

Exegetical Big Idea: Nebuchadnezzar is faced with his finiteness as a human as powerful as he is. The magicians are faced with the finiteness of their humanity as “wise” as they are. Daniel is faced with his finiteness as a human, but turns to the LORD for mercy and God graciously provides.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God is the source of all wisdom, and he gives it generously to those who truly seek him.**

Fallen Condition Focus: In foolishness humanity looks to ourselves for wisdom. In essence we fear ourselves more than we fear God. Instead we ought to humbly come to God in acknowledgement that we need his mercy.

Background:

Daniel and his friends are taken to Babylonia after the siege of Jerusalem under king Jehoiakim. They are likely quite young. We’re told they are young in chapter 1, and we’re also told that Daniel remained in the king’s service until the first year of Cyrus. It was this same Cyrus that decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem to build their temple. That was some 70 years later, so Daniel would have had to be maybe 20 or even younger at the beginning of the book.

At the end of the last chapter Daniel and his friends were in positions of prominence, given wisdom and knowledge ten times greater than all the pagan officials, and Daniel could interpret dreams. But Nebuchadnezzar seems to forget all of this by the time we get to just chapter 2. As we’ll see, Nebuchadnezzar calls in his magicians and such but Daniel and his friends are not among them.

Something interesting also happens here in chapter 2. After verse 4 here in chapter 2 until the end of chapter 7, the language of the text changes. It is no longer written in Hebrew, but in Aramaic. We’re not told exactly why this happens but it’s worth noting. The best possible answer that I have read is that chapters 2-7 deal more with events happening in Babylon (and later the Medo-Persian empire), and Aramaic was the common language in Babylon. Chapters 1 and 8-12 deal with either directly God’s people, or global future events as they relate to God’s people and so Daniel reverts back to his native language. We’re not sure why this happens but I am sure that it is all God’s Word here.

Read and Pray.

Intro:

I like to play games with my kids. Of course I have to be quite selective of the games that we can play. Some games just wouldn’t be fair. Games of skill, or strength, or strategy wouldn’t be fair because I am far superior to them in all of those. One game that my kids and I like to play is called Sneaky Snacky Squirrel. It’s a game with different colored acorns, and you need to collect one acorn of every color and put them in your tree trunk to win. So you spin on the spinner and whatever color the spinner lands on is the color of acorn you can pick up using the squirrel shaped grabber.

I don’t always win that game. In fact, I have zero advantage when we play that game. There is no strategy that I can employ, no strength that will help me, no intellectual advantage. We are all on a completely equal playing field. Try as I may, I routinely lose to my small kids.

All of the advantages that come with being older and stronger and having more life skills, and studied more, all of those advantages are gone when we play sneaky snacky squirrel.

In the first half of Daniel chapter 2, king Nebuchadnezzar finds himself, despite all his power and strength and fame and riches, on the same playing field as everyone else. The magicians and enchanters and wise men of Babylon, despite all their learning and reading and studying are on the same playing field as everyone else. Daniel even, faced with the mystery of this dream, is on the same playing field as everyone else.

The problem that all the people here face, and we need to include ourselves this category, is the need for wisdom. Wisdom, is knowing and acting on things that are true. Wisdom is knowing what is truly right and what is truly wrong and living life accordingly. I think we all want to be wise. I think we all see the need for wisdom. The problem is that the wisdom of this world is foolish. So where is wisdom found? The king's dream means something significant and *nobody* has the wisdom to figure it out. But the difference, is that Daniel knows where to go to get it. Daniel knows that:

God is the source of all wisdom, and he gives it generously to those who truly seek him.

Verses 1-4: Wisdom is not found within ourselves.

Chapter 2 opens in the second year of king Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He is apparently having dreams, and these are not ordinary dreams. These dreams, whether it's a reoccurring dream or a series of dreams we're not sure but they are bothering him. Verse 1 says he's troubled by these dreams, to the point where they are stealing his sleep. He needs a resolution. He needs to figure out what they mean to give him some solace.

Now right from these verses we read something peculiar. He is about to summon his wise men of Babylon, but his reason for summoning them is different than you'd expect. Verse 2 says he is summoning he wise men "to tell him what he has dreamed". He's either forgotten his dream and it's upsetting him, or he does remember his dream but he doesn't trust his advisors to tell him the true meaning of his dream.

It must be anguish for the most powerful man in the entire world, who has all the might and power of his empire at his fingertips, who has conquered kings and kingdoms and the gods of all these other nations, it must be anguish for that man to be faced with the reality that he is still only human.

Nebuchadnezzar is not God.

[I have to admit that I have a bad habit of not taking time to read instructions that come with new things. I like to think I'm getting better at this but I admit, when I open a package of something and it requires assembly I often have a go at it without looking at the instructions. Well what do you think normally happens in those situations? It's not often that I am actually able to put whatever it is together without the instructions. Often times I end up putting something on the wrong way, or getting stuck at a step, or not knowing where a certain piece goes. It's usually only then that I grab the instructions and figure out where I went wrong.]

Why do I do this? Well ultimately it's because I don't think I need the instructions! I think I'm better than the instructions...except I'm not!

Nebuchadnezzar is not all powerful. He's not all knowing. He's not all wise. But most importantly, he doesn't turn to the one who is.

Well he cannot find the wisdom to understand his dream within himself, but he does have advisors so he turns to them. He calls them in and they stand before them and he tells them his problem. In verse 3, he tells them that he has had a dream and he wants them to tell him what it means.

The advisors answer the king "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it".

The advisors answer with great confidence! After all, that is what they are paid to do. They have likely done this many many times before. Likely they have stood before the king and given the king all kinds of interpretations to all kinds of the king's dreams. But this is no ordinary dream. This dream has come from the God of heaven and has a special and real meaning, and because it has come from God, God alone can give the meaning.

They too, trust in themselves for the wisdom of understanding this dream. But just as wisdom is not found in all the power and might of the king, it is also not found in all the learning of these wise men.

Nebuchadnezzar wants the *right* answer for the interpretation of his dream, but he does not know the source of wisdom, so he looks elsewhere.

We've remarked that a large theme in this book is about how God's people should live their lives in exile. This world that we live in says seek this wisdom within yourselves. Find out what is good and true by looking within yourself and making your own wisdom. But the Bible says that is totally foolish!

We are exiles, we are not to do as the world does and seek wisdom first from ourselves or other people. If we are God's people, and we know the true God, then we know the source of wisdom! It's God! And I have some good news for us. God has revealed his wisdom to us in his Word. It is in his book that he tell us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of all wisdom.

So what will we do? Will we be frustrated that we are not God, or humbly seek him and his kingdom first?

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Verses 5-11: What is impossible for man is easy for a sovereign God.

So the king has called in his advisors and they ask the king for the dream so that they can give him their interpretation, whatever it may be. But now there's a catch. He reveals to them here that he not only expects them to give him the interpretation of the dream, but also what the dream was!

The king is asking for the impossible! Not only that, but if they cannot do it, he will cut into pieces and have their houses turned into piles of rubble. So he demands the impossible from them, and gives the harshest penalty for not being able to do the impossible. It kind of makes the reward part of this irrelevant doesn't it? Who is going to be able to do this? No amount of reward is going to be able to get someone to do the impossible, because it's not a matter of motivation, it's a matter of ability.

But here's the thing. If the gods of Babylon are true, then they can simply go to their gods to get the answer! Easy peasy! They can go to their source of wisdom, the gods will give it to them, and they can

claim the reward. But of course it's not that simple for them, because the gods of Babylon are not true gods.

[In this age of the internet it's really easy to be a self-proclaimed expert on just about anything. You can literally spend weeks on end watching videos of, and reading material on just about anything. But this doesn't make you an expert. I know this is true because I know this by experience. From time to time our house has needed some work done on it. Sometimes it's a simple thing, other times it's a larger renovation. Before I start a project I spend lots of time watching videos on it and reading up on it. You know what happens without fail? I run into something unanticipated. You know why that happens? Because I'm not an expert. Oh I think that I am...but I'm not.]

If these magicians and sorcerers and diviners are real, then this should be no problem for them! If their gods are genuine gods and they are as powerful and they claim, then this should be a walk in the park. Except they are false prophets of false gods.

They admit as much in verse 10. They come up with two reasons why what the king asks can't be done. First, because they are only human. Second, because the gods who would know the answer are unreachable.

In one sense they're completely correct. This is an impossibility for mere humans. And in one sense they are correct to note that would take divine intervention to get this wisdom. In their understanding of the divine, what god would be concerned with such matters and give such wisdom to a human?

They don't know Daniel's God. They don't know the God of all creation.

The true God does care about his creation. He is not a God who sits far off on his throne giving not thought to us. The true God stepped down off his throne, and did walk among his creation. Not only did he condescend to walk among his creation, but he also took on the nature of his creature and become human, while at the same time remaining truly God. He did this to make possible the impossible.

The truth is we are separated from God. Our sin separates us from God, and it is impossible for us to get to God. But there is a way to be in relationship with God, not by anything that we have done. We don't have the strength or wisdom or righteousness for that! It took God to come to us, and walk among us, and more than that to die for us and be raised to life again for us to reconcile us to God.

You've got two choices. You can be like the Babylonians and remain separated from God, relying on your own wisdom and power and strength, or you can trust in God's wisdom and power and strength and be reconciled to God and have the hope of eternal life with him. Chose the true God today.

After all, where do you think the wisdom of this plan comes from? God alone.

God is the source of all wisdom, and he gives it generously to those who truly seek him.

Verses 12-19: God is the strength of those who need him.

Well the magicians give the answer the Nebuchadnezzar certainly does *not* want to hear. They remind him of his humanity and that the dream and its meaning are outside of his grasp. He is enraged by this. Look at verses 12-13. He not only immediately orders the execution of all the wise men that are in his court at the time, but he obviously thinks that if these best of the best are useless, how much less everyone else. So he orders all the wise men of Babylon, and this includes Daniel and his friends. So the

commander goes out to get Daniel and his friends. When he gets there, verse 14 says, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. Daniel keeps a cool head and asks what this harsh decree is all about. Daniel immediately goes to the king to ask for time. The question is of course, why does Daniel ask for time? To scheme his way out of it? To go and read a book on dream interpretation? To try and run away? No of course not. He asks for time to go to God, the source and generous giver of all wisdom.

Unlike the king, who simply lacks the wisdom, unlike the magician who don't have it and don't know where to get it, Daniel knows exactly where to get it and he doesn't skip a beat. He doesn't try it first on his own, he has no other sure place to go but the God of all wisdom.

[I want my kids to learn independence and try things on their own, but there are some things they are simply not able to do on their own. My kids love books, of which I am thankful. The problem is that they can't yet read. They will often sit and look at the pictures and recite a lot of the book by memory but they cannot read. If they want a book read, they have to come to either Alana or myself. They have no choice. They can sit there and stare at the page for as long as they can but the understanding of how to read is not going to magically come to them. They know if they want it read, they have to come to mom or dad.]

Daniel knows that there is only one response to this problem, to go directly to God. Not only that of course but he asks his friends to plead for mercy from God as well.

The Christian does not grow in character and wisdom by struggling in our own strength. The Christian does not grow in sanctification by being independent from God. That does not lead to true Christian growth. That leads only to pride.

The opposite is true. The only way we grow in the Christian life is growing more and more dependent on God. It's just a realization of what already is true. We are dependent on God for absolutely everything! Admitting this and making it a habit to turn to God in all things is how we see his goodness. God is a gracious God. God doesn't withhold any good thing from us. We often fail to receive the good gifts of God because we struggle in our own strength.

The reality is that we all need God. It's not a matter of *if* you need God, but if you *realize* you need God. Christ said that he came for those who are sick, not the healthy. What he meant by that is those who realize they are the sick ones! The Pharisees did not see that they are also sick, and so they missed out on the healing nature of the gospel.

God is the strength of those who need him. Do you realize today that you need him? Do you realize that your eternal future is at stake? Receive the wisdom of God today in turning to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and be saved.

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Verses 19-23: The right response to God's mercies is worship.

As Daniel and his friends turn to God for mercy, they see the goodness of God. Verse 19 says during the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Daniel wakes up for the morning, realizing that God has given him not only the interpretation of the king's dream, but the dream itself. Now the natural thing to do here is to immediately run to the king. This is after all a time-sensitive issue. Not only is the

king furious at the world, but he's been gracious enough to Daniel to give him some extra time. I think we can be tempted to think that what Daniel does next is just inconsiderate to the patience of the king.

Daniel, instead of running to the king, takes the time first to worship God. Verse 19 says "Then Daniel praised the God of heaven". This is not just a quick "thanks God!" type of prayer. This has substance. Presumably he took the time to write down his prayer!

Daniel's right response to the mercies of God is worship. Why? Because he takes more joy in the giver, than the gift. Yes it's a great gift Daniel has been given, but only because the Giver is infinitely great.

[I can't help but think of the ten men healed of leprosy in Luke's gospel. All of them are in need. All of them cry out to God. All of them are healed and told to go show themselves to the priest. But only one of them, a Samaritan, not even an Israelite, returns to Christ and falls at his feet in thankful worship. To this one only Christ says "go, your faith has made you well". That one leper realized that the giver was infinitely greater than the gift of healing in that moment. Oh the gift is great and I'm sure he enjoyed it, but it's only great because the giver is infinitely greater.

Daniel praises God and the content of his prayer is perfectly fitting. Daniel praises God that God alone holds all power in his hands. Look at verses 20-21. Daniel praises God that God alone holds wisdom in his hands. Look at verses 21-22. But not only is God the source of all power and might and wisdom, God is the gracious giver of that wisdom. Look at verse 23 where Daniel says "you have *given me* wisdom" and "you have made known *to us* the dream of the king".

God alone is power. Not the king with his army and lands and control.

God alone is wisdom. Not the magicians and sorcerers with their learning and idol worship.

God alone is the gracious giver of power and wisdom, and he gives it to those who come to him humbly.

In this first part of this chapter, Daniel and his friends are under the threat of death. The only hope for salvation is a supernatural wisdom from God. Without this wisdom, Daniel is a dead man. God graciously gives it and Daniel is saved.

That's not totally unlike another situation. All of us are under an even greater threat of death. This death is an eternal separation from God and conscious torment. What is our hope for escaping this death? Only a supernatural wisdom from God. Without the wisdom given by God that allows us to know the evil of our hearts and the goodness of God, and the wisdom to turn to Christ in faith for the forgiveness of our sins, we're dead. We are still in desperate need of God's wisdom today, but it is a far greater wisdom even than what God gave Daniel, because this wisdom from God is eternal life.

My prayer is that all here have turned to the God of all wisdom, in faith, and received mercy through Christ's death on the cross. And my hope for us, is the only right response to the mercies of God: worship. Because

God is the source of all wisdom, and he gives it generously to those who truly seek him.