to use artificial stimulants to get people to loosen up and sing and laugh. We don’t need those things. We have joy from the Holy Spirit! Joy permeates every part of our existence. Jesus said in Luke 15 there is joy in the presence of angels over one sinner who repents. In Luke 19 Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a man who gave a great banquet, a big party. There is plenty of good food, laughter, and fellowship. Some of you think the Christian life is a funeral. Jesus said it is not a funeral, it’s a feast! You want to laugh? Hang around here. You want to celebrate? Join in every time we gather. You want to have fun? Give you heart to Jesus and you’ll enjoy life to its fullest!

Belshazzar’s party was like a lot of the parties held last night in many of these “private clubs” in East Texas. People drag in there and look for friends in low places where the whiskey burns and they *hope* the beer chases their blues away and they *hope* they will be okay. They are deceived if they think those places are an oasis. They are really deserts and judgement is just outside the gate. Instead, come on in and taste of the Living Water and I promise you will never thirst again and you will be a part of an eternal party and there’s never a hangover.

Next we see:

## **II. A SHOCKING REVELATION (vs. 10-28)**

Daniel 5:10-28. “The queen [this is not one of Belshazzar’s wives. This is who we would call the “Queen Mother.” She is probably one of the daughters of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps one of the wives of Nabonidus. When she speaks, everyone listens] hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. ‘O king, live forever!’ she said. ‘Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and

understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.’

[So he calls him and tries to bribe him, verse 16]

Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered the king, ‘You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. 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. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. This 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 Medes and Persians.’”

Daniel was not impressed with Belshazzar’s offer. The gifts and calling of God are not for sale at any price. After all, who wants to be the third highest ruler in a kingdom that would crumble within 24 short hours? Daniel was faithful to preach the Word of the Lord, even though it was an unpopular message. His message was not to tickle the ears of the king to gain his favor. He didn’t preach what the king wanted to hear. He preached what the king needed to hear. I pray God that He will always give me the courage to do the same thing. I don’t want to preach what you want to hear, to tickle your ears, I want to preach the Word of God without compromise and I plan on preaching Jesus until it harelips the devil!

The first thing Daniel communicates is the handwriting on the wall came straight from the finger of God. Remember, the book of Exodus says the Ten Commandments were written on the stone tablets by the finger of God. Jesus said He cast out demons by the finger of God in Luke 11:20.

And in John 8, Jesus stoops down and writes a message in the sand at the feet of the Pharisees who had stones in their hands to kill the woman caught in adultery. That was the finger of God. Many scholars believe what Jesus wrote in the sand at the feet of those men were the words, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPARSIN.” Let’s look at the exact meaning of those words. Belshazzar did not need a dictionary - he could read the words themselves. They said, “**ACCOUNTED, COUNTED, WEIGHED SHORT, DIVIDED UP.**” Belshazzar needed the interpretation of the meaning of these three words as written, in the context of that moment of

history. In effect, it would seem the message on the wall was a kind of abbreviation, summed up in three words. Imagine a three-point message!

The word *Mene* means “God counts,” or numbers. It is written twice for emphasis. God was telling Belshazzar his life and his kingdom were “numbered” and his number was up. The best way to communicate what God was saying would be “Time’s up.” Ready or not, here I come.” God makes it clear to Belshazzar and to us there is a last page in every person’s book. It says “The End.” God knows when that last day is. We don’t. That’s why the Psalmist says in Psalm 90, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

The word *Tekel* means, “God weighs.” He has a set of scales upon each one of us and we must be weighed and the king failed to pass the test. He fell short of God’s standard.

The word *Uparsin* (plural–singular is *Peres*) means “God divides.” He is taking the kingdom of Belshazzar and is going to give it to the Persians. Now that is what God said to Belshazzar. What do you think He is saying to us today? Can you read the writing on the wall? Here’s the **LIFE APPLICATION:**

### **1) Without Jesus: Your goodness will never match God’s righteousness**

How much do you weigh? Now that’s a rude question. If I were to ask that question in America, I’d be in a lot of trouble. Don’t worry because in this category, we are all underweight. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” We should be more concerned about our spiritual weight than our physical weight. God has a scale to weigh us, and He will weigh us someday. On the scale of God it is good to be heavy, the “glory” of God is literally the “weight” of God. If you take all the good things you’ll accomplish in your life and place them on God’s scale, they are like a feather compared to the massive tonnage of God’s glory.

In Revelation 20 we read about the Final Judgement of the Lost. It’s also called the Great White Throne Judgement. Jesus is on the throne. It says in Revelation 20:12, “And I saw the dead, great and small standing before throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Notice it says *books* (plural). What do you think are in those books? It says the “dead” (lost) were judged according to what they had done. I used to think those books contained the various sins of lost people. But I also believe that contain all the good deeds people without Christ perform. I think many people are trusting in their good works to earn acceptance in heaven. I think on that day all those good deeds will be placed on God’s scale and none of them will tip the scale in your favor!

Here’s the good news:

### **2) In Christ: Only God’s free gift of grace matches His righteousness**

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it by grace you have been saved, through faith [and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God] not by works, so that no one can boast.” Don’t despair. You may

be wondering “Who then can be saved, if not a good man?” God provided a way of salvation: it’s called grace. Grace is God’s free gift of mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance He offers us in Jesus Christ. Even if your life has been full of terrible sins, when you accept God’s offer of grace, the scale tips in your favor.

At the cross of Jesus, He was faced with dozens of religious Jews, Pharisees, who were trying their best to earn God’s acceptance. They memorized the Torah, they tithed, they gave alms to the poor, they were piling up a huge mountain of good deeds, and they were lost. On the other hand, there was a common criminal hanging on the cross next to Jesus. His good deeds weren’t piled very high, in fact, his sins far outweighed his goodness. But he put his faith in Jesus, trusted him and the scale tipped in his direction as Jesus said, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” God told Belshazzar he had been weighed and he came up short. What about you? When God looks at your life today, are you trusting your own goodness? Then you’ll come up short, too. But if you have given up the notion of trying to be good enough, and accept God’s grace through faith, then you will find God’s acceptance.

### **III. A SUDDEN CONDEMNATION (vs. 29-30)**

Daniel 5:29-30. “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. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.”

Herodotus indicates Babylon fell that very night as the Babylonians were holding a party.

Remember what we learned about the city? The Euphrates River flowed under the wall from the north and it flowed out under the south wall. Cyrus the Great, the Persian general had a brilliant plan to capture this impregnable city. For almost two years, his soldiers had been far upstream, out of sight, digging a canal to divert the river out into a large swamp below the level of the river. They finished the canal that night, and cut into the bank of the river and the water started flooding into the swamp. Like somebody turning off a faucet, suddenly the water of the mighty Euphrates River stopped flowing into the city. When the water level sank below the walls, the Persian soldiers walked in *under* the walls on the riverbed. Herodotus also tells us the Babylonians were so surprised they surrendered without a fight, and the only casualty was Belshazzar, who when he saw he was defeated, took his own life.

The prophecy of the writing on the wall was fulfilled that very night. What’s the lesson for us?

#### **1) *Without Jesus: You stand condemned now***

Once God had written those words on the palace wall, it was as good as done. It was just a matter of time. The Bible says clearly a person who has not accepted Jesus has an eternal sentence hanging over their head. John 3:18 says, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only son.”

To every person without Christ, God is saying, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Uparsin.” Your days are numbered. You have been weighed on God’s scales and you are found deficient. You are facing terrible judgement—right now.

## **2) *In Christ: You will never face condemnation (so don’t fear)***

Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That’s what salvation is. God removes the penalty for our sin: condemnation, death, and hell. And He removes the threat of judgement, so don’t be afraid.

Did you know the New Testament speaks about a “handwriting?” The word *handwriting* only appears one time in the entire New Testament and it speaks of “handwriting against us.” Just like God’s handwriting was against Belshazzar, and he died, we also have some handwriting against us. It’s explained in Colossians 2:14. It speaks about what happened when Jesus died on the cross, and it says, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances [that means the Old Testament regulations and rules], which was contrary to us, and it took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

I’m sure old Belshazzar could have wished for somebody to come along and just blot out those words God had written that predicted his doom, just erase it! But nobody could and nobody did. Take a moment sometime and just read the book of Leviticus with all the rules and regulations about what you can eat, which day you can do this or that, and on and on. And the same Bible says, “The soul that sins, it shall die.” Every one of these Old Testament laws is like a handwriting against us. We come up short on God’s scale and we are doomed to hell. But thank God for Jesus! What does Colossians 2:14 say? He took this handwriting that was against us and blotted it out. How? He nailed it to the cross. Actually the way this handwriting was blotted out, it was covered by His blood. So the only way you can escape the handwriting that is against you is to allow your sins to be covered with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Will you do that? Wow, What a story! Here is an arrogant man who shook his fist in God’s face by desecrating His property, and God showed up.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are many today who still mock God, and He shows up sometimes today as well. I’ve been told by someone I trust that this is a true story of something that happened just a few years ago the University of Southern California. There was a professor of philosophy at USC who was a deeply committed atheist. His primary goal for one required class was to spend the entire semester attempting to prove God could not exist. His students were always afraid to argue with him because of his impeccable logic. For twenty years, he had taught this class and no one had ever had the courage to stand up to him. Sure, some had argued in class at times, but no one had ever really stood up to him. Nobody would go against him because he had such a reputation.

At the end of every semester, on the last day, he would say to his class of 300 students, “If there’s anyone here, who still believes in God, stand up!” In twenty years, no one ever stood up. They knew what he was going to do next. He would say, “Because anyone who does believe in God is a fool. If God existed, he could stop this piece of chalk from hitting the ground and



breaking. Such a simple task to prove he is God, and yet he can’t do it.” And every year, he would toss the chalk up and let it drop onto the tile floor of the classroom, breaking into many pieces. Most of the students were convinced God couldn’t exist. Certainly, a number of Christians had slipped through, but for twenty years, they had been too afraid to stand up. Well, a few years ago, there was a freshman that happened to get enrolled in the class. He was a Christian, and had heard the stories about this professor. He had to take the class because it was required for his major. And he was afraid. But for three months that semester, he prayed every morning that he would have the courage to stand up no matter what the professor said or what the class thought. Nothing they said or did could ever shatter his faith—he hoped.

Finally the day came. The professor said, “If there is anyone here who still believes in God, stand up!” The professor and the class of 300 people looked at him, shocked, as he stood up at the back of the classroom. The professor shouted, “You FOOL!! If God existed, he could keep this piece of chalk from breaking when it hits the ground!” He proceeded to toss the chalk into the air, but as it fell, it bounced off the sleeve of his shirt, onto the pleat of his pants, down his leg, and off his shoe. As it hit the ground, the chalk rolled away, unbroken. The professor’s jaw dropped as he stared at the chalk. He looked up at the young man, shook his head in disgust and then walked out of the lecture hall.

The young man who had stood up proceeded to walk to the front of the room, and for the next half hour, 300 students stayed and listened as he presented evidences for the existence of God, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Don’t mess with God!

## OUTLINE

### I. A SHALLOW CELEBRATION (1-12).

1. *Without Jesus:* You may party hard—but judgement is near!

2. *In Christ:* You have a reason to celebrate!

"However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." *Luke 10:20*

### II. A SHOCKING REVELATION (13-28)

1. *Without Jesus:* Your goodness will never match God's righteousness



2. *In Christ:* Only God's free gift of grace matches His righteousness



### III. A SUDDEN CONDEMNATION (29-31)

1. *Without Jesus:* You stand condemned now

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." *John 3:18*

2. *In Christ:* You will never face condemnation (so don't fear).

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. *Romans 8:1*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes