

SRM14031 3/2/2014

“Three Words on a Wall”
Daniel 5:24-28, Matt. 25

What do you do when you find yourself in someone asks you for advice or an opinion, and you know it will not be something people want to hear?

Someone seeks your approval in the choice of a church that you know will affirm peoples preferences more than God's principles.

Someone wants you to give your acceptance to their lifestyle, and you don't want to offend, but you know you can't approve of their choice.

Someone wants you to tell them what you think, and you'd rather avoid controversy.

We have been sampling words from the Major Prophets in the past three weeks, and this morning's prophet often found himself in a place where he had to take an unpopular position.

Like Ezekiel, Daniel was a victim of the relocation of Jews in the Babylonian Captivity. He was chosen to serve in the enemy government, and the first challenge was to eat food it was against his conscience and God's law to eat.

It was the first of many times Daniel had to make difficult choices. He often had to speak unpopular words, and live with the consequences.

Daniel lived a long time, and when he was in his eighties, he was called to speak up when it would have been much easier to remain silent.

When he was taken to Babylon, he first served under Nebuchadnezzar. After him, Nabonidous became king. Nabonidous was taken captive by the Medes, so His son, Belshazzar filled in for him.

Babylon, capital of the most powerful empire of its time. An “impregnable” city, with walls wide enough for six chariots to ride abreast each other.

Surrounded by a moat, divided by the Euphrates.

Under siege, but the king, Belshazzar, is not afraid, so he decides to throw a party.

As the party progresses, the king, in his intoxication, calls for the vessels looted from the temple in Jerusalem, and they desecrate them by using them as flagons from which to drink and party.

As they raise them in a toast to their pagan gods, a hand appears, and writes a message on the wall.

[write “Numbered, Numbered, Weighed, Divided”]

It was customary to write a king's victories on a wall, but this was scary. The party was over!

1. People need reminders of their dependence on God because they tend to forget history.

Terrified of the mysterious writing, his knees knocking, the king calls for his Advisors, his "wise men", to interpret the message. They are stumped.

The Queen Mother appears, and reminds him of the aged Daniel's extraordinary wisdom.

Daniel is summoned, and is offered a King's ransom if he can interpret the message.

Daniel turns down the reward, but interprets the message for free.

A. Daniel reminds Belshazzar of his forbear's sins, and how God humbled him. V. 18-21 READ

1. Then Daniel enumerates Belshazzar's own transgressions: Daniel 5:22 (NKJV) "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this."

Even knowing what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar is found guilty of the same sin of pride.

2. His pride had led him to a deeper level of sin in thinking himself beyond Yahweh's reach: v. 23a (NKJV) "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."

3. He had failed to worship or acknowledge God as his Creator and Sustainer: v. 23b "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."

B. People today are guilty as well of such sin.

1. They do not heed God's warnings and judgments on the wicked in the past. Sometimes we hear, but fail to respond.

2. Pride may lead us to think God's standards do not apply to us. We may think we are better than others, and in a position to judge others.

3. We may live in the world as if God did not exist, is not our Creator, and can be ignored, so we do not praise God, but praise the things we have made.

What did God have to say to Belshazzar?

What does he have to say to us, when we do not thank God for what we have, take the things of God as common, and serve things instead of God?

Daniel interprets the words on the wall, and begins by reminding them that it is God's response to Belshazzar's sin that prompted the message: v. 24 "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written."

Trans: People need reminders of their dependence on God because they tend to forget history.

2. The message was one of judgment.

A. The first word, "Numbered" reminds us that God's patience over sin is not endless: v. 26

1. God has numbered each of our days

The fall of Babylon by Cyrus was prophesied more than 100 years before by Isaiah.

David wrote in Psalm 39:4 (NKJV) "LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am.

And Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, [Matthew 6:27 (ESV)] "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

2. God's patience has an ending.

He is loving, but He will not wait for you to forsake your sins forever.

3. Jesus warned His disciples to be in constant readiness.

In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke about the Final Judgment of all people. He applied the truth practically by means of three parables in ch. 25.

It is striking how the three parables parallel the three words on Belshazzar's wall.

The first parable is of the ten virgins. Five were wise, five were foolish.

The foolish took no extra oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom came at midnight, the five foolish had to run out to the market.

While they were gone, He came, and the door was shut.

When Jesus Christ comes to open the door of heaven, will you be away at the market, and return to find the door shut?

B. The second word: "Tekel" [v. 27] "Weighed".

v. 27 “You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting [too light]”.

1. The image points to a lack of righteousness.

David spoke of those who trust in earthly things instead of God as being “too light” in Psalm 62:9-10 (NKJV) “Surely men of low degree are a vapor, Men of high degree are a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They are altogether lighter than vapor. Do not trust in oppression, Nor vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.”

But our hope comes not by our own righteousness, but by faith in Christ: Psalm 62:5-8 (ESV) For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.” Jesus Christ is our solid rock!

2. The Matthew 25 parable that corresponds is that of the Talents.

An owner goes away and gives three servants money to put to use: five talents to one, two to another, one to another. A talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer.

The first two servants use the money wisely, and make the investment profitable. The third does nothing profitable with it.

The parable speaks of the gifts of God as they are given to people: the truth of the gospel and the gifts of the Spirit.

What have you and I done with the gifts God has given us? The one who has done nothing will be “cast ... into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” [Matthew 25:30]

C. The third word: “Peres” – “Divided”

v. 28 (NKJV) PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

It appears in v. 25 as “Parsin”. “Peres,” the singular of “Parsin,” sounds like the Aramaic for “Persia”. Belshazzar’s kingdom is to be given by God to the Medes and Persians.

1. It is a message of destruction.

The word for “divide” means “Fragment, destroy or dissolve”. Because Belshazzar has been “weighed” and found deficient, he will be stripped of all God's blessings.

All who do not give humble thanks to God, and fail to seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ face an eternal destruction.

The wages of sin is division and separation from God, which defines death.

2. The third parable in Matthew 25 is the Sheep and the Goats.

ESVSB: “The “sheep” are commended for their great compassion for those in need—for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger; for those who are naked, sick, or in prison. The righteous will inherit the kingdom not because of the compassionate works that they have done but because their righteousness comes from their transformed hearts in response to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, as evidenced by their compassion for the “least of these.”

In caring for those in need, the righteous discover that their acts of compassion for the needy are the same as if done for Jesus himself” v. 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

The parable does not teach salvation by good works. It is a question of love for Christ demonstrated in acts of mercy and grace.

How do you and I treat those near us that are in trouble? Are we tempted to think we are better because their trouble didn't come to us? Or do we show compassion and mercy, and help them?

Jesus says the authenticity of our faith is demonstrated by our practical response to these needs.

3. What is the Lord asking of us?

First, He is warning us to be ready for eternity every day. Our days are numbered.

One way to prepare is to “weigh” what we have done with what the Lord has given us. This involves the spiritual things first: righteousness mercy, etc..

We are called to speak up for God, even when it is risky or unpopular.

Thirdly, live in view of the “great divide” to come.

Action: Tell the Lord you want to be willing to speak up for Him as long as you live.

Stand before Him, letting Him alone be your Judge.

Prayerfully choose a person on whom you will bestow an act of mercy in Jesus’ name.