

When Is a Dream a Nightmare?

Daniel 2:1-24

June 5, 2016 6:00 PM

Introduction.

This morning we recognized our three high school seniors who are graduating this week. Daniel and his three friends have just graduated with highest honors from Babylon University and are now ready to serve God in the world where He has called them. Little did they know how soon they would be used of God and how great their service would be in glorifying God and benefiting their pagan captors.

The King's dream, his demand and his threat of destruction, vss. 1-13

King Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Babylonian empire. He had subdued all the great nations around him, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Syrians and Medes. He had enormous power and wealth. He had everything anyone in this earthly existence could ever desire. He was feared by all and had nothing at all to fear.

Except sleep. Night after night haunting dreams, nightmares really because there was in them a sense of foreboding, impending doom, something threatening to his power and wealth and security. His dreams left him troubled with an anxious spirit.

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown” (Shakespeare's Henry IV. Part II).

It is only the second year of his reign and already his insecurity is showing. For all his power and control, for all his ability to get what he wants, to have everything at his beck and call, there is something completely outside of his control, these dreams in his head.

And to make matters worse and more frustrating he can't get any of his wise men to help, even after the offer of great gifts and rewards, even after the threat of terrible death.

One theologian observed that lust for power comes out of a dark realization of the insecurity of one's existence. “Man is tempted by the basic insecurity of human existence to make himself doubly secure” so he grasps after position, power and wealth and the more he attains, the more insecure he feels (Reinhold Niebuhr).

If ever there was a current day poster child of this it would be Kim Jong Un, the tyrant of North Korea. “His power in North Korea is so great that not only does no one dare criticize him, no one dares advise him” (Mark Bowden, *Vanity Fair*, March 2015). Threats to his power are ruthlessly eliminated.

He will no doubt become more harsh, brutal, angry and suspicious as insecurity drives his fears and need to control and be in control.

Similar fears and insecurities drive us to pursue things and pleasures and recognition and when we fall short it stirs frustrations over unmet expectations or desires, and increased levels of anger or depression.

If all we have to live for is in this life, then anxiety is bound to reign supreme. This world is so full of change and decay. Our finances are subject to change, our health, our jobs and relationships, nothing is stable, nothing can be trusted to be secure. And this creates incredible insecurity.

Augustine captured it well in one of his most famous quotes, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.”

It doesn't matter whether you are Bill Gates or the guy on the Guide with a cardboard sign. “The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke” (Mark 4:19) us and rob us of peace and security.

Notice how easy it is to upset pagan leaders and any pagan for that matter. Notice how quickly fear can move into the soul of a non-Christian. Think about this, a Christian with a firm conviction that God is good and in control has nothing to fear. A non-Christian has everything to fear in life and in death.

As long as we seek our security or comfort or pleasure in the things of this life and this earth, we will never have the peace and security we long for and were created to have.

Think about this in regard to your own soul when you start to fear. Examine that, and ask why. Think about this in regard to your non-Christian friends and use their fears as a starting point for a conversation about the hope and peace you have.

Dreams meant a lot more to people in ancient times, they believed the gods were trying to tell them something.

Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar's dream is from God, he just doesn't know it yet. It is a chief means of God's communication in the OT. God is completely sovereign over everything. Even when we are asleep, God is sovereign over our subconscious and unconscious thoughts and dreams.

The dream was scary and the king is scared. He wants answers so he assembles his own wise men to tell him his dream and its meaning. The tension is palpable and the pain is about to become personal to everyone around him.

Either he can't remember his dream and wants someone to tell him what it was and what it means.

Or he does remember it and he doesn't trust his wise men, he is aware they might try to tell him just what he wants to hear or spin the dream in a positive way for the king and his kingdom.

Anyone can interpret a dream, but to have tell it first, that's a real test.

The king makes an incredibly unrealistic demand. He wants his court appointed and court-paid intellectuals and mystics and dream interpreters to tell him his dream and its interpretation. No one has ever done that before. It's impossible.

Daniel 2:10-11 The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. 11 The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

They are about to die for their inability to do the impossible. Welcome to the brutality of Babylon. The true nature of the king's heart comes out. Heads roll all the time, literally. Life is cheap and expendable.

He had no qualms about throwing people in fires, he had no problem killing all the wise men and enchanters and magicians and sorcerers. He issued the decree to kill them all and there was no changing it. The decree of the king was final.

All the wisdom of the world, the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and even the wise Chaldeans falls far short.

Look at vss. 10-11. What are they saying? This is beyond their ability and the ability of their gods. They are confessing their failure and impotence, and the failure and shortcoming of their religion, their belief system. God exposes the futility of all pagan religions.

There is more going on here that will come out when we hear the dream. The king is getting a lesson in history and in his own mortality. He is not God and he will not live forever.

He is also getting a lesson in theology and religion, a lesson about the one true God, the one by whom all things are known and the one to whom nothing is impossible.

Daniel's inquiry and prayer, vss. 14-24.

Into this incredibly tense and stress-filled scene, Daniel steps up. How can he act so different from everyone else? How can he be such a non-anxious presence in a very anxious situation? What does he know that gives him such peace? He alone knows the wisdom and power of the only true and living God.

This also leads him away from any brashness or pride or self-importance. He is confident, but his confidence is not in himself. He trusts the living God.

This part of the story is interesting both in what details it leaves out and what details it includes. How did Daniel know Arioch? What did he say? How could he get an audience with the king? None of that matters.

Daniel calls for a prayer meeting. Notice Daniel's faith in God and confidence in God. This is the spiritual center of this whole chapter, the key to understanding what happens.

God hears and answers. God gives Daniel a vision in the night (verse 19) and the king's dream is revealed.

We get our first clue in verse 21, that the dream is about how God moves and acts in human history and how God is the one who holds in His hands the seasons, the times, the destinies of dynasties, the lives of kings. God is the one who makes history serve His purposes, His glory.

Notice Daniel's words. There is no confession of impotence on the part of God. God is all wise, all powerful, in control of the times and seasons and of the rising and falling of all kings. God is the one who sees in the dark. God is the source of all light and truth and wisdom.

Babylonians looked to the stars for wisdom and understanding of the times. But God is the God of the heavens, the one who changes and times and seasons. He is the God of the future. Only the living and true God who is the creator and sustainer of the universe can and does know the future.

Notice the superiority of God to all the gods of Babylon. It is not a proud or boastful thing to say that the one true and living God is greater and better than all other gods.

All other religions and faiths and worldviews are dead-ends. You can pilgrimage to Mecca, pray at the Wailing Wall, bathe in the Ganges, get sprinkled with holy water in St. Peter's in the Vatican, kiss the Blarney Stone, or light candles to Mary. They are empty, lifeless, devoid of truth, without hope or real help.

We are surrounded by secular gods and secular religions. Religions based on works, based on cosmic forces, based on being in tune with nature or the universe, based on fate or chance or good karma.

We are given a contrasting picture between the futility of religions and pagan worldviews and cults and false God's and idols, and the God of heaven who knows all mysteries and reveals what He wants known.

Don't be in awe of the world's wisdom or the world's ways. Don't be taken in by the lies and deceptions that tickle our ears every day.

Everything else is darkness, God dwells in light and reveals His light to the world and to us.

Whatever fears you may have, whatever doubts or questions, be assured that while we may not know what the future holds, we know who holds the future. We have confidence even in our own darkness that God sees perfectly well.

Notice Daniel's response when God answers. The writer could have gone from verse 19 straight to verse 24, but he makes sure to record the most important part, the praise of God and who He is and what He is like.

Is Daniel the only one with something to praise God about? Do you have anything for which you owe God praise? In fact what do you have that hasn't come from His hand? Apart from Him we are nothing and have nothing. Everything in our life is cause for praise and worship.

Don't rush through life, from one thing to the next. Take time to praise and thank God for His goodness, for His kindness, His generosity, His mercy and grace, His provision and protection, His suppling your every need, your daily bread. Take time to acknowledge His faithfulness to you.

Any time God blesses us, answers a prayer, grants us wisdom or favor, let that be cause to pause and worship, let it stir a response of worship and praise, of humble gratitude.

Notice verse 21, politicians are in God's hands, politics is a matter of supreme interest to God. Political change and turnover is all part of God's plan and control. This election season we are in is completely in the hands of our sovereign God. He raises presidents up and He changes them.

Implications and application.

Dare to be a Daniel. What do we see of the character and nature of Daniel in this first part of chapter 2?

Verse 14 tells us Daniel was a man of prudence and discretion, meaning wisdom and sound judgment.

This is evident not just in what he said, but in how he said it. He is sensitive to God and to God's leading. His life is in danger but he doesn't react with panic or fear. He trusts God is in control.

Daniel's wisdom is available to all of us in God's Word. God wrote a book and gave it to us so we could know His heart and His will. How have you applied God's wisdom to your needs and circumstances in this past week?

Do you wish you had Daniel's wisdom and knowledge? You do, in fact, and it's greater than his.

In Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). To know Jesus is to be incredibly wise. If you have that knowledge you have reason to praise and thank God every day. He has made you wise unto salvation. No greater gift can be given to man. Jesus is cause for worship.

Verse 18 tells us Daniel was a man of prayer. We see this over and over in this book, he was often on his knees. This is the key to his wisdom, his faithfulness and his freedom from fear.

Verse 20 tells us Daniel was a man of worship. When God heard and answered Daniel's prayer, Daniel responded with worship. He saw what was cause for worship in his life, and gave worship to God.

He doesn't rush to the king. He first pauses, remembers, gives thanks, and worships. Our saying grace before a meal is a very simple, yet profound reflection of this spiritual truth and reality.

And it is rare. Remember only one of the ten healed lepers came back to Jesus to give thanks.

You can know a lot about a person by how they respond to the grace that comes into their lives. When God acts in grace, what do we do, how do we respond?

Verse 24ff tells us Daniel was a man of courage and boldness, willing to be used by God.

Our trials are not meaningless. They come from God to prove and test our faith and to give us opportunity to live our faith out among the Gentiles in a way that is clearly different.

When God gives us a trial and doesn't deliver us from it but walks with us through it, it is in order to display faith and grace to a watching world. It is to be salt and light.

Daniel 2:20-22 "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21 He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; 22 he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.