**Series: Stand Up for Jesus #5**

Daniel 5:1-30; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44; Ps. 146 Nov. 11, 2018

**Summary: The story of the "handwriting on the wall" is God's way of reminding us that there will be a day of judgment. What can we learn from God's warning to this King?**

In 1883, the greatest volcanic explosion in modern history took place. Krakatoa, a volcano in Indonesia, exploded and shot 6 cubic miles of debris 24 miles up into the stratosphere. Its shock wave traveled around the world 7 times, and its debris fell more than 2000 miles away. The official death toll – over 90,000 people. The sky was so blackened from the clouds of debris that the sun was blocked from the sky for the next 24 hours as far away as New England.

At the time of Krakatoa’s explosion, the Captain of a nearby British sailing ship wrote these words in his log: “I am writing this blind in pitch darkness. We are under continual rain of pumice-stone and dust. So violent are the explosions that the ear-drums of over half my crew have been shattered. I am convinced that the Day of Judgment has come.”

Let’s consider a little background for our text today. Babylon was a wealthy kingdom and the city was considered impregnable to attack. The Greek historian Herodotus claimed that "Babylon surpassed in wonder any city in the known world" and specifically praised the walls which he said were 56 miles long, 80 feet thick, and 320 feet high. There was no way that any foreign power was going to take their city.

But in the days of king Belshazzar (although the text calls him the son of Nebuchadnezzar, he was actually that king’s grandson. That terminology was simply the way things were spoken of back in that day). Babylon was being threatened by an army from the East - from the Empire of the Medes and Persians and war was constantly on the borders. Now that enemy was marching toward Babylon itself.

But Belshazzar was convinced that Babylon would not fall to his enemies. His army was too mighty, his walls too imposing, and his nation had dominated the region for nearly 100 years. It was just not going to happen!

In fact, Belshazzar was SO convinced that there was no power that could stand against his nation’s might that he throws a party. *“King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.”* (Daniel 5:1-4)

Notice – the King was holding a feast to honor “the gods of silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone”. But he didn’t take THEIR vessels to party with. Noooo. Instead, he deliberately calls for the vessels of gold and silver that came from the Temple of Jerusalem.

Now, why would he do that???

Well, apparently he did it DELIBERATELY. When Daniel appeared before Belshazzar he tells us what was going on:

*“Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes. But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.”* Daniel 5:18-22

What was Daniel saying? He was saying that Belshazzar had deliberately mocked the God of Israel because he was ashamed of his grandfather. He knew all the stories - he knew how Nebuchadnezzar had been bought low by Israel’s God… and he was embarrassed by it.

So now – faced with an impending attack by an enemy army - Belshazzar is making an open declaration that he not only rejects the threat of Medes and Persians but he ALSO rejects the supposed power of Daniel’s God.

Belshazzar is going to prove that he’s too powerful to be intimidated by some foreign God. He doesn’t want to bow down to a God that says he has to change his life - to a God who says he has to be humble rather than proud. Because that is the constant message of this God of Israel.

The Bible tells us *"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* James 4:6

You know… that’s why a lot of people reject God. They don’t want God to be in charge of their lives, and they don’t really want to change their lives all that much.

George Orwell once observed: "On the whole human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time."

And that’s true of many in this world. They don’t want to change. They want God, when they need him, on their terms. They don’t want His morality. They don’t want Him in control. THEY want to be in control

And after a while God says FINE. You want me off your back, you want me out of your life, you don’t want me controlling your life - we can do that. But there’s a price to be paid. And the price is that you will be storing up wrath for the day of the judgment.

Romans 2:5 says “… *because of your hard and impenitent heart you are STORING UP WRATH for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”*

And that’s pretty much what happened with Belshazzar. Daniel tells him *“Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. “This is the inscription that was written:* ***MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.***

*“Here is what these words mean:*

***Mene:*** *God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.*

***Tekel:*** *You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*

***Peres:*** *Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”* Daniel 5:24-28

Belshazzar rejected God and God was sending a message: Belshazzar had been weighed in the balances and found wanting, his kingdom was brought to an end, and his kingdom was to be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

The wrath of God had descended upon Babylon. That very night (October 13, 539 BC), the Medes and Persians conquered the city. They didn’t have to break down the mighty walls of Babylon. Instead they simply diverted the Euphrates river that flowed under the walls and walked into the city on the riverbed. And *“That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain,”* Daniel 5:30

The point is… there comes a time when God’s patience runs out.

C.S. Lewis once observed: “There are two kinds of people: Those who say to God: ‘Thy will be done,’ And those to whom God says: ‘All right, then - have it your way’”

You REALLY don’t want to be part of that 2nd group.

But now wait a minute!!! I thought God was a God of forgiveness and mercy. Isn’t God a God of forgiveness and mercy? Of course He is!!! 2 Peter 3:9 tells us *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

But the fact of the matter is… there will come a time when people WILL perish. And they’ll perish because (if they did anything at all) they just gave lip service to God. They saw the handwriting on the wall and they squirmed. They sensed the pain of impending judgment and they were sorrowful. But when it came right down to it,… they didn’t really want to change

2 Corinthians 7:10 *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”*

Belshazzar reflected a “worldly sorrow”. We’re told that when the hand writes a mysterious message on the wall and he is frightened. Daniel 5:6 says *“His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.”*

But then the oddest thing takes place. As soon as Daniel interprets the message it seems that Belshazzar goes back into his “party mode”. As soon as Daniel tells the King that his Kingdom is about to be destroyed, *“Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”* Daniel 5:29

What’s going on here? Why this big shift in attitude? Well the King is trying to buy God off. He’s thinking “If I reward this servant of God - if I clothe him in purple and give him a fancy gold necklace and say nice things about him - maybe God will realize I’m not such a bad guy after all. Essentially Belshazzar was trying to appease God with trinkets. He had no intention of changing his lifestyle or humbling himself to God. He just wanted to pay the bill, leave a tip, and then move on with his life.

It was the same way when Krakatoa exploded. The skies were so dark in New England that people believed it was the end of the world. According to one of my sources “At the very start, people began to gather in small groups to question what was happening. Slowly, people began to make their way to the Churches. They say that by twelve noon every Church in New England was filled to overflowing with people on their knees crying out to God. There were cries for mercy, people begging for forgiveness and others confessing their sins. The Churches were full late into the night.”

But, the next day when the sun rose again in the sky… the churches weren’t nearly as full. Many people no longer went to their knees in repentance and confession. Things “got back to normal” because now (without the threat of impending doom) they could go back to the idea that God wasn’t that important anymore. God was “OVER THERE” and they were “OVER HERE”. But those who did that didn’t seem to realize that they were still under judgment.

CLOSE: Now one of the great honors of being a preacher here is knowing that this church isn’t like that. I can’t think of any one of you that seems to want to play that kind of game with God. But there are times we need to realize that this IS the game a lot of people around us play. And we need to start thinking of ways to challenge those folks' thinking and nudge them toward Christ.

We should ask ourselves the kind of questions an employer would ask of a prospective hiree:

• Are you in this for fun?

• Or are you in this to make some money?

• OR are you in this to make some REAL money?

• What would you have to make to be happy?

• (And) How many hours a week would you be committed to the business?

Essentially the employer is asking the prospect – "How much is this worth to you? Does it matter to you?"

And that’s what God constantly asks us: how much is this relationship with me worth to you? Are you just here to play at Christianity or are you really serious about wanting to spend eternity with Me in heaven?

Now here’s the deal: Many people read this chapter as a tale of the “handwriting on the wall” and they think it’s a cool story. It’s in a lot of children’s Bibles and folks remember it from Sunday School classes… but this story wasn’t just written down for your entertainment. God placed this story in His Bible because He wanted to remind us that there will come a day of reckoning. A day when repentance will no longer suffice. A day when the handwriting may be on the wall for you.

If you don’t belong to Jesus this morning, do it now! Make him Lord of your whole life!

**Prayer:** Lord God, may we realize that living for You, that giving you first place in our lives, is the best thing we can do, not just for a place in eternity, but even in the here and now. In Jesus’ name. Amen.