

Special Messages From 2017

The Writing on the Wall

Unedited Transcript

Collin Outerbridge

All right, gentlemen, well, good morning. Like he said, my name's Collin and it's my privilege to be here with you. I do serve as the lead pastor of the Vista community. We're a family of neighborhood churches here in the city of Orlando, predominantly in the Vista Lakes and Lake Nona area, where there's a lot of really good golf. And so I'm thankful God called me there. Glad to be with you all.

I am married to my high school sweetheart, Stacy. We have three children. Our fourth is on the way, coming here in June. Somebody recently asked me, "Hey, what's it gonna be like to have four kids?" And I call on the words of a famous comedian who says, "Having four kids is like this. It's like drowning, and then somebody throws you a baby. That's what it's like having four kids." And so I'm excited about that transition and what it's gonna be like for our family as we step into that time and place.

But I'm gonna just kinda be frank and honest with you here. I'm 28 years old, and so I don't have a lot of great wisdom, any sage expert advice to give us this morning. But what I do have is God's Word. What I do have is his anointing, and what I do have is his Holy Spirit. And so we're gonna lean on those things today to allow God to speak to us, amen?

All right, so with that in mind, let's go ahead and pray. And you can turn your Bibles to Daniel chapter 5. Heavenly Father, we thank you that because of your grace we stand here today. It is only by your grace, your grace alone, and because what Christ has done on our behalf that, God, we have the opportunity to sit here today and learn from your Word. And so, Father, we pray that you would glorify yourself in this time, that your Spirit would move in power and give us eyes to see what we need to see. We love you and we thank you. In the precious, matchless name of Jesus, and Jesus alone, we pray. Amen and amen.

Daniel chapter 5, perhaps one of the most significant pieces of Scripture that we can find, particularly if you're a skeptic. Because Daniel chapter 5 does something for us that is incredibly powerful. It verifies for us that the writing in the book of Daniel is not simply metaphor and not simply myth, but it's actually history. And here's what I mean by that. When Daniel chapter 5 was being studied for the first few hundred years, it was rendered as myth, particularly among the historical community.

And here's the reason why. Daniel chapter 5 mentions a man by the name of Belshazzar. However, up until the 1800s, the name Belshazzar was not recorded in any version of history that had been written up until that time. Daniel 5 says that there's a man by the name of Belshazzar who reigns as king over the people of Babylon, but there's no record of that. In fact, the name that is recorded during that time is the name Nabonidus. And so for hundreds of years up until the 1800s, historians would use this fact to serve as the discrepancy that would point to the fact that the story of Daniel simply didn't happen, that there is no truth to it. It's simply metaphor, simply myth, nothing that we can actually bank our energy or time on.

However, in 1853 a British archeologist by the name of John George Taylor discovered some things as he was working an archeological dig in what we consider today to be modern-day Iraq. And while he was there, he found some tokens and he found some information that actually verified that Belshazzar was indeed the king the day that Babylon fell. Now, let me unpack what this means. During the days of Belshazzar, what had happened in the Babylonian Empire is it was beginning to have its poor, terrible, and slow decline.

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar had been the great king, the great conqueror for many a year during the days of Babylon. And this story takes place about 40 years after Daniel chapter 4, where we find that Nebuchadnezzar has actually had what we would call his come-to-Jesus moment. He's experienced a great degree of humiliation. God has put him in his place. And Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 speaks out at the end of that text that he has experienced the power of the God that we call our Heavenly Father, the one who we believe is true. That no longer is this God the God of Daniel, but this is now Nebuchadnezzar's God. He has had an experience with the God of the universe.

So about 40 years has transpired since that time, about 23 years since the death of Nebuchadnezzar. And they've gone through four kings in 20 years. Now this is not a democracy. This is not the United States of America. This is an empire that's built off of the strong leadership of one man. So four leaders over a 20-year span begins to create a situation and a scenario in which Babylon is beginning to lose its power and its influence in the regions in which they lead, to the point where, in fact, they are beginning to lose battles all across what they've owned for decades and decades and decades.

There's a new empire that's raising up. Perhaps you've heard of it, the Persian Empire, led by a man by the name of Darius the Great. The Persian Empire will eventually dwarf the Babylonian Empire and change the face of our history as we know it. So what we find in Daniel chapter 5 is this beginning to happen. Belshazzar is indeed the king of Babylon on the day that it falls because his father, or what some historians believe, his grandfather, Nabonidus, has taken a last-ditch effort to begin to wage war just outside the walls of the city of Babylon, in some hope to protect the little bit of power that they have left.

So Nabonidus has left the city gates. He's left the city of Babylon. He's leading the war against Darius the Great. But the issue is at play. They continue to lose battles. Now, you've gotta understand something. Belshazzar doesn't know that his father Nabonidus is losing all of these battles. There's no Fox News ticker. There's no CNN information for him. There's no text message that's getting back. And so what he doesn't know is that on this particular night that we see recorded in Daniel 5, sitting outside the city gates just a few miles away is the Persian Empire, led by Darius the Great. And the end is coming.

But Belshazzar doesn't know that. And Belshazzar is convinced that whatever happens outside of those gates will never happen inside of his city, because his city was built to last. His city was built to withstand siege for year after year after year after year. Here's what I mean by that. The city was surrounded by walls that were over 300, some places 500 feet tall. The thickness of these walls was 87 feet wide. So chew on that just for a minute. 87-foot wide walls built out of brick and stone that are hundreds of feet up into the air.

Historians, particularly the historian Herodotus, tells us that you could turn a four-horse chariot in a full circle on the top of these walls. I don't know if you know this, but a basketball court is 90 feet long. So you could have a full-court basketball game in the width of these walls. So they're hundreds of feet tall, almost 100 feet wide. These things are impenetrable.

Now you might be thinking, "But what about crops? What if the Persian Empire was to simply sit outside of those gates and wait for the people inside to starve?" Well, Babylon had this great gift. It's called the Euphrates River. And the Euphrates River flowed right through the city of Babylon, and they had learned how to create irrigation. They had learned how to take access of this water to make sure that they would be able to plant and have enough crops to last them a lifetime. They needed nothing outside of the walls of Babylon in order to survive. Everything they needed was within the gates of their great city.

And so Belshazzar, a 36-year-old, by the way, like any typical 36-year-old, is convinced that there's nothing that could possibly go wrong for him. His father or his grandfather is out at war. He is the leader of the greatest city during that time and period. And it really doesn't matter what happens out there because he's built an incredibly big wall to protect himself and the people he knows from anything that could possibly cause pain to them on the inside. Intrigued?

What Belshazzar doesn't know, as we open up Daniel chapter 5, is at the end of this story, his life is gonna be taken from him and his city is gonna come to ruin. But he doesn't know that. So if you've got your Bible, turn to Daniel chapter 5, verse 1. And we're gonna begin to simply read to see what happens. Here's what we find in verse 1. "King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles." So here's what we know about Belshazzar. As the war is going on out there, he's decided to have a good time in here. Belshazzar is throwing a big party. He has nothing to be afraid of, nothing to be scared of. Today is a day to celebrate the opulence and power of this great city Babylon, and the fact that he is in control.

We pick it up in verse 2. "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 -" pay attention to this - "of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone."

So here's the deal. Belshazzar themes the party. This isn't just a small party. This isn't a small dinner get-together that your wife is asking you to make sure you got a polo on because the friends are coming over and you need to be nice for just a couple of minutes, and please don't talk about politics. That's not the kind of party we're talking about here. We're talking about a frat party. We're talking about Las Vegas. We're talking about the most opulent, crazy, above-board party you can imagine. He's brought out all of the good wine. It's not only just his wife and his friends' wives who are there, but it's a lot of concubines as well. So imagine a Las Vegas party times 10. That's what's happening in the midst of a war that his people are fighting in.

But he themes the party as well. Belshazzar doesn't simply have a party. He's gotta theme it. And so what he does, in the midst of this party, is he brings out all of the different gods that are representative of the ones and the cities that Babylon has conquered. You've gotta understand something about Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, when he ran into certain cities and sieged them during his rule and reign, would walk into whatever the place of worship was, whatever the god was of that particular people. And he would take their god from its position of authority and bring it back to his home in the city of Babylon and put it in a museum.

And the reality was this. He was telling the rest of the world, as he colonized the surrounding areas, that the god that should be worshiped is not their god. That the fact that Babylon had won meant that their

god was dead. So imagine a party. The music's going. The light show's incredible. The booze is flowing. The ladies are there. People are beginning to have conversations. They're slurring their speech. It's a crazy, crazy party filled with debauchery. And the theme is, all of the gods that Babylon has conquered are sitting in there. They're putting, you know, hats on top of them, making jokes of these gods. They're reveling in their strength and their power, and they're pledging allegiance to bronze and silver and gold and their god, Marduk. Those gods that had once been worshiped were being relegated to simple relics of the past.

So as that is happening, in Daniel chapter 5, verse 5 we see this reality. That there's something about one of these gods that they've brought in that is a little bit offensive to the real God. And here's what I mean by that. When Nebuchadnezzar went into the city of Jerusalem and sacked it, and he went into the temple to find an idol that he could take as a relic to bring back to his city, guess what he could not find. An idol. Because we don't worship a god made of stone or bronze or brick or clay. We worship an infinite God who is invisible and powerful and almighty.

And so what he has to do instead is simply take the golden goblets, the chalices, the other things that are around, to use those as a means of remembering and recording what he had done. And so here's what happens. There's no god, there's no idol, to make fun of. But Belshazzar fills those sacred goblets and those sacred chalices with the wine of his party. He treats the things of the almighty God like they're simply tools to be used at a kegger or a tailgate or a frat party. And God will not stand for this.

So in Daniel chapter 5, verse 5, we see the story unfold. Daniel 5:5 says, "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. 6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together." Some translations say that he actually had a bowel movement out of fear of what he has seen. You ever heard that phrase, "Holy ..."? You've heard that before? He had that moment right there.

So what does he do? "The king called to the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to these 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.'" Why the third ruler? Because the first ruler is his daddy Nabonidus. The second ruler is Belshazzar. So he's not giving up his position of power, but he's willing to give you the third seat at the table. He's willing to give you a purple cloth, meaning wealth and success. A gold chain, a sign of value and significance.

And so he turns to the astrologers. He turns to Oprah, to Deepak Chopra, and says, "Would you please explain to me what is happening up on this wall?" So all the king's wise men come in. Verse 8, "but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed." Would you be greatly alarmed if a human hand showed up and started writing on your living room wall? "And his color changed, and his lords were perplexed."

Hear me. The music stops at this party. The lights come on. The buzz is killed, and everyone's looking at Belshazzar. It's as if you could hear a pin drop in the room. People might still be slumped over from the amount of alcohol that they've consumed, but all of a sudden everyone's a little bit worried. Everyone's wondering, "Wow, were the drugs that we just take bad drugs? Like, are we having a hallucination? Why are we seeing what we're seeing on the wall?" And of course, like anything, they look to their leader Belshazzar. "Belshazzar, what is going on? Is this a spectacle that you wanted to put on for us? Is this a,

is this a cool show? Is this, is this a part of the party? Like, will you explain to us what's going on right now?"

Verse 10. "The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into ..." It's important to know that she was sober. She wasn't at the party. Most likely this was Belshazzar's mother. Most likely, historians believe and scholars believe that his had been Nebuchadnezzar's wife. She had seen Nebuchadnezzar's life change because he had met the God of the universe. She had seen the prideful, arrogant King Nebuchadnezzar fall flat on his face before a God who is in control of everyone who is in control. And she walks into her son's party, her grandson's party, in the banqueting hall.

This is what the queen declares. "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. 11 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." Not his Babylonian name, his Jewish name. "Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

So now you've gotta understand something. At this point, Daniel is in his late 70s or early 80s. He's seen Nebuchadnezzar come to faith. He's seen Nebuchadnezzar experience the power of his almighty God. He has seen his friends be rescued from a fiery, burning furnace. He has been the second most valuable and important man in the Babylonian Empire. But now he's in his 70s and 80s, and often times what happens the older you get is people begin to relegate you to the back. They say, "Why don't you just go ahead and retire and stop doing what you're doing?"

And that's exactly what has happened to Daniel. He's no longer in power. He no longer has influence. And the God that Nebuchadnezzar had experienced 40 years before is all but forgotten in the city of Babylon. So, sidebar – if you're older and feel forgotten, pay special attention to what happens when this 70 or 80-year-old man walks back into the city, back into the banquet hall, back into the place where he had been a leader for years, and watch what happens, and I pray it would serve as encouragement to you that if you have breath in your lungs, God is not done with you yet.

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." Do you hear the disrespect in Belshazzar's voice? Not Daniel, the second most important person during the most powerful time of Babylon's reign. No, Daniel, that exile. Daniel, that guy we conquered. Daniel, that nobody from that small podunk town, 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." Belshazzar, who knew who Daniel was, did not treat him with respect or honor. And he tries to reward him by giving him the third place in kingdom after Daniel's already been the second. So, like Michael Jordan coming back out of retirement,

needing to set the NBA straight to remind them of who the greatest player of all time is, Daniel comes back out of retirement here in verse 17. And this is what he says.

"Then, Daniel answered and said before the king, 'Let your gifts be for yourself.'" I don't need your little trifling trinkets. I don't need them. "And give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation." Verse 18. "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty." My God gave your father everything that he had. Don't forget, Belshazzar, who's in control. God is in control of who is in control.

"And because of the greatness that he gave him," verse 19, "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. 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."

Your great father Nebuchadnezzar, who you celebrate as this great king, was nothing but a little child, a little minion, a little peon in the hands of my almighty sovereign God. Belshazzar, you never forget who's in control – of who's in control. "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," my God, Yahweh, "the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom He will."

Would you repeat this after me? Would you say, "The Most High God ..."

Audience: The Most High God ...

Collin Outerbridge: "Rules the kingdom of mankind ..."

Audience: Rules the kingdom of mankind ...

Collin Outerbridge: "And sets over it ..."

Audience: And sets over it ...

Collin Outerbridge: "Whom he will."

Audience: Whom he will.

Collin Outerbridge: God is in control of who is in control. Verse 22. "And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven." Belshazzar, you knew better. You knew these stories, and you chose not to repent. "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 the holy vessels of my God. 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 very breath, Belshazzar, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored."

Here's what Daniel tells Belshazzar. "You knew better, Belshazzar. You chose dishonor. You turned to idols. And today is your last." "Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: *Mene mene tekel upharsin*. This is the interpretation of the matter." Here's what's on that wall. "Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom, and he has brought it to an end, Belshazzar." In other words, men in this room, your days are numbered.

"Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." Meaning you are going to be held accountable for your decisions. Your days are numbered, and your decisions matter. "Peres upharsin, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians." All that stuff that you're celebrating, Belshazzar, all that wealth that you think is yours, that you didn't even accumulate. Boy, you haven't even fought a war in your whole life. All those things that you're celebrating right now, they're not yours. They're mine. I'm gonna divide them up however I want to. Your days are numbered. Your decisions matter. And your stuff is temporary. Your days are numbered. Your decisions matter. And your stuff is temporary.

So as all of this is happening, as Daniel is having this conversation with Belshazzar, and everyone at the party is leaning in, intrigued by what it is that is happening. The silence in the room is so quiet, a pin could drop. There is no one talking. Everyone is locked in. As all of this is happening, just a few miles north, what the people of Babylon did not know is that Darius the Great had found, just north of the city of Babylon, a place where the Euphrates River connected and flowed into the city.

And he had been, for quite some time now, diverting the water of the Euphrates into another canal, so that the table of water would slowly drop and drop and drop, just enough that you wouldn't be able to notice that it was dropping. And on that night, the Persian Empire, with their heads just above water, just enough so that they could keep their breath, marched down the river of the Euphrates, underneath the walls of the city of Babylon. And under the cloak of the night, the city fell.

Men, we've got some big questions we've gotta answer in our own lives. The walls you've built that you think are comfort and security can come crashing down at any moment. The things that you think have made you who you are, are not your identity. If you are rooted or founded in anything other than Christ and Christ alone, it's only a matter of days until the little kingdom you've built will fall. Belshazzar worshiped his accomplishment. Belshazzar worshiped his position. Belshazzar worshiped his power. But in the end, Belshazzar is a footnote, a footnote, in many ways a forgotten footnote, in the story of our great God. Would you pray with me?

Father, I ask that as we move into discussion today, that we would take this historical event and allow it to disciple us through the power of your Spirit. That, God, in the midst of our conversations and our dialogue, we would realize that we are more like Belshazzar in the story than we would care to admit. That our 401ks and our retirement plans and our paid-off homes and our education, what we think we've built with our lives, can quickly become idols, can quickly become the walls we build around ourselves to think that we're insulated and protected.

But ultimately, God, you are in control of who is in control. God, our days are numbered, so it matters what we do with them. Our decisions matter, so what we decide to do today absolutely matters. And Father, our stuff is temporary. It will be divided up among who you determine it ought to go to. So where we try to hold tightly to our life, would you remind us of the truth that, God, the man who tries to save his life will lose it, but the man who's willing to surrender his life will gain it. Help us to learn today.

Holy Spirit, lead us in power, we pray. In the precious, matchless, only names that saves, in the name of Jesus, everyone said, "Amen and amen." Thank you guys.