

Numbered, Weighed, Divided

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Date: 03 September 2006

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- [0 : 00] There's no city anywhere in the world protected as ours is. I mean, the walls are impregnable. We've got stores of food that'll last us for months. Sharmadook, you are such a worrier.
- I want a party. Yes, O King Belshazzar, live forever. I mean, we've had mind-blowing parties every night for the last week. But tonight, Sharmadook, enough.
- Just get it organised. I want a really big bash and, of course, lots of grog. Bring all of the lords. I want them to know that I'm just no puppet of my father.
- And Sharmadook, yes, O King. Sharmadook, where were all of the women last night? I mean, tonight, bring all of my wives and bring all of my concubines.
- We are going to party. We are going to party. We are going to party.
- [1 : 28] We are going to party. We are going to party. Let the music play on. Everybody sing. Everybody dance.
- Lose yourself in wild romance. We are going to party. Carambo. Fiesta. Forever. Come on and sing.
- All night long. We are going to party. Carambo. Fiesta. Forever. Come on and sing. All night long.
- All night. All night. All night long. All night. All night. All night. All night long. All night long.
- A Às J■■■■i. All night long. All night long. All night long. All night long.
- [2 : 29] All night long. All night long. All night long. might drink from them. And so they brought in the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them.
- They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone. Well, friends, we've made it to chapter 5, if you've been with us over recent weeks.
- And the question is, where's our mate? Where is Big Neb? I mean, remember the end of chapter 4 last week, King Nebuchadnezzar is the ruler in the 6th century of the world superpower, Babylon, the Babylonian kingdom.
- In fact, the capital of the kingdom is also called Babylon. And Big Neb is a massively proud man. And God, in his merciful judgment, humbled him.
- And Big Neb, in humble, heartfelt repentance, lifted his eyes to heaven and his reason returned to him. He blessed the Most High and praised and honoured the one who lives forever.
- [3 : 49] So what's happened to Big Neb? Well, he died in 562 BC, 43 years into his reign. And none of his successors were able to match his achievements.
- In fact, there was a succession of Babylonian kings that followed. And all of their reigns were short-lived in comparison to Nebuchadnezzar. There was firstly Big Neb's son, and then his son-in-law who murdered Big Neb's son.

And then the son-in-law died about six years after Big Neb's death. And then the son-in-law, he was replaced by his son, who was then assassinated in the first year of his rule in a palace coup.

And Nabinius was installed in 556 BC as part of that coup. And he reigned until the collapse of the kingdom in 539.

There's no test on these numbers. Nabinius sought to exalt the moon god Sin. Interesting word. As the chief deity among the Babylonian pantheon, he wanted to replace Marduk.

[4 : 59] Nabinius spent lots of time outside the capital Babylon at his royal residence in Tymon, southeast of Edom. Nabinius' eldest son was Belshazzar.

And he was actually installed by his father as the regent of the Babylonian Empire for the last 10 years of that kingdom. You see, that's why he's called King Belshazzar.

He was in fact the second-ranking person in the kingdom. And Big Neb was regarded as his father, not in a biological sense, but in the sense that King Nebuchadnezzar was his predecessor.

Verses 1 to 4. It's party time, so let's party. Page 720 or 721. Before a thousand pair of eyes, Belshazzar is on centre stage.

And if we're consumed with pride, then that's always where we want to be. And Belshazzar proceeds to act a lot like an Aussie bloke at a bucks night.

[6 : 10] He just proceeds to drink himself under the table. Problem 1. Belshazzar was in a position of authority. Why? Because of God's sovereign hand.

You see, back in chapter 3, in verse 25, we read this. The Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and he gives it to whoever he will.

And Belshazzar is acting like a drunken slob. Problem 2. Blasphemy. Belshazzar demanded that the vessels from the Jerusalem temple be fetched.

Now, these were amongst the items that Big Neb had brought back to Babylon after he'd ransacked and demolished the temple. But I want you to catch the significance of this act at two levels.

First of all, he's playing with Nebuchadnezzar's war booty. You see, in the midst of this national crisis, Belshazzar is, if you like, symbolically claiming more power than Big Neb.

[7 : 11] And what a pathetic boast. But much, much more significantly than that, Belshazzar is blaspheming God. He is, if you like, he's spitting in God's eyes because the Jews and their sacred vessels symbolised the presence and the power of God.

Belshazzar, he knew the significance of what he was doing. See, he didn't sin in ignorance. He sinned with knowledge. And a stomach full of grog gave Belshazzar the impetus to display the obvious rebellion that was in his heart.

Even in Nebuchadnezzar's worst moments, before he turned in repentant faith to God, Big Neb clearly saw that the temple vessels were too precious to actually use.

But not Belshazzar. Problem three. Idolatry. Verse three. So they brought in the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them.

They drank the wine and they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone. You see, the king, he combines blasphemy with idolatry.

[8 : 40] And he uses God's holy goblets to toast the lifeless idols of his own religion. I mean, if you think about it, sin is insanity.

It is so blind. And Belshazzar, he just simply goes out of his way to mock God. So question.

Is that risky? Can we mock God with impunity? Was it risky for Belshazzar?

Is it risky for Melburnians living in the 21st century? Immediately, the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace next to the lampstand.

The king was watching the hand as it wrote. Verses 5 to 12.

[10 : 08] The party is over. Then the king's face turned pale. His thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way.

And his knees knocked together. I mean, Belshazzar, he is just transfixed with terror. But look at verse 6.

We're at the end of that. His knees knocked together. I have to say, this is a very gentle translation. Because literally, the king lost control of his most basic bodily functions.

He didn't understand all of the details of the writing on the wall. But he was in no doubt that he was under the judgment of God.

His whole being was shocked to its very core. And that is the reality for all sinful people when confronted with the holy presence of God.

[11 : 06] And that's why God, in his unfathomable mercy, he literally pleads with men and women through the Old Testament, through the New Testament, and by his spirit to each of us tonight who are outside of his kingdom, to take refuge in his son.

To trust in the one, true, living God. The king, in his desperation and his panic, what does he do? He calls for the wise men and the astrologers and magicians to interpret the writing.

So let me ask you this. Do you think that they're going to do any better than the ones back in chapter 2 who were called for Big Neb's dream? I mean, do you think that they might have perhaps just improved their technical skills a little bit?

Since they failed so badly back in chapter 4 with Big Neb's second dream? No way. They are, and still are, absolutely useless.

Verse 8. Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king the interpretation. You see, in his own spiritual bankruptcy, Belshazzar turned to the wisdom of the world.

[12 : 24] And what did he find? Bankruptcy. And 2,500 years later. It's no different today.

Well, the king's body is in, I was thinking about this this week, one way to describe it. It's sort of in meltdown mode. I mean, it is the physiological outworking of the king's terror, but there is one to whom he's accountable.

There is one who is in supreme control. Enter the queen. Who is she? I mean, well, we know that she certainly had the good sense not to attend the rioters and debauch party.

Likely, she was actually the queen mother, a person of some importance in those ancient Near East cultures. Historians, in fact, suggest that it was possibly Nebuchadnezzar's wife, Neitrocris, still in a position of influence two decades after Big Neb's death.

But whatever her exact identity, she's the one who directs the king's attention to Daniel. This lady knows Daniel well.

[13 : 46] And the end of verse 12 tells us that she has no doubt at all that Daniel will be able to interpret the writing. Verses 13 to 28.

The deep, deep roots of pride. And Belshazzar is in such terror that he's lost control of his most basic bodily functions.

Do you think, if you can sort of imagine that, do you think that that would have dented his pride? Do you think that it would have had some impact on his view of his own greatness, of his power?

Not at all. Sin is such a deadly disease. It kills us physically. It kills us spiritually.

And even while we're physically alive, it blinds us to God's realities. You see, even in this state, Belshazzar speaks to Daniel in a very condescending manner.

[14 : 51] It's like this, Daniel, don't forget who you are. I mean, you're our prisoner. You're an exile. Big Neb captured you. Us Babylonians, you know, we're pretty tough.

And we're very clever. Pride. Deep-seated pride. In 1717, King Louis XIV of France died.

Preferring to be called Louis the Great, he was the monarch who declared, I am the state. His court was the most magnificent in all of Europe, and his funeral was certainly the most spectacular.

In the church where the ceremony was performed, his body was laid in a golden coffin. And to dramatise his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be very dimly lit. They probably had a sort of a Naomi on the light button.

With only one special candle that was to be set above the coffin. And thousands of people were there in attendance, and they waited in silence.

[15 : 53] And then Bishop Marseillean began to speak. And slowly reaching down, he actually snuffed out the candle. And he said, only God is great.

Having sought to assert his power and his superiority, Belshazzar, however, still needed Daniel. And so, if you like, he sort of recites Daniel's CV, but he does it without any conviction.

I mean, look at the start of verse 14 and the start of verse 16. He says, I have heard. And he goes on and he says, if you are able to read the writing. Belshazzar, you know, has got a strong commercial drive.

He seeks to incentivise Daniel with some promise of money, power, position, status. But in reality, the king has absolutely nothing to give.

And Daniel responds to this tin pot despot with sharpness. Look at 17. Let your gifts be for yourself or give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and let him know the interpretation.

[17 : 06] You see, Daniel stands before this king as God's messenger, as a prophet. And he's motivated by his faithfulness to God. He's not motivated by material gain.

Verses 29 to 31. Numbered, weighed, divided. Verse 18. O king, the most high God gave you a father Nebuchadnezzar kingship, greatness, glory and majesty.

And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations and languages trembled and feared before him. He killed those he wanted to kill. He kept alive those he wanted to keep alive. He honoured those he wanted to honour and he degraded those he wanted to degrade.

But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he acted proudly, he was disposed from his kingly throne and his glory was stripped from him.

He was driven from human society. His mind was made like that of an animal. His dwelling was with wild asses. He was fed grass like oxen and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven.

[18 : 08] Until he learned that the most high God has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and sets over it whomever he will.

Ah yes. Big Neb did humble his heart. He turned back to the Lord, the only God, the only saviour.

And friends, that is no different for all of us. You see, if we are to be in relationship with the living God, with the most high God, we do need to turn back from our self-centredness, our self-worship, our rebellion, and ask the living God for mercy.

And you, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart even though you knew all this. You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven. The vessels of his temple have been brought in before you. And you and your lords and your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them.

You have praised the gods of silver and gold and bronze and iron and wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know. But the God in whose power is your very breath and to whom belong all your ways, you have not on it.

[19 : 26] That is some accusation. More than a dozen times in just those two verses, 22 and 23, you and your are used.

That is, Belshazzar, you are unbelievably foolish. You have not humbled your heart even though you knew all this.

See, Belshazzar knew what he was supposed to do. But failed to do so. Belshazzar, you knew how King Nebuchadnezzar had been humbled after he had exalted himself.

How God had shown him great, great mercy after he repented. Belshazzar, you knew this. And not only did you know it, but you then spat in God's face.

You worship man-made idols rather than the living God in whose power is your very breath and to whom belong all your ways.

[20 : 39] God has pronounced his judgment. Mene, mene, tekel, parson.

This was a cryptic message, which in our terms today might be something like this. A dollar, a dollar, two cents, 50 cents.

Now, mene is related to the verb mnh and it simply meant numbered. Tekel is related to the verb TQL.

And that just simply meant weighed. And parson is related to the verb PRS, meaning divided. Numbered, weighed, divided.

God was the one who gave Daniel the interpretation. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and he's brought it to an end. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

[21 : 39] Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. On that very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.

Darius the Mede was likely the general who was in charge of the conquest of Babylon, acting under the orders of the Persian king, Cyrus. Friends, the end of the Babylonian kingdom came swiftly, came easily.

And actually, not surprisingly, this was just as God said it would be through the prophet Isaiah. Because speaking of Babylon in Isaiah 47, this is what we read.

You felt secure in your wickedness. You said, no one sees me. Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray. And you said in your heart, I am and there's no one beside me. But evil came upon you, which you cannot charm away.

Disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off. And ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

[22 : 54] And history records that the Medo-Persians, they actually diverted the Euphrates River and they entered the city, which was considered to be impregnable. How did they enter it?

Actually, via the riverbed. And the historian, Exenophon, a Greek historian, records that the city was captured while the Babylonians were feasting in drunken revelry.

Secular historical record. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar back in chapter 2 was being fulfilled. You see, the age of that golden head had passed to the age of the silver chest.

So, let me ask you this. Do you have any doubt, any lingering doubt, as to whether God is in total control of the cosmos?

I mean, of this world, which on the surface, granted, often appears to be out of control. Do you have any doubt about God's total sovereign control?

[24 : 02] The book of Daniel, the inspired word of God, speaks strongly to each one of us.

The question is, do we hear the Holy Spirit? God is in control. He is sovereign. He is Lord. Indeed, he is the only Lord.

Belshazzar, I think, is one of the most striking examples in all of scripture of how sin, it just blinds us. An example of our deadness outside of a relationship with the living God.

The Medo-Persians, they were literally surrounding the city of Babylon. And what was the king doing? He was simply letting the lusts of his heart completely overpower him.

Belshazzar did not anticipate the judgment of others and Belshazzar did not anticipate the judgment of God. God's judgment fell very suddenly.

[25 : 13] Belshazzar, he did know about the living God. I mean, in addition to the abundant evidence of creation, God had revealed himself over many decades, in fact, to the Babylonians.

How had he done that? Through the witness and through the words of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

God had displayed great mercy to King Nebuchadnezzar. You see, to know that God is gracious and not turn from sin in the light of that grace is to fall under God's righteous judgment.

And in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, the term Babylon is in fact used pictorially to refer to God's final judgment on evil.

In Revelation 18, we read, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. All the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her.

[26 : 21] And the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury. God actually links the final judgment to the fall of ancient Babylon.

And he uses that earlier fall as a portrait. It's a portrait of all sinners' destinies. And God reveals to us the reality, the frightening reality of his righteous judgment.

So that we might turn from sin to salvation as provided in Jesus Christ. A day is coming, it is a certainty, when we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Our deeds will be numbered, revealing that we've failed to achieve God's standards. And the book of Revelation, in fact, tells us that there is a great book in which the deeds of men and women are recorded.

And the evil, the rebellion against God shown in the book, will be placed on one side of God's scales. There'll be a weighing. And the scale will fall towards condemnation.

[27 : 40] There'll be a division. God's judgment is a final dividing of the ways. Either to life or to eternal punishment.

So what will we say on the day? I mean, there's nothing in and of ourselves that can fix the problem of the scales.

Because the Bible just simply tells us this quite starkly. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All human beings have, if you like, metaphorically words of judgment which are written on their own walls.

Weighed and found wanting. Numbered days. Kingdom lost. And there's nothing that we can do. There's nothing that we can do in and of ourselves to repair that broken relationship with the Holy God.

There is only one person who has something different written on his wall. Weighed and found worthy of unnumbered days and an eternal kingdom.

[28 : 55] And that person is Jesus Christ. You see, the glorious, the astonishingly good news of the gospel is that God is the one who's done something.

He's done something at the point of our greatest need. God himself has dealt with his holy, righteous wrath against sin in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has died in our place. He's died as our substitute. He's actually borne the consequences of our sin, of our rebellion, of our evil.

And so by turning from our sin, by trusting in Jesus, one way to think of it is that God takes the scales, he brushes aside our evil deeds, and on the other side of the scale, what does he do?

He places his own righteous character. And the scales, well, they swing back. We're justified on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

[30 : 05] You see, friends, what's written on every Christian's wall is what's written on Jesus' wall. We are numbered, we're weighed, and we're found forever in eternal relationship with the living God.

So as I close, let me ask you this. Where do you stand in relation to the living God? That is, what's your position when you think of the scales?

If you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are clothed in his righteousness. And I trust that, again, as we've thought of this part of God's word tonight, that you see it is a great privilege, indeed it's a responsibility, to promote the gospel, the astonishing good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But perhaps tonight I'm speaking to someone, maybe more than one, who, while, if you like, not being able to relate to every aspect of Belshazzar's life, you actually know that you're not right with God.

And you know that what you actually need, written on your wall, is numbered, weighed, and found forever in eternal relationship with the living God.

[31 : 31] Well, if that is your case, knowing that as you sit here tonight, you're actually out of relationship with God, and you need to be in relationship with God, then let me encourage you to simply pray in your heart.

as we speak to God in prayer. And you might like to just follow along in your heart, as we express our heart to the Lord.

Dear God, I realise that I'm a sinner. Dear God, I turn from my self-centred and self-worshipping life.

I trust with my whole being that Jesus died on the cross for me. He paid the price of my sins. Dear God, please have mercy on me.

Please forgive my sins. And bring me into a relationship with you. Based on Jesus' death and resurrection.

[32 : 48] And dear God, please give me the assurance that I am now your child. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.