



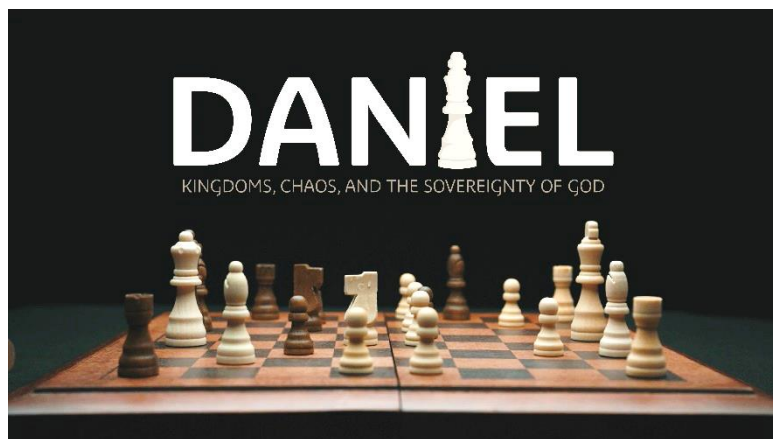
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

The Party Is Over!

DANIEL:
Kingdoms, Chaos and the
Sovereignty of God

Daniel 5

Tim Badal | February 11, 2024



We sing about living water, yet if we've been in church for a while, we forget how refreshing this living water is. In the second service, I was introduced to an older gentleman, probably in his 60s or early 70s. He pulled me aside, hugged me and said, "For 25 years, my wife has prodded me, nagged me to come to church. Last Sunday was the first time I'd been in church in 25 years and my life will never be the same again." [Applause] Amen.

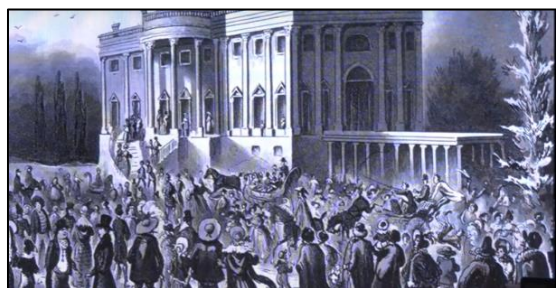
We too easily get into the habit of thinking God's not changing lives, that God's not moving. He is. We just need to create opportunities for God to be made known to the world around us. I'm so thankful to have you with us this morning; my prayer is that you will see the greatness of God and give Him the glory that's due His name.

If you will, turn in your Bibles to the book of Daniel. We'll be in Daniel 5 for the entire time this morning. We're continuing in our series titled "Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God." If there was a title I could use for Daniel 5, that would be it. We have kingdoms, chaos and the sovereignty of God being played out in one evening, at one party. Today we're going to explore the details of an epic party that took place about 600 years before Jesus Christ entered the world in Bethlehem, yet we see His hand (no pun intended) at work in a mighty way in this party.

It's kind of appropriate that today of all days we would talk about parties, because 116 million Americans are going to gather in parties for the Super Bowl. Maybe you're gathering at an event like that, where there's going to be food, festivities and football. You're going to enjoy all that transpires, not only what happens on the field, but whatever Taylor Swift is doing in the luxury boxes, rooting on her boyfriend. Boy, football has changed, hasn't it?

Now parties are big and Americans know how to throw parties, how to throw festivals, how to throw gatherings. In fact, some of the most well-known are events that not only took place in real time and impacted those who attended, but they went on for many years to come. For example, John F. Kennedy was thrown a birthday party about a year and a half before he was assassinated. It took place in Madison Square Garden with 15,000 people in attendance. If you were to ask most people, they don't remember if there was food or drinks served or what speeches were made. What they remember is the song that was sung, "Happy Birthday," by Marilyn Monroe. The great drama that came as the result of her saying, "Happy Birthday, Mr. President," in a very sultry and seductive way.

Another party that was big in American history was when newly inaugurated President Andrew Jackson—who was labeled the people's President—in essence said, "Come one, come all. Let's throw a party." He invited people to his new house, the White House. Twenty-five thousand people attended that party. They trashed the White House with mud and debris. Many of the President's underlings and officials had to take down paintings to make sure people didn't take them. They put away the fine china so it would not be ruined. Jackson

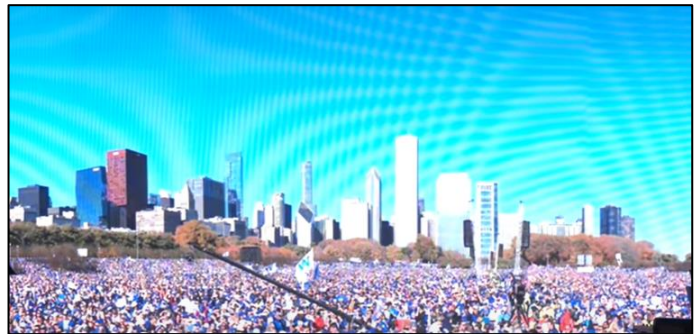


wanted Americans to know this White House was in fact the people's house, and that any and all should be invited in. What a party he threw!



Then, of course, who can forget the party that took place on a farm in central New York in 1969, where 400,000 people descended upon an incredible field to experience what has been known as Woodstock. Now, that's a bit of a misnomer, because Woodstock is quite a distance away from the farm, but no doubt it was the party of all parties. The best and brightest musicians came and played, and of course the hippies, with all their "free love," had a grand old time for three days out in that farmland.

But of all the parties that have ever been thrown, there's one that stands out above all others. About seven years ago, 5.6 million people flooded the Chicago area to celebrate the world championship of the Chicago Cubs, right? It is the second largest gathering in human history. This is the party of all parties, the festival of all festivals. I know even some of you were there and experienced it. I get your emails; I get your phone calls. We hate hearing about the Cubs; we have a lot of Sox fans out there but they don't get a lot of love. I know a couple decades ago you guys won a championship as well. That's really far back, so I knew you would want to be reminded of it. I couldn't find any partying, but I found the parade, the World Series parade for the White Sox. I thought you would enjoy this.



So with that, let's open up God's Word and learn from God. I've already offended half my audience, but maybe there's not that many White Sox fans. I want to talk about a party this morning, a party that happened 600 years before Jesus had His earthly ministry. The party isn't known for what food was served. It was a big party, a thousand people. Some believe it was even more, because the text says a thousand 'lords' were invited to this party. There was drinking; a lot of parties have drinking. But what made this party so significant was that God showed up at the party. He had a message for all the party goers, including the king, the most important and influential individual in the entire place. What we hear from God is a message all of us need to hear and understand, whether we are close to God or far from Him this morning. Here is how Daniel describes that event:

¹ 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.

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet hall, and the queen declared, "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, ¹² because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

There are a lot of details in this story that we need to fill in and understand. There's been some critical response to this text, and there are a couple reasons for that. First, we need to understand that Daniel is now about 60-70 years old. Yes, I will say it, he's an older man. He has been through the ups and downs of living as an exile in a kingdom that is not his own. He's had to figure out how to love God and be faithful to his God in the midst of pagan kingdoms. We also need to understand that between Daniel 4 and Daniel

5—that white space between the chapters—about 23 years have passed. How do we know this? From secular history. From that, we know who the Babylonian kings were, when they ruled and how long they ruled. Multiple historians give us clear dates for this.

So we can pinpoint that this party took place on a certain date in 539 B.C.

Where things get a little cloudy is the question who was Belshazzar? We don't know of a king in Babylon named Belshazzar. The text tells us that Belshazzar is the son of Nebuchadnezzar. But that's not the case. This story is written in ancient Aramaic in which there was no word for grandfather. You only speak of your 'fathers.' This is also seen in other ancient Hebrew writings, when it says that Jacob wanted to be buried with his fathers. It didn't say his dad, his grandpa and his great grandpa. Those are terms we use. So, if you were a descendant of someone, that person was referred to as your father.

We know from secular records that there is no mention of this guy Belshazzar. That leads some liberal theologians to say, "This is why you can't believe the Bible to be accurate. This is just a story and Daniel just created a character who didn't exist." That was the case until about the 1850s when there was an archeological dig around the area of Babylon. They unearthed what has come to be known as the "Cylinder of Nabonidus." It was a clay cylinder that had Babylonian writing on it. It's not hard to read Babylonian, because Aramaic is still a modern language. This artifact contained the information that Nabonidus, who was the son of Nebuchadnezzar, had a son who never served as king, but served as a de facto king while Nabonidus was off fighting a war. More importantly, the name of that son was written on the Cylinder of Nabonidus: Belshazzar. This confirmed that what we're reading about today was truly an historic event. Also, the queen mentioned was not Belshazzar's wife, but rather his mother.

As we go through this story of the finger of God writing on the wall, I want to look at three points. Two of them are points of observation, meaning I'm just going to tell you what it says. Then in the third point, I want to apply what we see in this text to our lives today.

This party reminds us about man's futility.

Chapter five may be the best place for us to see how small and futile we really are as humans. We see this in a couple ways in this story. First, we see it in the whole occasion of the party. They were throwing a party, all the while knowing the Medo-Persian army was surrounding their city. Why in the world would a king throw a party knowing there are enemies at his gate? The reason is that Babylon was known to be one of the most well-defended cities in all the ancient world. Here is a depiction of what it would have looked like around 550 B.C., then what it is today. That's a real picture of modern-day Iraq and what is left of the capital city of Babylon, 2,500 years after this story took place.

The Bible tells us it was a walled city. History also tells us there was a moat surrounding the city that was 50 feet deep, filled with water from the Euphrates River. So an army would have to go through a river, then once they got to the other side, they would be standing in front of a 90 foot wall. If you can, imagine crossing that deep channel in some kind of boat, then needing ladders that are at least 90 feet tall to get into the city. We're going to learn that the Medes and Persians are way smarter than the Babylonians. They dammed up the river, then they actually went under the walls and conquered the Babylonians in one fell swoop.

Here is the futility. We think we're secure. We think we have everything figured out, but we don't. This guy throws a party with all kinds of drinking and all kinds of carousing. This is an epic sinful party. One guy said it's a 3D party: drunkenness, debauchery and defilement.

We're told about drunkenness. Wine is mentioned a couple times. They're living it up. They're drinking it up. Then we see debauchery. Where's that? Three times in our text we see the word 'concubines.' I can assure you, concubines weren't invited to regal affairs. They were brought in for one reason and I'll leave that to your imagination. This was a highly sexual party. Then it was a defiling party. Not only did they defile themselves with immorality, but they took the precious things they had taken from the temple in Israel, things



that Nebuchadnezzar had put in his temples. But Nebuchadnezzar had a measure of restraint; he realized the things made for gods needed to stay with the gods. But Belshazzar decided, no, these should be brought out. So they brought the wonderful things God had had men create to be used as tools for worshipping Him. Now Belshazzar filled these vessels with wine, then as they drank the wine, they worshiped the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and clay. This caused God to be upset. He was not a fan of people using His treasured things in the worship of other gods. In fact, as we read, the writing on the wall took place “opposite the lampstand.” That was one of the most cherished possessions within Israel’s temple worship. Belshazzar said, “I don’t care what god these things were for; I will use them however I see fit.” That’s when God said, “Enough is enough.”

I want you to notice the word “immediately” and see man’s futility. He’s throwing a party, not knowing his life was about to be taken from him. God then showed up. He never needs to be invited. He comes when He wants, how He wants and where He wants. Did He show up with a mighty army? No. Did He show up with storms and winds? No. Did He show up with an angelic choir, announcing His arrival? No.

God showed up with the sign of a human hand. It was probably no bigger than my hand. Then a finger of that hand began to write on the wall. Let’s look at how the most powerful man in the room responded. Verse six says when the finger began to write, *“the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.”* Literally, he lost control of his bowels. He made a mess of himself. He was freaking out. And if the king was freaking out, I can assure you all the thousands present at that party were also freaking out. Why? Because a hand showed up and wrote some words on the wall. The great and mighty lords of Babylon were shut down and shut up because God showed up with a hand—nothing more.

We think we’re so great. We think we’re so powerful. We think we are so all-knowing. But when the rubber meets the road, we are frail and finite people. We bring nothing to the table. Our futility is seen when the going gets tough. In fact, at the end of the passage we’ll see the futility of this king because he was killed that very night. And his kingdom—everything he and his fathers had built—was all taken away.

Let’s stop here for a moment and ask are you living in the dream that you’re building something? Are you living in the world where you think you’ve actually got control of this thing called life? Do you believe that you’re smart enough, strong enough, able enough to address the issues both known and unknown, today and in the future? Do you think you’ve amassed enough riches to be able to deal with the troubles that may be coming your way? Notice this very clearly. Daniel 5 tells the people—including you and me today—“If you think you’re bringing something, you’re not.”

My family was watching a documentary about the titans of technology. In no way do I want to dishonor the dead, but I found it quite remarkable. They spoke about Steve Jobs, the brains behind Apple, the multi-multi-billionaire, the visionary, the dreamer who made such amazing advancements in things many of us use on a daily basis. What could he not invent? What could he not solve? What issues, what struggles could he not find solutions for? That is, until he got the news about his cancer. Then no amount of riches, no amount of vision, no amount of technology would help as he struggled with cancer. It’s clear that we are frail and finite people, that our attempts to build kingdoms of our own are the most foolish things we can do.

Belshazzar knew he was a king on borrowed time. He’s been warned, but he doesn’t listen. So he brings in the futile of the futile—his magicians, the Chaldeans, the astrologers, the enchanters. I wonder if, when they showed up, the carnival music started to play and they arrived in the clown cars.

The king was like, “All right, you guys are the best and brightest. These are our valedictorians. They’re going to solve the writing on the wall.” Has it dawned on them what’s dawned on us, that every time they’ve been asked to do something they have failed? How do they keep their jobs? I want to work in Babylon. You never have to accomplish anything and you keep your job.

They came, they looked at the writing on the wall, but none of them were able to make any sense of what it meant. Verse nine then tells us the king was *“greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.”* Can I just tell you something? Without God in our lives, that’s where we will end up: alarmed and perplexed. This world has way bigger problems than we will ever be able to deal with on our own. Here’s the thing: our Creator knows this.

So what did Belshazzar do? He brought in the queen. She told him, “You don’t have to be alarmed. Your color doesn’t have to change. There’s a guy in your kingdom who served your grandfather and I remember him serving my dad. He had understanding and wisdom. He was made the chief of the enchanters and the magicians. He’s able to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve problems. I’m glad he’s on our team.”

Now I want to remind you that Daniel was no different than every other enchanter and magician, except for one thing: God lived within him. The Spirit of God resided in him. I don't want you to get this idea that Daniel was bringing something to the table. Daniel would not know what these words were unless God gave him the interpretation. Which is something Daniel was continually confessing.

This party reminds us about God's sovereignty.

So we have man's futility; now we see God's sovereignty. God is powerful and mighty, in control of all things. Before we even get into this story, we see this in the details of Daniel 1-4:

- God was in control when the Babylonians came and took over Israel.
- God was in control when Daniel was taken into exile.
- God was in control when Daniel said, "I'm not going to defile myself with the king's food. Give me vegetables and water."
- God was in control when He allowed Daniel to have favor with the people in charge of him, allowing him to thrive.
- God was in control when He gave Nebuchadnezzar the dream in chapter two, then gave Daniel the interpretation of that dream.
- God was in control when King Nebuchadnezzar built a statue of himself and told every person they had to bow to it.
- God was in control when He saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fire King Nebuchadnezzar threw them into.
- God was in control when King Nebuchadnezzar started thinking too highly of himself and worshipped himself.
- God was in control when He brought Nebuchadnezzar down and turned him into an animal in Daniel 4, then allowed him to repent at the end of that chapter.

God has been in control every step of the way. Now we see God's sovereignty again here in the way He shows up—with a finger. He doesn't have to show up in any other way. And notice that God has the sovereign power to judge people. He declares three truths to the king that could also be declared to us. He says to Belshazzar, "You know better. You saw it in your grandfather when he became proud and I made him low. But he then repented and learned, verse 21, *"that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will."* He then says:

²² And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, ²³ but you have lifted up yourself 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.

Could God say that of you this morning? Could God in His sovereignty say, "I have declared Myself through My Word and the world. I have shown Myself powerful. I've shown how I've moved in the lives of others. And still you are hellbent on building a kingdom of your own, which in the end will show you how futile your life really is."

Are you building that kingdom? Are you doing it in direct rebellion against the sovereign control of God? Brothers and sisters, please hear me. A day is coming when the sovereign God will say what He said that very day. Look at what the text says. Daniel comes in and says, "You haven't listened. But I'll tell you what the words on the wall mean."

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^l in the balances and found wanting; ²⁸ PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Can it be said this morning of us today, "Your days are numbered"? Friends, you and I need to know that God has numbered our days. We can think that's fair or unfair, but He has numbered our days and we do not know when the last of those days will come, but we know it's coming. Every man, woman and child has encountered the death of others around us and we can be certain that at a time of God's choosing, not our own, will come as well.

Yet the world is telling us to eat, drink and be merry. Why? They don't want to think about death. Nevertheless, there is a day coming when we will no longer be living. The Bible tells us we live, we die, then comes the judgment (Matthew 25:31; 1 Corinthians 4:5). We will stand in the presence of God and our lives will be put on scales. The Bible tells us what all our scales will say: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We will be found wanting.

We will be found wanting through the kingdoms we build. It's not the money we amass. It's not the things we do. The only way those scales are brought to a good place is through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, and our faith and trust that His sacrifice was sufficient for all we need. For those who reject that—maybe there are some in this place today who are building

your kingdoms and pursuing your own parties—you will stand before the Lord and it will be too late. Your kingdom, all you've built, will be taken and given to someone else. The Bible says if anyone's name is not written in the Lamb's book of life, they will be cast into the lake of fire. These are sobering words about God's judgment. You see, God reigns supreme.

His sovereignty is seen in one other place in this story, at the very end. It says in verse 30, *"That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old."* It says Darius "received the kingdom." You receive that which has been given to you. God gave the Babylonian kingdom to Darius. God is the One Who gives and takes away. Today we've seen this juxtaposition of our futility and God's complete sovereignty, which begs the question: what do we do with this? It should do two things, before we look at our third point.

It should humble us.

We should do some serious evaluation of our lives, asking ourselves, "What am I building? Do I really think it's going to last?" Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, things that moth and rust can destroy. But lay up your treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:19-20). This should humble us and remind us that we're not in charge.

It should give us hope.

This truth should also give us hope. We're lost. We have nothing to bring to God in heaven, but we don't have to. That's what grace is. Jesus came so that we might have life in all abundance and here it is. Daniel is told that God is in charge, so he has hope. He's not worried about the Babylonians. He's not worried about the Medes and the Persians. He's not worried about the Greeks or the Romans, who will come after them. Daniel knows there's only one Kingdom and one Boss, God Who reigns supreme in heaven. That gives him hope to live another day amidst the trials and tribulations he faced.

This party reminds us about our opportunity.

All this leads to an application of our opportunity. In order to make the most of this opportunity, it will depend on how you answer some questions.

What will it take for you to believe?

For Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar's grandfather, it took seven periods of time during which he was made like an animal. Only after that did he surrender and believe in God. But this king doesn't believe. There's no mention of him repenting. There's no mention of him giving glory to God. Which begs the question: what would it have taken for him to believe? What more did he need to see? Maybe you're thinking, "If I saw a miracle, then maybe I would believe." Well, he got a miracle, but he didn't believe. What will it take you—you who are far from God—to believe that God is in control and you are not? You are not the savior. You are not the captain of your vessel. Jesus Christ is. What will it take? More preaching? More singing? More testimony? What will it take for you to believe?

Here's the thing. Whether you believe it or not doesn't make it true or not. Jesus Christ reigns supreme. He's the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). You will one day bow to this King. The question is: will you do it while there's mercy and grace to be found? What will it take for you to believe?

What is catching your eye right now?

When Daniel shows up, after he gets accolades from the king's mother, the king says, "If you make good on this interpretation, I'll give you clothing and power." In exile, those are great things to have. I have to wonder, as Daniel looked over the landscape of the party, if he saw every type of pleasure known to man offered there. But what Daniel says to the king is this: "Keep your stuff."

Later in the text we read that Daniel gets these things anyway, but it really doesn't matter. The king is giving him stuff that's going to be taken away a few hours later. Could it be said of us, as Christ followers, that, unlike Daniel, the things of this world are catching our eye—the pleasures, the possessions, the power? What the believer should be saying is, "Keep that for yourself." Why? This kingdom is coming to an end and these things are temporal. What I'm storing up, what I'm building up, what I'm pursuing are not the treasures of this world, but the treasures of heaven. Not the pleasures of this earth, but the pleasures of heaven. Not the possessions of this earth, but the possessions of heaven. What is catching your eye right now?

When asked, are you ready to speak?

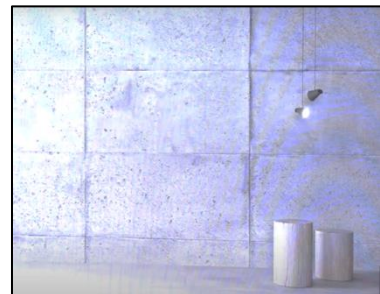
Daniel was called to a party. Let's face it—this isn't a brunch. This isn't a breakfast party. This isn't a power lunch they're having. This is late in the evening. Daniel is probably pulled out from his slumber, brought into the palace, brought into a situation where he's

now going to speak in front of the king and a thousand of the king's highest officials. What he has to do is the unthinkable: pronounce judgment on the king. He has to say, "King, you're going to lose everything, including your life."

Can we just say that takes courage? Can we just say that takes guts? Can we say better that that takes a whole lot of faith? It begs the question this morning that when opportunities come for us to share the good news of the gospel, and yes at times the bad news, will we declare it? Will we declare it when we're by ourselves with just one other person? Will we declare it when we're alone in the middle of a group of people? Will we declare it to someone underneath us or someone above us? Will we declare it if it means the loss of our lives? When we are asked, will we speak up? What will we proclaim about our God?

What is God writing on your wall?

Finally, and probably most importantly, is this question: what is God writing on your wall? See, each of us have walls like this behind me. These walls are in our hearts. The Bible says God has written on our hearts. What's He writing to you? What's He saying to you? Are they words of conviction? A call to cease and desist in going your way and turn to Him? Maybe He's writing on some of your walls words of compassion, words of love. Have you ever thought to look at the wall of your life and ask, "What's God writing on it?"



Last night we had an incredible event for the men—games, activities and all that. We had two speakers, Dave Beebe and Jared Williamson, who shared about their lives. If you know Jared, some time ago he experienced a life-threatening car accident that should have taken his life. It happened because of the sovereignty of God, yet also because of a driver under the influence of alcohol. He spent countless days in the hospital. I think he said he had six or seven major surgeries to put his body back together, and he still has one surgery to go. He told our men that he specifically remembered God speaking to him in his place of trial. God told him, "This trial has come, Jared, because I think you're sitting on the sidelines. I think you're building your own kingdom." Jared said to an audience of men who were listening with rapt attention, "I heard God and my life will never be the same again."

You see, God wrote on Jared's wall. Jared now isn't able to run like he used to. He's barely able to walk without crutches. Months and months later, he's still having surgeries. Yet he would say this: "I count it all joy, because God wrote on my wall and got my attention before it was too late. God gave me a second chance."

Belshazzar didn't take his opportunity. He never paid homage to God, so he lost his life. While you still have life and breath in you, what is God writing on your wall? This is the most significant question you could ask today. Not, who's going to win the Super Bowl, but what is God saying to you today, and will you listen to Him?

Listen to me, church, before it's too late. Will you change and do what He says before your life is taken. You and I don't know what the day might bring, so we should make the most of our opportunities. I pray that we will.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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