

DANIEL

PATTERNS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Six: Humility in the Hand of God
Daniel Chapter 5: 13-31; Matthew 23: 1-12

Opening Question: Who is the wisest person in your life?

1: CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the past 5 weeks. What did we learn last week about God's mercy? What have you learned from Daniel and his friends about a life of discipleship? Which story seems to be sticking with you in an important way? How would you summarize 1 or 2 main points in the book so far?

Today's Passage: When we pick up today's story, over 30 years have passed from the end of chapter 4 (which makes Daniel about 70-80 years old!). King Nebuchadnezzar has died, and since then, 4 different kings have ruled Babylon. The "king" mentioned in this passage- named Belshazzar- is actually the son of the current king, and the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. In this passage, he is throwing a giant banquet for 1,000 people- a rather rare decision as we know from other historical documents that at this moment, his enemies are pressing in and are about to conquer the entire kingdom, marking the end of the Babylonian empire. At this banquet, he takes out all of the precious and sacred vessels that were taken from Israel's temple, and uses them to party and worship false gods. In the middle of the festivities, a disembodied hand appears and writes a message on the wall. The king is (understandably!!!) quite scared, calls in all the wise men from the kingdom, and when none of them can help, is reminded by the queen about a man named Daniel, who seems to have slipped into oblivion over the past 30 years. We pick up as Daniel is called onto the scene...

2: CONTENT

Read Daniel 5: 13-31 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A or B) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. King Belshazaar knew that his enemies were pressing in. What does it say about his character, leadership, or care for his kingdom that at this moment, he hosts a lavish party and uses all the sacred vessels from Israel?
2. What does the king promise Daniel and what is Daniel's response? What does this tell you about Daniel's character and heart? What other stories in Daniel does this remind you of?
3. Daniel could have just read and interpreted the writing on the wall. Why do you think it is important that he retells the whole story of King Nebuchadnezzar (vs 18-21)

4. King Nebuchadnezzar struggled with pride but was shown mercy. Why is the story not the same here? How can verse 22 help us perhaps answer this?
5. What things does Daniel “charge” the king with in vs 22-23?
6. Just to make sure we don’t miss it, what happens to the king, what happens to Daniel, and how quickly does it happen?

3: CONNECTING THE STORY TO JESUS

In this story, pride once again comes in the form of a non-believing king. But in Jesus’ time, His harshest words against pride came not to those *outside* of the faith, but those within it. Read **Matthew 23: 1-12**. Talk about how this passage connects with our story from Daniel. How are the king and the Pharisees similar? What does pride cause us to do to others? How are we supposed to be identified? Are there stories that you know in the gospels that demonstrate Jesus living into his identity as a servant?

4: APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- King Belshazzar had to have heard the story of his grandpa Nebuchadnezzar being turned from king-animal-back to king, but he failed to listen and learn. What role (if any) do the faith stories of others (parents, grandparents, mentors) play in your life?
- Daniel seems to have been living behind the scenes for many years- still in captivity with his people and waiting for God’s redemption and freedom. And yet *he speaks of a God who holds our lives in His hand*. How hard is it to remain hopeful and humble when God seems so “quiet”?
- Do you think pride is a problem in religious communities today? Explain.
- Both of these passages speak about “weight”- Belshazzar has a life that is too “light” in the things that really matter, and the Pharisee’s have lives that make following Jesus “heavy” with rules and burdens. Do you identify with either of these groups? In what ways?
- How is humility portrayed or understood in our faith communities or cultures of origin? Is it valued? Ignored? Esteemed? Can humility and strength exist together?

4: PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

To the God who holds all of our ways-

If our lives were in our own hands, it would all be over. Because on our own, we fill our hands with things that don’t matter. We use our hands to clap for our own achievements. We point our fingers in disgust and judgment at others. But thanks be to God, you promise us that our lives are actually held in Your hands. The hands that formed the universe are also formed around us. Teach us to rest in your sure grasp. To let go of the tight grip we try to hold on our own lives. And to use our hands not to gain or clap or point, but to humbly serve others, in the pattern of Christ Himself.

We pray this in the name of Christ, whose wounded hands bring us life- Amen.