

Coach House Church BEACONS

GONE TO THE WALL

3 R D M A R C H 2 0 2 1

One of the sad consequences of the past year has been the number of businesses that have had to cease trading. Unfortunately this includes, what was for many years, Heaton Chapel's favourite restaurant, Donatello's. We ate here on a number of occasions over the past few years and although it was quite basic we enjoyed what we had.

The phrase often used when businesses close is "Gone to the wall". We have heard this many times recently but where does this rather odd phrase come from? Well before a business goes to the wall, and it can be seen beforehand that this is going to happen we say that "The writing is on the wall" for that business. Well you might now recognise this expression as having its origin in the Bible. There are many words, phrases and expressions in use in the English language that have their origin in the Bible which is a testament to our Christian heritage.

This expression, "The writing is on the wall" comes from a story in the book of Daniel, Chapter 5. It concerns a meal that was hosted by the King of Babylon, Belshazzar, which ended with a very different outcome from the one Belshazzar expected when he organised the party.

Lets read from Daniel Chapter 5

"Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking the wine he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines. So they brought these gold cups, taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the King, his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Suddenly they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace near the lampstand. 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"

I love this last statement that " His knees knocked together in fear" it tells us just how this event affected a man who had hitherto been the most powerful and untouchable man in the world at the time.

Spoiler alert – this story ends with Belshazzar dyeing, and it marks the end of his dynasty, the end of Babylonian rule, and the start of the period in history when the Medes were in charge. I mention this because this change of dynasty is recorded in secular history so we know that it happened in the October of they year 539BC.

Well to summarize the next bit of the story it turned out that nobody at the meal could understand the writing so they sent for Daniel. When Daniel first arrived in Babylon 65 years earlier he was given a Babylonian name Belteshazzar. It is no accident that these two names are so similar. Roughly translated Belshazzar means "God protects" and Belteshazzar means "God protects his life" Often in the Old Testament peoples names offer us a clue as to their character or something they had done. In this case the Chief of Staff who gave Daniel the name was unwittingly being prophetic. He was probably being ironic in thinking that a Babylonian god would protect Daniel and was totally unaware of just to what extent Daniel's God would protect him. Saving him from the lions den and from the rage of Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar, however, was about to find out that his god had no power to protect him at all.

So what did "the writing on the wall" say? Well it said "Mene Mene, Tekel, Parsin" I am glad Daniel was there to explain this because I wouldn't have a clue what these words mean. This is how Daniel explained it,

"Mene means 'numbered' - God has numbered the days of your reign and 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 the Persians"

The story concludes "That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. And Darius the Mede took over the throne at the age of 62"

God's judgement, when it came was swift and final. Belshazzar couldn't have known that his kingdom was about to be attacked, if he had he wouldn't have been throwing such a lavish party.

This should act as a reminder to us that when Jesus returns to collect those who love Him it will be just the same. There will be no warning and God's judgement will be swift and final.

So why was Belshazzar judged so harshly? Well Daniel explains that for us as well. He tells Belshazzar "You have proudly defiled 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 your gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone – gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have ignored the God who who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny!"

Belshazzar knew what had happened to his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, who had stolen the gold and silver cups in the first place, so he should have known better. It was clear from what he knew that he should have humbled himself before the Lord, but instead he trusted in the gods of wood and stone and the man named 'God protects' found out that these gods of this world actually couldn't protect him after all. Daniel however, was protected by God because he put God first in all his considerations. When he arrived in Babylon he refused to eat the meat. This was because the meat was shared as part of religious system, sacrificed to a false god, and Daniel did not want to defile himself with it. I am sure he could have made a convenient excuse to have allowed himself to eat some of it but no, he put God before himself.

Now in truth none of us is any better than Belshazzar. When we look at the word 'Tekel' it reminds us that none of us has measured up. We are all guilty of some form of sin. But there is hope and that hope is to be found in Jesus. Jesus is the only person ever who has passed the "Tekel" test, He never sinned and fully measured up. He died in our place so that we don't have to.

In the first letter to the Corinthian church Paul listed a number of sins which would prevent us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. "Don't fool yourselves" he said "Don't you realise that some of you were like this". Paul is being generous here, actually ALL of us were sinners, but he goes on to announce the good bit "But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right

with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

So you see Christianity really is quite simple. Call on the name of Jesus, believe in Him and humble yourself before God. The alternative is to put your trust in the gods of this world, gods made of wood, stone, plastic, money or pixels.

The future for Jesus and all those who love Him is eternity but for those who trust in the gods of this world, unfortunately, the writing is already on the wall!



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