

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Unshaken\_ Daniel Chapter 5

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A few years ago, I was invited to a gathering at Glen Eyrie Castle in Colorado Springs. We were celebrating the life and legacy of author and Pastor Eugene Peterson. Eugene pastored a church for 30 years, wrote more than 40 books in his spare time, and translated the Bible into an idiomatic translation that we call The Message. So here we are, absorbing the wit and wisdom of Eugene Peterson. He is dropping the mic but it's not what he said that I remember the most. Gravity had taken a toll on his body 85 trips around the sun will do that. He had lost a skip in his step but he hadn't lost the twinkle in his eye. He was still standing. He was still smiling. He was still dropping the mic at 85.

I'll share one story with you that Eugene shared with us. He was sitting on the dock of his Montana Lake House watching a Kingfisher do what it does. As the name suggests, it's a bird that is famous for its fishing finesse. He actually counted the number of attempts it took for that Kingfisher to catch a fish. He said it took 37 tries to catch a fish and he's the Kingfisher. Okay, dramatic pause, pointed question, Eugene says, "How many times have you tried?" Yeah, we give up too quickly. We give up too easily. Eugene wrote a book, I love the title; it's become a personal mantra of mine 'A Long Obedience in the Same Direction'. We tend to overestimate what we can do in a year or two, but we underestimate what God can do in 10 or 20. He who began a good work is going to carry it to completion. If you stay humble and stay hungry, nothing that God cannot do in you or through you if you do the right thing day in and day out, God is going to show up and show off.

Well, what does any of that have to do with Daniel? By the time we get to chapter five, it is 539BC Daniel was a teenager when he was taken as a prisoner of war marched to Babylon, he is now an old man. Best guess, in his 80's Daniel is a Kingfisher, a little double entendre right there. Gravity has taken its toll but Daniel is still standing, is still smiling, still praying, still prophesying.

There is a kind of power that is often overlooked and underappreciated, doesn't get talked about much. It's staying power. We think right here right now God is thinking nations and generations. We think that what God does for us is for us, it's never just for us it's always for the third and fourth generation. Staying power is long obedience in the same direction.

We've been talking about God raising up a generation of Daniels and Esthers in Nehemiahs and Deborahs, we want to leverage the next generation. I'm gonna stop right here and say, I want to honor long obedience in the same direction. Leviticus 19:32 "*Stand up in the presence of the elderly, honor the aged*". We live in a culture that celebrates 15 minutes of fame. God celebrates a lifetime of faithfulness.

Last weekend, I felt like the Lord gave me a word for someone. I trust the Holy Spirit in you. Well, the Lord did it again; this is a word for someone. You are not past your prime. You are not forgotten. You are not taken for granted. We love you. We need you. We honor you. You are invaluable and irreplaceable to the plans and purposes of God. And I don't just honor you, I exhort you, keep standing, keep smiling, keep praying, keep prophesying. Listen, I love that song we just sang, 'His promise is loyal from seed to sequoia. I can see the promise. I can see the future. If you're not done working, then God I am not done waiting.' I declare that over your life right now.

Alright, 539 BC Daniel is odd man out. Daniel is all but forgotten. Daniel is past his prime. No, no and no! Administration's come and go, people of God, stay calm and carry on. Listen, Nebuchadnezzar sat on his throne, while Daniel knelt next to his bed praying. Nebuchadnezzar had the privilege; Daniel had the power to shut the mouth of lions. Nebuchadnezzar had the title, Daniel had the testimony and testimony is prophecy. And that's why as we get older, we should have more faith. Why? Because you can look back at the faithfulness of God. If he did it before he can do it again. I hope you're encouraged today.

Ready or not. Here we go verse one. *"King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them."*

A few facts up front; many skeptics, many critics pointed to Belshazzar as evidence that the Bible had historical inaccuracy because there was no evidence of anyone named Belshazzar until 1854. Sir Henry Rawlinson discovers and deciphers an ancient cuneiform that names Belshazzar as the eldest son of King Nabonidus. Sure enough, they reigned as co-regents which is why verse 29 says that Daniel was the third ruler. Now I won't say a lot about Belshazzar makes a pretty quick cameo. I will say this ego is the enemy always has been always will be. Dick Foth who will be speaking by the way next weekend says that there are two kinds of people in the world. There's a person that walks into a room internally announcing, "Here I am". It's the person, you know this person, the world revolves around them. Ego barely fits in the door. It's all about me, myself and I. That's Belshazzar - but let me flip the coin. I think there are those who walk into a room and it's all about everyone else. There you are. There you are. There you are. Question, what kind of person are you? Here I am or there you are?

I'll add one more piece to this puzzle. On the night that Belshazzar throws this party Babylon is actually under siege by the Medo Persians. Okay, who throws a party with an enemy army is knocking at the door? I'll tell you who someone who thinks that they're invincible.

According to Greek historian Herodotus, city walls surrounding Babylon 320 feet high, 80 feet wide, 56 miles long. They had enough provisions to last them 20 years and the Euphrates River ran through the city providing fresh water. They thought they had 20 years on the clock. Spoiler alert - that night the Medo Persians would pull a Trojan horse on the Babylonians. They dug a canal, diverted the Euphrates

River, marched under the wall into the city. Come on, pride cometh before a fall - Exhibit A. Not sure what was on tap, but it is bottoms up.

Now this is fascinating for a few reasons. Kings drank in private, not in public. So this is already past protocol, but it's almost like this human chiasm where Daniel and Belshazzar are being compared to one another. You remember this moment in chapter one where it says that Daniel would not defile himself with the king's wine. Well, what is that all about? Well, the Babylonians drank their wine on diluted. According to the Talmud, the Jewish people would mix their water with wine and their wine with water. Two reasons they would mix wine with water to sweeten the taste and to purify the water. That's what homeopathic Paul is talking about in 1 Timothy 5:23, "*Stop drinking only water, use a little wine for the sake of your stomach.*" But then you flip that coin and they would also mix one part wine with three parts water. Why? So that it wouldn't intoxicate them?

Now, let me just share something personal. I grew up in a tradition where alcohol was wrong. The only option was abstinence. And the problem with that is that Paul says do not be drunk with wine, which seems to indicate or advocate moderation. Now, let me say this addiction is epidemic in America from opioids to alcohol. Death by overdose is up 42% during this COVID crisis. If you don't control it, it will control you. I want to say this if you struggle with something that is a mind altering or controlling substance, listen, abstinence is the only option in those scenarios. Now, I'm not an expert on addiction, but I will share one theological thought. Self consciousness, I believe, is a byproduct of original sin. It's the curse of self consciousness. Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, they're naked, and it says that they felt no shame, no inhibition in the Garden of Eden until they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They realize they're naked and what do they do next? They hide their naked selves. Why? Because inhibition enters the equation.

Well, what does that have to do with drinking to drunkenness? Again, not an expert but I think one reason some people drink to drunkenness is because it temporarily, temporarily alleviates pain, reduces self consciousness, lowers inhibition. The problem with that is this, I don't know anybody who gets smarter or gets better when they're drunk. Okay, are you with me? That's when we say things and do things that we regret. And so it actually exacerbates the pain and compounds the problem. And so if you have an issue with alcohol, or any other addiction, listen, God cannot heal which you do not reveal. Would you be courageous enough to confess it to someone you trust to get some help? And I'm going to say this. I've heard a lot of confessions over the years. I want you to know, my respect for people, when they confess an addiction or something that they're struggling with, never goes down, always goes up. I'm not surprised by sin. What's surprising is someone who has the courage to confess it. Maybe this is your moment to find freedom.

I'll say one more thing. If you want to break a bad habit, you better establish a good habit and I think that's what Paul is doing in Ephesians 5:18. He says, "Do not be drunk with wine." There is a better way to overcome your inhibitions. Okay? He says, "Be filled with the Spirit" It's this present imperative verb

'keep on being filled with the Spirit of God'. And what happens is this; as the Spirit of God fills us and leads us, we become less self conscious. We're less and less worried about what people think. God frees us up and we become more God conscious. We care more and more about what God thinks. We begin to live for His glory.

Alright, you guys are doing great. Okay, Belshazzar throws a party. And he has one of those ideas that you have when you've had a few drinks too many. Belshazzar while he was tasting the wine commanded that the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple, the holy place, holy of holies, which was in Jerusalem, be brought that the king and his lords his wives and his concubines, might drink from them. And as they drank the wine verse four, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. This is quite a cocktail, you've got blasphemy, you've got idolatry. I'm actually going to drill down on it in our post message Q & A. I will say this racism is a form of blasphemy and I'll explain what I mean in our Q & A.

Alright, they raised the toast, red solo cup I fill you up. Then Belshazzar sees this disembodied hand graffitied, mene, mene, tekel, upharsin on the wall, like Banksy. I'm not sure anyone has ever sobered up faster than Belshazzar. He calls the wise men they can't interpret the language. And so the Holy Spirit, love this, jogs the memory of the king's mother. She remembers a man named Daniel. Now listen, four kings have come gone but don't put a period where God puts a comma. I can see Daniel kind of limping into the king's court. He's lost a step but he hasn't lost the twinkle in his eye or the fire in his belly.

Belshazzar says, *"I've heard that the spirit of the gods is in you that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom."* Now notice the nuance in verse 12. *"To interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve knotty problems."* Listen, do we not need this anointing right about now?

Let me stop right here. George Washington Carver ranks as one of the greatest scientific minds of the 20th century, earned his master's degree in botany from Iowa State University taught at Tuskegee University for 47 years - long obedience in the same direction. Around the turn of the 20th century, the agricultural economy of the South was suffering. The boll weevil was devastating cotton crops; the soil was being depleted of nutrients. It was George Washington Carver who introduced this idea of crop rotation. He encouraged farmers to plant peanuts, and that revived the soil but the farmers were frustrated because there wasn't a market for peanuts. And so, when they complained to Carver he did what he had always done. He prayed about it. George Washington Carver would get up early in the morning, about four o'clock, and he would take prayer walks through the woods. He loved Job 12:7, he prayed Job 12:7, he lived Job 12:7. *"Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you."*

Carver asked God to reveal the mystery of the peanut. And it's almost like he had the same anointing as Daniel. He could interpret nature. He could explain molecular riddles. He could solve biochemical problems. On January 20, 1921 George Washington Carver testifies before the House Ways and Means

Committee on behalf of the United Peanut Association of America. I love this, chairman told him he had 10 minutes. An hour and 40 minutes later, they tell George Washington Carver you can come back whenever you want. Absolutely mesmerized, as he demonstrated dozens of uses for the ordinary peanut, everything from glue to shaving cream, to soap, to insecticide, to cosmetics, linoleum, and I might add secret sauce in Batterson burgers Worcestershire sauce. Alright there you have it.

Well listen to what George Washington Carver said. He said, "I love to think of nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks every day, every hour in every moment of our lives." And then he said this, "Anything will give up its secrets if you love it enough." That is so good. That is so true. "Not only have I found that when I talk to the little flower or to the little peanut, that they will give up their secrets, but I have found that when I silently commune with people, they give up their secrets also if you love them enough." Drop the mic George Washington Carver. "If I speak in the tongues of men or angels," said the Apostle Paul, "but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong and a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing." Love everybody, always love everybody. Always love everybody, always.

I'm going to double park right here. We're entering a season where we need to upgrade the gifts of the Spirit. And it's happening God is activating words of wisdom and words of knowledge. God is activating faith and healing and miracles. I don't care how big or how bad the problem is, as Christ followers filled with the Spirit of God, led by the Spirit of God we are called to bring supernatural solutions to the problems that are around us.

I love the way our pastor of prayer Heidi Scanlon says it, she says we're solutionaries. I love that. Listen, critics point out problems, prophets declare supernatural solutions. Now Daniel, he's operating in the gifts of the Spirit 700 years before those gifts are even named or identified. We talked about the gift of discernment last week. Let me talk a little bit about the gift of prophecy this week. Now listen, it sounds so miraculous. It seems so mystical. Like isn't that about predicting the future? No, no, no. Let me bring this down to earth, okay,

1 Corinthians 14 verse three. Let me unpack this. It says, "*The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.*" Now the Greek word strengthening, it's an architectural term, it's laying the foundation, it's framing the walls. It's all about building others up. That's why sometimes this word is translated edification. It's always in the best interest of the other person and it's always life giving. Now the word encouraging is Paraklesis. Does that sound familiar? Pretty close to a name for the Holy Spirit, but it's a military formation where two soldiers would stand back to back. In a sense, I think prophecy is fighting spiritual battles for someone you love. Yes, it can be pointing out blind spots including potential that we don't see in ourselves. But I think it's also protecting the blind side of people that we love.

Let me push this envelope a little bit. I just think it's so important right now, it's so critical; we need safe people with the rise of cancel culture, people who know that you're for them that you're not against them that you have their back. Well, what does that look like? Well, why don't we just start by bragging about people behind their back? Beats gossip, doesn't it? And then why don't we try an extra measure of grace? That's what we need right now as the body of Christ as we move forward prophetically into our future as a church.

And then finally, comfort is speaking tenderly speaking gently. I think tone is so critical right now. We are so polarized politically. Yeah, we are called to speak truth to power. But you know what I've learned no one wins a shouting match. Proverbs 15:1, "*A gentle answer turns away wrath.*" When we think of prophecy I think sometimes we think confrontation. And listen, I think there is an element of we've got to identify and confront sin, but the ultimate goal here is consolation.

Now stick with me. I think lament is a powerful form of consolation. It's supernatural empathy, for the pain and suffering of others. Let me paint a picture, March 21, 1965, thousands of peaceful protesters gathered in Selma, Alabama, many of them motivated by what had happened on Bloody Sunday a few weeks before. They walked 12 miles a day. They slept in the fields and then they finally rallied for the right to vote in Montgomery, Alabama. Now if you've seen the movie, maybe seen an old picture, you may have noticed an older white skin gentleman with a long beard, standing right on the front line right by Dr. King. I want to tell you who it is? His name was Abraham Herschel. He was one of the pre eminent Jewish theologians of the 20th century, wrote an all time classic book called *The Prophets*. Why did Herschel march? Listen, when millions of your people have been exterminated in concentration camps just 20 years before you identify with what Dr. King said, "Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere." No one does a better job of defining who a prophet is, what a prophet does, than Abraham Herschel.

I'm gonna rapid fire these. He said the prophet is human, yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears. Love that. He said a prophet's ear perceives the silent sigh, and their voice is lent to silent agony. He said while others are intoxicated with here and now the prophet doesn't lose faith in the end of the story. He said they exegete everything from the divine perspective. He said prophet hates the approximate, which I wish I had time to talk about but this is genius and he says their purpose is to conquer callousness. He said one more thing - to the prophets, even a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportions.

I'm gonna add this, the Talmud, Jewish commentary on the Old Testament underscores the sanctity of human life, from womb to tomb. It says if you destroy a single life, it's as if you have destroyed an entire universe. If you save a life, if you save a life, it's as if you have saved an entire universe. The idea of individualism, it's being attacked from a lot of angles right now, and I'll share a few thoughts in our Q & A. But I think it's so critical right now that we take our cues from the Word of God. Yes, we are called to sacrifice for the greater good, to bear one another's burdens, to give the seat of honor to someone else,

to consider others better than ourselves but we are far too binary in our thinking. It's not either or It's both and. Every single person, invaluable and irreplaceable, made in the image of God. You cannot read scripture and come to any other conclusion. Never has been never will be anyone like you, not a testament to you a testament to the God who created you. The significance of that is this; no one can worship God like you or for you?

I love what Abraham Herschel said after crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He said, I felt like my legs were praying. May God raise up a generation of prophets who don't just talk the talk, they walk, the walk, they lead with love, they'd rather be biblically correct than politically correct. They do justice, they love mercy and they walk humbly.

I am way out of time and so let me close with this. We find ourselves in a tough place right now as a nation. COVID crisis is spiking once again, tremendous unrest as it relates to race we're politically polarized, staring an election in the face. One third of Americans, according to the census bureau suffer from clinical depression or an age anxiety disorder, 71% of Americans angry, 66% of Americans fearful. Houston, we have a problem and we're not ignoring it. Listen, we're going to confront the brutal facts, but we're going to do it within unwavering faith. Do not lose faith in the end of the story. Why? God's got this and God's got you. We are here for such a time as this. We are here for such a place as this and I pray prophetic anointing on your life to bring supernatural solutions to the problems around you.

Listen, his kingdom is going to come; his will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, amen. I want to invite our worship team to come and you can grab some communion elements. Final thought, verse 25. This is the inscription that was written, "mene, mene, tekel, upharsin". And here is what these words mean.

Mene - God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Thought he had 20 years on the clock that one night.

Tekel - you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Come right back to it.

Upharsin means divided. Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

The theologian and apologist Francis Schaffer once said, "If we were all forced to wear a voice recorder around our necks that captured every conversation we ever had, and our conversations were made available for public consumption, we'd all go into hiding for the world rest of our lives."

Tekel, weighed and found wanting. Romans 3:23 *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* I owed a debt I could not pay - "mene, mene, tekel, upharsin", but he paid a debt he did not owe. God made him who had no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of Christ. Here's the gospel. God says, here's the deal that's on the table. You take all of your sin, everything

you've ever done wrong, why don't we transfer it to my account, and I'll pay it in full. Oh, and then we'll take my righteousness, we'll transfer it to your account, and then we'll call it even. What? That is the good news of the gospel.

Listen on the cross last words that Jesus said, "*It is finished!*" three words in English, one word in Greek Tetelestai. It's an accounting term it means the final installment on a debt. Archaeologists have found ancient receipts with this word written across it, "Paid in full".

I don't know where you are on your spiritual journey but there is a God who went to the cross for you paid the penalty for our sin. Why? Because we were weighed and found wanting. Our righteousness is not because of anything that we do it's because of his righteousness given to us. If you want to receive that gift today, you're at our online campus you'll see a little button would you raise your hand right now? We want you to take that first step of faith. We want to help you in your spiritual journey. I want to be the first to say welcome to the family.