Luke 20:1-18

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 November 2016

Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] A country that was, in fact, the most powerful in the world. Lots of power, lots of military might, lots of money, lots of money.

! Sadly, the nation's leaders became arrogant and full of themselves.
They then became prideful and in their strength, they forgot and failed to acknowledge the Lord.
And soon, the foolishness and folly of the country led to their failure and they fell.
This is the story of Babylon. About 600 years before the birth of Christ, you have a king named Nebuchadnezzar.
And he, with his country of Babylon, invades a land known as Judah, where the people of God were. They overtook Judah.
[1:37] And Nebuchadnezzar then took a number of the young men, the best and the brightest of Judah, and they exiled them out of Judah into Babylon.

Among the many that they exiled are a few familiar names to us. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
They come and they are schooled and they learn the language and the culture of the Babylonian Chaldean lifestyle. But they are faithful to the one true God all the while.
The king has a dream. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that bothers him. And so he calls for his wise men. These would be astrologers, philosophers, men who were supposed to be able to give interpretation to things such as troubling dreams.
And they are completely unable to help him. The king is so upset at their failure, he threatens to kill everybody. Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, begin to pray to the Lord for mercy.
[2:47] And the Lord answers their prayer. And the Lord reveals to Daniel the dream the king had and the interpretation of the dream. He gives it to the king and the king is grateful.

A little bit later after that, the same king, Nebuchadnezzar, builds a large statue. And his desire is that when music would play all around the city, that everybody would bow their knees and they would worship this statue that the king had made.
The king was what we would call a polytheist, meaning that he worshipped many, many different gods. And so the music would play and Daniel, who is away representing the king, is not present when this happens.
The music plays and everyone in town bows their knee to this false god, this statue, except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three young boys refuse to compromise and they stand strong, literally, as they refuse to bow the knee.
They are then threatened by the king and he says, If you don't bow down and worship this image, I will have you killed as we throw you into the fiery furnace. They refuse.
[4:07] And they say, we trust in our God. He will deliver us. And even if he doesn't, we will never worship a false god. The king keeps his word, has them thrown into the fiery furnace, and God miraculously, supernaturally delivers them.

And they are completely unharmed. The king then has another dream that terrifies him. Again, the wise men are unable to answer the question of what does it mean.
Again, Daniel is able to do so. And Daniel interprets the dream, and Daniel begs the king to repent of his sin and to instead begin to live in mercy.
And the king refuses to do that. And so he is punished by the Lord, and he begins to live for a number of years, essentially as an animal.
As he lives outside and begins to eat of the grass, loses his mind completely. Until eventually he is restored and acknowledges the one true king over all the world.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[5:23] Then that king, Nebuchadnezzar, dies. 23 years pass. And we find ourselves the story of the handwriting on the wall in Daniel chapter 5.

If you would please open your Bible with me to Daniel chapter 5. We're studying through the book of Daniel on Sunday evenings. It seemed good to me on this day, for reasons that I think will become apparent, that this would be a helpful word for us this morning.
Our evening service at 5 o'clock tonight, we will be studying through Luke, that we normally do on Sunday mornings. But for this morning, I want to include all of you here in Daniel chapter 5.
It's been about 70 years since Daniel was brought over as an exile. He is in his 80s. The next chapter is the story of Daniel in the lion's den.
That happens when Daniel is an old man. And so what's happened here is that we are introduced in chapter 5, verse 1, to a brand new king without any explanation.
[6:38] Chapter 4 ends with Nebuchadnezzar the king. Chapter 5 begins, King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Now for years, this was a real problem. People who believed the Bible was the word of God did not know how to answer this because history spoke nothing of Belshazzar.
And so believers were unsure of who this man was. Those who do not believe the Bible for years pointed at Daniel 5 as evidence that the Bible is filled with error because there was no evidence of Belshazzar.
And so those who were critics of the word of God would say, ha ha, here is an example of error in the biblical record. Until an archaeology discovery took place where they found what's known as the Nabonidus Cylinder.
Inside of that gives us information about a man named Belshazzar who was a co-regent, a co-ruler with his father Nabonidus who the world knows of.
[7:56] And what we discover took place is Nabonidus who was the reigning king moved out of Babylon and he went about 500 miles away. And though he was the king, he ruled from a distant place known as Tema.

It was Belshazzar who stayed in Babylon and ruled there. And so you have essentially two kings, Nabonidus and Belshazzar.
What's going on as you come to Daniel chapter 5 is you find this very immoral feast that is going on. Belshazzar has called all of these people together.
Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people are here. Nabonidus, the other ruler, is in the North Arabian desert, 500 miles away. And right here in Babylon, in the heart of the empire, this ungodly, immoral feast begins to happen.
That's the first thing we see is this unholy feast in verses 1 to 4. It says, Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem, be brought that the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.
[9:20] And they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple that the house of God of Jerusalem had. And the king and his lords, his wives and his concubine drank from them. And they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.

The implication here is that they are drinking to the point of excessive drunkenness and the kinds of parties and feasts they had would be filled with all kinds of sinful activity and all kinds of immorality.
Now, what happened is when Nebuchadnezzar went in 605 and in that time period, B.C., about 600 years from the birth of Christ, when they overtook Jerusalem, what they did is they captured some of these vessels from the temple.
These would have been very meaningful possessions to the people of God. Nebuchadnezzar took those and brought them to Babylon with him.
Belshazzar now asked for those vessels, those goblets to be brought in and what was supposed to have been made for the worship of the one true God, they now will blaspheme and profane the name of God as they use those very vessels to fill with wine so they can drink and become drunk.
[10:45] What is going on in the early parts of Daniel 5 is they are purposefully profaning and mocking the things of God and they are worshipping false gods.

As they are drinking and getting drunk, it says they are doing it as they worship the God of gold and the God of silver and bronze and wood. It is this immoral party filled with drunkenness, filled with all kinds of sinfulness and all of it done to emphasize the point that in their mind, the one true God is

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

completely subservient to their pleasure.
Which sounds eerily like the day in which we live. When people live for their own pleasure far above the things of God.
But right after this unholy feast in verse 5, we see an unknown finger that begins to write on the wall. It says, Immediately, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace opposite the lampstand and the king saw the hand as it wrote.
So imagine with me, church, that we're here and we're having this big party and this big feast and all kinds of sin is broken out and people are drinking and becoming drunk and over here on this wall, right on the plaster over here, a hand appears out of nowhere.
[12:19] And the hands and the fingers of this hand begin to write on the plaster of the wall. This is where the expression, the handwriting on the wall comes from that is very common in our vernacular.

Even those who aren't believers will use the expression, I see the handwriting on the wall. In fact, Tuesday night during the election returns, I'm watching a national newscast and right before the election was called, but when it became very apparent how it was going to turn out, one of the national newscasters said, you can now see the handwriting on the wall.
That comes from this very event right here. When you see the handwriting on the wall, the third thing we begin to notice now is a very uncommon fear that overtakes Belshazzar.
It's uncommon because this is the most frightening thing he's ever seen. We saw a little bit a few minutes ago as a church the fear that comes when something very unusual, unplanned, takes place.
Imagine if we would have seen instead over here on the plaster of the wall a hand by itself appear and begin to write. Well, fear overtakes the king.
[13:47] Verse 6, you see it. It says, the king's color changed. All the color drains out of his face. His thoughts alarmed him. His limbs give way and his knees knocked together.

The Aramaic in this actually would translate it this way, that the knots of his joints were loosened. it means he loses all bodily function control. All the color of his face is gone.
His legs are weak. Filled with fear. He can no longer control his own body. And what he does is he calls for the wise men just like Nebuchadnezzar has done.
So he calls for these wise men to come and he says, look, we all see the handwriting on the wall. I need someone to interpret what in the world does this mean? And he makes promises to them and he says, if anyone can tell me what this means, I will clothe them in purple, meaning royalty.
I will give them a gold necklace. And if you look at the very end of verse 7, whoever can tell me this, it says, shall be third ruler in the kingdom. Now for years, again, this troubled people.
[15:03] Bible scholars didn't know what to make of this. Why would anyone say that you can be third in the kingdom? For years, those who don't believe the Bible pointed to this as another evidence that the Bible record must be wrong.

Why would any king offer third place in the kingdom? Until history caught up. And now we understand from archaeology, you would offer third in the kingdom because you had Belshazzar ruling in Babylon, Nabonidus ruling in Tema as co-regents.
So the next highest honor you could give someone is to be third ruler. Just a quick note, if there's any place in your Bible that the world laughs at or mocks or scoffs or says this doesn't add up, just be patient.
Let history catch up. Don't worry about it. the Bible has been found true over and over and over again. And when history catches up to all things and all that can be known is known, as Romans says, let God be found true though every man found a liar.
We trust in the word of God. So this offer has been made and of course the wise men can't interpret it for him.
[16:31] We're introduced in verse 10 to the queen. It says the queen comes in. The queen is not the wife of Belshazzar. We know that because all of the wives and concubine are already there in the feast.

This is probably what we would know as the queen mother. So the mom who is known as the queen walks in and tells the king, hey, we've got this man named Daniel in the kingdom and he has a history of being able to interpret things that have troubled kings in the past.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Even when nobody else was able to, Daniel can do it. When you come to verse 13 to 30, we see fourthly this unwavering finding, this declaration from the Lord that will not waver.
And what happens in verses 13 to 16 for time, I'm going to just summarize a little bit since we're a little short on time this morning. What happens is the king tells Daniel a situation.
The king says, we've got this problem. We've got this handwriting on the wall. It's troubling me. I don't know what it means. My wise men can't do it. And he probably uses his language here to insult Daniel.
[17:41] He says, you're one of the exiles from Judah, aren't you? In other words, I know who you are. You're an outsider. You don't really belong here. You're one of those guys we captured as a teenager.

I know who you are. We beat your people. We defeated your land. We forced you to leave your home and to come here.
You're an outsider. You're not really one of us. I know exactly who you are. And he says, there's some people who tell me that you've got special gifts. You don't even give him the honor and respect of saying he believes it himself.
He just says, I hear that there's some things you can do. I hear you've got some special gifts. If you can solve these problems, I will give you clothing of purple.
I will give you a chain of gold and I will make you third in the kingdom. Verse 17. Look at it with me. Daniel answered and said before the king, let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another.
[18:41] In other words, he says, I don't need your stuff. I don't need your clothes. I don't need your necklace. And I certainly don't need third place in your kingdom.

You'll find out why in just a moment. Daniel then begins to lay out the case against Belshazzar. He reminds Belshazzar of what happened to his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar.
How Nebuchadnezzar is a man full of pride and that because of his pride, he fell. Until. Until. The Lord restored him.
Look at verse 18. He says, oh, king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father. It's it would be speaking of father like you would speak of father Abraham, not that he was his immediate father, but he's in the lineage of him.
The most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. Can I remind you that Nebuchadnezzar only ruled because God in his sovereignty allowed him to rule?
[19:52] You need to know. That is Daniel 2 21 reminds us, it is God who builds up kings. It is God who takes kings down. No king.

No military. No elected official. Nobody rules with absolute sovereignty. God alone is king and any kingdom only exists under the sovereign rule of God.
Verse 21. Speaking of Nebuchadnezzar, he was driven from among the children of mankind and his mind was made like that of a beast and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys.
He was fed grass like an ox and his body was wet with the dew of heaven. God until he knew that the most high God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.
You don't have to be a really intelligent person to figure out why this is helpful for us today. There is a God in heaven and he is sovereign over all things.
[21:10] And he can raise up kings and he can take them down. And he can use godly kings to be a blessing to the people and he can use ungodly kings to judge the people.

Interestingly enough, reading and studying this text on Monday, I had no idea who would be in my mind or your mind when we think about who our next leader is. Tuesday, reading and studying this text, I had no idea who would be in our mind when we would think about who the leader of our country is about to be.
Wednesday, early Wednesday morning. Most of the world. was shocked at who the next leader of our nation is going to be.
And the truth of Daniel 5 was not changed one bit. There is still truly only one ruler over all things and it is the Lord, the most high God.
And so we've got this problem with the handwriting on the wall over here on the plaster and everybody's looking at trying to figure out what in the world is this. The king is still shaken. The king is still frightened.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[22:31] And Daniel says, look, your predecessors were arrogant men who loved themselves and ignored God and they were judged.

And he says, you've made the same mistake. I don't need your gifts. I don't need your promotion. But I will tell you what the handwriting on the wall means.
Verse 24. Then from his presence the hand was sent and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed.
Mene, mene, tekel and parson. Listen. That's what's on the wall. So what Daniel does is he's going to begin to explain to the king what these words are all about.
The words are in Aramaic, but they are similar to words in Hebrew. And what they are are they are units of measurement.
[23:36] And so you have what says here, if you look again at verse 25, mene, which is related to the Hebrew word for mina, which is 50 shekels. Your next, you have mene, mene, and then tekel, which is related to the Hebrew word for shekel.

And then you have the word parson, related to the Hebrew word for paris. And they form these units of measurement decreasing from a mina to a shekel to a half shekel.
If you take the Aramaic letters that are there on the wall and you read them as verbs, what you would be reading are the words numbered, numbered, found, light, and divided.
Numbered, numbered, or counted, counted. And when measured, found to be light, not adding up.
And then the word divided. Mene, mene, numbered, numbered, tekel, light, parson, divided.
[25:01] Verse 26, this is the interpretation of the matter. Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekel, you have been found weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Paris, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. what Daniel says is right in the midst of this feast, all the drinking, all the immorality, all the partying, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people there just drinking it up and living it up and partying it up.
And Daniel says, this supernatural hand appeared and what it wrote down, Belshazzar, is that you have been examined and your life has been put on the scales and when your life is held up to the scales of what you should be, they do not balance because you have been found to be light.
And because you have sinned and because of your life and because of your judgment, your kingdom will be divided. Your kingdom is going to be taken from you and given to someone else.
Now, what history records for us and it's fascinating as you go back and read the extra biblical history on this is while this party is going on at the very moment outside the city the Medo-Persians are marching toward Babylon.
[26:46] He doesn't know. His father, Nabonidus, who ruled 500 miles away, has already been defeated in a crucial battle. And this army is marching toward Belshazzar.

He has no idea. Daniel says, here's the handwriting on the wall. You've been evaluated. And you are judged.
And you will lose your kingdom. And when he says that, there is absolutely nothing within vision of that feast that looks like there's any way he's going to be defeated.
Belshazzar is just living it up thinking he's got all the time in the world. Belshazzar keeps his word.
He gives the purple robe to Daniel.
He gives him the gold. He says, I'll make you third in the kingdom. But Daniel knows what's the value because this kingdom is about to come to an end in about 15 minutes. Verse 30 tells us that very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom being about 62 years old.
[28:19] What does this mean for us? I'll give you about four things I'd like you to make note of this morning. Number one, do not be impressed by earthly wealth and power.

power. Do not be impressed by earthly wealth and power. The night the kingdom falls, they are yucking it up in this extravagant immoral feast.
Indulging the flesh, indulging sinful desires, and everyone in that room would have looked at Belshazzar and said, oh, to be him.
Oh, to be the one that has all this money and all this might and all this power. Oh, to have what he has. Don't be envious of Belshazzar.
That very night, he will lose his life, he will lose his kingdom, and he will stand before the Lord as his judge. Don't be impressed with earthly wealth and power.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[29:32] Listen, there are Belshazzar feasts all around you. There are sinful people all around you that seem to have it all. There are people who lie and cheat and steal that seem to get by with it.

There are people that are ungodly and sinful, but they get the promotion, and they get the girlfriend, and they get the job, and they get the blessing, and they get the benefit, and you're heart contend to be envious of them, but do not be impressed with earthly wealth and power.
It is a horrible way to evaluate the quality of somebody's life. Secondly, ignoring coming judgment in no way does away with it.
Ignoring coming judgment in no way does away with it. Daniel had warned Belshazzar's predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, he had said, Nebuchadnezzar, repent, repent.
He has told the truth. Belshazzar has heard the stories of what happened in Nebuchadnezzar, but he ignored it. He acted and responded as if judgment would never come to him, but ignoring the truth that judgment is coming does not mean that judgment's not coming.
[30:54] Noah built an ark and preached repentance and preached righteousness and warned people of a coming judgment and nobody cared. But it did not stop it from raining.

Judgment is coming for those who do not know Christ. And pretending that it won't happen will in no way stop it.
thirdly, our humbling can lead to restoration or condemnation. Our humbling can lead to restoration or condemnation.
For those in our church, first, second, third graders, these are kind of big words for you. Let me help you know what this means. So, the point here is that when we come under the evaluation of God and we find ourselves humbled, broken, because of our sin, that brokenness can either lead to our restoration or to our healing or it can lead to our condemnation which means our judgment, our punishment.
So, the fact of the matter is, for Nebuchadnezzar, he was punished and because he turned to the one true God, he is able to be restored.
[32:17] Belshazzar is punished and it leads to his judgment or his condemnation. Now, what about us? If the Lord God were to take any one of us today and evaluate our lives on his scale, if he were to look with perfect truth at exactly who you are, at what you've done of your life and of mine, if there were no grace and no mercy and our lives are put on the scale of what we should be, every one of us would be found wanting.

And we're crushed by that. But that truth can either lead to our restoration if we turn to Christ, or it will lead to our condemnation if we refuse him.
And then finally, we learn that we must present the truth of God's word without compromise. We must present the truth of God's word without compromise.
Think of it this way. If we could take ourselves back to the place where this big feast happened, and we look over here on this plaster and we see the handwriting on the wall, and the king is troubled, and he is scared, and he is frightened, and we look at it and we see the words mene, mene, tekel, parson, people trying to figure out what in the world does that mean?
What does that interpretation mean for the king? Here you have a king who has the power to promote someone or to kill someone. Do you ever think about this?
[34:07] How tempting it may have been for Daniel to have said, king, I'll tell you what that means. That means that you're really strong. It means that God's really impressed with you.

King, that means that God has weighed you, and the rest of the world is lighter than you, that they're not as strong as you, and so you are going to be given all things.
Think the king would rather have heard that message than the message of you are a guilty son and you're going to lose it all? See, Daniel could have taken the revelation that God gave him and he could have been dishonest with it and he could have said what the king wanted to hear.
How many times do you find yourself in a conversation where you know what you should say? And you know what the Lord would want you to say and how to respond.
But out of fear of the one you're talking to, you back down. About, I don't know, eight, nine, ten years ago, my wife and I were on a cruise and on that vacation, we were there with some friends of ours and at dinner we were assigned with a large table and so there were six or eight or ten of us and we ate with them for our meals and so we got to know them from people from all around the nation, all around the world actually were there at our table.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[35:57] And one of the nights this older lady, religion came up, if you can imagine being on a cruise and religion breaks out among strangers, everybody just thinks, oh goodness. And this older lady, points her finger at me, all of us, at whoever would watch and listen and she said something to the effect of, don't you agree that as long as people are nice, as long as people do good, they're going to be fine.

now what am I supposed to say? We're on vacation. We're going to see these people the next night.
I know what she wants me to say. I know what she wants to hear. And if I say, you're probably right. She's happy. Her family's happy. And our meal goes on peacefully. But I can't say yes to that.
I remember sitting there with the feeling, thinking, oh my goodness, this is about to make dinner really, really bad.
[37:29] And that lady had no power over me, other than to judge me or be mad at me. Daniel was in front of a man who could have had him killed. And he could speak the truth.

Or he could twist the truth. Now, there's been other times I failed. I remember a time in college when our collegiate minister on campus, we were having an evangelism week.
And so, our leadership had asked us to all of these buttons that said, I know. And the idea would be, you know, you go to class wearing a goofy button that says, I know. People are going to say, what? You know. And you're supposed to say, I know Christ.
Can I tell you about him? So, I was a freshman and I was pretty easily made to do other things when it came to, you know, I didn't want to be disobedient to the Lord.
And when people said, hey, here's what we're all doing, then I'm going to do it. I'm not going to chicken out, I thought. So, I wore the button, go to class, remember it like it was yesterday, U.S. [38:36] history since 1877, had my books, went to class, carried it just like this. Because I wore the button.

I had the guts to wear the button. Just praying nobody saw it. And so I spent the whole hour in class, you know, like this and hunched down. And class is over and I got my book and put it right back up.
And unfortunately I dropped my book and I had to bend over and pick it up. and when I did, the goofy button I know is shown. To which someone says, well what does it you know?
And I thought, oh man. I said, it's just something for a group on campus I'm a part of.
And they said, okay. And I walked off. I knew the truth. I was just afraid to say it.
[39:40] I also know the story of Lot's wife who was zapped into a pillar of salt and believed that could happen again on campus to me. And so embarrassed and ashamed I walked back and tried to find the group and most of them had scattered a few were left and I said, you know what, I said, I blew it.

I'll tell you what it is I know. But by that point, some of the ones who were there that would have heard before had already left. My fear of what they would say or what they would think caused me to be quiet.
And I'm not proud of that. I wish that wasn't true. I wonder if there's been times in your life where you've known it's time to speak up for the Lord but you didn't.
The story of Daniel 5 tells not only about God's sovereignty, not only about the importance of humbling ourself, but it also reminds us that God's people must have the courage to speak the truth of God's word and never twist the truth of what God has told us.
And so we need to be a people that are bold, respectful, but willing to speak the truth.
[41:07] Maybe you're like me. Maybe there's times in your life where you've spoken boldly in times that you've cowered. Today is a reminder that we need to be a church that speaks the word no matter how the world responds, no matter what they think of you, that we would be a people that would say, I cannot speak of anything other than what God has told me and revealed to me.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host