

“Revealer of Mysteries”

Daniel 2
July 8, 2007

We sing songs like, “Great and Mighty Is the Lord our God”; “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”; and “How Great Is Our God” because God is sovereign. Those songs are more than simply words of puffery or empty praise, they are a witness to who God has already revealed himself to be.

God is great and powerful and loving and just. God has more power than the most powerful king; knows more and accomplishes his purposes where humans cannot control. As we move along to Daniel 2 today, the central character (again) is not Daniel. The central character is God.

Daniel 2

There is Daniel, a rather powerless exile, who is in the king’s training program. He is minding his own business when Arioch shows up. Arioch is the king’s chief executioner. If Arioch shows up at your door, the dark music is playing right behind him and the news cannot be good. This is worse than the King’s IRS man showing up. Arioch has orders to execute Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, along with the other wise men.

If the king’s reaction seems a bit harsh, and perhaps it was, it was not altogether uncommon in the ancient world. The king had started the training program for two purposes: to make the best in the world available to himself, and to limit the potential for insurrection. However, in drawing them together, he was always concerned that they were plotting against him.

So Daniel asked to see the king, and asked the king for time to interpret the dream. Why was his request granted? Because Daniel’s approach was different than the wise men. The wise men who originally discussed the issue with the king were in trouble because they only told the king that what he was asking could not be done. Daniel was granted time to do exactly what the king asked.

Daniel returned from meeting the king and instructed Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to engage in intercessory prayer to God for mercy so that they might not perish. (Note carefully: Daniel and his friends act in faith. God is in control of their future; more than even the king. Hence their prayer is to God, they do not seek mercy from the king.)

Let’s step back for a moment. The wise men were mostly correct in their advice to the king. “There is no one on earth who can reveal what the king demands!” True. “The thing that the king is asking is too difficult” – also true – “and no one can reveal it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with mortals.” Almost right. The one true God – not the gods – the one true God – the transcendent sovereign God of all creation –that

one true God responds and “reveals the mystery” in a vision of the night. Daniel wakes and blesses the God of heaven.

The actual dream itself – the king’s and the one in which God reveals the mystery to Daniel – takes second place to the action around it. God has given the dream, God has provided the means by which the king may have an interpretation of the dream, God is the one who is in control of history – even before it happens – so the interpretation is sure.

The point is this: all of existence falls into God’s plan. God is sovereign over all things.

God is in control.

Knowing that God is in control should be a great comfort to us; but it ends up being a frustration. All the things around us tell us that we need to be in control. The world tells us that we need to be in control. This is the problem that the wise men have; the king rejects their attempts to control him.

We look at these wise men and they seem almost like cartoons. The king shows them up for being NOT very wise, even though what he asks is beyond human capabilities. They are desperate because they are relying on the things that they know, the things they control. In short, they rely on the technology of the day to save them and tell the king that what he asks cannot be done.

But before we go on too long thinking that these “wise” men are not so wise, we had better be aware that we have the same issues in trying to be independent and self-reliant.

Think about the amount of anxiety, energy, resources, and time we spend trying to control our own world. Take technology as an example. The irony of modern technology is that it was supposed to serve us to create more leisure time. Instead, many people end up serving technology. I get concerned about myself some times, wondering if I spend too much time sitting before a screen and not enough time on my knees.

I know I am not the only one: I am not going to name any names here, but I want you to try to imagine going a day without your cell phone. Imagine your day without e-mail. Imagine your day without the internet, imagine your day without cable news. All of these tool are wonderful when we understand that they are tools – it becomes a problem when it takes over our life, our time, our attention, and our worship.

We struggle trying to discern our purpose, achieve our goals, and trying impress other people. There is a booming business in trying to help us achieve *our* plans. I did a quick search on Amazon.com for “self-help” and it returned 139,105 titles – and that’s the number currently available in-print!

Discerning our purpose, achieving goals, and planning are not bad things so long as we remember that our purposes, goals, and plans are subservient to the one true God’s. That’s

the problem with most self-help books – if they refer to a god at all, it is a god of the reader’s own choosing, most likely to a god of the reader’s own making.

Well, ok; if we are simply discerning our purpose, goals, and plans based on God’s will, how can we discern God’s will?

God reveals his plans.

God reveals his purpose. God reveals his goals. God’s plan is bigger, better, and more glorious than our plans – his ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways and thoughts are higher and better – higher and better than any humanly inspired self-help book can offer.

The wise men have a problem, and it is the kind of life-threatening problem that the self-help books can not solve. The king demands that they reveal both the dream itself and the interpretation. The king is really good at cutting through their pretense and getting them to the core of the issue: they throw their hands up in desperation, “only the gods could know!”

Well, only God does know.

This is not the only time in Scripture where God’s servant is used to expound the meaning of a dream to the most powerful king on earth; it also occurred in Genesis 41, where Joseph is called by Pharaoh to interpret the meaning of the dreams of seven fat cows and seven sickly cows; seven good ears of corn and seven withered ones. “Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.’”

In both cases the lesson to be learned is that the most powerful human is still subject to the sovereignty of God. In both cases the future is revealed, a future that is certain and that comes to pass. The king is fitting into God’s plans and not the other way around.

Further, the dream reveals that God is not absent. The king’s dream happens in time and the meaning is revealed in time. In other words, God did not simply set the planets spinning and wander off to do other things. God reveals himself in history. He revealed himself to Pharaoh and Joseph, he revealed himself to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, he revealed himself to the twelve, and he revealed himself to you and me.

Consider Peter’s confession in response to Jesus’ question, “Who do *you* say I am?” “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.’”

Jesus was the fulfillment of promises God had already revealed in the prophets. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise of a kingdom with no end. Jesus revealed God’s salvation plan and kingdom to the disciples, and he revealed his own identity to the early church, and, ever since, the church has borne witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ.

God reveals his plans. How can we discern God's will? Well, first we ask.

Daniel was faithful.

Within the court of the king, Daniel looks like the hero. Certainly the king is impressed and, obviously, the wise men and their families are grateful. But Daniel's heroics look very different than movie heroics these days. Daniel's plan to save the wise men? Go to sleep and have his friends pray. Although it is not very Hollywood, it is faithful.

Daniel acted by faith. Daniel was not caught up in trying to solve the problem by himself. When he was told what was the problem, he asked the king for time to seek God's help to solve it. He asked his friends to intercede in prayer on their behalf. He later will tell the king (in verse 30), "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind."

Daniel turned to God to discern what God's will was. He turned *to* God. He did not try to defend God or explain God, he turned *to* God. He humbled himself. He exhorted his friends to humble themselves. They got on their knees and prayed – really prayed – not just some rote prayers that they had memorized or gotten in the habit of saying, but really prayed. It was the kind of prayer that people generally only do under the most extreme stress. It is the prayer that we pray when everything else has been shown to be insufficient or powerless.

The truth is we often spend more time talking about God than we do talking to God. Daniel and his friends are an illustration of how and why we should *start* by going to God, rather than using God as a last resort.

You get the sense from this story that Daniel was not asking his friends to go to their knees in intercessory prayer for the first time. The impression I get is that this was a common thing, that they was their practice or – as the New Testament writers will say about Jesus – "as was their custom." Even having been hauled off into exile, even risking their lives for the sake of remaining loyal to God, even in the circumstances where they are sentenced to death because some of the king's wise men were incompetent, they put their trust in God, God whom they had known and trusted for quite some time.

When Daniel has a problem – and this time it happens to be a big problem – his first step is to join with his friends and go to God. Do you get the point?

Then, when God responds, Daniel's response is worship. He declares out loud the attributes of God: "Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his." Yes, that is true. "He changes times and season, deposes kings and sets up kings." That is the situation with Nebuchadnezzar. "He gives wisdom to the wise and

knowledge to those who have understanding.” That is humility; to recognize the giver instead of taking credit for the gift.

Daniel praises God because God is eternally good and Daniel praises God because God is good here and now. Worshiping God involves testifying to the wonders of God. It means that you have trusted God, that you have had eyes to see what God is doing, and that you are filled with joy that is so overwhelming you have to share.

Daniel’s heroics? Trusting God, praying to God, praising God.

The King declares God’s sovereignty.

So finally, we get back to the king and his dream. There are two things important about the dream as we consider the role of the king in this story. One, is that the king recognizes and praises the true sovereign God. The second is that God reveals that this king’s reign will end, but that there is coming a king and kingdom whose reign will not know an end.

Daniel’s revelation to the king was a profound epiphany for Nebuchadnezzar. I think it would be humbling for any one of us. For an already jittery king, this was the kind of encounter with the living God that should put things in perspective. The message was comforting, the reality that a sovereign God would communicate is a little less comforting.

Encounters with the living God are humbling experiences. It is humbling because we encounter the Holy and realize how human we are in comparison with divinity. Even the king is humbled, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries!” It is a statement of marvel and awe; which is appropriate.

We share that marvel and awe. We testify to the power of the living God. We believe that God will do what he has promised.

God fulfilled the promise of the dream. The God of heaven established a kingdom that shall never be destroyed and it shall stand forever. It will never be left to another people. Yet God did not achieve this kingdom in the way Nebuchadnezzar or Pharaoh had established their empire; God established the everlasting kingdom through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we really think about the mystery God has revealed – when we think about what God has really done – we experience the same kind of humility that Nebuchadnezzar experienced. “Oh.” “Oh my.” Paul says it this way at the end of Romans 11: “O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Exclamations and wonder and awe and even a little bit of fear because you are dealing with someone that you cannot fool and do not control.

Friends, we are living in the never-ending kingdom that God has established. Those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – who proclaim him God of gods and Lord of kings – are the people of that everlasting kingdom.

Conclusion

What can we take from this story? First, God is sovereign. No matter how we perceive things, God is in control. Second, God reveals his plans. He is the revealer of mysteries, he is faithful to the promises he makes, he knows and shows us what he will do ahead of time. Third, our job is to be faithful. We do not need to defend God or explain God, we need to trust God first and only. And, fourth and finally, we can see that God is fulfilling the promise of the everlasting kingdom – the hope of our salvation and adoption as children of the King of heaven through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his.”

Amen and amen.

8:45 prayer and offering

10:00 offering