

Being A Person of Substance

Daniel 5:1-31, Matthew 5:1-10, Matthew 7:24-27

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A few years ago, a book was published titled, "*The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook*."

It was a sort of a "How To" book with advice from various experts on what to do when you found yourself in different situations.

How to...fend off a shark. How to...deliver a baby in a taxicab. How to...jump from a moving car. How to...survive if a parachute fails.

One of the scenarios was what to do if confronted by an angry mountain lion. What do you think it suggested? 1) Run, 2) Play dead, 3) Hold your coat open like a cape, 4) Sing a happy song.

The correct answer, according to the expert, was to hold your coat open, thereby appearing larger and more imposing to the lion. That's exactly how some people cope with life.

They project an image that's larger than life. They want people to think they're the smartest, most confident, or most powerful person in the room. They're masters of manipulation and control.

Now, that might work if the "lion" is small, but eventually situations arise where appearances aren't enough. Crises pile up, defenses crumble, and the truth comes out. What then?

Many people use the phrase "*seeing the writing on the wall*." Meaning they know that things are probably going to turn out badly.

Most people don't even know from where this phrase originated, but just know it carries a negative connotation.

Well, that phrase comes from today's scripture, and it does mean that things aren't going to work out as expected.

Therefore, today we're going to examine how this phrase came to be and to do that we need to know a little more history.

It is 539 B.C and the current king of Babylon is Nebuchadnezzar's son Na-bo-**NI**-dus.

Now, Nabonidus wasn't a very conscientious king. He preferred to spend his time at an oasis in Arabia. Therefore, his son, Belshazzar, was left in charge, and he's way beyond his depth.

Even though the Medo-Persian army was advancing into his kingdom, Belshazzar believed that, since Babylon was protected by walls 30 feet high and wide enough to drive a chariot on top, as long as he stayed within the city walls he was safe.

He wasn't concerned about a siege as the Euphrates River supplied their water and the walls extended far enough out to contain a half-mile of farmland inside them.

I believe his subjects weren't as naive. So, to give the appearance of royal grandeur and build up the morale of the leadership, he gave a banquet.

But the country didn't need a banquet, it needed for Belshazzar to start acting like a king.

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Daniel 5:1-4, "King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his

concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.”

The theme of the party is mentioned 5 times in these 4 verses: It's drinking and more drinking. As someone pointed out, *“No one is as brave as the one who has had a few too many.”*

To emphasize the splendor of the royal court and his power as acting king, Belshazzar brought in the goblets taken from Solomon's magnificent temple by his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar.

After which the king, his nobles, and his wives and concubines commenced to drink from them. And, if that weren't bad enough, they profaned the temple goblets by toasting the idolatrous gods of Babylon.

You have to understand that profanity isn't just using curse words; it's taking something holy and misusing it, and these temple items were holy.

These goblets had been set apart for God and Belshazzar and his guests were treating them in an unholy manner.

This principle hasn't changed. The same is true today. The ultimate profanity for a Christian is when they take what's holy and abuse it by unholy actions.

Hebrews 10:26a, 29, *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth...How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the*

covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Belshazzar's profanity was understandable because he didn't know the true God. He was a desperate, drunken man, covering up his weaknesses in extravagance while projecting an image of boldness and strength.

Yet stupidity is no excuse, as Daniel pointed out in verse 23, *"You have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven... You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways."*

God may tolerate profanity for a while, but this was judgment day for Belshazzar and the Babylonians.

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Daniel 5:5-6, "Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking."

When the hand wrote on the wall, Belshazzar's grand banquet plans were in disarray. He called in the "wise men" of his court, promising them anything, if they could help him control the situation.

Daniel 5:7-9, "The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant."

So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.”

Yet it's the queen, probably the queen mother, his mother, who's not at the banquet, who's the wise one.

She goes into great detail about an old man named Daniel, who has true insight and wisdom, and a divine connection.

Daniel 5:10-12, “The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. “May the king live forever!” she said. “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”

Belshazzar then calls for Daniel, and, still wanting to project power and control, flatters Daniel and offers him honor and status in his kingdom if he can interpret the writing on the wall.

Daniel 5:13-16, “So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

But Daniel's not interested in what Belshazzar has to offer.

Daniel 5:17, *"Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means."*

Daniel examined the writing on the wall and then laid it all out for Belshazzar. I can just hear Daniel asking, "Do you want the good news or the bad news first?"

Daniel 5:25-26, *"This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

"Numbered. Weighed. Divided." The game's up. Belshazzar, clothed in his royal finery, was exposed as a man without substance. His reign, celebrated by a thousand parties, was over.

His kingdom, spanning the Middle East, was already being divided among the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar had come up empty: all show, no substance. What will he do?

When Nebuchadnezzar lost his sanity, he *"raised his eyes toward heaven,"* and God restored his kingdom.

You'd think Belshazzar would reach out to Daniel for help or cry out to God for mercy and grace for his dire situation.

But no; He still thinks he can bluff his way through. He clothes Daniel in purple, puts a gold chain around his neck and proclaims him the third highest ruler in the kingdom. He's still in control; just ask him.

Yet, while Belshazzar kept the party going, the Persian army entered the city. Maybe they diverted the river, or were let in by people fed up with Belshazzar and his father, Scripture doesn't say, but...

Daniel 5:30-31, *"That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two."*

You might get by on appearances for a while, but when a crisis comes, or people look closer, and you finally have to face up to the reality of who you really are, the game is over.

The boss wants results. Friends are fed up with the lies and narcissism. Family members are tired of covering up faults to support an image of a great husband or wife, father or mother.

Even if you can fool everyone else, at the end of the day, you have to take yourself home with you, and you can't escape who you really are: your character, your values, your commitment, or your actions.

So, how can we become a person of substance?

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How can we be solid at the core? How can we be stable and secure in the storms of life? How can we be strong when evil people seem to have all the power and influence?

Look to Daniel for the answer. Daniel wasn't impressed by the kingdom of Babylon. To stay faithful to God, he rejected the fine food and drink of Nebuchadnezzar's court.

He dared to speak truth to power, telling Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his troubling dreams and visions.

His friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego weren't impressed with Nebuchadnezzar's 90-foot statue of himself. They risked their lives to worship God alone.

Daniel and his friends recognized that the kingdoms of this world do not give substance to life.

God revealed to Daniel that another kingdom was coming. A kingdom that would be greater than all the kingdoms of the world.

A kingdom that would endure forever as God revealed it to Daniel in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Daniel 2:44, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

The time in the vision was the time of Jesus! Daniel didn't know about Jesus, but he lived by faith in the God whose kingdom would never fail.

How can we be solid, stable, and secure in the storms of life? If Daniel were here today, he would point us to Jesus.

Matthew tells us in Matthew 4:23, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."

God's kingdom had arrived, in the person of Jesus. Yet the kingdoms of the earth had not been crushed; the Roman and Jewish leaders still seemed to be in control.

Even today, the kingdoms of this world loom large, offering stability, power and significance.

Where and how will we establish ourselves people of substance? Will we look to the kingdoms of the world—political, economic or cultural—to protect us?

Will we try to build up our image, by trying to impress people with our importance, power and influence? Will we play by the rules of the world, dominating others for our own benefit?

No, we recognize that the kingdoms of this world will pass away, but the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ Jesus, endures forever. His kingdom gives us meaning, stability, and security.

So, how do we live in the kingdom of God? After Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand, he pulled his disciples aside, to tell them about life in the kingdom of God:

Matthew 5:1-10, "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus said nothing about trying to build up our image, scrambling for power or control, or climbing over other people to get to the top.

We're blessed in the kingdom of God if we trust God, seek God's righteousness, and live as children of God.

After the Beatitudes, Jesus went on to contrast life according to the kingdoms of this world with life in the kingdom of God.

He explained that the kingdoms of this world rewards those who build themselves up and satisfy human expectations, but the kingdom of God is built upon getting right with the God, self, and others.

RIGHTEOUSNESS in the kingdom of God is not about keeping rules, such as not killing anybody or not having an affair.

It's how you see people, how you talk to people, and how you treat them when things fall apart.

APPROVAL in the kingdom of God isn't from earning God's favor by being perfect. It's accepting God's grace, by loving one's enemies, forgiving other people, and refusing to judge them.

RELIGION in the kingdom of God isn't to impress other people, or even oneself. Prayer is knowing the Father and trusting Him to give good gifts to those who ask.

SECURITY in the kingdom of God isn't found in laying up earthly treasure or worrying about having enough to live. It's about recognizing God's power and care, which will never fail.

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Conclusion

Finally, at the end of His teaching, which is called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told a parable about building a life of substance.

Matthew 7:24-27, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jesus said that it's not people who simply HEAR His words who stand firm in the storms of life, but people who PUT HIS WORDS INTO PRACTICE.

If we build our lives on Kingdom principles, we'll be people of substance. We'll treat people with respect, grace, and kindness.

We'll have an authentic relationship with God. We'll worry less, and rest in God's loving care. When the storms of life come, we'll be grounded in God, whose kingdom will never fail.