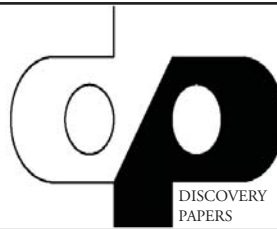


WHEN WISDOM IS A WINDOW

SERIES: WHEN KINGDOMS COLLIDE



Catalog No. 20140921
Daniel 2:1-49
3rd Message
Paul Taylor
September 21, 2014

I love detective stories. Sherlock Holmes is one of my favorites. A few years ago there was a movie made about Sherlock Holmes. At one point in the movie he meets Mary, the fiancée of his partner, John Watson. She is skeptical because he makes what she calls “grand assumptions out of tiny details.”

She asks him what he can tell about her. With one look, he tells her that she is a nanny. He says that the boy she takes care of is eight years old. She corrects him that he is actually seven. He says that he is tall for his age and that he flicked ink on her earlier that day. He knows that she didn't get mad. That's why the boy's mother loaned her the beautiful necklace she is wearing: to make up for her son's behavior.

He then focuses on the lightly colored strip of skin on her ring finger where it's apparent an engagement ring used to be. He can tell she spent time abroad because of the tan, but then the engagement was cut off and she returned home where she is now about to be engaged to a different man. Perhaps a better prospect, he suggests.

All of this from a few glances. Why do we love characters like Sherlock Holmes? What is so fascinating about them?

I think it's because they look at the same things that we look at, but they see so much more. They see the same world, but they are able to interpret it with so much more skill. We love characters like this because we want to be like them. We want to see more than we can see. We want to know more than we are currently able to know.

Today we continue our series in the Book of Daniel called *When Kingdoms Collide*. This book highlights the distinction between the two kingdoms that we operate in day after day. The kingdom of man, filled with material things, busy with the activity of our lives, fueled by accomplishment, effort, and success. We live every day in that kingdom, but if we follow Jesus, then we also live in the kingdom of God, granting us a spiritual life, guided by the values of redemption and hope and love, filled with the presence of Jesus and the power of the Spirit. But these kingdoms lie in tension. There are moments when they collide. And we find ourselves not knowing how to live between them, not knowing how to choose.

One of the problems that we have, living in two kingdoms is that one of those kingdoms is a whole lot easier to see than the other. The kingdom of man is more apparent—more present in our daily lives. It exerts a greater influence on the regular everyday aspects of our lives than the kingdom of God.

Our challenge is to see the kingdom of God when it seems hidden. Sometimes, it even seems absent.

This morning we are looking at a story where Daniel sees more than what others can see. It's a great story filled with twists and surprises. God gives him supernatural vision which allows him to understand something that no one else knows. Daniel's wisdom opens up a window on the kingdom of God. But what happens when others look through that window? What do you do when wisdom is a window?

We all want to be able to see more. But what do we do when we are given that opportunity? How do you use that kind of vision? What does it translate to in our everyday lives? When we are given the opportunity to see the kingdom of God, how do we respond?

The story this morning is fairly complex. The main story is about a dream and its interpretation, but there is a whole backstory to how the dream is even able to be interpreted in the first place. We're going to work our way through the story, and as we do so, we're going to consider things from three different points of view. First, we'll think about Daniel himself and the circumstances through which he understood this dream. Then we'll think about King Nebuchadnezzar and what he does with the information he receives. We'll finish by considering the people of God living centuries later who received these words and read them as we do today.

What we'll find is that Daniel's wisdom opens up a window to something more. And it begs for a response. How will we respond when a window is opened on the kingdom of God? Let's follow this story and find out.

Risk for God

Our story begins with a disturbing dream.

Daniel 2:1–4—

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. ²Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³And the king said to them, “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.” ⁴Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”

So far, the reader of Daniel would understand exactly what was going on. This was a common scene. In the ancient world, dreams were thought of as windows into something else. God spoke to Jacob and Joseph and Solomon through dreams. When kings had dreams, they would call their advisors together to help them understand what they meant.

This story follows the script that everyone knew. Until verse 5.

Daniel 2:5–6—

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. ⁶But 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.”

This was not how it worked. The way it was supposed to work is that the king told the wise men the dream and they told him what it meant. That’s what the wise men ask for. But the king has just changed the rules.

It would be like me walking into a car dealership and talking to a sales person. After looking around I select a car that I like. When it comes down to the negotiation process, the sales person says, “OK, the price is \$15,000.” And I say, “Fine. You write me a check for \$15,000 and bring me the keys and we have a deal.” The sales person would laugh in my face. That’s not how it works. I’m not playing by the rules.

The difference in our story is that the person changing the rules is the most powerful person in the kingdom. Unfortunately for the advisors, he can change the rules whenever he wants. And if they don’t like it, apparently they will get torn limb from limb. The advisors try to talk the king out of this, but he gets upset. When they realize that the king won’t relent, they say this in verse 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.”

No one can show it to the king except the gods.” This is a foreshadowing about what is about to happen. But the king isn’t happy with this answer, so he commands that all his wise men be killed, including Daniel. When Daniel finds out that he is going to be executed, he asks why. When he is told about the dream, he asks if he can have some time to figure out what it means.

After all, we heard in the past chapter in 1:17 that *Daniel had understanding in visions and dreams*. Isn’t that incredible? Daniel has a particular skill in regards to visions and dreams and then the king just happens to have a troubling dream.

This is what God does. He puts people with the right skills in the right place at the right time. That’s what happened with Daniel. He asked his friends to pray with him and God answered. He showed Daniel the dream and gave him the interpretation.

Daniel had understanding in dreams, but he wanted to make sure the king knew that this information didn’t come from him. He wants the king to see that this knowledge came from God.

Daniel 2:27–28, 30—

Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”

³⁰“But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.”

The magicians had said, “no one can show it to the king except the gods.” Daniel says *there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries*. Daniel has done something incredible. He has opened up a window so that King Nebuchadnezzar can encounter the one true God.

God was the one who gave Daniel wisdom. But Daniel took a risk and asked for it. This is the mystery of God working through us. Somehow our faithful effort combines with the work of God in a beautiful way. For Daniel, his effort meant a risk. He was already doomed to die. He wasn't risking his life. But he was risking the possibility that God wouldn't come through. And that would be worse. What if God didn't show up and tell him the dream? What then?

Daniel opens a window because he is willing to risk. I'm not sure I would have done that. But Daniel becomes an example for me. Of what could happen if I take risks for God. Daniel's example encourages us to risk for God.

Daniel puts himself in a place where his only hope is for God to come through. That's some kind of a risk. It's not like me saying that I'm going to take on a new project and risk failing. I might be smart enough and capable enough to handle the project. It doesn't depend on God's supernatural appearance.

Think about what Daniel did. Someone he knew was going through a struggle. That person didn't understand what was going on. So he was mad. He was taking it out on everyone around him. We've all been in situations with people like that. Friends, families, coworkers—they go through a difficult circumstance, they don't understand what it's happening, and so the people around them suffer.

But Daniel has sympathy. He asks God for wisdom and God helps him to see what is happening. He risks the wrath of this person in a difficult place to share God's perspective. But he is willing to step into this situation and see God behind it. He is willing to share it and become a window to the kingdom of God.

Do you ever face situations like that—when someone you know is confused or hurting and taking it out on others? What would it look like to bring God's perspective into that situation? Not in a condemning or self-righteous way. But to help others see behind the veil into what God is doing. It's definitely a risk. You never know how people will respond. But it's worth it.

When we risk for God, we can open up a window for others to see the kingdom of God.

Respond to God

The whole first part of the story just leads us up to the dream. Now we get to the point in the story where we hear what the dream was about. Here is Daniel describing the dream to the king.

Daniel 2:31–35—

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Can you imagine the king's surprise when Daniel said all of this? The king had asked an impossible request. No one could have known what he dreamed. Then Daniel shows up and describes it, detail by detail. The king would have been incredulous. Who is this guy? And who is his God? Then Daniel goes into the interpretation.

Daniel 2:37–45—

“You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory,³⁸ and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.³⁹ Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these.⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom

shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

It’s a complicated interpretation. It focuses on the layers of the statue, particularly the top and the bottom. The golden part of the top of the statue is the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. That would sound good to him. He would like being referred to as the “head of gold.” Then there are two subsequent kingdoms—of course inferior to Nebuchadnezzar—silver and bronze. Then there’s a bunch of detail on the fourth kingdom. It’s mixed and unstable and it is eventually destroyed and replaced by a kingdom established by the God of heaven. This new kingdom will stand forever.

Daniel closes by insisting that the great God has revealed this to Nebuchadnezzar so that he could be aware of the future. And that there is no chance of this not happening. This is definite.

At this point, silence hangs in the air. The king has just received an incredible picture of the future. How will he respond?

I remember the first time I called up a girl in high school and said, “I want to be more than friends.” The silence after that lasted a lifetime. That’s what this pause is like. Nebuchadnezzar has heard something incredible. How will he respond? We find out in verse 47.

The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”

At first this sounds great. Nebuchadnezzar has realized something about God. He sees that the God of Israel is a *God of gods and Lord of kings* and that he is a *revealer of mysteries*. That’s a pretty good thing to say about God. It’s certainly true and it’s a great start.

But at this point, it’s a bit disappointing. Especially because the next chapter begins, *King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold*. He might have seen something of God, but he doesn’t really seem to have absorbed the impact of the mystery that he’s been shown. He might have recognized the futile nature of earthly kingdoms and been drawn toward the eternal kingdom of God. But he didn’t. He was just impressed that Daniel figured it out. It’s as if the girl on the phone answered, “Paul, you’re such a great friend.” It’s a nice thing to say, but I was hoping for more. We are hoping for more out of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar missed out on a huge opportunity. He could have recognized the kingdom of God, but he stopped short. Have we been given similar opportunities that we don’t take advantage of? Have we shrugged off God’s message to us and gone back to sleep. How might we respond to what God has allowed us to see or experience. How can we respond to God?

Sherlock Holmes was able to take one look at Mary, the fiancée of his friend and see a lot. He saw into her personal life, her professional life, and her romantic life. How did she respond? She threw her glass of wine at him and stomped off. She was furious. Sometimes we don’t want to see more. Sometimes we’re not interested in windows.

Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t get mad. He just ignores it. Daniel opened a window for him to see beyond his current situation. But all Nebuchadnezzar saw was the beauty of the window itself. What great framing, the glass is so beautiful, and it all sparkles so much. It’s as if he didn’t even notice what he saw through the window.

Sometimes it’s hard to know how to respond. I’m guessing that’s what happened for Nebuchadnezzar. I know that feeling. There are times when I’ll walk away from meeting with someone or drive home after an event or return from a trip to India or Mexico City in complete awe of what I’ve seen God do. I’ve had that feeling where it seems like the curtains have been pulled back and you see the work of God.

It can be hard to know how to respond. It always begins with worship. With recognizing who God is. Nebuchadnezzar gets close to that point. But it can’t stop there. Real worship changes you. It moves you to action. This is the question that Nebuchadnezzar’s failure puts before us. How do we respond when we see the things of God?

This is a particularly good message for us at Peninsula Bible Church. I think we see a lot of God around here. We tend to appreciate knowledge. We enjoy the process of

uncovering the mysteries of God. We love to find windows. But sometimes we stop there. We don't do anything with our knowledge. We admire the window, but don't really take in what we've seen and allow it to shape our lives.

I've been encouraged lately because I see us growing in this area. I see us wanting to impact our community in significant ways. I see us taking some risks that we wouldn't have taken several years ago. I see people trying to respond to the window God has shown them. That's what we need. When God opens up a window, we need to respond.

What have you seen of God? How should you respond?

Rest in God

Daniel takes a risk and opens up a window to God. Nebuchadnezzar fails to respond in the way that he could. That's where the story ends, but there is one more character to consider. What about the recipients of this story?

I said a few weeks ago that this book was first read not by God's people while they were living in Babylon, but by God's people after they had returned from exile. They were living in their land, but oppressed by foreign rule. Their kingdom was not independent. To them, it seemed as if the kingdom of God were inferior to the kingdom of man which held sway over them. I've suggested that our own situation is similar to theirs. We live in a culture where the kingdom of God exists, but can too easily fade behind the prominence and power of the surrounding kingdom of man.

How would they have heard this story? What would they have taken from it? Where would they find themselves?

One of the big interpretive questions for this passage in Daniel focuses around the identity of the four kingdoms in King Nebuchadnezzar's vision. The statue he sees has four layers. Daniel very clearly explains that they refer to four subsequent kingdoms which are eventually replaced by the eternal kingdom of God. For years, people have tried to figure out which specific kingdoms are being referred to.

The debate involves how you count kingdoms, whether certain kingdoms existed and what the basic character was of certain kingdoms. The two most common interpretations end up with the fourth kingdom being either Greece or Rome.

Here's my view. The first kingdom receives a lot of detail. That's clearly king Nebuchadnezzar. The second and third kingdoms are mostly skipped over. There isn't a lot of detail about them. Then the fourth kingdom has very specific

information. I think that the reader of this book is meant to find himself or herself in the fourth kingdom.

The original readers of this book were most likely living in the Hellenistic era. This is when Israel was under the rule of the Greek empire during the 2nd century BC. The Greek empire had recently split into several parts after the death of Alexander the Great. There were two powers fighting for control over the region of Israel. The readers during that time would have immediately recognized the polarized, unstable fourth kingdom as their own.

Later readers during the Roman Empire might have heard their own situation described equally well. It would be natural to associate Rome with an iron force that crushes those in its way. Everyone thought of the Roman Empire that way. And it too was divided: eventually having an Eastern and Western center of power. So readers in Rome would have recognized the fourth kingdom as their own as well.

Even readers today might recognize this fourth kingdom. Aren't we living in a kingdom that believes itself to be as strong as iron. Yet, isn't our own kingdom split by polarities: partly strong and party brittle. You could make the argument that this is 21st century America.

Biblical prophecies don't always refer to a single historical event. Sometimes there are ripples of fulfillment. But if that's the case here, what does it mean? If we are supposed to find ourselves in the fourth kingdom, what are we supposed to hear?

We hear that kingdoms are fragile, that the kingdom we live in won't last forever. But that the kingdom of God will come and be established forever. We hear that God is in charge and that we can take our focus off the kingdom of man that seems so dominant in our lives. All of this means we can rest. We can rest in God.

The kingdom of man that we are living in isn't as strong as it seems.

We need to hear that, living in Silicon Valley. The kingdom that we live in seems so strong. It's seems like the strongest thing we can imagine. It seems like it will last forever.

That's what Babylon seemed like. Babylon conquered the world through its military. They ruled through fear. Silicon Valley has conquered the world through our technology. We rule through promise. Everyone around the world worships the gods that are produced in our backyard.

They are worshipped for the same reason that any god is worshipped. They seem to offer promise for a new kind of life. A world of tolerance and peace. A world where people are freed up to live the way they want: professionally, personally, religiously, sexually, relationally—and those choices won't have any impact on the community around them. A world where technology connects us and frees us and enables us to live at peace with each other.

But those are empty promises. Silicon Valley is way more fragile than it seems. Our ideas will not save the world. Social media will not bring in a new wave of equality and peace. We have not finally arrived at the worldview that will free the world from oppression, injustice, and suffering. The promises of the kingdom of man in Silicon Valley are not the answer.

We are not the first ones to have promised such things. Communists thought they had discovered the secret to a society of equality. Dictators from Hitler to Chairman Mao thought they had uncovered the secret to a perfectly ordered society. Utopian cults across the world create communities that they think will be perfect.

There's even a reality TV show that started recently called "Utopia" where a group of people are tasked with starting over on a farm to build a new and perfect society. I think the title of the review from *Slate Magazine* sums it up, "These People Will Not Create a Perfect Society." I could tell you that and I haven't even seen an episode.

The kingdom of man that we live in makes incredible promises. We need to hear the message that it can't deliver on them. Peace and justice and healing will not come through technology or politics or economics. The kingdom of man will not create a perfect society. Only Jesus Christ will do that.

This might be the key to responding to the windows that God shows us. After Nebuchadnezzar heard about this incredible dream foretelling the future, I think it was the kingdom of man that crowded out the revelation. He realized that he had to deal with the fact that he had almost killed all his advisors. He had a ton of work to catch up on because he had lost so much sleep.

The glamor of the kingdom of man makes it hard to respond to God. Whatever you hear at church or at Bible study gets crowded out by the pressing concerns of the day. But the kingdom around us isn't as strong as it seems. And the eternal kingdom is coming. That gives us the peace to

rest in the middle of all the instability around us. Resting allows us to see what God wants to show us and allows us to respond.

Conclusion

The character of Sherlock Holmes has been portrayed many times—first in the books, then in multiple movies, and recently in several TV shows with Sherlock as the main character. One thing is consistent about this character whenever he is portrayed: he's lonely.

His ability to see more than the average person puts him in a different category. He can't relate as well to others because he knows more than them.

Today we encountered a story about a window into the kingdom of God.

We saw how the risk Daniel took allowed the king to see something of God. Are there ways that we can open up windows for others?

We saw how Nebuchadnezzar failed to respond to the opportunity he was given. How do we respond when we see the kingdom of God?

And we saw how the people of God heard the message that the kingdom of man they lived in was not going to last forever. We realize how much we need to hear the same message so that we can focus our hope in the right place: on the kingdom of God.

We can see the kingdom of God. But it doesn't make us lonely like Sherlock Holmes. In fact, it can be exactly the opposite. We open windows as a community. We can see the kingdom of God together. And together we reveal the kingdom of God to the world around us. Together we respond. And together we risk. That's an incredible experience and an incredible privilege.

Take a risk to open a window for someone else. Make sure to respond when God opens a window for you. And rest in the God whose eternal kingdom is coming.