

WHEN THE PARTY IS OVER

(Daniel 5)

Daniel 5:1–5-----¹ **Belshazzar the king** made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. ² While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ **Then they brought** the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* 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 and iron, wood and stone. ⁵ **In the same hour** the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Now we will drop down all the way to verse 25:

Daniel 5:25–30-----²⁵ **“And this is the inscription** that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN ²⁶ This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ²⁷ TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ²⁸ PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made the a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

(Psalm 37---PPT for slides) Over the last ten years or so, there has been a lot of media coverage of a man named **Bernie Madoff**. In the year I was born (1960), Bernie Madoff started a financial investment firm that became one of the top businesses on Wall Street. Eventually, 1000's of people, including his relatives, friends, and even Hollywood celebrities, had entrusted \$18 billion dollars of their wealth with him. For almost 50 years, Madoff lived and worked in astoundingly beautiful places, went on lavish vacations around the world, and ate the best food that money could buy. But on December 11, 2008, it all came tumbling down. **He was arrested by the FBI** for securities fraud. All the money that he told his investors that they were making was one big lie---a Ponzi scheme. They thought that Madoff was getting great returns for them, but for all practical purposes, their money was gone.

Madoff was eventually found guilty and sentenced to 150 years in prison. Since his imprisonment, both of his sons have died (one hanged himself because of the shame his father brought to his life and the other due to cancer). In a letter to CNBC in January of 2016, Madoff disclosed that he had kidney cancer and has recently tried to get an early release from prison because of the coronavirus scare, but to no avail.

When the court was in the process of deciding how long that Madoff should go to prison, Judge Denny Chin asked family and friends to send letters listing the good that Madoff had done for others in his life so he could decide his punishment. He didn't receive one letter. Madoff, who is now 82, got 150 years in federal prison.

With good behavior, Madoff is scheduled to be released on November 14, 2139. He will be 201 years old.

I have a feeling that after 50 years of keeping his financial Ponzi scheme secret hidden from his wife, his family, and nearly all of the people who worked for him, Bernie Madoff thought he was home free—that no one would EVER figure out his secret sin. For nearly his entire adult life, he lived lavishly and traveled the world on the financial backs of the people he was lying to. But as we saw, one day, the hammer came down, and the party was over for Bernie Madoff.

What we read earlier in Daniel 5 was the story of a king named Belshazzar, the grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar. Like Bernie Madoff (and even people that you and I rub shoulders with on a regular basis), King Belshazzar thought that he was invincible. He thought he was untouchable and that what he believed and how he lived was HIS business—and NO ONE was going to convince him otherwise. But God had other plans, and as we saw in our text, Belshazzar's party was ended and his life was snuffed out on the very same day.

Title: When the Party is Over

(Prayer)

If you are listening to me today and you are part of that group of Christians that became believers in Christ in your late teens or a little later in life, you can probably tell me a story about yourself or someone you knew, who, at some point in their life before Christ, thought it would be funny to make fun of God or of the things of God. Maybe it was subtle, like putting a Darwin-Fish emblem on your bumper. Or maybe it was some kind of verbal put down, mocking things Christians say, like: "Praise the Lord!" or "Praise Jesus!" or something like that. Or maybe it was more serious than that. Not too long ago, droves of people uploaded videos of themselves to a website in which they publicly declared that they were blaspheming the Holy Spirit in light of the words of Jesus who said that whoever blasphemes the Spirit will be eternally damned. Apparently, they thought it would be cool to be part of those damned to hell.

In Daniel chapter 5, King Belshazzar is a king who is like this. He knew all about the true God. His grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, on many occasions in his life gave thanks and praise to the God of heaven and most likely received

the gift of eternal life through the preaching of Daniel. **And Belshazzar heard about these things growing up.**

According to Daniel 5:22, Belshazzar knew the story about how God judged his grandfather and made him insane and made him eat grass like an ox until he humbled himself and found mercy from God. Daniel reminded him of that story and said to him: “Belshazzar ... you **knew** all this...”

“You knew that the God of Daniel humbled your grandfather for his arrogance and for his sins against the poor ... but you laughed at all that. You didn’t care. You are proud just like he was. You filled the holy golden vessels of God from the temple in Jerusalem with wine to make fun of the True God and to exalt your gods of gold and silver, so you and your friends could get drunk.”

And Daniel goes on to say in vv. 22-23:

Daniel 5:22–23-----²² “But you ... Belshazzar, **have not humbled your heart**, although you knew all this. ²³ And you **have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven**. They have brought the vessels of His house 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**, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and **the God who holds your breath in His hand** and owns all your ways, **you have not glorified**.

Daniel is telling him he’s toast—that “the handwriting was on the wall.” His party was over and his days as a king were ending. That very evening, the city he ruled over, that he and everybody else thought could never be broken into because of its massive walls WAS broken into. The Persian army outside those walls as Belshazzar partied the night away diverted the Euphrates River that flowed through a tunnel into the city, and the city was conquered. Belshazzar lost his life that very night.

What do we learn from the story of Belshazzar in Daniel 5?

1. It is only a matter of time, but God will judge those who live in sin

I’m going to share a list of names. What do all of these people have in common? **Jim Bakker. O. J. Simpson.** Jimmy Swaggart. Bernie Madoff. Jeffrey Epstein. Harvey Weinstein.

They thought they were smarter than God. They thought they could hide their sin and continue to prosper and enjoy their fame.

But as professor and author Bryan Chapell once said:

“...power, position, prestige, peer approval, wealth, wisdom, wonderful potential, amazing accomplishment, even esteem in the church will not shield us from an all-

powerful, all-knowing, holy God who brings every dark thing to light and judges sin. The names change, the situations vary, but the consequences do not. The judgment of God is sure. God's Word still whispers, "Mene; Tekel; Peres."

Paul put it this way:

Galatians 6:7-----⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

And this is true of the rich and the poor.

Maybe you here today or you are watching the live-feed and you know that you are not living according to God's desires and maybe you don't even care. It doesn't matter. If you don't make a break with evil, one day, the party will be over, and the price you will pay will be massive.

That's the bad news. That's lesson #1. But there is good news as well.

2. If God hasn't brought the hammer down on you for your sin, you still have time to find His forgiveness.

In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar is wakes up, humbles himself, and finds God's forgiveness.

In Daniel 5, King Belshazzar sees the handwriting on the wall and knows his time is short. Does he fall down before the prophet Daniel and ask him, ***"Daniel, I don't want to die ... what do I do?"*** No. And that very night, he loses his life.

Nebuchadnezzar and his grandson Belshazzar are a study in contrasts. Both are kings. Both are arrogant. But Nebuchadnezzar listens to God and Belshazzar doesn't. And God gives Nebuchadnezzar his throne back to him, but takes Belshazzar's throne as well as his life.

Lesson 3:

3. Turning from sin will lessen its punishing effects on your life, but it will not save you from hell.

(Comments)

Romans 6:23-----...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Invitation