Found Wanting

Daniel 5 | Week Five

Overview
The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now
So far we have seen the Most High God demonstrate his authority over all gods and kings. In both dreams and trials, the Lord has said he would reign forever. Last week, he showed a merciful discipline to the most powerful king on earth by reducing him to a beast in order to teach him humility.

This Week
In chapter 5, we see the end of the Chaldean empire with a king who should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation.

The Big Idea
The Almighty God determines the steps of all mankind. His Word is our highest authority, guarding us against pride and idolatry.

Memory Verse
Daniel 5:22

Looking at the Text

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

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. 3 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. 4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

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. 6 Then the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. 7 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.” 8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

1. Knowing King Belshazzar’s party takes place on the eve of their defeat, what is your initial response? We may be quick to mock these people for indulging in sin and inviting God’s judgment... There may be people in our lives that we are tempted to condemn. When might you be tempted to condemn rather than show grace?

It’s unclear all the reasons Belshazzar, the viceroy of Babylon, throws this lavish and lusty party, while his father, King Nabonidus, was living in another city for many years. Cyrus the Persian had defeated the Chaldean army in a nearby city days before, so Belshazzar and his nobles should know they are threatened. They may feel safe, because Babylon is a powerful fortress and the city has not been overrun in 1,000 years. They may be in denial, simply pushing away their fears with pleasure. Clearly, Belshazzar is drawing attention to his position-only relationship with Babylon’s greatest king, Nebuchadnezzar, in order to make himself look strong, and everyone loves the idea of toasting their gods with the implements of defeated gods.

There are plenty of reasons to mock them for being blind to God’s judgment, but that’s not the example Christ Jesus sets for us. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:17-18).

2. How should a Christian respond to a blasphemous scene like this?

Some Christians will see their role as the killjoys of the world’s party. When Daniel comes in (v17), he bluntly tells Belshazzar to keep his own gifts, but we would be reading into the text to say this is how we should act when confronted with flagrant licentiousness. The heart of the gospel is a love of the lost.

Pastor Matt Chandler says, “Because a God who is ultimately most focused on his own glory will be about the business of restoring us, who are all broken images of him. His glory demands it. So we should be thankful for a self-sufficient God whose self-regard is glorious.”

So the blasphemous peers, the worldly advisors, and the ungrateful undergrads are all broken images of our wonderful creator, whether they like it or not. We must encourage each other to love the lost around us as Christ did, even as we encourage...
each other to hold closely to the Word of God which makes us holy. Who is one person you know you should be more loving and gracious toward?

**Summarize 5:10-16. Read 5:17-23.**

The Queen Mother remembers Daniel and highly recommends him to Belshazzar, who summons him, showing marginal respect and offering to reward him.

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. 18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. 19 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. 20 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. 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. 22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, 23 but you have lifted up 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.

3. Daniel explains that Belshazzar should have learned humility from Nebuchadnezzar’s remarkable testimony, recorded in chapter four. He says he was praising worthless gods instead of honoring “the God in whose hand is your breath and whose are all your ways.” What does God’s Word tell us about guarding our hearts and minds so that we remember him? Philippians 4:4-8

There are many good answers to this question. Our focus should be on God’s grace and mercy, because the grace that made us alive in Christ continues to work in us to make us holy.

4. When is a time you have failed to learn a lesson from the past and what consequences did that have/could have?

24 “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. 25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. 26 This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; 27 Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

29 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.

30 That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. 31 And Darius the Mede
received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

5. Just as the Word of God held the rulers of Babylon accountable, it holds all humans accountable. What about you in your research? How might the Word of God hold you accountable in your own work?

Tim Keller says, “Daniel is telling us unless you take the Bible seriously and completely, even those parts that you don’t like, you can’t have a God that is not an idol of your own making.” This may be hard to apply in your field of study, but that is one of the reasons God has you where you are. What would the Almighty God say about the subjects of your work? If he only says personally comforting things and nothing that challenges you, you may not understand him fully. If you believe the whole Bible, Keller teaches, you know you have a God who can contradict you. “Pride is simply not seeing that absolutely everything you have and everything you are is a gift of grace.” — Tim Keller

6. How does the Word of God keep your pride in check?

Daniel clearly tells his masters that his information doesn’t come from his own gifts. In v17, he tells Belshazzar not to reward him because he isn’t the one deserving honor (plus the kingdom will fall that night, so all gifts are worthless). The honor should go to the one who sent the hand that wrote on the wall.

God’s Word should be our highest authority in order to guard us against intellectual pride. We may begin to think that because we live today, we know more than anyone has ever known. As a growing expert in your field, you certainly know many things. The magicians around Daniel were children compared to us, but God would disagree. “Modern worldly wisdom is not a bit more helpful than ancient worldly wisdom,” Keller says, because fearing the Lord is where a full understanding of anything begins. All knowledge must be framed by the Word of the God who owns all of our ways.

7. How does the Word of God give you hope for the future? How might this hope shape the way you approach your field of study?

Remember what Nebuchadnezzar said in chapter four:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; 35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

One message Daniel keeps repeating is the everlasting reign of our Holy God. The “immeasurable greatness of his power” will overcome every kingdom on earth by finding it wanting, like Belshazzar’s Babylon.

WRAPPING IT UP
Know the difference between religion and faith.

Tim Keller tells a story about a man he knew in college who claimed to be converted to Read Ephesians 1: list more reasons to work in hope in our God.
Christ. He had been a very licentious man, known everywhere as a heartbreaker. He would seduce woman and, as soon as he had them, drop them. So when he professed faith in Christ, Keller and others believed him. They were happy about it, because he had been a cruel guy.

“But we notice that in every Bible study, he had to be right. We noticed he had to be elected an officer in the fellowship. We noticed when he was in any conversation with a non-Christian, trying to tell them why the Bible was right and Jesus was right, he was really pretty abusive. We began to realize the way he was originally trying to gain significance was through power of other people, and now he was doing the same thing.

“You must know the difference between religion and faith. Religion is ‘I give God a good record, then he owes me a good life.’ The gospel is ‘God gives me a good record which I receive by faith and now I live in grateful knowledge that he has accepted me forever.’” What does it look like for you to live the gospel as a grad student? What attitudes or practices might you have to show you are living out the gospel during your academic pursuits?

I pray for each of us that we trust our Lord and take him at his word. Let’s not settle for a few religious comforts or make the church merely our inner ring. Let’s rest entirely in the one who deserves our praise and owns all of our ways. Amen!

Notes:

1. Matthew J. Franck is Director of the William E. and Carol G. Simon Center on Religion and the Constitution at the Witherspoon Institute. Quotation from a commencement address at Glendale Preparatory Academy, 2014 (http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/06/uncluttering-the-house-of-the-mind)


4. Ibid., 103.


6. Ibid. All quotations and paraphrases attributed to Keller in this lesson come from this sermon series.