



The Writing on the Wall

RECAP

This week's focus: In Christ, the scales of justice are tipped in your favor.

God is loving, patient and merciful. But that does not mean God will overlook or disregard sin; or that He stays out of the way when wrong happens. It simply means that God's motivation in whatever He does is a desire to move us towards repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

God is also a righteous judge. He is the protector and defender of those who seek refuge in Him. That means God promises to right wrongs. Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." He will destroy sin because sin causes death. On the cross Jesus became sin for you so that the scales of justice would be tipped in your favor. If, however, you will not be separated from your sin, you will face and feel His judgment. This might sound mean, but God's hatred of sin is a sign of His love for us. It is proof He is the defender of those who seek refuge in Him. He will not "be patient" with sin forever. God is wise and knows when being slow to anger looks like He is overlooking sin.

One such story of God's judgment follows on the heels of a story of His mercy. Daniel 4 is the story of how God corrected Nebuchadnezzar severely, brought him to repentance, had mercy on him, and restored him. Daniel 5 is the story of God's swift and final judgment on a sinful person and a sinful nation. God knows when which approach is required.

The year was 539 B.C. Nearly 70 years have passed since Daniel and his friends were brought in chains to Babylon. Daniel is an old man now, well over 80. Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for over 20 years and Belshazzar, his uber-privileged, spoiled grandson, is on the throne. Belshazzar is hosting a raging party using the goblets taken from the Jewish temple. Suddenly, as they are partying it up, a mysterious floating hand appears and begins to carve a message into the plaster on the wall. This terrified Belshazzar and rocked him to the core.

The three words written on the wall were "numbered," "weighed," and "divided." People started screaming and the party descended into chaos. The Babylonian wise men were summoned, but none of them can tell the king what it means, when the elderly Queen, Nebuchadnezzar's widow says, "I once knew a man who could interpret messages like this," and she tells them about Daniel.

Daniel has long since retired from public life and they send for him. He comes in pronouncing divine judgment on Belshazzar and Babylon. He predicted not only the end of Belshazzar but of the entire Babylonian kingdom.

This story is about how God ultimately brought down the prideful, rebellious, unjust Babylonian Empire and kept His promise to restore His people to their Promised Land. But, this story also gives us a picture into how God deals with prideful, rebellious people in all times and places. We need to be reminded that any judgment before the ultimate judgment is mercy, because it can wake us up before it's too late. God's small judgments in this life are warnings to us, screaming: "Don't go down that path! It will only leave you empty! Turn to God and your sin will be wiped out."



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SHARE (5-10 min)

1. Icebreaker Question: On a scale where one is a minimalist and five is a hoarder, where would you rank yourself? Your spouse or roommate?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Daniel 4

2. What about the message on Sunday and this passage stood out to you?
3. Belshazzar used the pure things (the goblets from Israel) and made them profane. How in our culture do we do the same with money, sex, talents? Why do you think it's such a big deal to God that we use what is set apart for His glory rather than our own?
4. The past didn't seem relevant to Belshazzar's life, yet it contained a lesson he desperately needed (humility). Why do we so easily forget God's goodness at work in the past? How can we pass on our faith to the next generation when they don't see it as relevant?
5. Daniel didn't want the credit or rewards that came with his actions. What does this say about Daniel's character, and how do Daniel's actions represent Matthew 5:13-16 (being salt and light of God to others)?
6. If we asked God to remove every remnant of evil from the planet tonight and midnight, who would be here at 12:01 AM? What is it about God's judgment that is difficult for us to understand? How does His justice reveal His love?
7. In regards to worshipping God above all things and taking pure things meant to glorify Him and making them profane, how would you do if God "weighed" your life today?
8. The Gospel is: Jesus died in your place. That means as a believer the scales of justice are tipped in your favor. What should be your response knowing "Jesus paid it all"?
9. Daniel 5 reminds us that we all have a choice to make concerning our relationship with Jesus. What choices, decisions, and circumstances are necessary to seek out God's wisdom instead of relying on your own wisdom?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Take time to pray for one another. Share the name of one person in your life that you are asking God to whom to reveal Himself. Pray together that these individuals would see the love and justice of God and turn toward Him in repentance.