

4/5/2008

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Laughter and music raged through the 3 impressive courtyards, as 1000 nobles, the king's wives, concubines and other ladies banqueted into the night. Occasional shouts and raucous laughter clattered and splashed with gold goblets.

The familiar praise to the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone grated on the queen mother's ears in her chambers. She thought of her husband (King Nabonidus) leading his army in defeat after defeat. She had heard whispers that the Persians were near. Babylon was in great danger. Yet her son Belshazzar partied. 1000 nobles feasting! Not protecting the city! They were a limp shadow of the real men of the past. — A shriek stood her hair on end. It sounded like Belshazzar, yet it was different. She went to look.

In the courtroom, with its blue ceramic wall behind the throne, and its immaculate white plaster on the other 3 walls, a terrified Belshazzar stared at the wall near the fancy lamp. A large hand had written 4 words.

The king's trembling voice announced that any wise man explaining it would be clothed in purple, have a gold chain round his neck, and be made 3rd ruler of the land (after Nabonidus and Belshazzar). But none could.

From the courtyard shadows, his mother brought news. Old Belteshazzar, from the court of king Nebuchadnezzar, he would know.

Old Belteshazzar (Daniel) had retired. His fame had faded, but not his faith. As he came to the throne that had dominated his life, he told king Belshazzar to keep his rewards.

Unlike many, his wisdom was not for personal gain. He came and prepared Belshazzar for the bad news. He told how God had given Nebuchadnezzar great glory, power and majesty. However, Nebuchadnezzar's proud heart was hard, so God humbled him to acknowledge God's power, glory and majesty.

Daniel boldly turned to Belshazzar. *You are an arrogant king. You have used the gold plates and cups from the treasure house in a Babylonian temple, which had originally been taken from Jerusalem's Temple. You know it is taboo to use religious vessels for common purposes. You are using the holy vessels God ordered to be used in worshipping him.*

God's power and majesty was again rubbished by a braggart king of Babylon. So God was breaking into history, to judge. With 4 words Mene, Mene, Tekel,

Uparsin, that haughty and brash caretaker king was undone.

Though stunned, Belshazzar kept his promise and clothed Daniel in purple, placed a gold chain round his neck and made him the 3rd highest ruler in the kingdom. Unwillingly, Daniel regained the place of honour he had known with Nebuchadnezzar.

At the start and end of Babylon's domination, Daniel was there as God's wise man directing the course of history.

That night, just as Daniel said, God shut down Belshazzar's reign. He had been weighed in the balance, found wanting, his kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians, and he was killed. Belshazzar was a proud fool.

Like the rich fool in Jesus' parable, who said *I have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry. God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you'.*

Belshazzar thought life was great. In the face of danger, he threw a party. He had contempt for this powerless God.

He thought and lived the way many people in Sydney do. They do not care about God. They eat, drink and be merry. They are not ready for trouble. Life is full of escapism. Why worry? Why be concerned?

But pride, self confidence and utter disregard of God is foolish.

Belshazzar found that the God he had treated with contempt cannot be ignored. He has the power to overthrow kingdoms and change the course of nations. He does not use power in whims. In His good timing He uses it to save His people. For with Babylon overthrown, God's people defeated and living in exile by the rivers of Babylon for 70 years, would soon be going home. They could return to Jerusalem, to their promised land, to restore their way of life, as God had promised yrs earlier.

For 70 years, they had yearned for God to flex his muscles. They had seen glimpses, but most people treated God as a joke. He is weak, powerless and the feeble hope of a minority.

What God's people wanted was a decisive victory. A thunderclap event in which everyone would know "Hey, God is alive! He is real! He is powerful! And can help us!"

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever wanted those major thunderclaps. Well, God did do something. But the thunderclap was small. It

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sounded in the palace, through the 4 words written by the hand.

Not many Babylonians would have known much about it. It rattled the king, but barely rippled from the palace. Yet it explained the tsunami which followed.

As Persian soldiers busted Babylon, most of the world did not know God's hand was in the judgement. But those in the court did, including Daniel, who survived to tell.

It is typical of God that the thunderclaps are small. The Lord of all, the high majestic ruler of the universe is humble, not arrogant. He does not emblazon the sky with billboards about how great he is. But thunderclaps do occur.

The most vital thunderclap occurred as Jesus died on the cross. Those seeing it mainly mocked or cried. But there hung Jesus... the son of God, the most perfect human... he hung there in our place. and in that moment, the 4 words came back. We had been weighed and found wanting. Our free reign in a godless kingdom is numbered and is brought to an end. Judgement had come.

As he hung and died there, Jesus went through hell literally. He took the punishment we deserve, so that if we believe he has done it for us, then the bad news for Belshazzar will not come to us. God will not say we have been found wanting.

Rather, as we trust him, He is pleased with us.

We are now like the Israelites beside the river. The thunderclap has occurred, but we are waiting to see the destruction of the evil which has made our lives so hard, so short and so touched by horror, grief and shame. It is as if we are in exile, living here, yet looking forward to our promised land, as 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:11 say.

It does not always appear as if God has thundered from heaven. There appear to be many Belshazzars in our world. They try to oppress God's people, and ridicule the glory of God and abuse Christian things. Modern day Belshazzars do not have to be rulers. They can be financial kings, educational masters, TV owners, bosses, spouses or friends. They have some power, and are foolishly puffed up in pride and haughtiness and contempt.

The tsunami is coming, because the thunderclap occurred. But we are to wait in faith, trusting God is in control, that He knows what's happening.

If you are living as though there is no danger coming, with blinkers on, just eating, drinking and being merry, then hear this message of Daniel. God will judge us, and if we have not humbled ourselves

by accepting Jesus, we will be found wanting. And our independence from God will come to an end, sooner or later.

It may be that today God is calling on you to humble yourself to him. If that is so, then take time to pray. Tell him how you feel. Ask Him to forgive you for your pride and foolishness. Trust that Jesus died for you.

And for those of us who already trust in Jesus, pray for continuing forgiveness and humility. And pray that God will change others to be humble and to accept Jesus. For our God is powerful, and He does change people. He is our Judge. As we remember the cross and resurrection, pray that people will humble themselves and be forgiven because of what Jesus has done for us.