

Whenever we read the Bible, Christians, we should always pay attention to details. Because sometimes if we miss an important detail, that can change the whole way in which we think about a particular passage. And one of the most important details here in this chapter of Daniel is actually at the very end, starting at verse 30 if you're reading in your Bibles. "That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old." And that important detail "that very night" shows us that everything that happens in this chapter happens on the same day. And if we don't keep that in mind, we might think that Belshazzar was just throwing an ordinary party, that he was just trying to have some fun and it ended up ending badly. But in reality what was happening is that Belshazzar was throwing this party in the midst of a war. Because the Medes, who we can also call the Persians, have been invading the kingdom of Babylon for several years by this point. And they have had victory after victory. And now they have surrounded Babylon itself, besieging it on every side. And it seems like they're going to take the city too! And so I imagine all the people living in the city of Babylon were afraid. They're wondering, "What's going to happen to us? After all, there's this great army on every side of the city. What is going to happen to us in the future?"

But Belshazzar the king is not afraid. Probably because he's a fool, but mostly because he is a proud man. Because I'm sure he looked around him and thought to himself that "we have all kinds of food in this city. It would take many, many years before the Persians could starve us out." And he probably also thought that "we have the great walls of Babylon. Those walls which were bigger than any other city wall in that part of the world. Legendary for their size, their thickness, and their strength. Who would be able to take such a strong fortress surrounding this great city?" But Belshazzar was a proud man mostly because he trusted in himself. He was going to be the one who was going to save the city. He was the one who was in control of this situation. He was the one who was the master of his own fate. And for that reason, even with the Persians on every single side of the city, practically knocking on the gates, Belshazzar throws a great party, wasting food he could've saved up for years. All because he's convinced that he is the one in control.

That makes him very different from Nebuchadnezzar, who we met in the previous chapters of Daniel. Because Nebuchadnezzar was also a proud man. Nebuchadnezzar also thought that he was in control of the situation. But Nebuchadnezzar was also humbled by the hand of God. Because as Daniel tells us, God made him act like an animal, eating grass like an ox, even living among the wild donkeys for some time, until Nebuchadnezzar came to realize that he was not the master, that he was not the one in control, that it was God who ruled over the kingdom of men. And in fact, when Nebuchadnezzar came back to his senses, he even said this, and we find it in Daniel chapter 4, starting at verse 34: "At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever. For his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation." Nebuchadnezzar learned to fear the Lord. He learned to respect him and to recognize that he was the one in control.

Belshazzar didn't. He ignored all of that. He didn't want to bend the knee to God. He didn't want to be the one who gave all the glory to the Lord. He wanted to be the one in control. And he did that so much that he actually gave a great insult to the Lord himself. Because what he did at his party was not just something he thought up while he was drunk. No, he did this as a deliberate

blasphemy against the Lord. Taking the temple vessels from Jerusalem, the cups, the pots, the plates, the sort of things that were used in the worship of the Lord, taking them into his party and using them as if they were ordinary vessels, ordinary cups and pots and plates, drinking from them, eating from them, and treating them as if they were nothing special. And worse than that still, he used them to praise his "gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone," idols which were not gods at all. He did all of this very intentionally as a way of saying to God: "I am the one in control here. I am the one who is the master. And I'm going to use these things which belong to you in any way in which I please, because I will control my own future." He wanted to be the one who took the things that properly belonged to God.

And Christians, Belshazzar was a fool, a drunken fool, perhaps, but a fool. But I think even he would have blushed to see the things that happen in our own day. Because yes, the ancient kingdom of Babylon is long gone. Yet we as Christians still live in the midst of Babylon. We still live in the midst of a kingdom uttering blasphemies against the Lord, and as the book of Revelation tells us, a kingdom which is drunk with the blood of the saints. Because think about the things which we face in our own culture, Christians, even in our own nation, things which are blasphemies against the Lord. The president not all that long ago signed an executive order abolishing the distinction between male and female, saying that you could go to whatever bathroom you felt you identified with. A mortal man saying with a signature that he could wipe away that distinction, that very basic distinction that God has given to us of male and female! That's a very bold thing to do, to claim something that properly only belongs God. Or you think about the judges, for example, who deny the very humanity of the unborn, who say that they are not human at all, that they're just cells so that we can end up treating them in any way that we choose. To deny the very basic humanity given to us by the Lord! That's a tremendous thing to claim for yourself. Or think about all the doctors or even schools these days who will give hormone blocking drugs even to young children as a way of transitioning between male and female, as if our sex was something that was fluid, that could be changed at will. And even given to children who we think aren't old enough to vote, but are old enough to make these kind of life altering decisions. That's a tremendous thing claim for yourself. Or even the government which says that marriage is what we make of it, that we decide who gets to be married. Something that has been foundational since even before the fall into sin, and yet we claim it for ourselves. Yes, Christians, we still live in Babylon, a Babylon which oppresses us. And maybe the worst thing about all of it, honestly, are the churches who go along with all of this, who call evil good, and who say that this is God's will, that this is something that is pleasing to him. That probably is the most difficult thing to bear out of all of it. Yes, we are struggling, Christians, and it can be very hard to live in Babylon, to wonder how to deal with all of this evil. What are we going to do? Which way shall we turn?

But Daniel gives us an answer in this chapter. Because the Lord comes down to ancient Babylon in the middle of that party of Belshazzar, and he brings a judgment upon that kingdom, writing with his own hand in the wall words against that kingdom. Belshazzar, of course, doesn't know what any of it means. He can't interpret it. And he's so frantic to figure out what it means that he promises great things to anyone who can interpret it to him. You could even be the third most powerful man in the kingdom if you can just tell me what this means! None of them are able to interpret it, of course, until Daniel comes in. And Daniel by this point is an old man. It's been a long time since the days of the first part of this book. And Daniel doesn't really care about

anything anymore. He is bold. He is fearless. And he says exactly what needs to be said. He said, "I don't want your presents. I don't want your honors. Keep them for yourself. They mean nothing to me. But Nebuchadnezzar once humbled himself before the Lord, knowing that the Lord was the one in command. But you, Belshazzar, have not done this. You have not humbled yourself. You have only tried to mock the Lord. And therefore these words have been written against you: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. 'Mene'--which in the original language sounds something like the word for 'numbered,' so you could say 'numbered, numbered'-- numbered, numbered are your days, Belshazzar. You are not the master of your own time. God has determined the length of your life. God has determined the length of your reign. And he will bring it to an end when he pleases and not according to you. 'Tekel'--which in the original language sounds something like 'weighed'--you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. You thought you were this great thing. You thought you were somebody important, that you were the master of your own fate. Somebody heavy as it were. But you're lighter than a feather. You're not all that much after all, because you thought so much of yourself but in the eyes of God you are nothing. And then 'Parsin' or 'Peres'--Parsin being plural, Peres being singular. It's the same word, which sounds like the word for 'divided' or 'Persian' even.--And so your kingdom is going to be divided. This kingdom you thought was going to stand forever, this kingdom you thought was going to wear out this siege is going to be divided and given to the Persians, because this kingdom will come to an end." And then after Daniel had left, it all happened just as he said. Belshazzar was killed that same night when the Persians broke through the walls. Having diverted the river off of its course, they went right through it and captured the city, so that the kingdom of Babylon fell and the city along with it, never to rise again. Because God is the one who is in control.

So what can we learn from this, Christians? How can we apply what Daniel is trying to teach us? Just like this: God is the one who rules over all things. God is the master of history. He is the master of the nations. Evil cannot stand before him. No one can resist his will. No one will be able to stand against him. No one is the master of their own fate. God will judge the world in righteousness. And that's good news, Christians! That's good news for us! Because that means that all of this evil which we see in the world today, which we see while we live in the midst of this new Babylon, all of it will come to an end. And it will come to an end quickly when the Lord chooses. Because he is the one who establishes its boundaries, that it will thrive only during this time, and after that time God will swiftly bring it to an end. Because this is not outside his control, as if he didn't have anything to do with it. God is the master of all things. And God is also the master of your ways as well. He will watch over you. He will lead you through this time in Babylon. And in the day when evil is weighed and found wanting, the kingdom will be given to another, to our Lord Jesus Christ, and it will go on forever. The kingdoms of men will fall. They will fail. But the kingdom of our Lord will go on into eternity.

So don't be afraid, Christians. Evil will be judged. The world as we know it and all the evil in it will come to an end. God will judge the world in righteousness, because he is the one who controls all things. He is the one who will lead you safely to himself.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you are the master of all things. You are the one who raises up nations and who also causes them to fall. We pray that you would cause us always to

trust in you, that we may know that you are the master also of all our ways, so that we will trust in you through everything; in Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.