

A Dream Come True Pilgrim Living in the 21st Century

Daniel 2

David Sunday

September 11, 2016

It's good to hear you sing and greet one another with so much love. As we continue to worship, let's turn to Daniel 2. Let's pray together as we open God's Word.

Heavenly Father, as we bow in Your presence, we thank You that You are a speaking God and that You are with us. We pray, O God, that Your Word would be our rule, Your Spirit our only Teacher, and we pray that Your greater glory would be our supreme concern as we hear this message. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and King. Amen.

Most of us can remember, if we're over 20, exactly where we were and what we were thinking 15 years ago this very hour. September 11, 2001—an American nightmare. As those World Trade Center towers toppled on that sunny September morning, we were reminded how fragile and how fading our lives in this world are. And yet we soon forget. We forget that we have feet of clay.

Our Bible passage today introduces us to a dream that a powerful king, Nebuchadnezzar, had in Babylon about 2,618 years ago—around the year 603 or 602 B.C. This dream is about an ominous statue with feet of clay, and about a stone that is cut from a mountain that will expand and fill the whole earth.

God wants us to know what Nebuchadnezzar saw in that dream. He recorded it in His Word for us today, because it's a dream that is coming true. It's a dream that will help us—in the words of Dale Ralph Davis—to “serve where we have been placed within the fading kingdom of this world, as we go on waiting for the final Kingdom that is coming.”

September 11th reminds us that we live in a world where everything is being shaken—but there is an unshakeable Kingdom. We live in a world where things are fading—but there is a final, unfading Kingdom. We live in a world that is crumbling—but there is a firm foundation. We live in a world where everything is passing away—but there is something permanent that will never be destroyed. If you are investing yourself in these—if you are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as Jesus taught us—then we will be remarkably useful in this world too.

Realize how desperately we need a wisdom that comes from above (2:1-13).

Daniel 2 is here to help us know how to serve in this passing world as people who are seeking first that which is permanent: the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. It starts by realizing how desperately we need wisdom that comes from above. We're going to see that in verses 1-13. God's Word says, *"In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him"* (2:1).

In the words of Sinclair Ferguson, "The problems of the day often appear in different guise in the dreams of the night. The anxieties of daylight can become the monsters of darkness." This powerful king of Babylon is like a lost child in the darkness. He's trembling in fear. He's very insecure right now. Seeing this powerful king trembling like this over a bad dream reminds us that outside of Christ, no matter how strong people look on the outside, on the inside people are easily terrified.

In verse two the king makes a demand: *"Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams."* Not, "Just tell me what my dream means," but "Tell me what I dreamed." Either the king can't remember what he dreamed...you know how that is. Sometimes you have a really bad dream and it's so foggy you can't remember what it really was. Or, it could be that he does remember what he dreamed, but he's really paranoid, thinking he can't trust these guys in his cabinet. So he's testing them to see if they can tell him what he dreamed.

"So they came in and stood before the king." Verse three, *"And the king said to them, 'I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.' Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic...."* and interestingly, from this point until chapter seven in the book of Daniel, this portion is written in the Aramaic language.

They *"said to the king in Aramaic, 'O king, live forever!'"* It's kind of an ironic wish here, because the very dream he had is telling him he's not going to live forever. *"Tell your servants the dream,"* they say, *"and we will show the interpretation."* Well, they realize they're in trouble here. "Just give us the data. This is what we're trained to do." The magicians, wise men and astrologers of Babylon would have had access to all kinds of books, annals of the dreams of the kings, that they would have studied with signs and symbols and past history to attempt to interpret what this dream meant. "Just tell us the dream, and we'll tell you what it means."

But the threat intensifies in verse five: *"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.'"* Whoo! Imagine that.

This king says, “I’m going to tear you apart if you can’t tell me my dream. And not only am I going to destroy you, I’m also going to leave your house in ruins. You will have no posterity.”

“But,” the king goes on in verse six, “since I’m such a nice guy, *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.*” They’re desperate. They’re stunned. No king has ever asked for this before. One of the commentators says, “With exaggerated politeness, driven by sickening fear, once more they answer.” Verse seven, “*They answered a second time and said, ‘Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.’*”

We see the tyranny of the king in verses eight and nine, as he answers them: “*Know with certainty that you are trying to gain time...*” In other words, “You’re just stalling...”

...because you see that the word from me is firm—if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.

We come to the moment of truth in verses 10 and 11, where these temple servants—who are paid to have access to the minds of the gods and to know what the gods are saying—show that “the emperor has no clothes.” They don’t know. They don’t have any wisdom from above. They don’t have a god who speaks to them and reveals mysteries to them. They’re lost in darkness.

Verse ten:

The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. 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.”

Is there a god who dwells on earth? Is there a god who dwells among his people? Is there a god who speaks, and we can hear his voice? A god who reveals mysteries and makes known his ways on earth? If there is, the magicians, enchanters and astrologers of Babylon do not know his name. They do not have access to this god. They do not know where wisdom is found.

Reading this reminded me of Job 28, where Job says people know where to mine silver and how to refine gold. They know where to dig iron from the earth and how to smelt copper from the rocks. They know how to shine light in the darkness and explore the farthest regions of the earth, as they search in the dark for ore.

But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living. It is hidden from all the eyes of

humanity. God alone understands the way to wisdom. He knows where it can be found, and this is what He says to all humanity: “The fear of the Lord is true wisdom, and to forsake evil is real understanding.”

If there are people on earth who know where wisdom is to be found, who have access to what God has revealed and can make known His ways on earth, such people are poised to make a difference in this world. Such people are at a high premium in this world—people who are in touch with the God Who is there and Who is not silent, as Francis Schaeffer called Him.

Such people are desperately needed in our world today. They’re needed in the board rooms of businesses and in the halls of academia. They’re needed in media and in the arts and in Hollywood. They’re needed in the White House and in the state legislatures. They’re needed in families. They’re needed in hospitals. People who know where wisdom from above can be found are poised to make a difference in the kingdoms of this world.

Look at verse 12. *“Because of this”*—because none of them knew the wisdom from above—*“the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.”*

Nebuchadnezzar is furious, because within his heart is a deep-seated insecurity. “What if I’m not as powerful as I look? What if my life is but a vapor? What if there is someone who is supreme over me who controls my destiny, to whom I am accountable?” It’s as if he’s echoing the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, “If there is a God, how I can I bear not to be that God?” He is very insecure and hostile and angry right now. And because of his anger, even the lives of Daniel and his friends are at stake.

Where is wisdom to be found? We must realize how desperately we need wisdom that comes from above. As we see the emptiness and the lack of answers in Babylon, we see a picture of our world today—how desperately people need wisdom that comes from above.

Know where to turn to find the wisdom we need (2:14-30).

If we want to be people who serve in this passing world as those who are seeking first God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness—if we want to serve here meaningfully as those who know the King and are seeking His Kingdom—we need to know where to turn to find the wisdom we need.

Imagine you’re Daniel and someone knocks on your door. It’s an army of soldiers saying, “The king has demanded you be torn from limb to limb.” How calmly would you respond to such a summons? As you look at verses 14-16 and see Daniel’s response, remember this is a young

man. He's only in his high teens, or maybe at the most 20 years old. Look at the calmness, the prudence, the wisdom, the discretion, the courage he displays in verse 14. Don't you want to be like him?

“Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.” He's coming to kill Daniel too.

He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

Now, how is Daniel going to find the discernment that he needs? How is he going to figure out what this king dreamed in the night? How is he going to find the interpretation of the dream? What gives Daniel such poise, such calm confidence, to stand before this king who demands his execution and not be afraid?

He knows what those astrologers don't know. He knows there is a God Who dwells among men. There is a God Who reveals Himself. There is a God Who will hear him and Who will answer his prayers. So in verses 17 and 18 we have what someone has called “the first student prayer meeting recorded in history.”

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

They're not just going through pious actions here. These guys are going to pray as if their lives depend on it—because they do. But they trust in a God Who reveals mysteries. They would die if there is no such thing as wisdom that comes from above. They would all die if there is not a God Who dwells among men and Who speaks to people.

As we see them praying, it makes me wonder: is there anything in our lives for which we are utterly dependent on God to supply? Is there anything that we are so burdened about that we are desperately crying out to God for mercy? Isn't that what we're trying to do here on Wednesday nights with “Mission Unstoppable”? We're saying, “Our lives are short. We're just a vapor. But God has put us here right now, in this place, because He's got Kingdom purposes He wants to advance through us.”

We're saying, “There are people in our lives, there are people in our families, who need to know Christ. There's a mission we have. There's a work God needs to do in us internally, and we

are dependent on Him for this. So we're going to pray, and we are going to seek God for mercy. We want to be in sync with God's unstoppable mission in this world." And friends, what would happen if we gathered in prayer on Wednesday night as if our lives depended on it? What would happen if we cried to the God of heaven and sought mercy from Him?

We see in verse 19 that this God answers prayer. *"Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night."* And when God answers prayer, His people praise Him, because God said in Psalm 50:15, *"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."* That's what Daniel does. Beginning in verse 19:

Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.
²⁰ *Daniel answered and said:*
"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
²¹ *He changes times and seasons;*
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
²² *he reveals deep and hidden things;*
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.
²³ *To you, O God of my fathers,*
I give thanks and praise,
for you have given me wisdom and might,
and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
for you have made known to us the king's matter."

Daniel praises God for revealing mysteries, for knowing what is hidden in the darkness. Because of Daniel's faith, and because Daniel's prayer was answered, wise men of Babylon are going to be spared. Look at verse 24:

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

Wow. What's Arioch going to do in verse 25? Well, he rushes in and brings Daniel in before the king in haste, and says thus to him, *"I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation."* Wow! "King, you are so lucky to have a servant like me. Look at what I have found." Arioch is boastfully currying favor.

But not Daniel. No, not Daniel. Picture this young man. Tradition says the king of Babylon would sit on a throne, and chained on both sides of him were two live lions—just to scare

the people who would draw near. I wouldn't want to get within a block, if there was a lion nearby. Daniel comes before the king, and the king asks him, "*Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?*" (verse 26).

"*Daniel answered the king and said...*" What's the first word out of Daniel's mouth? "No. No." Would you be like that? You get to come before the king. Wouldn't you say, "Yes, king, I know. I can give you the interpretation. Just don't kill us!" But Daniel says, "No. I can't do that for you, King. "*No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked.*"

Picking up with verse 28, "This isn't in the power of men to do, King, but..."

"...there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. 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."

Who are the kinds of people who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness—and make a difference in the kingdoms of this world? They are people who know where wisdom is to be found. They are people who turn to the Lord in confident, faith-filled prayer and pray together for mercy from God. They are people who understand that wisdom comes from God alone, so they give all the praise and glory to God.

And because of this, they are bold and courageous to stand in the presence of kings without fear. These are the kind of people we want to be: prayer-filled people, people of praise, people of humility, people of wisdom and people of courage. Because, friends, what are we without prayer? What are we without praise? We'd just become proud, foolish, fickle and feeble in the face of the powers of this age.

We will wither before the powers of this age if we are not strengthened in the Lord and in the power of His might, if we are not strong in the Lord and in His mighty power with the whole armor of God in place, so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil. Because what does the Bible tell us?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore [we need to] take up the whole armor of God,

that [we] may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

(Ephesians 6:12-14)

Daniel found his strength by knocking on heaven's door and crying out to God for mercy. And this posture of prayer, praise, humility and courage is not just an isolated incident in his life. This marks this man's life until he's an old man, as we're going to see in this book.

Cultivate a contagious confidence in the victory of Christ's reign on earth (31-49).

This brings us to the last section. What was it that fueled such courage in Daniel? How is it that he never faltered in his courage? I believe it is fueled by the vision that he saw in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The valor that's in Daniel was fueled by the vision of this dream.

In verses 31-49, we see that we are to cultivate a contagious confidence in the victory of Christ's reign on earth. That's what Daniel sees in this dream. First, in verses 31-37, he's told what the king dreamed, and he tells it to the king:

³¹ You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

This is where that expression, we have "feet of clay" comes from.

³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.

We want to be paying attention to the difference between the statue and the stone.

Beginning in verse 36, We can picture Daniel standing in front of the throne, the lions looking at him, and he's telling the king what his dream meant.

This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. 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, 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.

As Daniel speaks these words to the king, we should be reminded of Genesis 1, when God created humanity in His image to rule, to represent His rule on earth. This is a reminder to the king that all his power is not in himself. His power comes from God. He is the head of gold' there's value and splendor in the Babylonian civilization. But it's not forever. Notice verse 39: "*Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you.*" In other words, "Nebuchadnezzar, you're not going to be around forever. Someone is coming after you." And then, "*Yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.*" Notice the value is diminishing: gold, silver, bronze. Then in verse 40, here's something that's very strong, very enduring—but it's not as valuable as gold.

As the splendor diminishes, the strength, or the endurance, of these kingdoms increases. Diminishing splendor, longer rule—it's a picture of the way things are in our world today. We're always looking for more and more progress, aren't we? We've got this myth of progress that thinks things just get better and better and better and better. But it usually doesn't happen that way in human kingdoms, does it?

Verse 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. 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.

Notice the mixture of very strong, yet vulnerable and weak.

Verse 42:

And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As 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.

Let's pause here for a minute. Notice, Daniel was being given wisdom into the future here—prophetic insight. He was in the 7th century B.C. and was talking about future kingdoms:

- The kingdom of silver was probably the Medo-Persian Empire, which rose to power during the writing of this book of Daniel during the 6th century.
- The kingdom of bronze came into power in the 4th century B.C. and was the kingdom of Greece under Alexander the Great.
- Then in the 1st century, a kingdom of iron arose—the Roman Empire.

Here's Daniel, a prophet of God, seeing into the future—because God is revealing to him mysteries of the future. God is the first and the last, and He declares what is to come and what will happen.

We also see from this vision that these kingdoms have diminishing value. Their splendor dissipates, even as their hardness increases. We see all that, but friends, here's the main thing God wants us to see. Notice the difference between the image, the statue, and the stone, the rock. Verses 44 and 45 are probably the most important verses in this chapter. Here we see a Kingdom that is everything these earthly kingdoms have failed to be:

And 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, just 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.

Here, friends, is where God wants us to focus. Here is the vision that will give you valor in this world, that will make you courageous when you realize that God is raising up a Kingdom that is unlike any of the kingdoms that are on the face of this earth. It is a Kingdom that is indestructible. As verse 44 tells us, *“the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.”* It is a Kingdom that is:

- Unconquerable. *“Nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.”*
- Overwhelming. *“It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end.”*
- Eternal. *“And it shall stand forever.”*
- Supernatural. *“Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand.”*

This is a Kingdom that only God can establish. In the words of Dale Davis, “It's a Kingdom that is paradoxical.” It starts out small and obscure, verse 44. In the days of these kings God is doing something that most men don't recognize. It's barely noticed when it appears. It doesn't seem powerful. But even though it appears small and weak, it strikes the image and breaks into pieces all the kingdoms of this earth. It carries them away like chaff in the wind, and becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth, verse 35 says. It begins small, but it dominates over all.

As we read these words, we should be asking, “What is this rock? What is this stone of which Daniel is speaking?” Even better, we should ask, “Who is this rock? Who is this stone?” Because it says in 1 Peter 2:6-8, *“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and*

precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame....The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

Daniel is directing our gaze to Jesus here, friends, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Born in obscurity, in a manger in Bethlehem. When the ruling emperor Caesar seemed to be the most powerful man on earth, angels sang Jesus’ glory, but most people went on with their lives as if nothing significant had taken place. He walked the dusty roads of Palestine, preaching and demonstrating that God’s Kingdom had come.

What did they do with God’s King? They crucified Him. But He died to make His enemies His friends. He died to transfer us from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of His glorious light. Then He rose again and He is now reigning at the right hand of the Father, and His gospel is going forth into all the earth. As people repent of their sins and believe in this gospel, they’re brought into this Kingdom that will never end—a Kingdom that is indestructible, unconquerable, overwhelming, eternal, and supernatural.

God wants us to know that this dream is coming true on earth. And He wants us to be fueled by the vision of this Kingdom that will never end. When we are, it will change our lives in three specific ways. Let’s look at these applications today:

1. Be not afraid of earthly powers.

What looks so impressive, so mighty, so domineering in this world all has feet of clay. It will all come crashing down. Be not afraid of the powers of this age.

2. Don’t confuse what is passing with what is permanent.

Learn to discern the difference between what is fading and what is final, what is passing and what is permanent, what is ephemeral and what is enduring. Don’t invest your hope in riches, politics or earthly security. Don’t count on everything working out in this world.

In fact, I’m almost tempted to have you say aloud right now, “I’m not counting on everything working out in this world.” I think you need to be saying that to yourself. “I’m not counting on everything working out in this world, because the kingdoms of this world will come crashing down.” We shouldn’t be disillusioned when things don’t work out perfectly here. They never will.

But remember, you’re investing in a Kingdom that’s not of this world. And if you keep remembering that, then you won’t be devastated by what happens on November 8th, or what happens on Wall Street, or what happens with your health, because you are investing in a Kingdom that is enduring.

3. Serve in this fading world as an agent of the King whose Kingdom will never fail.

If you're making your investment in that Kingdom, you can serve in this fading world as an agent of the King whose Kingdom will never fail. Realize that whatever you do in this world in the name of Christ the King will reap a harvest in the Kingdom that's coming.

Let's look at how the chapter ends. Verse 46, *"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel."* That must have been humbling for Daniel. I can imagine him saying, "Don't worship me." The king says to Daniel, as he's pouring offerings and incense on him, *"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."*

Nebuchadnezzar has seen something of Who God is here. He's not converted, but he's seeing truth about God. Then look what happens in verse 48:

Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

Here's Daniel and his friends, elevated in this world and in their influence in this fading kingdom of Babylon. Because they had their focus on the final Kingdom, they were able to be a blessing in the fading kingdom. People's lives are going to be spared because of Daniel and his friends.

And friends, that's why we're here today in this world. You're not just polishing bronze on the Titanic, waiting for it to sink. You're here to be a blessing to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net