

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

AMONG LIONS | WRITING ON THE WALL

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Alright, how's it going, everybody? You guys good today? Hey, just want to just hello to everybody gathered across all of our locations and if you're joining us online, welcome.

If you have a Bible go ahead and find Daniel, chapter 4. Today I've got a tall task in front of me. I'm going to try to get through all of chapters 4 and 5 today to set us up for our study in chapter 6 next week. So if you have a Bible go ahead and get to chapter 4.

As you are turning there, I just want to give you one last call out. If you have not signed up for our fall semester of *Rooted* today is the last day. We've only got a handful of spots left in that except for the Downtown campus. Downtown, you have filled every single spot in *Rooted* so way to go. But for the rest of you, there are only a handful of spots left and I want to encourage you to get in.

And *Rooted*, some of you are like, "Well, what in the world is that? Is that a potting class?" No. It's designed to do what it's called. It's to help root you to your faith, why you believe what you believe, which is really, really pertinent to what we have been studying in this Daniel series. So I can't recommend it highly enough. Our entire staff has been through it. I've been through it. And you're not going to want to miss out on it.

However, some of you might be like, "I just can't swing it the fall semester, there are too many things going on. We're going to run it back in January of next year. So you might just tuck that away, put that in your calendar. What a great way to kick off the New Year. If you can't do the fall semester maybe you can jump in in January.

Well, really, really hard to believe. We are about at the half-way point in our study in Daniel. And if you are just now joining us we've been calling this *Among Lions*.

And what we've been doing is we've just been walking our way through the story of the life of a guy by the name of Daniel who lived faithfully for God in a very godless culture for roughly 70 years of his life. And he is tested in a variety of ways and times. And Daniel continued to live out his faith in ways that are uncompromising and unmistakable.

And oftentimes, as Christ followers, when we find ourselves in the midst of cultural and societal pressure, we can find ourselves going one of two ways. And I've been guilty of both.

Maybe we just find ourselves sort of withdrawing and isolating from the culture. Like, "I don't want to stay engaged. I just want to sit back and not get wrapped up in it."

Others of us though, we lean a little too far in. Maybe we assimilate to the culture and there really isn't anything all that distinct about the way that we live our lives.

What Daniel does is that he provides this model for us for how to live for God in a very godless culture in a way that earns the respect of those who are far from God.

And the Babylonian authorities, they just keep noticing how Daniel conducts himself. So he just keeps getting these promotions over and over again and a seat at the table to have this tremendous influence.

Now, here's why this matters for us today. The same spirit of Babylon that existed then is the same spirit of Babylon that exists today. It's behind every nation and kingdom among men throughout time. However, the same Spirit of God that lived in Daniel who helped him live his life is the same Spirit of God who lives within you today.

And Daniel knew, 1 John 4:4:

"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

And I want you to take heart in that. I've heard from so many of you already in this series. It's like, "Man, this study has been so relevant. It's timely with where we are living our lives."

So we're not overcome by the spirit of this world, we know that the Spirit of the living God lives within us and we can prevail regardless of circumstances.

Now, as we come to chapters 4 and 5 we're going to find God confronting the pride that existed in a guy that, by this point, we are very, very familiar with in our study, King Nebuchadnezzar. But he's also going to confront the pride of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, a guy by the name of Belshazzar. And we're actually going to see that God is confronting the pride that is within you and me as well.

Now, maybe some of you recall the story of one of the greatest, if not the greatest boxers of all time, Muhammad Ali. He was on an airplane one time flying to an engagement and they got into a little bit of turbulence. The captain comes on and says, "Hey, I need everybody to fasten their seat belts." And Ali refuses.

The stewardess comes up to him and says, "Sir, I really need you to fasten your seat belt." And Ali famously said to her, as some of you might recall, he said, "Superman don't need no seat belt." To which she automatically said, "Superman don't need no airplane."

I love that story. I hope it's true.

And thinking about that, I don't know that I've ever been that brash. I couldn't back it up if I was. I've never been that brash, but that doesn't mean that I haven't been that prideful. And that is kind of like the mega theme of chapters 4 and 5 as we come into this. God is confronting the pride that is in all of our hearts.

Now, I want to clarify something. When I say that God wants to confront the pride in your life and in mine, some of you might be like, “Now, wait a second. I thought it was a good thing to have self-confidence. I thought it was a good thing to have a healthy self-esteem.” And it is.

So when I say that God wants to confront your pride, I’m not talking having a healthy sense of self-esteem. When I say *pride* I’m talking about that toxic of sense of self-reliance that exists in all of us. The sense of superiority or entitlement that often stems from our insecurities.

It’s an overcompensation for our fears. It’s that little Nebuchadnezzar that lives inside of all of us trying to build our own personal kingdoms and empires without or apart from God.

And pride is a really sinister, tricky thing that is at work in all of our lives. It is much more sinister than just playground arrogance or cockiness.

See, here’s the dangerous thing about pride. Pride can cause me to appear humble. The crazy thing is that pride is actually causing me to do that because I want you to see me as humble. See how that works?

In pride I can appear to be really generous, but pride is my motivation because I know that other people are watching. I can come across as caring, but it’s pride that is pushing me to get a leg up.

And oftentimes when I’m defensive, insecure, or easily offended, if I stop and just pay attention to what is going on underneath the surface of my heart, I realize that what is at the root of all of those things is my pride.

Pride not only keeps you and me from becoming the kind of person that God wants us to be, made us to be, who Jesus died for us to be, but it also damages our relationships with others and ultimately our relationship with God.

You have an interpersonal thing that goes down in your life and your relationship falls apart, chances are pride is the culprit either yours or his or both, which is why I think pride is listed in the book of Proverbs as one of the things that God despises. And He despises it because of what it does in us, to us, and around us.

Pride is also one of the things that is really, really easy to see in other people, isn’t it? How many of you, right now, can think of a prideful person in your life? You’re just like, “Yep, I’ve got them. I hope they listen to this message. I’m sending them the link this afternoon.”

We are very well aware of the prideful people in our lives. But, usually, we’re the last ones to see it in our own lives. It’s like this blind spot. Scripture backs that up. Obadiah verse three says:

“The pride of your heart has deceived you.”

We just don't see it. Or, maybe we see it but we call it other things, it's ambition, "I'm just trying to provide. I'm trying to accomplish great."

Proverbs, chapter 16 says this:

"Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall." Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)

It is always that thing in our lives that precedes a fall of some kind. It's kind of like that game Jenga. You remember that game? Man, there is nothing enjoyable about that game, "Let's just relax and play a little Jenga." It's this anxiety producing game. I played this with my kids when they were little and I was like, "I better start saving for their counseling," because this is so anxiety producing.

What happens in Jenga, it's this tower of wooden blocks. It's kind of an illustration of pride. We pull from the foundation and build higher and higher and higher and all the while the foundation is weakening until the whole thing collapses.

C.S. Lewis famously put it this way. He said, "Pride leads to every other vice, it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

Or, as my grandma put it, "Pride is acting like I know so, even when it is not so, in order that it might be so, simply because I said so." Thank you, Grandma. I'll never forget it.

So as we come to chapters 4 and 5, as I said, God is going to confront the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. And I said this a few weeks ago. Oftentimes when we read these Old Testament narratives, it is very, very easy to put ourselves in the sandals of the hero.

We read it and we are like, "Oh, I'm clearly Daniel and my boss or my neighbor is Nebuchadnezzar." What I really want to challenge you to do is do what I've done this last week and simply say, "You know what? Maybe I'm not Daniel in this narrative. Maybe I'm Nebuchadnezzar, maybe I'm Belshazzar. Is there any sinister pride that I'm blinded to that God is trying to confront in me?"

A great summary of the book of Daniel could be this: it is one big, epic story of God's kingdom versus human empires. And what we've been looking at over the last three weeks, we've already covered the first 3 chapters, is there is back and forth.

Daniel is kind of an illustration for how to live faithfully in a godless culture. Nebuchadnezzar is an illustration of how God pursues human hearts. There is this back and forth going on where it's as if God is fighting for the very soul of Nebuchadnezzar.

You see God work in dramatic ways through Daniel and his friends, and you see Nebuchadnezzar's heart start to soften. And then, all of a sudden, it hardens again. And it's like this back and forth not unlike you and me.

We saw this last week. Nebuchadnezzar builds this statue after having a dream which Daniel interpreted, "This is representative of the kingdoms and nations of men. By the way, Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold represents your kingdom and the whole thing is coming down.

So the first thing that he does is he builds a gold statue and then he says, "Hey, you need to bow down to worship it. And if you don't bow down and worship, I'm going throw you into a fiery furnace. And Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego square off with him and they said, "We will not do it." They defied him. And Nebuchadnezzar throws them into the furnace.

We said last week that there is a furnace coming for all of us. And when we are in the midst of a furnace—figuratively speaking, it's usually an emotional furnace of some kind or a spiritual furnace—oftentimes we pray and our prayer is, "God, would You extinguish the flames or rescue me out of it?" Very rarely do I pray, "God would You please be present with me in it?"

I just said this last week, Nebuchadnezzar noticed this. He said, "Hey there is a fourth inside the furnace. And there is no other God who saves like this."

And just want to remind you of this. Keep this at the forefront. Furnaces are inevitable and in those moments there are opportunities for intimacy with God. And if your prayer is, "God, get me out of this," you miss His presence in that moment.

We see at the very end of chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar has this change of heart and there is no other God who saves like this. However, as we come to chapter 4, we see that pride will not let go of his heart (or your heart or mine without a fight).

We see in chapter 4 that Nebuchadnezzar's heart is hardened once again. He got distracted by the things of the world. And chapter 4 is going to be God's knockout blow because He is pursuing him.

And I just want to say this today, right now there is somebody listening to this, watching this, sitting in the room that you're sitting in right now and I just need you to know that you are not here by accident. It might seem that you are.

It might seem that you woke up today and you were like, "Ah, I didn't plan on going to church but I did." Or maybe you came today because somebody invited you. Maybe you're here today because somebody gave you an ultimatum; you're here against your will.

Whatever it is, I just want you to know if you are listening to this right now, it is no mistake. God wants you to listen to this because He is pursuing your heart. And there isn't anybody who is too far gone.

There is nobody beyond the reach of God's grace or grasp. It doesn't matter what you've done, it doesn't matter where you've been, God is pursuing you today and I want you to hear that. As long as there is breath in your lungs, God is not done. Okay?

So, here's where I want to catch you up to. As we come to the beginning of chapter 4, this is Nebuchadnezzar at the peak of his success. He's at the peak of his earning power. He owns the vast majority of the empire, the world.

And Nebuchadnezzar opens up chapter 4 almost as if we are sort of sitting with him around a campfire and he's telling us his story. He's just going to share his testimony with us as if he is looking back. And he says: "Hey, there was a time that I acknowledged God but I didn't fully submit to Him."

And maybe that is representative of somebody today. Maybe that describes you. You acknowledge God, but haven't really fully committed to Him.

And Nebuchadnezzar goes, "By all appearances my life was a complete success. And I was at the pinnacle of luxury, comfort, and power."

However, I'm reminded of something Abraham Lincoln said. He said, "Any man can withstand adversity, but if you want to test his character, give him power."

And we see that Nebuchadnezzar has got power and is at the peak of all of his (quote, unquote) ultimate success in the world's eyes, he just loses it emotionally and mentally. We're talking he cracks up. We'll read it here in just a minute.

We are talking Nebuchadnezzar is wearing an aluminum hat made of tin foil and he's got his underpants on the outside of his shorts kind of crazy. That's what is happening. He's been out seven years on his own living in the wilderness and then he returns to tell everyone what had happened.

So I'm just catching you up to speed. I don't have time to read every single verse in chapter 4, but at the very beginning of chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. God has a word for Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. The first dream was about a statue. The second dream is about a tree. This tree gets cut down.

And Nebuchadnezzar brings in his spiritual advisory team once again, just like he did with the golden statue. And surprise, surprise, they have no idea how to interpret it.

So he brings in Daniel, and Daniel hears the dream, and Daniel is legitimately freaked out by it. Daniel is shaken when he hears this dream. But not for reasons that you might think. Daniel comes in and he's like, Nebuchadnezzar.... This tree represents Nebuchadnezzar and it's going to get cut down and Daniel is shaken by it.

Now, if I was Daniel, I think I would actually find a little bit of satisfaction in sharing with this with the guy who had enslaved me for so many years. Wouldn't you? "Yeah, I've got

a dream for you. That tree is you and you are getting cut down.” And I would just kind of enjoy that.

Daniel doesn’t. Look at Daniel’s response in verse 19:

“Belteshazzar,” by the way, that’s Daniel’s Babylonian name, not to be confused with Belshazzar, who is Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson. So these chapters are in Aramaic.

In other words, Daniel *“replied, ‘I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!’”*

That’s astounding. Daniel genuinely appears to love the man who sort of ruined his life. Now, he doesn’t admire him and he’s not approving of everything that he does. But this is clear. He has grown to love him as a person, and he cares about his heart as well as his eternal future.

Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago? God is on a rescue mission. And Daniel sees this. He is seeing Nebuchadnezzar not as an archenemy, but maybe the very guy that God sent him into exile to rescue. Because Nebuchadnezzar needed to hear this message.

It brings up a real point of conviction for all of us today. Is that the way that you feel about the Nebuchadnezzars in your life? Is that the way you feel about the combative, obnoxious Babylonians in your office? Or the ones who live down the street from you with their antagonistic bumper stickers, yard signs, and Facebook posts? Do you see them primarily as political opponents to overcome and shout down, or people who you genuinely love, care, and pray for?

That’s too convicting so let’s move on. Verse 22:

“‘That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great;’” undeniable, your worldly powers are super strong, *“‘your greatness reaches up to heaven,’”* kind of like a Jenga tower, *“‘and your rule to the ends of the earth.’”*

And in the following verses he goes on to explain that the tree is going to be cut down, but the stump and the roots will remain. And surrounding that will be fertile grass, which is representative of the fact that there is still hope. Now, verse 25:

“‘You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals.’” That’s the aluminum hat and underpants on the outside of his shorts. *“‘You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time,’”* that’s roughly seven years, *“‘will pass while you live this way....’”*

And now get this next verse, I think this is one of the key statements in the entire book of Daniel. Some of us need to print this out and put it above our television sets when we watch the news and when we are on social media. *“‘... until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.’”*

It doesn't matter what is going on in the world or how far the wheels have come off. God rules with His feet up. He is not surprised by anything that is happening in the world and we need to be reminded of that. Verse 26:

"But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules."

So He's not opposed to you having a kingdom, He just wants you to have a kingdom that is stewarded through the lens that heaven rules. Verse 27:

"King Nebuchadnezzar," I love this, "please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper."

Now, Daniel gives that to him and then God gives Nebuchadnezzar roughly a year to respond, which I think is astounding and incredibly gracious. Not to mention the fact that he's already gone through the previous three chapters with everything that has gone on there, now God has given him an additional year to repent, change his mind, and turn around.

And I'm reminded of 2 Peter, chapter 3:

"God is not slow in keeping his promises... instead he is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

He is patient with us and it is His kindness that leads us to repentance. But the day finally came when Nebuchadnezzar's heart did not change. He continued to rebel. He continued to be prideful. And a line was crossed.

And God said, "Okay, that's enough. You have walked in disobedience long enough. And so now to really get your attention, you're going to lose your kingdom and I'm going to send you out in the wilderness for seven years."

And I just want you to know that there is a line in the sand for all of us where God actually, in His mercy, will say to you and me, "Okay, that's enough. You've walked in disobedience long enough."

For some of you, maybe you're thinking, "Well, you know, that happened a long time ago and I haven't gotten caught yet. That thing I've managed to keep hidden in the closet, underneath the shadows for a long time, nothing bad has happened yet. I think I'm okay." But it is pride that is causing you to think that.

And there is a line in the sand where God will allow you and me, through free will, to continue to go over in our disobedience, but eventually He will say, "Man, enough is enough." And God will send something to strike the foundation of the tower that we have been building.

And it could be anything. It could be the loss of a relationship. It could be an unwanted divorce. It could be an affair. It could be a bankruptcy. It could be a health thing. And it actually seems like this really terrible thing. But what it is doing is it is causing the veil to drop from our eyes to what we were originally blinded to so now we can see it. And God, in His mercy is drawing us back to Himself.

And that happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He was standing, in chapter 4, on top of his empire. He's looking out and kind of admiring it all, boasting about his accomplishments. And then it says in verse 33:

"Nebuchadnezzar was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven. He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles' feathers and his nails were like birds' claws." Daniel 4:33 (NLT)

So get the visual in your mind. The most powerful dude on earth was reduced to a mad man. And his hair is all grown out. His finger nails are all gnarly. We're not talking about no haircut November; we're talking seven long years of no haircut, hot baths, or hygiene.

And God is using Nebuchadnezzar to give us a picture of what happens to people, nations, and society when we rebel against Him.

And we're kind of in it right now. Right now when you turn on the news or you're on social media, it's just like long hair and gnarly fingernails. We are just off the rails. God's like, "Hey, I'm going leave you in your rebellion."

And this is why I think that right now (I'm trying to encourage us with this) right now is an opportunity. Right now is the time to shine a bright light. Why? Because the world is honestly freaking out.

All of the ideologies that they been bowing down to, that they have been told would give their life meaning, purpose, and an identity are evaporating before their eyes and they are freaking out.

And now is the time for calm minded, compassionate, steady footed Christ followers to have the Spirit of the living God within them to stand and to live unapologetically in a winsome way.

So in King Nebuchadnezzar's own words, he says in verse 37, because he actually goes away and then he ends up coming back, God restores his kingdom—here's what Nebuchadnezzar says at the very end of chapter 4:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud." Daniel 4:37 (NLT)

And I love this because the way that Nebuchadnezzar's story has been trending, be honest, if you didn't know anything about it, you'd go, "Man, his story isn't any good. He's

going to flame out.” But it appears that he genuinely repented and he genuinely gave his life to God.

And that gives me such hope. Not only hope for me, in my rebellion and in my pride, but hope to recognize that there might be somebody and you would say, “Man, he would never come to know Christ.” Man, you never give up. You never count them out because God is pursuing hearts.

Now, as we transition into chapter 5, here’s what I want you to see. Nebuchadnezzar is long gone. And his grandson, a guy by the name of Belshazzar, needs to learn the exact same lesson. That’s usually the case.

Understand the year is 539 BC. This is about 70 years after Daniel has been brought to Babylon as a captive. So Daniel is a very old man now. He’s over 80 years old.

Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for about 23 years. And his super spoiled, extremely entitled grandson is now in power. And he throws this huge kegger with a bunch of his friends. They are partying like it is 539 BC. So look at verse 2:

“While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor,” his grandpa, “Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines.” Daniel 5:2 (NLT)

So there is this big, big party going on and he says in the middle of the party, “Hey, I’ve got an idea. Here’s the key to my grandpa’s storage unit. And inside are all of these silver and gold goblets that were the Israelites’. This is God’s property way back when. Let’s open this up.”

Ezra 1 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen 5,000 different items that belonged to God. So he goes, “Hey, man. You think that this party has been great drinking out of these little shot glasses, wait to you drink out of God’s silver and gold goblets.”

So they go and they bring all of these in and they really get the party going. Verse 5:

“Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king’s palace, near the lampstand.” Notice how detailed that is. *“The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.”* Daniel 5:5-6 (NLT)

The literal translation of verse 6 is that he wet himself. And I would have too. Just imagine. You are in the middle of a party and all of a sudden a severed, detached hand appears in the air and starts writing on the wall. And we’ll read what it writes here in just a minute, but it’s not good.

So he brings in his spiritual advisor team, just like his grandpa did all those years ago, the magicians and astrologers and he's like, "Hey, guys. Tell me what this means." And surprise, surprise they cannot. History has a way of repeating itself.

So there they are and Belshazzar's grandma is at the party. Apparently she liked to rock it out too. So she's there and she sees all of this and so she goes over to her grandson and she says, "Hey, I'm reminded of a guy who used to be on your grandpa's payroll named Daniel. And Daniel interpreted stuff like this for your grandpa. I think if you brought him in, he might be able to help you."

Now, keep in mind that Daniel is well over 80 years old at the time. He is long left public life. I don't know where he is at, kicking it in the nursing home or something. And so they bring him in and she says to Belshazzar:

"This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." So Daniel was brought in before the king." Daniel 5:12-13 (NLT)

And Belshazzar says to him:

"I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

And I love how Daniel answers him. I cannot wait to be an old man who just doesn't care anymore. It will be so great. Daniel is in there and he's like, "Man, I don't care about your wardrobe." He's like, "Keep your gifts and give them to someone else. But, I'll tell you what the writing on the wall means."

So he gives Belshazzar a little bit of a history lesson, like, "Hey, here's what happened with your granddad and God. And so now he says in verse 22:

"You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this," you knew the history lesson, *"yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone,"* Sounds like the statue, doesn't it?

"... gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! So God has sent this hand to write this message. This is the message that was written: Mene, mene, tekel, and parsin.

“This is what these words mean: Mene means “numbered”—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. Tekel means “weighed”—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. Parsin means “divided”—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.’

“Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed.” Daniel 5:22-30 (NLT)

So what I want you to understand is that while this party was raging on, what was happening is that less than 50 miles away the army of the Medes and the Persians came together to form one mega army to attack the Babylonian Empire to take them down once and for all. And that night Babylon would be overthrown and Belshazzar and all of the royal family would die.

Now, this is a story of how God will ultimately bring down the prideful, rebellious, unjust Babylonian Empire and keep His promise to restore His people to the promised land. But it is also a picture that tells us how God confronts the pride and the rebellion in our own hearts in all peoples, times, and places.

So I want to give you three questions of application to do a little bit of self-reflection on your own, later today or maybe in your quiet time later this week. And I’m really, really grateful to pastor J. D. Greear and some of his work on this. It stimulated my own thinking and on this is what some of these questions came out of.

Here’s the first question I just want to present to you. It’s simply this:

What am I “numbing out” with?

Is there anything that I am numbing out with? What am I numbing out with? Now let me explain what I mean by that.

Some of you are probably familiar of an image of an iceberg. An iceberg, you only see a small portion of it above the surface. But there is all of this other stuff underneath the surface.

What I want you to do is I want you to imagine this as an analogy for your heart, the seat of your emotions. Your spiritual health, your emotional health, the stuff that is going on underneath. We oftentimes present and just show people what is going on above the surface, but there are a whole bunch of things that are going on beneath the surface, whether we are aware of them or not.

We can be aware of what is going on underneath the surface of our hearts and really dig in there and do some work and submit and resubmit that to God. Or we can just stuff it and stuff it and ignore it and numb out on other things and distractions so that we don’t have to do the heart work. But eventually it will come to the surface.

My counselor will oftentimes talk about this, this deep heart work. He'll ask me a question every now and then when I talk to him. He'll go, "Hey, Aaron. How's your heart?" And sometimes, when I'm being lazy, I'll go, "Well, it's good." And he's like, "No, no, no, man. You can't answer that way. What's going on underneath the surface of your heart? Is there anything you're suppressing or repressing?"

We all have some sort of pain, some sort of trauma, some sort of junk that we are going through, some unmet expectations and things that get hung up down there because we're human. And if we don't deal with it in healthy ways it will come to the surface in very unhealthy ways.

So, I've got a friend who said that he's got an anger issue. But he said, "Really, Aaron, all my anger is, it's my fears and my insecurities and my pressures coming out as anger. There are all of these things that I'm not dealing with and they come out in sideways ways."

Now, some of you are like, "Aaron, where are you going with this?" I think that this is what was happening to Belshazzar at the party.

Belshazzar, I would imagine.... We don't know a lot about him, but I would imagine that he probably had a pretty jacked up childhood in Babylon. I would imagine that he grew up extremely rich, extremely entitled, and extremely lonely. He probably had anything that he wanted and it wasn't good for his soul.

And I think that what is really unusual about this party in 539 BC is that (as we've already read) the Medes and the Persians were less than 50 miles away getting ready to attack, but it was not a surprise attack. Belshazzar knew it.

He was aware that they were getting ready to attack his empire and instead of responding to that, instead of doing anything about it, he chooses to just throw this big party and to bring these silver and gold goblets out of storage to drink out of.

And you ask yourself, "Why would he do that?" Maybe it was because he was trying to put on a brave front for the rest of the people. Maybe it was because he was trying to drown out his problems with alcohol and sex, we often do that. Maybe he was so out of touch with reality he thought that Babylon was invincible, no matter what.

There is a Jewish atheist philosopher by the name of Ernst Becker who said this in his book, *The Denial of Death*, he said, "When all of us face our own mortality, we often turn to one of three things to console and distract us."

The first is:

Reputation

We just focus on our reputation. We are just carefully crafting our image. We're working on our career, our contributions to the world. It's not necessarily a bad thing in and of

itself, but it can become something that we numb out with. We're just totally focused on that and we see that in the life of Belshazzar.

The second is:

Romance

We turn to the thrill of intimacy or maybe in a twisted way empty sex or porn. And we're seeking to fill that emptiness in our hearts through intimacy and it never fulfills it. And we see this with Belshazzar with his wives and concubines at the party.

The third would be:

Religion

We seek to be worthy through our efforts and pious living and we think, "Hopefully, when it is all said and done, when I get up to the pearly gates, hopefully I've done enough good things to tip the scales in my direction and God will let me in," which is not the gospel message.

The gospel message is not religion where you try to earn your way to God. The gospel message is that God has already done for you on your behalf what you could never do on your own. And Belshazzar toasted the false gods.

We see all three of these in his life. I'm just wondering, do you see them in yours?

Steve Jobs, Apple's legendary founder and CEO was asked on *60 Minutes* right before he died whether he believed in God or not. And he said that throughout his lifetime there had been some seasons when he had and some seasons when he had not. But he said, "After I was diagnosed with cancer, I found myself wanting to believe." And here's what he said, "It can't just be that when we die it all fades to black. All of the accomplishments, all of the wisdom, all of the things that we have learned somehow have to live on."

And incidentally he said that that's why he never liked to put on/off switches on Apple devices. He didn't like the idea of being able to flip a switch and something shuts off.

So can I just ask you this? Is there anything that you are numbing out with? You're just distracted so that you don't have to deal with the convictions of your soul.

Here's the second question:

What "voices" am I listening to?

What voices are informing the way that we see the world? And we need to pay attention to that. Throughout the study of Daniel we see a pattern. We see that the trusted voices in Babylon, the astrologers, the magicians, and the enchanters could never come through when it really mattered. And they failed the king over and over and over again.

And Daniel proved over and over and over again that there is a God who has spoken, He is speaking, and He will speak. And His Word rings true.

Jesus is described in the gospel of John as, “In the beginning was the Word.” He was the Word. God is speaking today, sharper than any double-edged sword and He is able to penetrate.

Can I just ask you what voices are you listening to to make sense of this world and your life?

Some of you might be like, “Well, I listen to the voices of science.” Well, I think that is great. I don’t think we need to disparage or dismiss science. But I do think we need to frame it and to understand what science can speak to and what it can’t.

Science can certainly tell you what happens and how things are at work around the world. But it can’t necessarily tell you why. It can’t speak to your purpose or what is right and wrong. It’s limited in its scope.

Maybe the voices that you are listening to are the politicians. Maybe for you you’re like, “That’s where the answers have got to be.” And certainly they have unique contributions to make, but I think that we would all agree they are largely unsuccessful in dealing with some of life’s greatest problems. They always come up short.

Maybe it’s the voices of education, or entertainment, or sports. Maybe it’s some sort of social media. Or maybe it’s some sort of news outlet.

I just want you to know that no matter where or what you are listening to oftentimes you will find that it comes up short when it’s providing answers. And it’s a lot of noise. And through all of the noise God is speaking.

The question is: do I turn down the other voices so that I can hear Him clearly? We’re moving so fast and things are on all of the time. When do we just get quiet for a minute and say, “God, I’m listening. Please speak”?

Here’s the third and the last question. Admittedly this is going to sound a little strange. Here’s the question:

Am I aware of the “finger” of God in my life?

Now, inevitably somebody is going to write that down wrong in his notes and say, “God gives me the finger.” That’s not what I’m saying.

Am I aware of the finger of God in my life? Maybe a less weird way to say it is, “Am I aware of the hand of God in my life?”

Now, taking us back to chapter 5, Belshazzar’s big party, it would be so weird to all of a sudden have this floating, detached hand start writing on the wall. It kind of reminds me of an old episode of *The Addams Family*. Any of you remember that show?

It was so crazy and so random like, “What is going on here?” However, this isn’t the first time we’ve seen the finger of God on a hand communicating in some way. For those of you who know your Old Testament history the first time that we see it is in Exodus, chapter 8 when Moses squared off with the Egyptian magicians in Pharaoh’s court.

And they are sort of having a match back and forth with the staff. Moses’ staff turns to a snake. And they are kind of matching them, match for match. And at one point, Moses takes his staff and throws it on the ground and it becomes a bunch of gnats. And the magicians immediately turn to Pharaoh and go, “We’re out. We can’t do that.” And this is where they say it. They say, “That is the finger of God.”

The second time that we read about it is in Exodus chapter 31. Moses is coming down the mountain. He’s got the two tablets with the Ten Commandments. And he says to the Israelites, “These were etched in the stone by the finger of God.”

So now we’ve got the third instance of this, Belshazzar’s party, and all of a sudden you see this floating detached hand that starts writing on the wall: *Mene, mene*. Your days are numbered. And by the way all of our days are numbered. Last time I checked mortality rates still came in at about 100 percent.

Tekel, you are measured and found deficient. Which means no amount of good works, good behavior, or intentions will earn right favor with God. And by the way, that’s good news because God already paid it all. You don’t bring anything to the table. It’s just Jesus and nothing else. Right?

So he says to Belshazzar, “Hey, all of your efforts are going to be deficient.” And then the last thing is *Parsin*. Your stuff will be divided for others to plunder. Meaning, work hard, be a success, but just realize you ain’t taking it with you to heaven. There are no U-Hauls behind hearses.

So he says this very sobering thing, right? *Mene, mene, tekem, parsin*. XOXO Okay?

And I just want to ask you, is there an area of your life where God has been trying to get your attention? Maybe for years. And in the example of Nebuchadnezzar God’s grace and His patience lasted decades. In the example of Belshazzar it was that night.

We are not guaranteed another day. So the question is.... Now I don’t think that you’re going to go home today and see a floating, severed hand in your closet. I hope not. I don’t want that for you. But it does mean that God is speaking right now.

In fact, scholars say that the finger of God thing is not meant to be a scary thing. It just means this:

“Finger of God”: a direct word from God, containing the power of God, without a human messenger to relay it.

Now, God speaks through human messengers. I hope so because that is kind of what I'm doing right now, alright? I'd be out of a job if He didn't. And God spoke through Daniel and God spoke through the prophets. But there were some times that there was a message that was so urgent that God didn't need to.

And it was the finger of God, what represented it, and was this conviction that went straight to the heart. So, I'm just asking, are you listening to what God is saying to you today? And you're not guaranteed another day. Act on that right now.

You know there's another place in which we hear about the finger of God in the New Testament. Do you want to know who described as the finger of God? It's found in Luke, chapter 11. Jesus is talking. And Jesus says:

"... if I am casting out demons by the power of God," and in the Greek that's actually translated as the "finger of God," *"then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you."* Luke 11:20 (NLT)

Jesus is describing Himself as the finger of God. So, in the Old Testament, this is God showing up with no other mediator. In the New Testament Jesus is like, "I am God in the flesh." Jesus would often do miracles to show evidence that this was the hand of God at work. Jesus would say, "You want to know what God is like, then look at Me."

He would say to Thomas who had genuine doubts in his mind about the resurrection, "Thomas, if you have seen Me you've seen the Father."

In Romans 12 it says, "Through Christ God engraved His law on our hearts." And through Jesus we are given a message just like Belshazzar that there is a word that comes from God today.

The question is, are you going to respond to it and receive it? Or are you going to continue to ignore it, party, be distracted, and numb out. That's the question today.

And maybe for some of you, you'll respond to that right now, today, "I want to give my life to Jesus. I want to respond just like Nebuchadnezzar did because I know that there isn't anyone too far from God's grace."

Others of you though, maybe you responded to Jesus a long time ago. Maybe the message of application for you is that you are right now a follower of Jesus but you are discouraged in Babylon. And you look around and you go, "Man, God, why are all of these Babylonians in charge? Have You fallen asleep at the wheel? How much longer is this going to go on?"

And I just want to gently remind you that Daniel lived faithfully for God in a godless culture for an entire generation, but that didn't mean that God had fallen asleep at the wheel. We see evidence of God's power all through the book of Daniel.

And chapter 5 shows us that God has been, still is, and always will be in charge. And He will have the final word. And our hope is not in our circumstances, but it is in Him and it is in Him alone.

So, what I want us to do as we close out our time together is that I just want us to spend a moment in silence. We do a lot of talking. We talk about God. We talk to God. We have discussions around all of this. But when was the last time that you just really stopped and were quiet?

Not for long, but just for a few moments here I want us to be quiet. And may the disposition of our hearts would be, "God we're listening. Would you speak?" So just a few seconds of silence and then I'm going to pray and then I'll have you stand to your feet, and we'll respond in song.

[Quiet pause.]

God, would You forgive me when my life is so full of noise that I've crowded You out. Forgive me when I numb out to things that maybe aren't bad, but they are distracting me from paying attention to the stuff that is going on underneath the surface of my life.

God, I ask that in the quietness of these few moments that You would be present, that You would speak, that we would know that it is Your patience and Your kindness that lead us to this place of repentance.

So, I pray in this moment right now this would be a defining moment for some people's lives. This would be the moment that they said, "You know what? Enough is enough. I'm not going to walk in disobedience any longer. I'm not going to be distracted any longer. I'm going to pay attention to the voice of God in my life. I'm going to come back to the place that I never should have left to begin with."

God, we're so thankful for Your grace. We're so thankful that there isn't anybody who has out sinned Your grace for us. We can always be reached. So, God, I pray that we would respond right now. Thank You for Your goodness. Thank You for being a sovereign God who is in control when things seem so out of control. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen.