

Fake Lives

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[0 : 00] If you can turn back to Daniel 2 in your Bibles, and tonight I want to look at the whole of this chapter and see what lessons we can learn from Daniel as he served in this pagan court.

And in many ways it was quite like the situation we have in our own world today, where there are so few believers around and people living what we could call fake lives.

Fake news is something that we quite often hear about on the television, and I think now that Donald Trump has been re-elected as the Presidency of the United States, we'll probably hear quite a bit more about it again.

But far worse than fake news is the whole issue of fake lives. And as we look at this court of Nebuchadnezzar, the first verses of the chapter give us a view of people who are living in a bubble, who amongst themselves are quite happy to tell one another lies, as long as they all play the part that they have been given.

We see the astrologers and the enchanters, the magicians and sorcerers all gather together in this place to tell the king, no doubt, what he wants to hear.

[1 : 27] And they would have been happy for him to tell his dreams to them, and they would put all kinds of spin on the dreams that he had. No doubt to talk about what wonderful victories he would have on the battlefield and what a glorious ruler he would continue to be.

None of which would have had any foundation in reality or in truth, but it was what the king wanted to hear. And Nebuchadnezzar, for much of his life, would have been happy to play along with that kind of thing, because that is essentially what happened in courts in those days.

And that's what happens today in countries where you have dictatorships. Nobody is willing to speak a word against the dictator for fear of their life coming to a rather premature end.

Nebuchadnezzar will have enjoyed listening to these things, and he will have rewarded his astrologers and others, as we see in verse 6 when he was promising them rewards.

Each time he would have given them, he would have given them some kind of reward, and the ones who no doubt butted him up the most, he would have paid the most and given the places of greatest honour within his court.

[2 : 44] So we have this great pack of fake lives within the court itself. But here, in this instance, when this particular dream comes to Nebuchadnezzar, instead of all the self-congratulation, we find that there are troubled minds and troubled hearts in his court.

We read in verse 1 that his mind was troubled, and he could not sleep because of the dreams that he was having. And as a result of him being troubled, the astrologers themselves were troubled.

Because in verses 5 to 7, Nebuchadnezzar says to them, This is what I have firmly decided. If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces, and your house is turned into piles of rubble.

There is certainly no greater threat that he could make than that. And that shows quite clearly how troubled Nebuchadnezzar was. All the fakery was now being put to one side, and what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know was, What is the truth?

What have I just been dreaming of? What am I being told in my dreams? So the king himself demands the truth from his people.

[4 : 06] And he tells it to them in verse 9. He says, You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change.

He was happy to go along with all these misleading and wicked things in the past. But now that his mind is troubled because God has given him a dream, he has no idea what to do.

But he does know that the misleading and the wicked things must come to an end. And he wants to know the reality. He wants to know the truth in this situation.

The one positive thing that we can say for the astrologers at this point is that they do indeed recognize their limits. In verse 10, There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks. No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. They knew what the setup was in royal courts.

[5 : 03] They knew the way other empires were run as well. And indeed, nobody had ever asked such a thing. And indeed, no mortal man could ever give such an answer unless it was revealed to him by God.

So within the limits of their own knowledge, they were actually telling the truth at this point. And yet they were trapped by their own belief because they said no one can reveal it to the king except the gods.

And they do not live among men. They had no idea, no concept of the reality that God could come down and live amongst men.

And yet, as we read later on in Daniel, the Lord Jesus Christ himself came down when Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace.

And there he was with them. And even Nebuchadnezzar could look in and say, I see one like the son of the gods in the fire with them. So they were trapped by their own beliefs and by the limitations of the knowledge that they had.

[6 : 14] And they were trapped because of the king's threats. He was going to put them all to death and have their houses turned into rubble unless they could answer. They could tell him what his dream was and explain it to him.

So they were trapped by the king's threats, but the king himself was trapped by his own terror. And it reveals the terror that there was in his mind and in his heart at that time.

It's something that in many ways we can say, sadly, we don't see too much of today. But certainly there are times when God meets with people.

And they are consumed by the thought of dying and not being in Christ. Consumed by the thought of what their sins deserve.

And of the need to escape the judgment of them. And far too many people do not turn to Christ when God starts speaking to them in such a way.

[7 : 14] But here we have the king. He demands to know the truth. So if you have God speaking to you in your own mind through his word, I would say to you tonight, ask God to reveal the truth to you.

Don't run from it and don't hide in fear and don't hide in terror of what your own mind is telling you. I remember many years ago reading an account of persecution.

I think it was in the times of Mary Tudor in England. And there were plenty of nobles who were willing to blow with the wind. And whoever was in power, they would worship, whether it was in a Protestant format or a Catholic format.

But when the Puritan ministers were being dreadfully persecuted, there was one noble, he was dying.

And the priest came to see him, to say the last rites. And he found no comfort there whatsoever. And instead, he asked for a minister to come and speak to him.

[8 : 23] And only a Puritan can give him any peace of heart at that time. Have I got this thing set wrong now? Let me try that.

Okay. Troubled minds and troubled hearts. But in the midst of all these troubled minds and troubled hearts, we have one trusting heart.

The heart that belonged to Daniel. And his voice was really just one of a cacophony of voices that were in the court at that time.

And he himself didn't know anything as to what was going on until Arioch, the commander, came out to seek, to put the wise men to death. And it's quite remarkable when he heard that that was the job that Arioch had to do.

He had the presence of mind and the calmness of heart to speak to Arioch. Not doing well here.

[9 : 34] Can you switch to the main mic? Good. You had it upside down.

There you go, just like that. It'll stay on there. We're not used to this complicated technology. Simpler forms in Harris.

So we have Daniel, the one with the clear heart. And he was able to speak with tact to Arioch and find out what the situation was.

And we see Daniel doing a really bold and a wise thing at this point. It says in verse 16. Now this Daniel went into the king and asked for time so that he might interpret the dream for him. So he was asking for time. And it was really interesting. Just a few verses earlier, the king was able to say to his own astrologers, you're just telling me misleading things and you're looking for some spare time so that don't execute you quite so quickly.

[10:41] But here we have Daniel going into his presence and asking for time. He must have seen that there was something genuine in Daniel's request. And something spoke to him in that situation that he was willing to give Daniel time when he was not willing to give others time.

Perhaps he remembered, as recounted at the end of chapter 1, how wise Daniel had been when he was speaking to him and how he had appointed him to his position of authority precisely because of the wisdom of his answers.

But whatever the case, he knew that Daniel was different and he was willing to give Daniel some time if only he could get peace of heart. And Daniel, having been given the time, he called his friends together, verses 17 and 18, and asked them to pray for him and to pray to God that God would reveal this mystery, that God would reveal this dream that he'd given to Nebuchadnezzar. And he wasn't willing or seeking to try and find the answer to the dream on his own. He knew that he needed support in that.

And then eventually, in that night, God came to him in a vision and revealed the dream to him. And his immediate response in that situation was to praise God for the revelation that he had been given.

[12:12] And as I was studying this, I was thinking to myself, how often do we thank God each time he reveals something to us from his word?

I can think of many times when I go to church and a minister will preach on a passage, and it might be a new passage or it might be an old one, but something new comes out as he opens up an aspect of the gospel.

And we're unable to marvel when we see a new aspect of the gospel, a new element of truth that we had not picked up on before. And it's very easy to marvel at the truth and think what it tells us about God, but not actually go to God and thank him for revealing that to us.

So I think that's something that would be a great benefit to us all. Whenever we learn something new, always give praise to God, because he is the one who reveals mysteries.

And he is the one who reveals supremely the mystery of the gospel to those who seek his truth. He praised God for that revelation. He then went into the king and told him the meaning of his dream in verses 31 to 35.

[13:30] And explained about what the king had seen. A dazzling statue with a head of pure gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron, which was then smashed to pieces by this stone, which became a giant mountain, filling the whole earth.

We have a wonderful picture of history there. Daniel in exile at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. And he could say to Nebuchadnezzar, you are that head of gold.

Your Babylonian kingdom is that gold head. And he was able to explain that other empires would rise. After him came the Medes and the Persians.

Then the Greeks. Then the Romans. Each empire in turn becoming a little bit weaker than the one before in terms of the power that it could exhibit on the earth.

But longer lasting than the one that came before it. But ultimately this rock came that struck the statue and became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

[14:42] A wonderful picture there of Christ coming and of his church filling the whole earth as the gospel goes out to the ends of the earth.

And how often can we think of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ? In worldly terms as being the weakest of kingdoms, visibly and outwardly.

But inwardly it is a kingdom that will last forever. And one that will outdo all the kingdoms of this earth. Daniel was able to explain all that to Nebuchadnezzar.

And Nebuchadnezzar will have known immediately upon Daniel recounting the dream that indeed this had been revealed to Daniel. Because nobody else was able to do it.

And as the astrologer said, no one else in the history of the world had ever been asked to do such a thing by his king. And yet here we have Daniel responding and Daniel giving the answer and giving the honor and the glory to God.

[15 : 48] We see clearly in verse 47 that Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that. He honors Daniel in verses 46 and verse 48.

In verse 46 we have Nebuchadnezzar falling prostrate before Daniel. Here he is, the man described as the king of kings. He was lying flat on the floor in front of this humble slave who had been brought from Israel to serve in his palace.

He was so overwhelmed at the authority that came with Daniel sharing the word of God with him. And he ordered the honor be given to Daniel.

And he recognized God. He said, surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries for you were able to reveal this mystery.

He recognized God as being the almighty God. The God who was sovereign over all the kings of the earth. At this point he was not yet converted but he had been awakened to the reality of the living God.

[17 : 02] The God who did indeed speak to men. And the God who would indeed come to earth to live with men. And if you read through Daniel later on tonight or through this coming week.

You will see God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar were truly remarkable. Nebuchadnezzar had to be humbled to the point of eating grass before he eventually recognized God.

And repented of his ways. But God worked all that through in his life. And it's remarkable when God starts to work in a life.

How he can do amazing things. Often we look at people and we say, if only this person was saved. If only that person was saved.

They've heard the gospel but have not yet come to Christ. And yet it was many years that God was working in Nebuchadnezzar's life through Daniel. Before the Lord Almighty.

[18 : 04] Seeking to him. Before Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself. Before the Lord Almighty. Nebuchadnezzar had a troubled heart. At this point he had a calmed heart.

He did not yet have the heart that was truly at peace through trusting in that living God. And as we close I just want us to think on points of application for ourselves tonight.

Everywhere we look today folk are living fake lives. Maybe some or indeed all of us are living fake lives to some degree or others.

We try and fit in with society around us. And project somebody who we indeed are not. The gospel calls us to live true lives that are honoring to the living God.

And our job is to point out the falsehood of the lives that people are living. I remember a number of years ago a woman in our congregation speaking about her own conversion.

[19 : 08] And how the day after she was saved she went into local news agents. Looked at all the magazines that were there with their lifestyle this and lifestyle that. And she just said, she thought to herself, this is all fake.

It's all fake. And she had seen through the outward glitz of what was being offered in this world. And now that she had Christ, this other stuff meant nothing to her whatsoever.

And it's the job of everyone in here who is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. To point this out to the people around us. That whatever they are living for, if they are not living for Christ, it's fake.

It's waste. It will come to nothing. It will be like the rubble of the houses that Nebuchadnezzar was threatening to make of his astrologers.

All our lives, by nature, are like a set of ruins. And we will have nothing at the end of this world if we do not trust in Christ.

[20 : 14] We need to pray, not only ourselves, but to get our friends to pray. And in Daniel's case, those three friends of his will have been his church.

He was in bondage. They were the closest men to him. And he could ask them to pray that he and they, indeed, would be delivered from the threats of King Nebuchadnezzar.

And it was in response to prayer that God acted. I'm in the privileged position of not knowing how many of you are here tonight. We'll be in the prayer meeting later on this week.

But it's the calling of all of us, if we are able, to attend the church prayer meeting. Because if we are not a praying people, we are not going to see God's blessing in great measure within our congregations.

Like Daniel, when we approach the rulers of this world, we need to be calm, respectful, and humble. He was in danger of his life.

[21 : 21] He did not flee. He did not speak rashly. He was calm, respectful, and humble. And that will be because it reflected the fact that he was a man of prayer long before this incident came about.

And so often, we get ourselves into great trouble in trying to think of how we deal with the troubles of this world. Precisely because we do not spend enough time meditating upon the kingdom of Christ.

And praying to God. And being close to God. And being close to Christ. So that we know the right thing to do when trouble comes. Like Daniel, we need to praise God when he reveals things to us. When he opens up his word and shows us the great depths and the wonderful riches that are in there. We need to thank God. If we are ungrateful children, he is not going to reveal so much to us. And each of us should be more grateful in our hearts for what he shows to us. We should also take comfort in the certain victory of his kingdom.

[22 : 34] We need to think upon that. Of how there we have Daniel sitting in that pagan court. And serving that pagan king.

And yet he knew that his God was greater than the king of kings that he was serving at that time. And he was able to look forward to the true king of kings who was to come into the world. Therefore, each of us must give up our trust in the kingdoms of the world. It's very easy. Whatever our political persuasions may be, to be delighted when the party we voted for gets into power. And to be depressed when it's thrown out and another party comes in. But the older we get, the more we realise that none of them are able to truly solve the problems of this world. Having just and stable government is a great blessing. But above all, we want our rulers to be worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 37] And we want the people of our nation to be worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because in that way, our earthly kingdom will be far better than anything that politicians using their own wisdom can ever think of.

And for anyone here who is not in Christ tonight, I would just say to you, unlike Nebuchadnezzar, the first opportunity you have, humble yourself before God.

As I said a short while ago, he ended up losing his mind and acting as if he was a grazing animal out on the grass.

And one missionary once very succinctly put it by saying, it's far better to humble yourself before God and to ask God for the grace to be humble than to be humbled by God.

Because then you may end up eating grass like Nebuchadnezzar did. Humble yourself before God. Trust in him as the sovereign ruler of this earth.

[24 : 51] Trust in him as the sovereign ruler of this earth.