2-16-20

Daniel 5

Before reading our Scripture for today, I need to explain what is happening in this section of the book of Daniel. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who had defeated Judah and Jerusalem and brought the people as exiles to Babylon, had died. His son, Nabonidus, became king. Nabonidus preferred to rule the nation away from the city of Babylon, so his son, Belshazzar became second ruler of the nation and stayed in Babylon.

Belshazzar was prideful and arrogant. He threw a party for 1000 of his nobles along with all his wives and concubines. During this party, while drunk, he ordered that the gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought to them so they could all drink wine from them. These were vessels that had been sanctified to the LORD. They were holy, even though they had been stolen by the gentile Babylonians.

As they drank from these vessels, they praised all their own idols. Before long, a hand appeared and began writing a message on the wall. Belshazzar was terrified: his face grew pale, his knees knocked together and his hip joints loosened. He couldn’t understand the message that was left by the hand, so he called for the wise men of his kingdom to come and read the message; but they could not figure out what the words meant.

The queen heard all the commotion and entered the banquet hall. This was probably the queen mother; either Belshazzar’s mother or grandmother. She remembered Daniel and advised Belshazzar to call for him; and he did. When Daniel came, Belshazzar promised him gifts and promotion to third ruler of the kingdom if he could read the message.

Daniel told the king he could keep his gifts, but that he would explain the message anyway. Before doing so, Daniel let Belshazzar know that his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had been humbled by God and that he had had enough sense to acknowledge God for who He is.

Daniel 6:22-30

My message today does have a theme: The writing is on the wall. I think we’ve all heard this saying and this account of Daniel is where it comes from. It means that we can see what’s coming.

Belshazzar treated almighty God with contempt. He was arrogant and prideful and he encouraged all those with him to join him in what he was doing. He raised himself up against God; and he paid the price.

By the time the writing was on the wall for Belshazzar, it was too late. But we need to know that the writing is on the wall for us, too. The difference is that it is not too late for us. The Bible tells us enough for us to realize that the end is coming. Belshazzar is an example of what will happen to those who do not turn to God through Jesus Christ; to those who act arrogantly toward almighty God. While we as Christians look forward to the return of our Saviour, we need to be ready; and this is no time to be slack in our work.

In Matthew 24, the disciples ask Jesus when He is coming back and what are the signs of His return. Jesus tells them that there will be many who claim to be Him, that there will be wars and rumors of wars. He tells them that there will be earthquakes and famines. Jesus says that lawlessness will increase and the hearts of many people will grow cold. He tells us that the Gospel will be preached in all the nations and that His followers will be persecuted and killed. Next, Jesus issued a warning in verses 32-33.

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.”

In other words, when you see all this distress happening, the writing is on the wall. Jesus is letting us know to be ready and watching. For the Christian, this is a time to be received with joy; we know our Saviour is coming soon. For unbelievers, this is a call to turn from evil and seek Jesus. All the things that Jesus mentioned took place in the first century and have continued taking place. But notice how much all these things have increased throughout the 20th century and continue today.

In Romans chapter 1, Paul goes more deeply into what takes place with human-beings as we come closer to Christ’s return. What Paul speaks of is simply the judgement of God poured out on people who refuse to acknowledge God for who He is. In arrogance, they defy holy God, just as Belshazzar did. Paul describes this judgement in verses 21-32.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Again, have all these things ever been as prevalent as they are today? Be it terrorists with guns or terrorists with twitter, have we ever seen such abject hatred of anything good? Think about all those words Paul is using and consider how much they apply to our day and age. Yes, there are people, even non-Christians, who are good, but the percentage under God’s judgement has increased.

When we look at these things, it becomes obvious: the fig branches are tender, the leaves are out, the writing is on the wall. The things are happening now that Jesus told us to be aware of. We are without excuse if we don’t pay attention to what is happening. We must also be aware that there may still be a great deal of time before Jesus returns to set up His kingdom. Still, the signs are there; it is time to be looking up and to be busy about our Master’s work.

With these things in mind, what should we do? First, we consider Hebrews 3:12-4:1.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said,

“Today if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.”

For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? *So* we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Even though the writing is on the wall, for us, it is still “today”. Make sure you are depending on Jesus Christ for salvation. None of our works will suffice. Our only way to eternal life is through faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. That means we believe in Him and obey Him. Remember that the demons believe, but do not obey; they do not have salvation. Jesus is who saves us by faith in Him; our obedience to Him is the evidence of our salvation. Don’t come short of that rest in Christ.

The Bible makes clear those things that are pleasing to God and these are the things that we need to be busy with until our Master returns. It is easy in this life to put the things aside we are called to; but we must resist this temptation. Put God first in everything.

Jesus has some special words for us in Revelation 3:19-21.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

These are words of tremendous encouragement. Jesus is letting us know upfront that we will suffer during these times of distress and tribulation, but our suffering is not judgement, our suffering is preparing us for that wonderful eternal life that is promised to those who follow Christ. He is calling us to check our hearts for sin and when we find it, to repent. Repentance is not a once in a lifetime thing. Christians are still fallen people and we need repentance often to be in fellowship with our Lord.

See also how Jesus wants to be with us. He comes to the door of our heart and knocks. He wants to be part of our lives and He offers us great reward. But time is limited; He will not stand and knock forever. Again, time is short; the writing is on the wall.

There is one more warning for us in Revelation 18:1-5.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

The idea of Babylon in Revelation is complex. But at the very least, it is the name for the spiritual condition of the world. As we look at the spiritual condition of the world, we can see how much evil there is. Immorality is the norm, be it drunkenness or hatred or perversion or self-centeredness. Sex is making many merchants rich whether it is in human-trafficking or sensuous advertising that calls our attention to their products.

God will only let this go so long. He is patient because He hopes people will turn to Him; but the time is soon when He will put an end to it all. In His great love for we His people, He calls to us, “Come out of her, My people.” This is not a call for us to leave the world now, God has work for us that we need to be about. It is a call to avoid the spiritual Babylon that is now firmly in place. Our spirits must be guided by the Holy Spirit; we must make a conscience effort to follow Christ and reject the things of the world.

This isn’t a call to alarm for the Christian; but it is a call to be awake and looking up. It is an alarm for those who continue to reject Christ. We do not have the luxury of ignoring the signs; there are too many people who are blinded by the world and need to have their sight restored by the Gospel. We need to tell them, we need to pray for them, we need to support those who are in the mission field.

The fig tree branches are tender, they are in full leaf. The writing is on the wall.

Prayer

LORD God, You have graciously made it clear to us that history will come to an end. Jesus will come back to establish His kingdom. You have also provided us with things to look for, signs that let us know that Jesus is right at the door. Thank You for these warnings; thank You that we need not be taken by surprise; thank You that we can be looking up for our Saviour and be about our Master’s business when He returns.

Lord, we ask that Your Holy Spirit keep our eyes and ears open, so that we are not deceived by the spiritual forces of Babylon. We know that we who overcome will be saved, but we know that we can only overcome by Your strength and guidance. Holy Spirit, forgive us when we resist You, and keep us focused on Jesus. The evil is too strong for us without You.

Lord, in seeing these signs, we don’t try to set a time for Your return. To do so would be to infringe on Your sovereignty. We know that You will return at the perfect time. Knowing that, we patiently await You; by Your strength, we will be at work when You return.

In the name of our King and Saviour we pray

Amen