

You KNOW BETTER!, DANIEL 5

Unshakable Faith #5

◆ **Intro:** Ten year old Jonny and his 3 year old little brother decide to play catch with the goldfish, and then let him swim in the toilet. When Mom gets home she angrily corrects them both. Little brother gets time out in his room for 10 minutes. Jonny gets a half-hour and garbage duty for a week because he “knew better.” We say it all the time.

◆ “You know better than to play in the road.”

◆ “You know better than to stick your finger in a light socket.”

◆ “You should know better than to eat things for money.”

◆ “You know better than to burp your answers in class.”

◆ We say these things because we assume that a person would be wise enough to have learned a lesson or two by now. If they know they’re doing the wrong thing, and do it anyway, that’s worse offense, because it’s deliberate disregard. Well that’s what Belshazzar was doing in our episode of Daniel’s book.

◆ A lot of time and change has come and gone between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. In fact, chapter 5 takes place 30 years later. Belshazzar is the 5th king to reign after Nebuchanezzar, who was most likely his grandfather. Belshazzar ought to know better but he deliberately disregards God.

◆ 1. Belshazzar knows granddad’s stories; the golden statue fiasco, the furnace that couldn’t burn the Hebrew men, the insanity period when grandpa lived like an animal until he acknowledged God.

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- ◆2. Bel is getting drunk with a 1000 officials (v1). It's like the President being drunk at a press conference. It's shameful.
- ◆2. Bel is mocking the God of the Hebrews. He calls for *their* religious vessels that had been looted and housed in the pagan temple. Grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had passed a law against anybody saying anything bad about this God! (3:29) Using Israel's vessels to honor a pagan god was a slap in the face.
- ◆3. The army of Cyrus the Persian is at the city's edge. This is not a good time to be getting hammered. It is arrogance in the highest degree. Belshazzar's immediate father, Nabonidus, is away fighting other enemies, and even if the historians were right, and Babylon had enough supplies to last under siege for 20 years, Belshazzar should have "known better."
- ◆4. The queen mother respectfully refers to Daniel by his Hebrew name and remembers that God is in him, but Bel calls him only "one of the captives" from Judah. [Daniel was probably dismissed from the king's court earlier much as when a new President fires all the previous Whitehouse staff, and cabinet.]
- ◆So all these things stack up to show us that Belshazzar is a windbag king, his only claim to fame that he drinks a lot. And he doesn't care much about any Most High God, even though he

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knows better. You almost would think he's a teenager. (Wouldn't it have been nice if we had solved the world's problems when we were 17 and knew everything.) It's flagrant disregard for God's design. He's in for a shock.

◆ Pause a moment; is there anywhere in your life that you are *freely disregarding* one of God's directions? Do you have anything from work that doesn't belong to you? How about going on vacation with a member of the opposite sex to whom you're not married? Looking for a way to hurt someone for hurting you? Hang around God's word for any length of time and you know these are not his will for your good life. And every one of us fails to keep God's law, but the point is we must not pass it off as of no consequence.

◆ 1. Now how serious is it to disregard God? **God of Israel has more power in his little finger than the greatest world power on Earth.**

◆ It is not without reason that God revealed his word to Belshazzar with a mere finger writing on the wall. No big ominous apparition floating in space. No stomping giant, shaking the tables. Just a finger of a hand. There's something scary about a power that is SO great even a finger is more than you can face! There's a joking, little word play in Daniel's account about how scary this is.

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- ◆ V6 in Hebrew is *"the knots of his loins were loosened."* In a literal sense that means he was so scared a little wet spot appeared under his chair.
- ◆ V12 The queen mother comes in and notices and almost jokingly says, *"well I see we have a knotty problem. Dan is good at "loosening knots" (rendered "solving problems" in English)."*
- ◆ So Belshazzar had literally lost all control of himself facing unfathomable power of God. You and I need to be equally awed by the seriousness of God our Creator. And here's the thing; though we know better.. that there is a God; that God is sovereign, that planets larger than our whole Solar System exist at his word; though we too know of God and even call on his name when we want to swear; though we have miraculous answers to prayer that couldn't be anything other than an act of God –still we easily pass him off. We are often little Belshazzars.
 - ◆ We credit what God does to Mother Nature, whoever that is. We assume our forefathers were old fashioned and that faith is unscientific, though the scientific revolution in Western Civilization was a literally spearheaded by Christians. We wrap our knuckles of a table expecting "luck" as though it exists. We rise from an illness and claim "I beat it." We think our prosperity is due to our earning it.
(Com'on, Man!)

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◆C. Here's what Bel was learning, and also us: God has more power in his little finger than the greatest world power on Earth... So...I need to humbly acknowledge God in my daily life. Another way of saying this is to "give glory to God".

◆v23 *...you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.*

◆Would God say this of us? Bel's sin was a sin of omission; he failed to honor the God, even though he heard all about him! He left him out of the picture just like Hollywood does.

◆*James 4:13-17 (NIV 1984) Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

◆James is talking properly recognizing God in your daily life! We are little Belshazzars when we pretend he's not around, or that what I'm doing right now is of no concern of his. It's a life that will be weighed, and found of no substantial weight.

◆**2. I am going to answer to the One True God.** This is a stark reality pointed out in Belshazzar's story. Daniel's repeated theme is that God is sovereign. One clear implication of a

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sovereign God, is that everything I do matters to him. I am not leaving him at the church building when I go home, even if I live like it.

◆A. There is a holy equation set in the universe: evil always results in death; good always results in life. Sometimes it is reserved for the Last Day. Sometimes it is immediate.

Sometimes it is rewarded now, sometimes later. But God's word on it is we are answerable to God at every moment. Not just in church, but also when sneaking out of the house.

◆*Romans 2:5-10. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil... but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good...*

◆The handwriting on the wall makes this point. Mene Mene Tekel Parsin. As nouns these are all weights used on a scale to weigh precious metals. Mina (500 gm), shekel (10 gm), Parsin (half-mina, 250 gm) (like saying pound/ounce/half-pound). As verbs they mean "numbered, weighed, divided". Bel is God's

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illustration: his life has been evaluated and found to be worthless and insubstantial. No weight on the scale of justice. It's also a warning to Israel who remains subjugated under Babylon, and then Persian, and then Greece, and then Rome –because they ignored God's commandments too. It is not the blessed life!

◆ B. What's new in this episode of Daniel's series is the immediate judgment of Belshazzar. While God gave Nebuchadnezzar various opportunities through dreams and miracles, Belshazzar appears and disappears all in one chapter. What is accented in this chapter is that judgement is coming. The world will answer to the God who made it, as will you, and as will I. This is a philosophical position asserting that human history is leading somewhere. You do not just go around in reincarnated circles, and you won't simply cease to exist at some point.

◆ *Hebrews 4:13. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

◆ This is so opposite what our world currently believes. Judgment is exactly that which many folks do not want to believe in any longer. Daniel 5 is saying "Stop pretending there isn't a moral standard. Stop glorifying your gods of freedom and personal choice about what's right and what's wrong for you." Ah, but these are our gods.

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- ◆ We don't want to be "judged" by people who think our lifestyle is wrong, so we call them "haters" and "discriminators."
- ◆ We don't want personal limitations of "he" or a "she" so now we invent dozens of unscientific new pronouns.
- ◆ We raise the god of "my choice" over the value of human life in the womb. I must be free!
- ◆ People say, "Only God can judge me!" What they mean is, "None of your opinions matter. It's just me and God." But folks who say such things overlook several realities: 1) They still have God to contend with. God is certainly going to judge us, everyone of us! 2) Judgements (not proud judgmentalism) are vitally necessary for life. We ought to care about what someone say, especially if it is true. We should "know better" than to say it doesn't matter. *The very essence of truth is to make judgements about right/wrong, good/bad.* To affirm that broccoli is good for you and should therefore be eaten, is a judgment. To decide that a mob should not be free to vandalize your house is to make a judgement. No society is possible without judgment; truths and laws are judgements. So let's stop complaining about someone passing a judgement on us as though it's wrong to have them. Let's have no more of this nonsense that something can be true for you but not for me. What we need to be concerned about is not that people make

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judgements, but whether or not the judgements being made are true according to God.

◆**Conclusion:** Listen, we can either disregard God, and have our stomachs all tied up in knots. Or we can humbly submit to God and have our knots untied, and our ciphers uncoded.

◆Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. Eccl 12:13-14

◆And here is the best good news, because as soon as we realize this truth we also become aware that not one of us had it in us to keep to God's path. Eternal life requires not the balancing of demerits, but the absence of them! We will give an account and someone must pay!

◆*Hebrews 9:27-28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

◆When you have accepted Jesus as your savior, then he stands up on Judgment Day, and to every charge leveled, (and there will be many for sure) he will reply to God the Father, "I'll take the punishment for that one too." Praise his holy name!