

Daniel:
Conviction in an Age of Compromise

The Power of Praise

Daniel 2:19-23

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The Power of Praise

Scripture

If you live a typical life span, you will spend about twenty years of it asleep. And during those twenty years, it is estimated that you will have about 300,000 dreams.

As you know, we don't remember most of our 300,000 dreams. Only if you wake up in the middle of your dream are you likely to remember it. And even then the details quickly drift away.

When Eileen and I were first married, I used to have a lot of nightmares. At that time we used to work with people who were struggling with demonic attacks. We wondered if I was now having demonic attacks while I was asleep. For a long time we tried to figure out what my dreams were and meant.

Years later I decided to quit caffeine. I then made a remarkable discovery: As soon as I quit caffeine, the demons went away!

In Daniel 2 we learn that king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream one night while he was sleeping. This dream was in a class all by itself. There was something very special about his dream. And that something special was that the dream was given to him by God.

I would like to read Daniel 2:1-23 this morning, although today's text is found in Daniel 2:19-23:

¹ In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and in-

terpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.”

⁷ Once more they replied, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁸ Then the king answered, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.”

¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, “There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.”

¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king’s officer, “Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷ Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

¹⁹ **During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and said:**

**“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.**

**²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.**

He gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to the discerning.
²² He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.
²³ I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”
(Daniel 2:19-23)

Introduction

In his book *Character Forged from Conflict* Gary Preston writes:

Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, there was a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office.

The young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his presumption and summarily disqualified for the job.

Within a few minutes the young man emerged from the inner office escorted by the interviewer, who announced to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man."

The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up saying, "Wait a minute—I don't understand something. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair."

The employer responded, “I’m sorry, but all the time you’ve been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: ‘If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.’ None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his.”¹

Just as the seven young men could not understand what the telegraph was ticking, sometimes people don’t understand what God is saying when he speaks to them. God was speaking to king Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, but he could not understand what God was saying to him. God graciously sent Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar so that he could help him understand what he was saying.

Review

Let me briefly review what we covered last time.

I. Daniel’s Crisis (2:1-16)

First, we reviewed Daniel’s crisis.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream kept him from being able to sleep. It was a dream he didn’t understand. So the king called together his top advisers and ordered them to prove their authenticity and abilities by telling him his dream, and then interpreting its meaning.

No one could do that, and so in great anger, the king ordered that all the wise men in Babylon be executed immediately. Since Daniel was now one of the wise men, that meant that he and his three friends were also all sentenced to death. Daniel was able to win a brief stay of execution, not to devise an escape plan, but so that he could pray to the God of heaven, asking him to reveal to him the king’s mysterious dream, along with its interpretation.

II. Daniel’s First Response: Prayer (2:17-18)

Last week we noticed that Daniel’s first response to the crisis he faced was to pray. He gathered his friends together and in

¹ Gary Preston, *Character Forged from Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1999), n.p.

prayer they sought the God of heaven in order to reveal the dream to them.

Lesson

Today, as we come to verses 19-23, we find that in the middle of the night, when Daniel and his friends were probably still pouring out their hearts to God in prayer, God revealed the meaning of the dream to Daniel. Verse 19a says, **“During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.”**

I want you to notice in verses 19-23 Daniel’s second response to the crisis. Daniel responded in a way that sets him apart as a man worthy of our imitation, and in a way that is meant by God to teach us a few very important lessons.

III. Daniel’s Second Response: Praise (2:19-23)

Next, Daniel’s second response to the crisis was praise.

Verse 19b tells us that after God answered Daniel’s prayer **“Daniel praised the God of heaven.”**

So, Daniel’s first response to his crisis was to pray. His second response to his crisis was to praise the God of heaven.

Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, once said, “Praise is the honey of life which a devout heart extracts from every bloom of providence and grace.”

Frankly, my response would probably not have been the same as Daniel’s response. If I was Daniel and if I had received this vision, I would probably have jumped up, got dressed and then gone and banged on the king’s door and shouted, “King Nebuchadnezzar, I’ve got the answer for you!”

Instead of doing that Daniel responded in a way that is unfortunately foreign to many of us.

The next several verses are a divine record of Daniel’s words of praise to God. We read in verses 20-23:

**“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.
He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.
He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.
I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”**

Here God has given us not only wonderful literature but a model to follow. What do you do immediately after God intervenes in a mighty way to answer your crisis? If you are not very careful—at that significant moment—you will forget to take the time to step back and say, “I thank and praise you, Father, for stepping in.”

Daniel’s response of praise reveals to us a lot about his character. You see, Daniel’s godly response *before* this impending catastrophe was now matched by his godly response *after* the catastrophe was averted.

Years ago I learned how painfully unlike Daniel I was in a minor “catastrophe.” Lauren—who was about six years-old at the time—and I were involved in a car accident. Thankfully, no one was hurt. I noticed many hours later that I never took that opportunity to thank and praise God for his protection. A potentially serious accident turned out to be not much more than a nuisance. Nevertheless, I felt chastised several hours later as I reflected that I had been negligent in prayer and praise.

You see, the test of our spiritual maturity does not lie only in the fervency of our prayers during times of crisis, but also in our wholehearted response of praise when God answers our prayers.

There have been times in my life when I have been very faithful to pray diligently for something for an extended period of

time. And yet when God finally answered that prayer I have neglected to drop back down to my knees and offer him the praise he deserves, and which so deeply pleases him.

Hebrews 13:15-16 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. . . for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Notice also how Daniel praised God. Look closely at the content of Daniel’s praise. In verse 20, Daniel praised God for his eternal wisdom and power. In verse 21, Daniel praised God for his sovereign governing of history and then for his willingness to share the riches of his wisdom and power with his people.

If you think about it, Daniel’s praise to God for God’s wisdom was very appropriate, especially in light of the utter failure of all the so-called wise men of Babylon to recall and interpret the king’s dream.

In his classic book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer has a chapter on the wisdom of God. Tozer writes,

The idea of (seeing) God as infinitely wise is at the root of all truth. (God’s) wisdom, among other things, is (his) ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. (God’s wisdom) sees the end from the beginning. It sees everything in focus, each in proper relation to all, and is therefore able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision. All God’s acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for his own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time.

The reason that we, like Daniel, can have courage in the face of any challenge in life is because the God who loves us is perfectly wise and incomprehensibly powerful! Although our wisdom is limited and lacking, we know that God has the wisdom to know what is best and the power to see that what is best for us will always come to pass. And because of that, he is fully deserving of our praise.

Conclusion

Let's learn two important lessons concerning the power of praise.

- A. *Praise is the necessary antidote we all need in our battles with pride.*

First, praise is the necessary antidote we all need in our battles with pride.

When God works there is no room for pride—only praise. Please take up the battle against pride in your life. That ought to be an ongoing project for all of us here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. We need to let go of our pride and give praise to God. There is great power in that process.

Never forget the pervading truth throughout the Old and the New Testaments, “God is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6).

A sincere music lover once ran into the great composer, Johannes Brahms. When he recognized him he said, “Master, would you please write here a small portion of a masterpiece and sign it so that I can have a precious memory of this fortunate encounter?”

Brahms took the pencil and paper and scribbled the opening bars of “The Blue Danube,” which, of course, was written not by him but by Johann Strauss. And then he signed it with these words: “Unfortunately not by me! Johannes Brahms.”

Brahms took the opportunity to direct the praise to someone other than himself. That is what we are to do. We are to work at directing praise away from ourselves to God and all the great things that he has done.

One reason you may not be experiencing more of the presence and the power of God in your life is because you have not been willing to humble yourself. You have not learned the joy of standing in the shadows and giving all the praise and glory to God.

B. Praise is meant by God to be a source of great stability in the face of your trials.

And second, praise is meant by God to be a source of great stability in the face of your trials.

Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher, always began his prayers with an expression of gratitude. One cold, miserable day his people wondered what he would say. He prayed, “We thank Thee, O Lord, that it is not always like this.”

Some of you may want to say to me, “Pastor Freddy, the truth is I don’t have too much to praise God for now. Things aren’t going too well.” Well, sometimes that is just a question of perspective.

A story is told of a man who owned a small estate and wanted to sell it. Sending for a real estate agent, he asked him to write an advertisement describing the house and land.

When the ad was ready, the agent took it to the owner and read it to him. “Read that again,” said the owner.

The agent read the description of the estate once more. “I don’t think I will sell after all,” said the owner. “I have been looking for an estate like that all my life, and I did not know that I owned it!”

One step beyond the veil into heaven, at the very moment of death, when you step from time into eternity, everything that now makes absolutely no sense to you will finally make perfect sense. All the pieces of the puzzle of life will finally fit together perfectly. You will then see how every event of your life was ordered by an all-wise and all-powerful God for your good and his glory. And you will praise God then—even for your trials.

One insightful though unknown author wrote these words:

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man;
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him

Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!

How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses,
And which every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendor out—
God knows what He's about.²

The Puritan, William Law, in his *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, wrote these marvelous words:

Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice, but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who received everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it.

May God help us all to learn the power of praise! Amen.

² Robert J. Morgan, *The Red Sea Rules* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 11-12.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

As hard as it may now seem to grasp, know that God is ordering even your difficulties for your good and his glory. In heaven, you will praise God for how he used your trials to accomplish his perfect purposes in your life.

My encouragement to you today is not to wait until then. Dare to praise him now! Praise him especially in your trials, knowing that with such faith the Scriptures tell us that God is pleased.

Let's take the next few moments to praise God.

Thank and praise him for the many good things he has given you. Salvation, family, friends, health, provision.

Our gracious, Sovereign God, we join with Daniel and praise you for your wisdom and your power. For the way you have chosen to use even our problems in life to break us, and shape and mold us into the very likeness of your Son Jesus Christ. Teach us how to be a people of praise. Grant us the grace of humility that we might follow after not only Daniel, but even more so Jesus himself, and walk humbly through our lives bringing glory to your name.

All of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

The first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* reads, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "*The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*"

There is a biblical truth underlying that question that is missed by many today. And that truth is that it is only as you learn to live a life of humility, following the example of Daniel, being willing to lie low and exalt Christ high in every area of your life that you will enter into the full experience of enjoying God. I invite you to follow after Daniel and enter into the life changing power of praise. And as you do so, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.