

Calm Confidence in Nightmarish Futures

Daniel 2:1-30

“...but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries”

Introduction: It happens to all of us sometimes. We wake up in the middle of the night and our minds wander. It seems the older I get, the more prone I am to wake up between 3-4 AM and not be able to get back to sleep, and definitely not able to shut my mind off. What can keep us awake? There is much to be concerned about in our lives and the world around us. *Will I be able to get a job, or even keep the job that I have? What will the future of our State and country look like over the next years? Will I be able to meet someone and get married? Will we be able to have kids? If we do have kids, what type of world will be waiting for them? Will they be able to go to school? Play sports? Will life ever get back to normal?*

These are questions we wrestle with normally, and when we get fixated on trying to answer these, especially in the middle of the night when we are not thinking clearly, it can generate **anxiety** in us. Proverbs 12:25 says, “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.” **So the question this morning is this:** *what do we do, where do we turn, and how do we think through* the areas of our life that are future and uncertain? What we will find is the foundational answers of these questions are rooted in **an overall worldview** of who actually is in control and a **battle of godless humanism vs. a God centered** way of life. When we look to human wisdom and humanistic answers, we are left with insecurity, fear, anxiety, ignorance, and anger, unable to actually bear up under the pressure of future realities. When we look to the God of the universe who not only knows the mysteries of life but reveals to us what we need to know, we can live with **confidence**, even in the midst of harsh realities.

This morning we will look at a contrast of responses from a king and an 18 year old, one the most powerful man in the world and the other a captive teen. The first could not handle the unknown, where the latter stayed calm, trusting the Lord, and given opportunities to thrive personally and display the glory of God. The difference between these two is NOT found in their position, but rather in the object what they trusted in.

Godless Response to a Nightmarish Future (1-13)

Anxiety Filled Dream of the Future (1)

*In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his **spirit was troubled**, and **his sleep left him**.*

Nebuchadnezzar had one of those nights. He had a dream that was nightmarish, one that seemed so vivid and real that it left him anxious and troubled. Have you ever had a dream that you woke from and couldn’t remember all of it (it was 3 hours long in your dream, but you explain it in 10 seconds and can’t remember anymore?), that mixed up reality and unreality, and that left you concerned in real life?

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was like this, as we’ll see next week, of a giant statue of mixed metals getting smashed by a giant stone, with the statue being blown away with nothing left and the stone becoming a great mountain filling the earth. I’m not sure this would have shaken us, but it clearly did him. Why?

Three things to keep in mind here: 1) Babylonians, as most cultures at the time, viewed dreams as divine messages from the gods. He knew this had something to do with his future, it did not seem good, so he was shaken. 2) He was the ruler of the world, the most powerful person with unlimited authority,

yet as much effort that it took to get to the top of the pyramid was as much anxiety to **keep that position**. In fact, two of his successors would be assassinated in office, so there was never real peace or confidence in his standing. **Having more or even everything you want does NOT solve anxiety** and in fact, the more we have the more anxiety that may be produced. 3) He was early in his rule but already was thinking of his legacy. Notice that the verse says it was his **second year of ruling**, but in reality it was his **third year**, since by Babylonian reckoning they would have counted an ascension year. This means that this dream came at the conclusion of the 3 year training of Daniel and his friends, a continuation of events of chapter 1.

Fear Darkened by Ignorance (3-11)

*The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: **if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb**, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. ⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."*

*The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There **is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand**, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. ¹¹ The thing that the king asks is difficult, and **no one can show it to the king except the gods**, whose dwelling is not with flesh."*

Nebuchadnezzar was wise to surround himself with counselors, but foolish in whom he chose. **Proverbs 13:20** says *"Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."* He had compiled groups of "experts in science" of the day: magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, and a class of scholars known as Chaldeans (of whom his dad Nabopolassar was a part of). These posed as those with knowledge of the gods, and they gained knowledge by studying the most progressive methods of the day. They had tomes that tracked the movement of stars, and predicted outcomes based on celestial positions. They had libraries full of accounts of dreams, and would then give guesses of meaning based on similar themes within dreams. **This was the best they could do!** In other words, they had no real information, they could postulate best predictions, and every once in a while they were right. This was the impotent group that Nebuchadnezzar gathered in his **moment of crisis, and it became abundantly clear that it was not going to end well.**

Whether it was skepticism of the whole system or an awareness that this group would try to kiss up to him, Nebuchadnezzar through down a polarizing gauntlet to them: do not just go to your journals and manuals and offer me some flowery interpretation. I want you to give me the interpretation, but also tell me what I dreamed! Success will bring reward beyond measure. Failure will force me to make your houses into outhouses, your homes to dung hills.

Notice the interaction between the counselors and the king: *both are in crisis*. We learn much about ourselves and others when crisis hits, and both these groups responded in fear and ignorance. The king was tired of their stall tactics ("you are trying to gain time" v. 8) and pacifying him with lies and corrupting words (v. 9) hoping that over time his anger would subside. On the other side, the **wise men and counselors** were becoming more and more desperate. All they could offer was what they had: *not access to the gods but rather agreed upon 'scientific' data that they could give information as valid as a circus mind reader*. They knew they did not have access to the divine, and all of their **bluffing, celestial studies and philosophizing** could not actually answer the real questions in crisis. That is why they said in desperation, *"There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has ever asked such a thing. Only the gods could answer this."* And they were absolutely right.

What was going on here? God was not only showing the response to ignorance of God's plan and sovereignty, but He is showing how worldly philosophies 'work' when things are going well or when they can identify what is wrong with the current rule of the day (oppressed vs. oppressor), but CANNOT answer the longing questions of every heart. The Chaldean system was limited by what they could observe or deduce, but they did NOT have true answers about the future or ability to communicate with the God who does. And when things started to fall apart around them, all they could do is shift the blame back to the king: *King, you are being ridiculous! No king, ever, has put this type of demand on his wise men.* This is a you problem. Keep us out of it.

Anger Demanding the Ridiculous (12-13)

*Because of this the king **was angry and very furious**, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. ¹³ So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and **they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them***

This did not sit well with old Nebuchadnezzar. He did what any absolute dictator does when he does not have answers he wants, feels out of control, and is angry at those who let him down: *he wanted to kill them all!* This is classic overreaction. These were his top aids, assistants, managers, and overseers who Babylon had spent much time and resource into to train, and he wanted them done away with. We are reminded, and have even observed, over this last year, that when people are angry at the circumstances around them, and cannot identify any one person with whom to attach their angst, will inevitably turn their anger toward others (maybe even you). Rudyard Kipling, in his poem "IF", said, "If you can keep you head, when all about you, are losing theirs and blaming it on you." Anger will quickly squeeze out rational, reasonable, logical thought and turn toward blame, ridiculous demands, and even violence.

So in these first 13 verses, we see how a godless worldview CANNOT answer the ultimate questions we have nor can it help us through real crisis, since it does not give the truth of the future. Nebuchadnezzar was restless and troubled about the vision of the future he received, and his ignorance lead him to be fearful, insecure, and angry. Have you observed those same things around us today? No one has the type of power and authority that Nebuchadnezzar has, but they are still left with the same troubling angst that he experienced. Now the text shows a completely different response to crisis, one that was born out of certainty of the future, even though the present realities were real and nightmarish. ***The difference between these two reveal a categorical difference of worldviews, one that leads to peace and the other to angst.***

God Saturated Response to Actual Realities (14-30)

Calm Confidence (14-16)

*Then Daniel replied with **prudence and discretion** to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁵ He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so **urgent**?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. ¹⁶ And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.*

Because the decree went out, Daniel and the 3 friends were implicated. They were not currently in the king's palace but were likely in an **apprentice status**, waiting their turn to serve the king. The king sent out his brute squad led by Arioch, who was tasked with rounding up and systematically eliminating this once powerful group. If there was anytime or reason to hide, run away, or respond in sheer fear, this was it. King Nebuchadnezzar meant business, and had the reputation and ability to carry out this decree, and everyone knew it.

But let's consider Daniel's reaction. Again, if these events took place after 3 years of being Babylon, we are looking at a young man of **18 years old** (think CJ Caravaggio instead of Noah Cooper) who once again is faced with a response to crisis: I just finished by training, am set up to move forward, and now I'm going to get whacked by the king's hit men! C'mon man! Can I catch a break. But notice out of a kingdom filled with worldly wise people, it was an 18 year old committed to the truth of God and His Word that stood out in his response. **Age alone does not breed wisdom. Age without truth breeds growing ignorance, but age with commitment to God's Word produces courageous calm, clarity, and confidence.**

As Arioch approached Daniel with the news of his impending death, Daniel responded with uncommon calm. The text says he used prudence, or wisdom, and discretion, or maturity in communicating with Arioch. He was respectful. "Why such an urgent or harsh decree?" What's really going on with the king? What's fascinating is the fact that the wise men of the king's court asked for more time as a stall tactic, but Daniel asked for time so that he could interpret the king's dream, and Arioch actually agreed. This is clearly God's grace, but Daniel also gained the favor of this captain by the way he responded.

NOTE: Daniel had confidence in God's work, even though he had NOT received the answer to the question yet. In other words, at the moment of his statement to Arioch, he did NOT have the dream or interpretation in his back pocket. What gave him confidence? Was this some brash 18 year old type of pride? Not at all. Daniel knew that God has gifted him with wisdom AND the ability to understand dreams and visions (1:17), so knew God could give it to him here. Again, Daniel put himself in a position to be used by God and had already exercised the gifts given to him. Folks, let's all remember that God still gifts us today, but many do not know or exercise those gifts because they have not established faithfulness or have not actually put them into practice, but instead they lay fallow to personal detriment and the detriment of the church as a whole. Daniel's confidence gave him courage, courage to do the seeming impossible even in the midst of crisis.

Calling Out For Mercy (17-23)

*"Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to **seek mercy** from the God of heaven concerning **this mystery** so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest the wise men of Babylon. **Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.**"*

Far from trusting his own giftedness or naive pride in his own abilities, Daniel did what was most natural to him: **he called his 18 year old friends together to pray.** They spent the night crying out to God for mercy, knowing that they had no ability IN THEMSELVES to answer the king's dream, but had access to the one who knows and reveals all mysteries. Can you imagine if our teenage boys/young men would have this become their reaction to crisis? How about 38 year olds? Or 58 year olds? But this type of dependency did not come out of nowhere. This was clearly the habit of Daniel's life, as he would regularly pray three times a day (Dan. 6:10) under normal, disciplined activity. I talked to a good friend this week who was convicted about not praying enough in his personal life and with his family, and he pointed out that it was awkward to pray with his spouse since it would seem out of the normal. This happens when prayer itself is irregular at any and every level. For Daniel and his friends, it had become the constant response to seek the Lord.

Somewhere in the night vigil of prayer, God revealed the mystery of the king's dream. Upon receiving this, Daniel responded by, you guessed it, prayer. Only this time it was a prayer of thanks and praise. Often this is a missed step in our prayer life, where we focus on our needs instead of reflecting back God's praise in thanksgiving. In crisis or in regular life, it is difficult to be fearful, insecure, or angry when

we are spending time in thanks to the Lord. Here are a couple of emphasis that we see in Daniel's prayer:

- **Prayed to the GOD OF HEAVEN** - Notice that he prayed to God who was over the sun, moon, and stars, all of whom were entities that the Babylonians worshipped. He directs his prayer to the God of heaven in verses 18, 19, 28, 37, and 44, all pointing out the difference between the One true God and all the other false gods that were being represented.
- **Prayed in light of God's SOVEREIGNTY** - Daniel knew the secret of staying calm in light of any and every circumstance: *God is the one who changes seasons, who removes kings, and sets up kings.* God is the one who is in control of governments, kingdoms, and those who have authority for any given amount of time. God was the one who gave Nebuchadnezzar his rule (2:37), who chose the Babylonians to be used for the destruction of Judah, and who would be taken down after they had fulfilled their purpose. WE don't always know the exact purpose for which God is acting, but we know He does everything for His glory and to draw His own to Himself. *Is this the reality by which we pray today? Are you aware that whatever is going on in our country or around the world is accomplishing God's plan?* That rulers are raised up for a time and taken down under **God's timing!** We should be the most CALM people in the shifting sands of changing structures and governmental disappointments.
- **Prayed in light of God's OMNIPOTENCE** - God functions in **wisdom and might**, and is the one who can give **wisdom to the wise** (those who fear Him), and **knowledge to those who have understanding** (who seek Him according to the truth). Daniel understood that God not only had knowledge but ability to carry out that knowledge, and He was the source or dispenser of wisdom, rather than trusting in human systems or philosophies based on scientific observation. To the degree that we believe in God's omnipotence is to the order that we cry out to Him. In other words, is He our first pursuit or last, after we've exhausted our own wisdom?
- **Prayed in light of God's REVELATION** - God is the revealer of mysteries, so Daniel prayed to the one who reveals the deep and hidden things, in whom the light dwells. In this case, the mystery was a nightmare given by God to a king, to explain the coming days for encouragement and hope for His own people. But we also know that God reveals the ultimate mystery in this world: *how can mankind have hope in their sin, and how can they have access to God?* God reveals this mystery to us in the person of Jesus Christ!

*"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: **He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in the world, taken up to glory.**"*

1 Tim. 3:16

*"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**"*

Col. 1:27

*"This **mystery** is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise **in Christ Jesus through the gospel.**"*

Eph. 3:6

God reveals mysteries to us, and as He was going to reveal the end of all things to Nebuchadnezzar, He reveals something even greater to us: *the reality of Jesus Christ who brings us to the Father through His work on the cross, forgiving our sin through His substitute, bearing the wrath of God, and giving us life eternal.* This should be reason for **daily rejoicing, that we have hope in the future and certainty in the present.**

Spurgeon told a story of a woman who he had been explaining the gospel to who was on the edge of entering the kingdom when she burst out with, "***Oh Mr. Spurgeon, if the Lord saves me, he will never hear the end of it!***" This was the attitude of Daniel and should be our attitude when our eyes are opened to the realities of the God of this universe revealing to us His purpose and plan in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Concern for Others (24)

He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

Notice that even in the midst of crisis, Daniel was not just concerned for he and his friends, but for those who he worked with. This would have been an easy time to get rid of the competition, but he cared about those who were lost around him. Calm in crisis has a focus on others, not just our own situation. Prayer and care for others is a tried and true way to stop living in fear and anger.

Capturing the Opportunity (24-30)

Daniel did capitalize on the opportunity, but not for career advancement or personal glory. Notice that when the king asked if he could do this thing, Daniel simply said that **no man** could do this thing, but there is **a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and has made this known to you.** In other words, Daniel not only trusted God in all things, but also pointed back any praise or credit back to God, so that there was no question who would **get the glory.** This was no token platitude attached to the end of personal aggrandizement, it was an extension of how Daniel lived his life. In this, he had opportunity to explain the true God to the most powerful man in the world.

Are you calm in the midst of crisis? What is your first response when you face nightmarish possibilities of the future? It is clear in the contrast of foundational truth realities that if we trust governments, philosophies, or the wisdom of this age we will continue in a cycle of fear, insecurity, ignorance, and anger. However, if we train ourselves in the truth, to trust the sovereign, omnipotent, wise, and revealer God, we can respond in calm, courageous, and confident ways, with opportunity to display the goodness of God to a scrambling world.