

This Thursday coming we have our monthly Fellowship group starting back. At the end of last term we treated the fellowship group to an old black & white movie. It was one of the Laurel & Hardy movies called Laughing Gravy, and by the end we were all laughing at the antics of these two familiar characters. There was no bad language, no scenes that the kids couldn't watch, and really it's such a far cry from the world that we now live in. Do you know, in the mornings when I'm taking the kids to school, there might be some news report on the radio which I have to turn off (even at 7:30) because I fear what questions my Nathan may ask from listening to it. There is no escape. That's the nature of today's world folks; we can no longer rely upon the media to protect us from all the darkness that invades every one of our senses. And so every day as Christians we are faced with big decisions, especially if we are parents of young children, we need wisdom to know how to deal with a world that is so ungodly. It is a minefield. We need Godly wisdom in our decisions.

And our reading today from Daniel points us to a situation where he has to decide what to do next – where does he find his wisdom. Hopefully today, through his example, we all can think more carefully about the wisdom we need daily from God as we face situations. It would really help today if you had your bibles open as we look more deeply at this text, Daniel 2, and because this story was quite long to read, we omitted some verses that I might pick up on as we go along.

So King Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream. Now in Ancient Babylon, it was believed that dreams were from the gods. And there would have been people appointed who would be able to explain the dream. But the King decides to do something different. We're not quite sure why he did it, but maybe it's to see just how wise these experts are. In verse 5 he says this, "This is a public decree: if you do not tell me both the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. <sup>6</sup> But if you do tell me the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation."

The King is willing to bring the whole structure of interpreting dreams into disrepute if these wise men could not tell him what the dream was. Never before had this been asked.

And so now that the wise men have nothing to lean onto, once they realise that they have no spiritual wisdom to rely on, the King orders the execution of all those experts. And now Daniel, and his friends, due to no fault of their own, are included in those to be executed. Talk about be unlucky. I wonder have any of you faced a crisis, clearly not like one such as this, and wondered where do you turn to? Where are you going to find an answer? Crisis breaks out and soon after naturally comes panic.

But the account of Daniel doesn't seem to suggest that Daniel in any way was panicking. And this is when we see for a young man, probably only 20 at this stage, where he gets his wisdom to face this situation. While the rest of his world is running about like, very soon to be headless chickens, Daniel looks to God. Today folks, when the world is moving at breakneck speed towards oblivion, where do we look? When we read the papers every day and see the mess of Stormont, the mess of Brexit, the mess of the Trump and North Korea, where do we turn to?

In order that God continues to receive glory, when dealing with a crisis, only he can provide wisdom. I purposefully went and bought the Sunday paper this morning, and as I read these headlines I will tell you plain and straight where our wisdom should come from – God.

So for a 20 year old like Daniel, how did he become so wise and how can we learn from his example?

**Well firstly, his wisdom came from a reverence for God.**

Proverbs 9:10 says – ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding’.

Remember that fear here of God doesn’t mean that we need to be frightened of God. After all he is our Father, but we must remember that he is All Holy, and so we come to him in reverence and respect. Daniel had a relationship with the One true God knowing His love, His power, His sovereignty, and His authority and he had trusted in the Lord for his life and for his future. His wisdom was not based on intellect, its source was God and God alone. For many people today they think that having the skills or the experience is going to help us them different situations. Folks, there is nothing in this world that gives such wisdom like Godly revelation. But today’s world just doesn’t get that. For the Babylonian’s their gods did not communicate with humans. Today’s world relies entirely on experience, reason and qualifications.

The Babylonian officials knew there was something different with Daniel. He wasn’t like them, and so he was allowed time to consider his response to the King. Does he go straight into prayer? No, he goes back home and speaks to his friends.

**So you see, the second way that God helps us grow in wisdom is when we humbly seek the counsel of God’s People.**

Proverbs 11:14 says “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisors”

Folks, when you face decisions, it is always, always wise to get insight from others and discuss the matter with other believers. When Alison and I are thinking about decisions for our family, I thank God that I am married to a faithful woman of God, where we can seek God and know that our conversations are being influenced by Godly wisdom. **Who do you seek counsel from in decisions you are making?**

At present I am seeking God for the future of our parish and will be bringing this to the Select Vestry in February – one year after my institution here. But to get there, I have gathered a small group of people as we seek God, and as they provide me with wise counsel. I could never do this on my own. If you are going to grow in wisdom and be able to deal with crises or any situation for that matter, with the wisdom of the Lord, you had better be seeking out other mature Christians to seek their counsel when faced with challenges.

**And so in reverence to God, and with the counsel of God's people, wisdom next comes as we humbly pray to God.**

Verse 17 onwards says this , <sup>17</sup> Then Daniel went to his home and informed his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>18</sup> and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions with the rest of the wise men of Babylon might not perish. <sup>19</sup> Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night'.

If you are a Christian, our need to pray is a given. It is not optional. And as a Church community that is why I now want the week of prayer to be at the beginning of each term. It must be a priority for us, and if you are in any form of leadership within the Church then I do expect you be there.

So why did Daniel go to his friends? Why didn't Daniel start praying and then seek the counsel of his friends? Well I believe praying came 2nd for 3 reasons.

One, when we talk things over with others, God uses that to help us know what to pray for.

Second, I believe God wants us to be praying together in unity.

Thirdly, I think praying with others ensures that our own selfish motives may not influence our thinking.

We see all kinds of examples in the book of Acts of believers praying together in unity and God responding to their prayers, because they are praying according to the Lord's will. After Peter was arrested and going to be killed, it looked as if there was no hope for him, a crisis situation certainly, but in Acts 12:5 it says, "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." And it turns out that God miraculously freed Peter from the prison! God's people praying in unity is one of the ways God has chosen to work powerfully for His glory in crisis situations and reveal His desires and grow us in wisdom. And as Daniel and his friends pleaded with God for his mercy in prayer, God answered and supernaturally revealed to Daniel the dream and its interpretation.

Now clearly Daniel's head and many other heads were on the chopping board if Daniel didn't come up with the goods, so does Daniel rush off to see the King? No. Instead he comes before God in praise.

Now I know we didn't read these verses from 20-23, but it does show us another way in which we grow in wisdom, **and that is by humbly giving glory to God**.

Daniel gives glory to God by acknowledging the Lord's complete sovereignty back to Him. These are not just words. This is what Daniel actually believes and knows to be true. Truly believing that God is the One who gives wisdom in any crisis or situation. This is why Daniel appears to be so calm, because he knows that God is ultimately in control of all things. And it also ensures that Daniel does not try to steal the glory for himself. After all, he could have went to the King, revealed the dream and the interpretation, and received the reward all for himself. But instead he wants to keep pointing everything back to God.

So Daniel now goes to the King's official Arioch, and notice the difference between how he communicates to the King and how Daniel communicates.

Verse 25 'Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king and said to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who can tell the king the interpretation."'

Really? Did you find him Arioch?

The reality is that Arioch had absolutely nothing to do with coming up with a solution to the king's situation, but he says "I have found a man." Arioch is trying to get some glory for himself. "King, look at what I have done. I have been hard at work seeking an answer for you and I have found one!" Arioch wants a piece of the glory and recognition.

So now in contrast to that, listen to what Daniel says to the King.

Verse 26, <sup>26</sup> The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" <sup>27</sup> Daniel answered the king, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking, <sup>28</sup> **but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries**, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days'

Daniel doesn't try to take any of the glory for himself, but glorifies God to Nebuchadnezzar. God wants us to have a wisdom that always honours him. That's why Peter says this in 1 Peter 5:5, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Folks, if we try to steal God's glory we are not going to grow in wisdom, we are not going to be able to be at peace and remain calm as we face a crisis in the future, or really any situation. Give glory to God and only him.

This final stage folks is where I believe we have a tremendous witness to our community, and yet it's the area where we can fail so terribly. Our society today is looking for many answers, but does the Church give that wisdom that is revealed by God and God alone? Or are we just like the rest of the Babylonians, searching for answers through our intellect, our reasoning and our experience? We live in a modern day Babylon, where people search for answers to life using crystals, or well-being books and the like, where **revelation** is just not a word that springs into people's minds. But it needs to be the word that the Church of God relies on more and more to reveal God's light in the uncertainty and mess of today's society. How is the Church today speaking into the uncertainties that people who have no faith have to deal with? Do we find Daniel panicking in the mess of Babylon? Do we find him complaining or getting angry? No. Daniel knew that God was in control. God wants us to seek him in all our decisions, and in the proclamations we make as a Church into our society. He wants society today to see a people who come humbly in reverence before Him, seeking Him in unity, praying and giving glory to Him as he reveals his wisdom.

Once again, the life of Daniel, reveals to us that we need to be distinctive, non-conforming to the world around us. Or are we just going to be like the rest of people

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out there – running around like headless chickens, or are we going to take the example of Daniel, who looks to God, the revealer of mysteries.