

# The End of a Wicked Kingdom

*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: 18 April 2021

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not just because we're, or not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. This week we're continuing our study in the book of Daniel. We're going to be in Daniel chapter 5, and you'll remember that the book of Daniel takes place in the 7th and 6th century BC, and it tells the story of a man named Daniel who was a faithful Israelite living in exile in Babylon. And this book for us has two main points.

First, it reminds us, it encourages us that no matter how bad things seem, God is still in control. He rules and He reigns over the nations. Not only is this book here to encourage us, though, it's also to instruct us how it is that we live faithful lives in a foreign land. Now, at the beginning, we looked more at instruction last week, and this week we're going to look, we've been looking more at encouragement. Last week, we looked at the fact that there are wicked rulers, and we live in a wicked world. And so we asked that question of how we can stay away from doubt and cynicism and fear.

We're going to look at a similar situation this morning. We're continuing that theme. We're going to look a little bit less at wicked rulers and more at wicked kingdoms. We're going to ask less about doubt and cynicism. We're going to ask more about fear. How is it when we look at the power and the wickedness of the nations around us, which Chris mentioned in his prayer this morning, how do we maintain hope? And not only how do we maintain hope, how do we keep going and moving? How do we continue to be people of peace rather than people of violence? It's with that question of how we maintain that hope in the midst of a world filled with wickedness that we come to Daniel chapter 5 this morning. I invite you to turn there with me now in your worship guide or your phone or in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. In other words, He has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead He's given us

His Word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now, starting at chapter 5, verse 1. King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that 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. Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Verse 5. 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.

[ 3 : 28 ] Then the king's color changed and his thoughts alarmed him. His limbs gave way and his knees knocked together. The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers.

The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, whoever reads this writing and shows me its interpretation shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed. Verse 10. The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, O king, live forever. Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation. Verse 13.

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king, my father, brought from Judah. I have heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter.

But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Verse 17. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive. Whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. Verse 21. 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, until he knew that the most high God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this. But you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven, and the vessels of his house have been brought in before you.

And you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know.

[ 7 : 02 ] But the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored. Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed.

Many, many, tekem, and parson. This is the interpretation of the matter. Many, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekem, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple. A chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

That very night, Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old. So, I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, which comforts us and instructs us. And we ask for your help again this morning. We know that without it, we will not be able to know or see or hear or understand.

[ 8 : 15 ] And so, we ask that you would send your spirit now to be at work in us as we hear the truths from your word. That we would be able to believe and see and hear and understand everything written about you and your word.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. About last summer, not quite a year ago, I decided I was going to join a very exclusive club.

Some of you have heard of this club. It's Costco Wholesale. And I am mostly a big fan of Costco, although I have a few complaints. And one of my main complaints is this.

I buy a lot of eggs, and I buy now the 18-pack of eggs at Costco. And if you've been there, you know what I'm about to say. The egg carton is plastic.

Now, if you go to Walmart, you'll also see this as well. This is sort of an affront to the way the world should be constructed. Egg cartons should never be plastic, especially when they're an 18-pack, because they kind of bend and give.

[ 9 : 20 ] So, they're unreliable. And in fact, the barcode is on the top of the carton. So, when you're checking out, you have to hold and you have to flip. And so, I always get a little bit nervous when I'm holding and flipping.

I have made it this far without sending 18 eggs onto the floor of Costco. But I have to play this game when I'm at home, getting the 18-pack out of the fridge and putting it back in.

And I've been doing great for months. Until this last week, I did not have the support I needed around all the elements of the 18-egg carton. I was putting it back into my refrigerator.

And I had, I believe, three eggs just drop down and splat all over the kitchen floor. It was great. It was a sad day. Now, what did I do? Of course, I cleaned it up with a paper towel.

But I want you to imagine with me for a second. What if instead of cleaning it up with a paper towel, it was this morning. I was dressed for church. And I took off my suit jacket. And I just got in there and just wiped it up.

[ 10 : 20 ] And then the remainder was there. And I took my tie off. And I finished it up to make sure it was done. Okay? Now, go a step further with me. I'm in the, we're not at my house. We're in the kitchen here at the church.

I have my Costco of 18 eggs. And I drop three on the floor. And I ask for your suit jacket. Unsuspecting, you give it to me. And I use it to wipe up every single one of the eggs off the floor.

What's the feeling that you have? Ugh, right? Why? Well, there's a couple reasons, right? It's your coat jacket. It's not mine. Of course, if it was your kitchen rag, you'd probably be fine with it, right?

So, it's something else. I'm using it for a purpose it was never intended for. And I'm using something that is precious and sacred and valuable for this sort of everyday profane use.

I mean, it's just disgraceful, right? That I would take your suit jacket and I would use it to wipe up eggs on the floor. Now, you're probably wondering where I'm going with this. This is exactly what we see at the very beginning of this chapter.

[ 11 : 23 ] We've seen a transition from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar. Belshazzar has decided he is going to have this great feast. And it is beyond what we normally expect. He is drinking wine in front of the thousand.

There's a thousand of his lords. This is verse 1. And he's not drinking it privately like we might expect. He's doing it in front of everyone. There's this public debauchery that's going on. We can expect here that Belshazzar is getting drunk.

And then, verse 2, he commands that the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords and his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

Now, you'll remember chapter 1, verse 2, this was what happened at the very beginning. Remember, Nebuchadnezzar came. He took the vessels of the temple. Even Nebuchadnezzar did not dare to use God's vessels for his drinking party.

And so what's the feeling that Israelites would have here? Remember that feeling you had when I told you about wiping up the eggs with your suit jacket? That is the feeling the Israelites are having as they're hearing this passage read to them.

[ 12 : 30 ] Who would dare use something so sacred for something so profane? There's probably a visceral reaction among them. Hearing about the vessels of God's temple being used for a drinking party.

And in fact, it's emphasized here by the author here that tells us verse 2. We're told they're from the temple. And in case we missed it, it's repeated again in verse 3. They're from the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem.

Now, of course, everyone knows the temple is the house of God. Why is it emphasized here? To remind us how awful this is. How inappropriate this is.

What an affront to God this is. That his vessels would be used in this way. And then we find out something even more. Remember I told you this morning we're not looking just at wicked rulers but wicked kingdoms.

Nebuchadnezzar is not the only one involved here. We see in both verse 2 and verse 3 who is participating. The king, his lords, his wives, and his concubines.

[ 13 : 34 ] Verse 3, it's repeated. His lords, his wives, and his concubines. Verse 1, we hear the word thousand, not once but twice. The point is this.

It is not just that King Belshazzar is the one who is insulting God to his face, but that the entire elite of Babylon have become wildly corrupt.

The entire elite, everyone who's in command here, the thousand rulers, all of them are complicit in this. It's not just that we have a bad king. We have elites who have gone wrong.

All of them are blaspheming God by what they're doing. The ruling class is corrupt. There is no fear of God in this kingdom.

Now, we're going to have to use our imaginations here because, of course, in America we know nothing about our ruling class being completely corrupt. So you're just going to have to pretend, kind of imagine what that might be like.

[ 14 : 36 ] But that feeling of having that eggs wiped up with a suit, that's what they're seeing here. It's sort of like a child, right, playing with his father's gun. He has no idea what he's doing.

These people have no idea what it is they're playing with. And so it's highlighting for us their wickedness. If they're willing to do this, what else are they willing to do?

And you may remember from chapter 4, when this condemnation came down for not Belshazzar but Nebuchadnezzar, one of the things he was told is he needed to stop practicing wickedness.

Remember 4, verse 27, break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed. Now, these rulers are making it much worse.

And so the question they would have is this, what is God going to do? What is God going to do that these people are so profane that they would use his suit to wipe up their eggs?

[ 15 : 39 ] Now, that question is one for us as well. We also live in a world filled with places where the ruling class, the kingdom, is corrupt to its core.

We don't have to think hard to go there. We know places and people whose wickedness makes us cringe. We have a visceral reaction to it. We can think right now, the Chinese government, right?

There is an ongoing genocide. I could list other places around the world. It's easy to talk about. Other people in other places, of course, we can turn very quickly to our own country. Just this January, the 117th Congress was opened up by a prayer to a pagan god, the pagan god Brahma.

And we can look around and quickly see celebration among our elites of all kinds of sexual perversion and practices that lift up the powerful at the expense of the weak. And so this question is not far off for us.

What is God going to do? What hope do we have? And are these people going to get away with this?

[ 16 : 46 ] We know from the last chapter, chapter 4, that God raises leaders up, gives us all our leaders. Is he also going to tear them down?

And so that takes us straight into the next section of our passage. We see verse 5 starts out with this word, immediately. That's not a coincidence. We're being told that God's response comes right away to this affront that he's given by these pagan rulers.

There's a direct connection between what they're doing with the vessels of his temple and the handwriting that appears here on the wall. And in case we forgot, verse 6 tells us that the handwriting appears right by the lampstand.

This would be the lampstand. Most likely, that's one of the instruments, the vessels from the temple that they're using. So they're using God's lampstand to light up their drinking party.

So God decides he's going to use this lampstand to write up, to highlight his writing, reminding us that they're abusing the vessels of the temple. And then we're going to have in verse 6 an interesting phrase.

[ 17 : 50 ] We're told the king's response. Belshazzar has a dramatic response in verse 6. His color changed and his thoughts alarmed him. And then we have this interesting phrase here, his limbs gave way.

Now, in Hebrew, this literally means his knots were untied. And Hebrew scholars would tell us what this means is that Belshazzar went to the bathroom.

But he wasn't in the bathroom. Remember, Belshazzar is having this great drinking party. He's drinking in front of everyone.

I didn't make that up, by the way. Okay. The point is this. As we think about how we have hope in this world, as we look at wicked rulers and wicked kingdoms, the author of Daniel in this story is reminding us that as we look at them, no matter how powerful and great they may seem, God's power is so much greater that he can make the rulers of this world poop their pants.

That laughing is appropriate, right? Because that is the reaction that the author wants here. These people have this fear. They're looking at the rulers of the world.

[ 19 : 03 ] God is using potty humor to help them get some perspective. Remember, we talked last week about the heavenly perspective on the earthly reality. These people may seem powerful, not compared to God.

Now, kids, don't get me in trouble, okay? This does not mean you get to run around all the time talking about people pooping their pants. If you do, remember this.

I'm about to have been a pastor here for four years. I've only said this once. You, therefore, can say this once every four years, okay? So when you get to be 18, you can have racked up a total number of four times.

Keep that in mind. I say this because that is the way this story works. He wants us to begin to have some humor, to laugh at these kings, right?

We're supposed to think of them as being powerful, and now we see how fragile they are. The rulers of this world are a joke compared to God and his power.

[ 20 : 13 ] The rulers of this world are a joke compared to God and his power. Don't fear them. Don't fear them in their blasphemy. Don't fear them in their wickedness.

God is so much bigger and greater compared to God. They're so small. They're only men.

The same is true for us. We don't shake in fear at the kingdoms of this world because we know how great and powerful our God is.

So that's the first reminder to these people and to us as well. As they look at the power, the rulers and the kingdoms around them, as they look at their wickedness, they're tempted to fear and give up hope.

They remember the greatness of our God. We continue in verses 7 through 12 as they scurry around to try to find an interpreter.

[ 21 : 16 ] And the queen remembers Daniel. By the way, when the queen talks about Daniel and tells of his powers, she uses the same phrase here. She tells Belshazzar that he is able to untie knots, which I'm sure Belshazzar did not appreciate.

But the queen remembers Daniel. And so Daniel shows up and he tells the story. He summarizes chapter 4 for us. He reminds us that God brings down earthly kingdoms.

He reviews Nebuchadnezzar's story in verses 13 through 21. And I just want you to notice there, verse 18, he notes that the glory here all belongs to God.

Verse 18, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. Why was Nebuchadnezzar great? Because God decided he was going to be great. Exactly what we talked about last week.

God raises up, he gives us all our rulers. And so Nebuchadnezzar, or Daniel, reminds Belshazzar of this. And then he provides the final verdict here in verses 22 through 23 after reminding them of the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned he tells Belshazzar, but you ignored that lesson.

[ 22 : 31 ] Verse 22, And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all of this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them.

And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know. But the God in whose hand is your breath and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

At the root of the wickedness of the Babylonian empire is this, they will not worship and honor God. He has not learned the lesson he needed to.

He rebelled against God. He worshiped idols. And so it's at this point that Daniel provides for us the interpretation in verses 25 through 28.

And there we see something very simple. God numbers the days of kingdoms. God judges kings.

[ 23 : 39 ] And God raises up and brings down kingdoms. God has numbered the days of every kingdom. God will one day ultimately judge every earthly king.

God is the one who establishes kingdoms and brings them down. And so for us, we also take comfort. Not just that God is the one who causes kings to be incontinent, but also that he numbers the days of the kingdoms of men.

No matter what wicked empire we are talking about, God has numbered their days. They will persist in evil for a time. They will not persist in evil forever.

God brings down the nations that will not honor him. He may not do it today. He will do it. Remember what I've mentioned before. There is no nation in the history of the world that has or will be a superpower forever.

And on top of that, there is no evil nation that will persist forever. God numbers the days of every evil empire. And I'll just give you one example. Some of you are old enough to remember the Berlin Wall.

[ 24 : 57 ] The Berlin Wall came up in 1961. It came down in 1989. That's less than 30 years. Less than half a lifetime.

Right? It would have been painful. It was painful to be a Christian living during that time under that empire with the oppression and persecution of communism. Right? And God numbered their days.

The same is true for us. No matter what evil kingdom we may see or live under, God has numbered them. There is a time when he will cause them to fall.

It is true now. It will ultimately be true in the future. And so as we're tempted to fear, as we're tempted to give up hope, we remember that God is the powerful one.

We do not shake or tremble at the nations. But instead, the nations should shake and tremble before God. He is the one who can untie their knots.

[ 26 : 06 ] I've heard a couple people recently, I don't remember who, have said this. They say, you know, if someone's afraid of the Christian right, they should actually really be afraid of the non-Christian right.

We could say the same for the left. The reason is this. Because we as Christians, when we think about kingdoms and nations and powers, when we think about politics, we always remember that God's in control.

He has a plan. That means, on a practical level, we don't have to resort to violence about anything because we trust God. Imagine what the world looks like when there are people who see wickedness and they don't trust in God.

They believe it's up to them. Daniel is able to remain faithful and peaceful and serve this kingdom because he knows God is the one who's in control.

What it means that we don't shake or tremble at the kingdoms also means we're able to be like Daniel. We're able to be bold and speak the truth when we need to. Many people think that the way Belshazzar talks to Daniel is mocking.

[ 27 : 15 ] He mentions that he's from Judah multiple times, which many people think is a racial dig at him. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, who said that he knew Daniel could do these things, Belshazzar says he's heard that he can, if he can.

There's all these little insults that he's giving him. It's dangerous for him to tell the truth to this man. And Daniel says what's true because he doesn't fear the powers of this world.

So we take hope. We remain peaceful. We don't have to shake or tremble. Daniel knows who's in charge, and so he's able to take Belshazzar to task.

Remember I said before he's quiet at times? Yes. He's also bold. And this is again where we return to the question. It's how we dare to be a Daniel.

Those who know how powerful God is are not afraid to speak the truth. Those who know how powerful God is are not afraid to speak the truth.

[ 28 : 19 ] We don't dare to be a Daniel in a moralistic sense, in the sense that we just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We dare to be a Daniel in the sense that Daniel knew how powerful God was, and that enabled him to be faithful and obedient and bold.

We also know how powerful God is, and so that enables us and empowers us to be faithful, obedient, and bold. Now, a non-Christian could say these things, right, about speaking the truth.

It's we as Christians who know the power that we have to be able to do it, because we know it is our God who does it. And so that's our hope and our confidence as Christians.

If you're not a Christian, remember from this passage that God is the one who is so powerful that he can untie knots. When Belshazzar saw him for who he was, his color changed and he shook and trembled.

That is how powerful God is. You can choose to shake and tremble before him now in repentance of sins and following after faith in Jesus Christ, or you can choose to shake and tremble before him later when he comes and returns to this world in judgment.

[ 29 : 38 ] You cannot escape the shaking and the trembling, because that is how powerful and great God is. And so the question that Mark Bates asked you from chapter 2 is the same today.

Which kingdom are you a part of? The kingdom of God or the kingdoms of this earth? We began by asking how do we maintain hope when we look at the wickedness of this world and the kingdoms in it.

We maintain hope because we know that God numbers the days of kingdoms. He judges their kings and he raises them up and he tears them down.

He is the one who is powerful enough to untie their knots. And of course we see that fulfilled by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We're told by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 22 and 23.

Especially in 23 and 24. Christ the first fruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ. Those who belong to his kingdom. Verse 24. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

[ 30 : 48 ] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. God numbered the days of kingdoms in the time of Daniel.

He ultimately and finally numbers the days of all the kingdoms in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Who is coming to establish his kingdom. As we prayed this morning.

On earth as it is in heaven. And so we fear him and not the kingdoms and rulers of this world. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word which gives us great encouragement and great comfort.

We ask that it would work into our lives. That we would abandon the fear of those who seem so powerful right now. And we would instead have confidence and hope in you knowing how great and how much more powerful you are than any earthly kingdom or ruler.

And we ask that we would have this hope because of your work especially through your son and our Savior Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.