**MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN**

(Divine Graffiti: The Writing on the Wall)

August 20, 2017

Daniel 5:1-31

Key Verse 5:25 “This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.”

Daniel chapter 5 is a story about the handwriting of a human hand on the wall during a wine drinking banquet King Belshazzar hosted for a thousand of his nobles. In fact the foreboding use of the words: “The hand writing on the wall” comes from this chapter in the Bible. So the phrase, “Writing on the wall” came to mean “sign of impending judgment.” Moreover from this chapter we will find when alcohol drinking and irreverence towards God are mixed, then indeed the hand writing of the wall indicating God’s judgment, is just around the corner. Let’s learn from the mistakes of Belshazzar so we may not make the same one.

Seventy years have passed since Daniel chapter 1. Daniel is not a teenager anymore. He is in his 80s. Also 23 years have passed since chapter 4 ended. A lot has happened since then. Nebuchadnezzar has died. After 43 years of reigning, seven of them in insanity like an animal, in 562 B.C., he died. After Nebuchadnezzar died, the empire began to decline. He was followed by his son, whose name was Amel-Marduk. He reigned only for two years, because he was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Nergal-sharezer. Nergal-sharezer ruled for four years, and was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk. He was a little boy and lasted only 9 months, and he was beaten to death by a group of men that included Nabonidus who was then made King. Nabonidus reigned 17 years. Now when Nabonidus was appointed as king, he was not related to Nebuchadnezzar so he did not have a right to the royal throne. So in order to secure his claim to the throne, he married one of the widows of Nebuchadnezzar. So he married into the royal family, and had a son named Belshazzar. So Belshazzar was in Nebuchadnezzar’s line. Nabonidus was still insecure, and so he moved his palace to Tayma in the middle of Arabia. For 14 years of his 17 years, he never set his foot in the city of Babylon. But in order to hold on to the power in Babylon, he appointed Belshazzar, who had the line of royalty, as co-king, co-regent. So Belshazzar occupied the throne in Babylon.

But the kingdom of Babylon kept waning. When chapter 5 begins, Cyrus, the king of the Medes and the Persians, was eating up the world. Cyrus and his army met Nabonidus and his forces outside the city of Babylon, and destroyed the whole army of Nabonidus, and they took him captive. The Medes and the Persians literally surrounded the entire city of Babylon. According to historians, they had already been besieging the city of Babylon for four months.

Look at verse 1. “King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.” Belshazzar hosted this wine-guzzling banquet as a way to boost the morale of his nobles as they faced the Persian armies who were just outside the walls of Babylon. In 2 Kings 18,19 we find the armies of Assyria outside the walls of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah was the king of Judah at that time. He reacted to this siege by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and going to the temple to pray. Because of Hezekiah’s humble prayer in his time of national emergency, God sent an angel who put to death 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, thus ending the siege of Jerusalem. Now in contrast King Belshazzar reacted to his national emergency by having drinking party.

It is hard to imagine that Belshazzar could be so stupid to get a drunken orgy going while his city is surrounded by the Medo-Persians. But Babylon was so formidable. According to Herodotus, the city was 15 miles square and the walls were 87 feet thick, and 350 feet high. They had no problem getting water because the Euphrates River flowed right through the middle of the city. The city had enough food and supplies to withstand an assault for 20 years. Plus, they had history on their side. No army had taken the city of Babylon for ten centuries. Those Persians weren’t going to get in by force, and they weren’t going to starve them out. But still, people in the city were getting restless. King Belshazzar decided to get people’s minds off the threat outside the walls by throwing a party. What a picture of our world today: judgment is about to fall, yet men are enjoying drinking parties and worshiping false gods. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 says, “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”

Look at verse 2. “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.” When he got drunk and was pretty high, he felt good at first. But he soon lost his inhibitions and made an irrevocable mistake. While Belshazzar was drinking, 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, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. A goblet is a drinking vessel with no handles. The Jewish priest used these goblets to carry out their priestly duties in the temple of God. Even the great king Nebuchadnezzar had never dared to use these sacred utensils, acknowledging that they were untouchable because they belonged to the Holy God. King Belshazzar committed the sin of blasphemy. Not only that, he also praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone which were made by men’s hands. He worshiped idols in order to appease his inner fear. In his drunken state, he committed the sin of idol worship. Today binge drinking on college campuses is a big problem. Drinking causes men to commit many kinds of terrible sins. By the way, in the same city of Babylon, in the very same palace, 200 years later, Alexander the Great, undefeated by all the armies of the world, died in his own vomit in drunkenness. It wasn’t just Belshazzar. Alcohol has destroyed many lives. It is destroying many in Canada.

What happened? Look at verses 5-6 “ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.” The sheer terror that struck Belshazzar when he saw this hand writing on the wall, showed that he was fully aware, this was nothing less than a sign of the coming judgment of God.

All his wealth and power were completely worthless to resolve his problem of facing the judgment of God. So he called out for all the wise men in his kingdom and said, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (7). But the wise men could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. In verse 10, the queen is most likely queen mother, Belshazzar’s mother. When the queen mother saw the king, he looked like a zombie after he had seen the handwriting. The king was suffering from an anxiety attack. She said, “Don’t be alarmed. Don’t look so pale!” and advised him to seek help from Daniel.

King Belshazzar promised to give Daniel many gifts and a high promotion if he interpreted the meaning of the handwriting. But Daniel refused his offer by saying, “You may keep your gifts for yourself.” Daniel was not willing to receive any gift or ruling position from King Belshazzar. It was because he knew King Belshazzar’s destiny was flickering like a candle before the wind since he had provoked God to anger through his blasphemy and idol worship. Daniel refused to receive any gift from King Belshazzar since he was nothing but a godless man and an idol worshiper; it would be shameful for Daniel to receive anything from such a corrupt king. Also, it was not necessary for Daniel to try to receive a gift from the king because Belshazzar would soon perish in the invasion of King Darius, before having a chance to keep his promises. Moreover, Daniel was unwilling to receive a gift from him because he loved God and he loved the things of God. Daniel had a value system in God.

Before interpreting the writing to the king, Daniel first rebuked his no learning mind, by explaining what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Look at verse 22: “But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.” Belshazzar knew God was the one who deposed Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride. He also knew God restored Nebchadnezzar after he humbled himself before God. A person with a learning mind would have learned from King Nebuchadnezzar’s mistakes and his willingness to humble himself before God to restore his position. Yet instead of humbling himself before God, he deliberately set himself up against the Lord of heaven. His liquor-induced pride and courage against God only accomplished swift and quick judgment from God, on himself, his family and his nation with no possibility for a second chance. Here we see God judges much more harshly deliberate disobedience to God’s word than he does those who disobey because they are simply ignorant of God’s word.

Look at verse 23b. “But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.” In this verse Daniel summed up all the charges God has brought against Belshazzar. In this verse we find the meaning and reason why God has given us life and why every second and everywhere we go, God sustains our life. God gave Belshazzar his life and kingship for the purpose of honoring God. God gives us our life, blesses our life and sustains our life so that we too can honor God.

Look at verse 25. “This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.” If we look at the footnotes, we find that they also refer to units of money. Here we see that just as we count, value, judge and use money, God counts, places value, judges and uses people. Look at verse 26. “MENE: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.” When King Belshazzar did not maintain God’s blessing, God brought his reign to an end. History records that it was October 13, 539 B.C. God reigns over the world. When God blesses us, we should not forget God. We must honor and thank God for his grace. In this way, we have to maintain God’s blessing. This is the secret of overcoming our pride and humbling ourselves before God.

Look at verse 27. “Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” “TEKEL” means when God weighed Belshazzar on the scale he was found too light to be a king. In the sight of God, as the king of Babylon, he should have been mature like a huge oak tree. He was supposed to be in the heavyweight category. But because of his drinking and having no learning mind his inner man did not grow. As a result, he remained immature and childish. In terms of character, he was a mosquito-weight. He was too light to be a child of God, not to mention being a king. He fell short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23). Probably his outer appearance was glamorous and fascinating. But in the sight of God he was worthless. He was a man of no contents.

Look at verse 28. “Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” “Peres” is the singular of "PARSIN.” King Belshazzar’s kingdom would fall and be invaded by Medes and Persians; he would be killed and his people dragged into captivity to suffer as slaves. The Medes and the Persians built a dam on the Euphrates. It flowed under the wall of the city. They diverted all of that water coming into the Euphrates into a swampland. They marched underneath the wall on that shallow riverbed, went on to the inside, killed the guards, threw open the gates, and the whole Medo-Persian army conquered Babylon.

Mene, Tekel, Parsin can signify death, judgment, and hell. At death, the sinner’s days are numbered and finished; after death the judgment, when he will be weighed in the balance and found wanting; and after judgment the sinner will be given as prey to the devil. Mene, Tekel and Peres are the writing on the wall for every sinner. Like Belshazzar we will be found wanting on the judgment day. Hell is the only place we deserve to be cast into. But unlike Belshazzar we have the good news of Jesus Christ; his death for our sins and resurrection from the dead. We do not know if today may be the last day God may give us to accept God’s favor. This is why the Bible urges each person to accept God’s favor today. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 says, “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” Today we know for sure we have Jesus. We don’t know what tomorrow will hold for us. Therefore let us today repent of our sins and call on Jesus to save us.

In this passage we learn that King Belshazzar’s sins were innumerable. Among them, his sin of having no learning mind was the worst. Having no learning mind kept him from having a sense of history through lessons God had given. Having no learning made him ignorant, which made him an arrogant man and boldly commit sins of blasphemy and idol worship. We come in this world knowing nothing. At the same time God has given us a mind and heart that can learn endlessly about our Creator who holds our life and our ways in his hands. May God help us to have a holy desire to endlessly learn what pleases God and his Son Jesus Christ.