

The Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5:13-31, Trinity Sunday XV

September 13, 2015

Sermon Text: Daniel 5:13-31 (KJV):

“Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.”

Beloved of the Lord.....People often ask the question, Which is the true church? Which church has the truth, and how do we know? This is a good and fair question. But what is the answer? The answer is this: the true church (visible) is that church which faithfully preaches and teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The True Visible church faithfully teaches all of God’s Word. It only

follows then that false churches preach one or many false doctrines contrary to the Bible. We know then what is true and false, only by what the Bible says. Whatever a pastor, priest, or minister may teach, we must examine it all through the eyes of Holy Scripture. Don't sit back and just soak in what you are taught as if your pastor cannot fail you. He can. Search the Scriptures yourself, because your faith cannot be in flesh and blood. In like manner, all the churches and denominations of this world must be judged according to the teachings of the Bible. You could say that the Bible, is God's handwriting on the wall!

The king of our lesson today was named Belshazzar. King Belshazzar, King of Babylon, read the handwriting on the wall with his own eyes. In the verses previous to our text we see Belshazzar throwing a party for his nobles, wives, and concubines. At the height of the party, at the height of Belshazzar's revelry and drunkenness, he commanded his servants to bring out the golden vessels which his father had stolen from Solomon's temple. Remember these vessels had once been used in service to the True God of Israel. Now Belshazzar used these golden goblets to get drunk. The Bible says, "They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." This was sacrilege, a mocking of the True God of heaven, and God judged Belshazzar for it. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." Dan. 5:4-5 Suddenly now, in the middle of the party, Belshazzar and all his guests literally see the hand of God Himself writing on the wall! The True God of Israel reaches down from heaven and writes mysterious words upon the wall! Belshazzar is now terrified. His happy, merry, and drunken face now changes into terror. His whole body started shaking so terribly that his knees knock together. What is the meaning of all this? Having rejected the Word of God his entire life, God's Time of Grace had ended for poor Belshazzar and now came God's judgment. The writing was: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

I. False prophets will only falsely interpret God's handwriting. This handwriting upon the wall was the Word of God. Belshazzar wanted to know the meaning. "Then came in all the king's wise *men*: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." These "wise men" of the king were his astrologers, soothsayers, and magicians. They were the false prophets of his day, but in all truth they blindly served Satan by teaching lies. God would not permit these false prophets to interpret the writing. God kept the meaning of the writing secret from them so only Daniel, a true prophet could reveal it.

In our world today we must recognize that there are both true and false prophets, and the false prophets always outnumber the truth. Since the Bible, God's Word, is the sole authority in the church, far above any pastor or preacher, it behooves all of us to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the Scriptures, for your Bible is "God's handwriting on the wall". If you do as Jesus says, and you learn to "beware of false prophets", then you will be serious about studying God's Word for you know well how easily Satan can lead you astray if you don't. None of us should be content with the knowledge that we have been raised "Lutheran" all our lives. Nor should we be content with having gone through the catechism once or twice in our teenage years. That is not enough. Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Think about how much schooling and education we have in life, beginning at Kindergarten, then High School and sometimes college. We have all this education so we can earn money and make a living. This education is good, but it cannot bring us to heaven nor can it deliver us from hell. We need to think about our souls and what will happen to our soul after death. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole

world but lose his own soul?" Christian education, namely the searching and studying of Scripture should be lifelong. If you don't open your Bible after confirmation, or if you think all you need to do is go to church on Sunday and you will be fine, the devil has already lured you into a false sense of security. You are either a weak Christian or you are fallen, because you have very little love for God's Word.

Thus if we are to beware of false prophets as Jesus said, let every one of us understand: **GOD'S WORD IS THE SOLE AUTHORITY BY WHICH WE JUDGE, RECOGNIZE AND IDENTIFY FALSE PROPHETS.** Truly we live in a world where we are bombarded daily by spiritual and religious messages, which we must either hear or reject, and God's Word is the only standard or ruler, whereby we can discern lies and truth. Therefore if a so-called "prophet" comes to you and tells you that you must listen to him because he had a dream, or a vision, or a revelation from God, **DO NOT LISTEN.** In Jeremiah 14:14 the Lord says, "The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart." False prophets always claim to have the "spirit" of God, and they will always appear to know the Scriptures well, but in the end they are liars and deceivers. God says, "Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD." Jer. 23:32

II. God's prophets faithfully bear witness to the True Prophet Jesus Christ. Let us then thank God that He has sent us a True Prophet, who has faithfully revealed to us all of the important councils of God. His name is Jesus Christ. As our Prophet, Jesus "revealed Himself by word and deed, and by the preaching of the Gospel still reveals Himself as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world." (Catech. Q. #132) Jesus is so different from all the false prophets of this world. Muhammed didn't wash the feet of his disciples. Mary Baker Eddy wasn't the Bread of God which came down from heaven. Charles Taze Russell didn't transfigure himself before the Peter, James, and John. Neither did Joseph Smith rise again from the dead. Jesus is the only True Prophet in the Holy Christian Church, because only the words of Jesus give life to dead sinners. Yet you hear Jesus speak only when you read your Bible, or hear a sermon faithful to God's Word. Yet if you listen closely you will hear Jesus say He is **THE DOOR** to heaven, the Bread of Life for your soul. Jesus said "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." And "I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

This same Prophet, Jesus Christ, spoke to that evil king Belshazzar through the mouth of the lesser prophet Daniel. And you notice that Daniel did not care for the gifts that Belshazzar offered. He did not speak God's Word for money, power, or influence. He spoke God's Word in order to serve God and man. In like manner today, when we hear a sermon in church, what we should be looking for is this: is Christ being exalted as the only Savior of sinful man, or is that pastor exalting himself? Did I hear the Gospel? Did I hear of God's grace through Jesus? So the Apostle Paul said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Like the Apostle Paul, Daniel was a faithful servant of Christ. Daniel therefore explained to the king that it was the Lord God who had given to Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar, all of his earthly power. Moreover when Nebuchadnezzar became exalted in pride, God took his kingdom away from him, and punished Nebuchadnezzar with insanity. "His heart was made like

the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen." God smote the king of the land with madness. Until "he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men." Once Nebuchadnezzar repented, God restored his right mind to him. Now Daniel says to Belshazzar, "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven." It is not as if Belshazzar didn't know better. He did. Knowing the life of his own father he should've repented. But he didn't. Neither did Belshazzar confess the True God of Israel. Daniel says, "the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." The very life of Belshazzar was in God's hands, and yet Belshazzar did not glorify God! Thus the handwriting on the wall! MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN: which means, numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. In the scales of God's justice, Belshazzar was found lacking. Like us, he had broken God's commandments. But since he had not repented of his sins nor put his faith in the True God, now his kingdom would be divided and given to another! The Bible says "That night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." A foreign army invaded the city and murdered him with the sword.

You know the worst part of this lesson is that Belshazzar could've been saved. He could've been like the thief on the cross, who in his final moments before death, repented of his sins and sought God's forgiveness. Daniel, could've then said to Belshazzar, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!" God had forgiveness for Belshazzar the same as us, but Belshazzar didn't want it. He wasn't sorry for his sins. After hearing the interpretation, Belshazzar simply rewarded Daniel! Again the Bible says, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul." Belshazzar lost his own eternal soul, because on the last day of his life he still refused to repent of his sins and seek God's grace while he lived.

Beloved of the Lord,.....what are the lessons we can learn today from Daniel and Belshazzar? FIRST let us learn to number our days. We live in a Time of Grace in which God, for a limited time God permits us sinners to live because God wants us to repent of our sins and look to Jesus for forgiveness. While we can rejoice that some people come to faith in the nick of time just before death (like the thief on the cross), this is the exception - not the rule. Let us not be like him and put off repentance until tomorrow, for tomorrow may never come. But the SECOND lesson for us is to beware of false prophets. The only way we can discern between truth and error is God's Holy Word. Your Bible then is God's handwriting on the wall. If you read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word, if you study your Bible and your catechism, you will be able to recognize, mark and avoid false prophets. The Holy Spirit will help you by the power of the Word.

And our FINAL lesson for today, is that Jesus Christ is the True Prophet, the Living Word, our Savior. His Word is truth! How good our Lord is to us, to send us this glorious Prophet who not only preached the Gospel message of deliverance, but Jesus was the Living Gospel Himself....Himself the Living Word whose words of life quicken and convert our dead soul. Jesus and Jesus alone, your True Prophet, did not want you to perish as Belshazzar, and so Jesus made all your sins His own. Because Jesus offered Himself up a ransom and payment for the world, that means also He gave His life for you and me, so we would be forgiven all, washed clean by His blood. Faith alone can believe this, and unbelief alone cannot believe. What does God then want from you? Not your works, for you are a sinner who cannot save himself. But He does want you to believe and see what the son of God did for you. Therefore "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Likewise Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come to Him now while you can, believe on Him now while He holds out His pardoning hand, for the Gospel is God's Handwriting on the

wall and these things "are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Amen.