

Daniel 05-11-06a

This is Sunday the 6th of November 2005. We continue our worship this morning by taking a moment as we approach the study of the Word of God to remember the context of our lives. It's a privilege that we enjoy to know that we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

Our citizenship has been granted to us even while we continue to sojourn as strangers and pilgrims in a fallen world. But it would be a sad thing for us to forget who we are and why we are here. You remember the great passage in the Old Testament where the psalmist says, if I forget Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth and so forth.

If I ever forget where my citizenship is, where I belong, my identity as one of the people of God, well it's equally true for us. If we get caught up in the affairs of this life, whether it is tasks or accomplishments or requirements or circumstances and situations, interactions with people, struggling to stay afloat in the flotsam and jetsam that is our culture today, it would be a tragic thing for us to have come so far and learn so much from the Word of God and forget who we are and why we are here. It's a constant battle.

There is no encouragement and there is no reinforcement of our spiritual identity in the world around us. It has to come from within. It has to come from the voice of God's Spirit speaking through God's Word in our souls and we have to incline our ear, we have to lift up our voice and cry out for that reminder and that knowledge day by day, hour by hour or we will be swept away.

I have often thought of our time and place in history as it has always been since creation was corrupted by man's fall and the curse, but it is as though we are on a down escalator and unless we actively step and strive to move upward, standing still will carry us downward. We are not in a neutral environment, we are in a hostile environment and if we don't swim against the tide, if we don't pay attention and work to preserve our perspective and our divine viewpoint of life through the application of God's Word, we will be swept away. It is inevitable and it is a success, it is a tactical victory for the forces of darkness when we squander the victory that the Lord Jesus Christ won, the strategic victory on the cross.

So there is no more important time that we spend than that which is devoted to immersing ourselves in God's Word, renewing and refreshing and restoring God's perspective in our hearts through the study of His Word. So we take time before we begin each session of Bible study to individually and personally affirm that knowledge and ask for the ministry of God's Spirit to overcome whatever the limitations are of the presentation or the intake. You know, you've got the pitcher and the catcher.

I'm the pitcher, you're the catcher and either one of us can drop the ball, but God can supernaturally through His Spirit superintend the process and ensure that each one of us has

what we need to fulfill the plan of God in our lives. So we take this moment to acknowledge those things, to ensure that our hearts and minds are in a teachable state for the study of the Word of God. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful that in the swirl and chaos of the world as it is today, we have an anchor that holds within the veil.

We have a sure rock upon which we can stand, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth and conducted His life and ministry for 33 years on our behalf, left us an example of human life lived in the power of the Spirit and in the light of Your Word, and who now sits at Your right hand to make intercession for us, to plead our case, to justify our cause based on His own justifying work on the cross. We thank You for the privilege of living in this age and at this time, of having the full revelation of Your Word available to us in so many forms and in so many ways. We have access to knowledge and understanding and light that is shed on the content of Your Word as never before in history.

There has never been a time when it was as easy to put together the lines and precepts that are found in Your Word and come to an understanding. We are grateful for the nation in which we live, the freedom that we enjoy, the provision that You have made for us, the fact that we are alive this morning, breathing air and conscious and in reasonably good health is an indication and an evidence of Your faithfulness and Your grace. And we thank You for that.

We thank You for the opportunity to nourish our souls through the study of Your Word. We pray that that opportunity will be afforded to all those who love You and seek to glorify You in their duties as they execute them in our government, in our military, in our law enforcement, in all of those areas that secure and extend our freedom and our opportunity. We pray especially for the President, his staff, his cabinet, those who are leaders in our Congress and in our judiciary, who are believers and who understand Your Word and are doing their best to do their job in a way that is pleasing in Your sight.

We pray a special blessing on them that You will encourage them, strengthen them, give them the joy of their salvation, even in the face of the opposition that they inevitably face from those who live in the darkness, who want to foist that darkness upon all of the rest of us. We ask Your blessing again upon us as a fellowship and individually. May God the Holy Spirit minister Your Word to each one of us in a way that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior and be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Our scripture reading this morning comes from the Book of Psalms, Psalm 9. This is a psalm dedicated to the chief musician.

It is to the tune of Death of the Son. This is Mut Laban. You may remember all of those words from our investigations into Hebrew.

Mut, of course, is the word for death. Ben, like Ben Hur, means son. Mut Laban is the death of the son.

You could imagine that this is not a little toe-tapping polka type of tune. It is not going to incite people to stand up and frolic and clap hands and everybody join in and sing along. This, by its very title, would indicate that it is something of a dirge, something of a mournful, wailing sort of lament or a melancholy, brooding sort of a setting.

And yet, you'll notice that there are notes of celebration even in this somber accompaniment. Psalm 9, I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart. I will tell of all your marvelous works.

I will be glad and rejoice in you. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. Now, I almost thought of having an experiment where I would just put this to the tune of you know, the Funeral March or Moonlight Sonata or something like that that's mournful and sad because there is a tension between the content of these words and the obvious solemnity and brooding nature of the tune to which it is set.

Why would that be? We sometimes find ourselves in a period of challenge, don't we? Or in a time where we feel somber. You can grieve, you can be sorrowful, there's a death in the family. There's no more sober occasion than when someone has passed away.

No matter how much of a relief it might be for someone who's elderly and been suffering or whatever else, it's always a sad occasion. There's a sense of loss. And to say, I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart.

I will tell of all your marvelous works. This to me reflects an act of volition. David here says, I will do what I know I should do even though the setting does not encourage it.

Even though this is not a conducive situation for praise, I'm going to do it anyway. Most people in this situation, particularly unbelievers, would be distraught, would be full of sorrow, would be in a state of disarray, would be disheveled and unkempt and frazzled, frayed. David begins and says, the first order of business is to praise God.

What did Jesus say at the beginning of the model prayer? Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. You always start with a recognition of God and his glory, God and his greatness, God and his righteousness. And that's what David does here, even though obviously this is a very sober setting.

I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart. I will tell of all your marvelous works. I will be glad.

I will rejoice in you. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. I will.

I will. I will. This is an act of volition.

Many times we have to decide how we're going to think. Remember Satan's fall? I will be like the Most High. I will elevate my throne above the stars of God.

I will do this, that and the other. Well, look at the I wills here. I will praise.

I will tell. I will be glad. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

When my enemies turn back, they shall fall and perish at your presence. For you have maintained my right and my cause. You sat on the throne judging in righteousness.

You have rebuked the nations. You have destroyed the wicked. You have blotted out their name forever and ever.

And once again, notice the subject and the verb here. David says the enemies are going to fall back and perish because God has maintained David's cause. God has sat on his throne.

God has rebuked. God has destroyed. God has blotted out their name forever and ever.

And you see the logical relationship. I will be glad. I will praise because you have done these things.

This is the mechanism of controlling our thinking and directing our thinking in a way that's pleasing to God. I will be the way I should be because God has done what God does. O enemy, destructions are finished forever.

And you have destroyed cities. Even their memory has perished. But the Lord shall endure forever.

He has prepared his throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness and he shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness. You notice now David moves from, he says, I will do the following things because God has done what he's done and God will do what God will do.

And so he just covers all the bases, doesn't he? He says, here I am in the present. This is what I'm going to do right now because God has done these things in the past and God will do these things in the future. That is faith and that is hope.

And it is an expression of David's love toward God that he dedicates himself to dwelling on these things in a time of great trouble, time of pressure. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know your name will put their trust in you.

For you Lord have not forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the Lord who dwells in Zion. Declare his deeds among the people.

When he avenges blood, he remembers them. He does not forget the cry of the humble. He does not forget the cry of the humble.

Have mercy on me, O Lord. Consider my trouble from those who hate me. You who lift me up from the gates of death, so that I may tell of all your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion.

I will rejoice in your salvation. The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made. In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught.

The Lord is known by the judgment he executes. The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. The wicked shall be turned into Sheol and all the nations that forget God.

For the needy shall not always be forgotten. The expectation of the poor shall not perish forever. Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail.

Let the nations be judged in your sight. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." National Israel, Old Testament days, individual believer, New Testament days, right? This is a great psalm for meditation when our trials come to us because of people. And it's pretty difficult to think of trials that don't come to us because of people.

They're pretty much almost always going to be people related. Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail. Let the nations be judged in your sight.

Those who are not Israel, those who are not the people of God, those who do not walk in God's ways, who do not honor God, who are empty in their imaginations and their foolish hearts are darkened. Put them in fear, O Lord, so that the nations may know themselves to be but men. What does God say over and over again? How many times have we seen it in Ezekiel? Then they shall know that I am the Lord.

When you recognize that God is the Lord, what else do you recognize? Remember the guy on Saturday Night Live that did Weekend Update and he would say, you know, I'm Chevy Chase and you're not? If God is the Lord, what does that make everybody else? Not the Lord. The nations may know themselves to be but men. We went into this extensively when we studied Ecclesiastes.

Man dwells under the sun. He's like the grass that withers and the flower that fades. Isaiah 40.

When you recognize that you're strutting and fretting your hour upon the stage is just sound and fury signifying nothing, you begin to realize that unless you can partake of the eternal, you are meaningless and pointless. It is, once you die, it is as though you never were. And it is only through God that we can partake of the eternal.

And that is something we have that those who oppose us and those who reject us and those who give us a hard time in life, that's something they don't have. Even if they are believers, if they are not walking in the light, if they are not seizing and laying hold of the righteousness of God by faith, they are forfeiting eternal life. Not in the sense of loss of salvation, but in the sense of forfeiting the privilege of reflecting the glory of God, of partaking of the future kingdoms, of proximity and fellowship with God both now and in the ages to come.

And any paltry damage that they are doing to us is insignificant compared to the damage they are doing to themselves and to the cause of Christ and to the plan and purpose of God by their

disobedience, by their apathy, by their indifference. And it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Nothing they are doing to us can hold a candle to the fiery judgment of God that comes on those who ignore him.

And people who are stacking the twigs and the hay and the stubble in this life by abusing us are going to find that their inheritance and their robe of righteousness is incinerated by that bonfire at the judgment. And nobody wins in that scenario. Nobody gains.

We are not going to be dancing on the grave of their future, so to speak. We are not going to be happy that they frittered away their life. We are not going to say, aha, so there you gave me trouble.

You don't see Lazarus over there with Abraham saying, you know, chuckling at the rich man, saying, ha, don't hold your breath until I come over there with a drop of water. Lazarus is not rejoicing. Abraham is not rejoicing.

God is not rejoicing. God says, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But God has to do it anyway.

Well, all of this pertains, oddly enough, to our study in the book of Daniel, to which we now turn. We have covered in detail the first three chapters covering the captivity and initial circumstances of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, or Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They have sort of a dual identity, don't they? They have their Jewish identity, and they have their Babylonian identity.

And those are referenced at different times in the book. We also have a dual identity. We are Americans.

We are human beings living on planet Earth in this generation, and yet we are also known to God. If we are faithful, if we are obedient, if we are overcomers, we have a new name given to us by God. Have you ever thought about that? What kind of a name God might be thinking up for us, as it were? You know, all of those Old Testament names have a meaning.

You think about Hananiah, referenced to the grace of God. You think about Azariah, the help and the comfort that God provides to those who call upon Him. Mishael, who is God but God.

Daniel, God is my judge. Yeshua, Deliverer. All of these great names.

Israel, Prince of God. And the name that God is going to give us in the future, hopefully, the name that we ought to be laying claim to, is going to be a reflection of something. So what will we be known for? What will our name reflect? I hope it's, you know, the Indians used to have those names, you know, what was it, Running from Wolves, or Dancing with Wolves, or, you know, Running Bear, or whatever it may be.

The Indians used to have these names that were supposed to reference, you know, Sitting Bull,

and that sort of thing. Our name, if you think about it, is very likely going to reflect some characteristic or pattern that is manifest in our lives. And I don't know about you, but I don't want my future name to be something like, you know, Wilting Flower, or, you know, Bending Reed, or something where it's all about, you know, collapsing under pressure.

Hopefully there is some aspect of the glory of God that will be manifest in our lives, and we will have a name like Hananiah, or Mishaël, or Azariah, or Daniel. Well, we've seen these young men. Catastrophic circumstances.

Catastrophic. You want to feel sorry for the people in New Orleans, or the victims of hurricanes, or the victims of famines around the world, the victims of warfare, people crying the blues about the people in Iraq, and so on. Nobody can really complain in this country when you look at what happened to these four individuals.

We haven't been castrated and taken captive in some other country, and in the danger of our lives from a capricious king. These men aren't. And we saw in Daniel chapter 2, the great vision, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation.

Chapter 3, we saw the image of gold that was set up on the plain of Dura. By the way, I didn't tell you this last week, but there was a fanciful interpretation of this whole image of gold. You remember the dimensions of the image of gold? What were they? How many cubits wide, how many cubits high? Six cubits, nine feet wide, 60 cubits high, 90 feet tall.

Well, you know, if you're sort of a wild-eyed prophecy nut, and you say, oh, you know, the mark of the beast is 666, I've got to find 600 in here somewhere. And so somebody went and tried to do gematria, the Hebrew fanciful assigning of numbers to words, you know, add up the number value of the letters. And they said, well, you know, plain of Dura in Hebrew gematria adds up to 600.

So you have 666. Well, you know, you read this stuff. Well, I went into the, into the, for one thing, well, never mind.

Uh, this is Aramaic, remember? It's not Hebrew. It's Aramaic. So you're already on kind of thin ice using Hebrew gematria on Aramaic words.

But I went and added up the Hebrew letter values of plain of Dura. It's not 600. It's 777 for whatever that's worth.

But it's not 600 so that you have 666. But there are some symbolic elements here. What is the plain of Dura? Dur in both Hebrew and Aramaic, they're related words.

In Babylonian, in the language of the Babylonians, Dur or Dura has the idea of a wall. So you say, what? Plain of the wall? That's kind of a perpendicular idea there. You know, you've got the plain and you've got the wall, plain of the wall.

Well, you have to dig a little further back in the etymology. Dur has the idea of to dwell or to assemble together. Well, dwellings, when you're going to dwell in a place, you build walls, you protect yourself, you build houses and that kind of thing.

But in the Hebrew idea, it has to do with more those who dwell, not where they dwell. And in Hebrew, the idea of Dur is generation, generations. This is the life of mankind.

This is how he dwells. And this is the plain of the generations, if you will, if you kind of retrovert this into Hebrew. This is the plain of dwelling, mankind dwelling.

And then you have this great image standing there. And this represents the kingdoms of men and what's going to take place. So every word in scripture, the fact that this is given, of course, it's out in the Iraqi desert.

Now, you can't nail down the location with any precision. But we saw this in chapter three, we've gone through the fiery furnace and the appearance of the fourth man in the fire that has the appearance of a son of the gods, then Nebuchadnezzar's praise. And he speaks and blesses the God of these three, who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him.

And obviously, somebody explained to Nebuchadnezzar, well, you know, this is in our relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God sends his minions, he sends his messengers at times of crisis. We know about this. It's a historical fact to us.

And God just sent another one and you were privileged to see it. So Nebuchadnezzar says, God sent his angel. This is the fourth man in the fire, the angel, the messenger delivered his servants who trusted in him so that they would not serve or worship any God except their own God.

Then he makes this decree. Of course, you cannot legislate spirituality. You can't legislate morality.

You know, one of the worst things that happened to Christianity probably is Constantine, because ever since then, people have been saying, well, Constantine is the one that defined modern Christianity because he picked one kind and outlawed all others. Boo on Constantine. You can't legislate Christianity.

But Nebuchadnezzar tries it here. There's no God who can deliver like this. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

They had already been set over it and now they are enhanced. Their powers are enhanced. They're given broader powers even than what they had.

Now we come to chapter four, but all we're going to have time to do before the break is read this. But in chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar the king puts out a proclamation and you get the idea that this is a copy made from the original at the time that this book was put together.

These words were available in the archives, in the library, in the palace.

To all people's nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great are his signs and how mighty his wonders.

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Sort of a déjà vu situation here. The magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans and the soothsayers came in.

I told them the dream but they did not make known to me its interpretation. But at last Daniel came before me. His name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my God.

In him is the spirit of the Holy God. And I told the dream before him saying, Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the Holy God is in you and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen and its interpretation. These were the visions of my head while on my bed.

I was looking and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong. Its height reached to the heavens and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.

It could be seen to the ends of all the earth. What is this? Flat earth society? How can you be at the ends of the earth and see a tree, I don't care how tall it is? Well, that's what he says. It's a dream, right? Strange things can happen.

Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a Watcher, a Holy One, coming down from heaven.

He cried loud and said thus, Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field.

Let it be wet with the dew of heaven and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him. This decision is by the decree of the Watchers and the sentence by the word of the Holy Ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.

Do you remember our scripture reading this morning? In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will and sets over it the lowest of men. This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you." Well, we will move forward from this after having reviewed some of the ideas here, but this is consistent with what we know of the setup in the kingdom.

Why is Daniel not in the initial group of wise men? He's over all the wise men, right? And this is what we call escalating the ticket. This is a trouble ticket. This is a work order.

And first echelon wise men are not able to fulfill the requirement, and so it's been kicked up to a higher order of support. You know how this works in the military. You know how it works in computer support companies.

You have your first line of help desk, and if those people can't answer the question, you kick it up to somebody who knows more. Daniel is no fool. He knows how to administrate, and he's not going to be in there for every little piddling thing that the king needs, or that the cabinet for the king needs.

They consult him on the biggies, the tough ones. And so Nebuchadnezzar is, in a sense, consulting things in the order that Daniel has set it up. Daniel is in the process of training these wise men, and it's kind of like Moses in the wilderness having the judges.

The judges handle the routine and the ordinary. If they can't handle it, it goes up to Moses. Same thing here.

So these guys are not able to make known the interpretation, so at last, Daniel came before me, and he says, Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know the spirit of God is in you and no secret troubles you, explain to me this dream. After he gives the content of the dream, he says, this dream I have seen you declare its interpretation since the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make it known. He says, look, I've already talked to the lower order guys, and this is one for you.

He does not say, tell me the dream and its interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar no longer needs to put his people to the test, right? Daniel has already solved that problem two chapters ago. Well, what is the significance of the dream? If you're familiar with the overall outline of this book, and with its general content, you know that Daniel is going to interpret this dream in terms of Nebuchadnezzar.

He is the great tree. He leads this world-dominant empire, but he is going to be chopped down for seven times. During that time, he's going to lose his reason, and he is going to graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth.

His heart is changed seven times. You're going to pass over him. The dew of heaven is going to

fall on him, and so forth.

Does that exhaust the meaning of this dream? It does not. So, what else does it mean? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break, and when we come back, we will look at Daniel's interpretation of the dream, and the details that he gives, and then we're going to figure out not only what it meant in the Old Testament day, but what it means to us. But let's pause here and take our break.