

Lake Cities Community Church
July 6, 2008
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Book of Daniel

An Impossible Request
Daniel 2:1-30

Kids! Come on up here – I have something really cool show you! Here is a plastic thing that I want to see if someone can balance on their finger. Can I have a volunteer? Can't do it? Well, I know it is possible – I'd say we need some help. What about if we ask 2nd Peter the plant to help us? Do you think that would be a good idea? No – you are right – he couldn't help us – he is not a person – he can't even move himself! It would be silly to ask a plant for help – but sometime people do ask for help from silly places listen to this Bible verse: **Is. 46:6 Some people pour out their silver and gold and hire a craftsman to make a false god from it. Then they bow down and worship it! Is. 46:7 They carry it around on their shoulders, and when they set it down, it stays there. It cannot even move! And when someone prays to it, there is no answer. It has no power to get anyone out of trouble.**

Now who should we ask for help? From parents, friends, God. Especially from God – Because nothing is impossible for God. Say that with me – Nothing is impossible for God. Let me show you what I mean. (Belt / balance). Just like I am going to help you with this trick - God can make something that seems impossible - possible! **For I am God—I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Is. 46:10 Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish (NLT).** Nothing is impossible for God! Thank you, you may sit down.

We continue our study in the book of Daniel this morning – Please turn with me to Daniel chapter 2, we are in verses 1-30. We will take two weeks to explore the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great statue and the dream’s interpretation. Let’s follow the story together.

A “normal” Babylonian Request (1-4)

In the first four verses of chapter two, we have what appears, at first blush, to be a fairly normal Babylonian request for the interpretation of a dream. Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream – that in verse 1, woke him up. I would guess you have had that happen to you – when the intensity of what you are dreaming about literally wakes you up from your sleep and you are physically upset. Shaking perhaps – full of emotion.

So the great King of Babylon calls in his wise men: magicians, conjurers, sorcerers and astrologers. These four groups probably had some distinctions in the ancient world – but most of that is lost to us. We do know they practiced a mixture of occultism and science. On one hand do strange things like reading the liver of a dead sheep to determine the future – and on the other they would track the stars and planets movement with meticulous care. A Babylonian astronomer named Naburimannu, about 500 B.C. calculated the length of the year at 365 days, 6 hours and 15 minutes (only 26 minutes and 55 seconds too long).

So Nebuchadnezzar says to them: **“I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream.”** So, they say, verse four, **“Tell the dream to your servants and we will declare the interpretation.”** Simple enough – they were all experts in dream interpretation - You dream – we interpret. Dreams R us! Archeologists have found ancient dream interpretation manuals that explained various symbols.

An Impossible Request (5-11)

But what should have been a normal request becomes an impossible one in verses 5-11. Where the King clarifies: I don't just want the interpretation of the dream, but for you to tell me the dream itself! Nebuchadnezzar says (5-6), "The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. But if you do declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation."

The wise men respond (7), "Let the King tell the dream to his servants and we will declare the interpretation." What is the definition of foolishness – doing the same thing over and over and hoping for different results? That is what they are trying to do! The King responds (8-9), "I know you are stalling for time inasmuch as you have seen the command from me is firm, that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you (death). For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed – therefore tell me the dream that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation."

Commentators debate whether or not Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dream or not. One thing it for sure – anyone can come up with an interpretation for a dream – Nebuchadnezzar will trust no interpretation without first the dream revealed.

So the wise men give up – they admit (10-11) "there is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the King – and no king before you has ever asked such a thing of any magician, sorcerer or astrologer – the thing you ask is difficult / impossible. Only the gods could do such a thing – but their dwelling place is not with mortal flesh."

It is an impossible request – no person could ever fulfill it – only divine intervention could help– but the Babylonian gods did not dwell with humanity – they were useless.

You know at some point human knowledge ends. At some point the dead sheep livers could tell no more tales. All scientific discovery and knowledge came to a conclusion. The magicians and astrologers were at the end of their rope – end of the line. Not even the gods could help them.

Do you see what is happening. Do you see the set up. Like a pitcher with a 3-2 count, God has set up Nebuchadnezzar for an inside fast-ball. These people can't help – the gods can't help. Who is going to help? Who is going to solve the problem? In the wake of the spiritual failure of Babylonian gods – the True God is about to make an appearance! Nebuchadnezzar is set up to meet the true God of God and King of Kings. But we are not there yet...

Execution Ordered (12-13)

In light of the failure of his wise men and their gods – Nebuchadnezzar makes good on his threat to kill them – the execution order is given in verses 12-13, and we learn that Daniel and his friends were not part of the original group summoned to the King, but they, as part of the court, will be killed.

Daniel has just graduated from his three-year course in Babylonian culture. The “new guys” were probably not yet on the on-call list to be summoned to the King. And so the executioner comes to Daniel and we see Daniel's response in verses 14-30.

Daniels' Response (14-30)

Track with me to observe six facets of Daniel's response – six ways in which he demonstrated once again great wisdom and gives to us a model of how we might respond to an impossible situation.

First, verse his response to the executioner named Arioch is (14) **prudent**. He response with discretion and discernment – a measured and wise response. You have heard someone say – you are dressed tastefully. Of all the possible things you have worn – you choose well. The Hebrew word for Discernment was a culinary word – to taste different flavors and then distinguish between them. It became known as meaning a person who is discerning. The book of job says – does the ear test words, as the pallet tastes foods? Are you embroiled in a difficult situation where you need to act prudently? At work, with a neighbor? May God help us to have discretion and discernment this week.

His second response is to ask for **permission** (16). Sound familiar? This is the same thing he did in the first chapter – he does so again with more success than the other wise men – he gains time to work through the problem. Why was he successful when the others were not? It is like the old adage – a drop of honey will attract more bees than a barrel of vinegar. This is especially a good application for kids. Tammy and I have tried to instill in our children the importance of asking permission. Asking permission does several things. It shows respect for authority. It communicates that you are in community – and recognized we are interdependent. It is inherently humble, as you put yourself in submission to the other permission. Maybe there is something going on in your life today – which you need to consider asking permission?

The third response to the impossible problem is **prayer** verses 17-19. He gathers his three friends and they “request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.” Why –

so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed. The Sunday School answer would be so God gets glory, or so the King might prosper. This is what they call a *felt need*, and it is OK for them to want to stay alive. It is OK for you to want to have relief from financial pressure, or to improve your marriage, or to get a better handle on parenting your children. We have real needs – that can lift those to God in prayer.

Well, God answers their prayers over night the dream is revealed by God to Daniel. And so in 20-23 Daniel's fourth response is to give **praise** to God for answering their prayer. How often do we forget to stop and thank God – praise Him for answering prayer. Or we do so in a shallow way? This is a great reason to have a prayer journal – a place to write down prayers to the Lord and praises to Him when he answers. Here we have a beautiful prayer of praise to God – “Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removed Kings and establishes Kings.” What a great reminder for us.

Fifth – after thanking God Daniel is **prompt** to settle the matter, verses 24-25. After praising God Daniel says, “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the King's presence– and Arioch hurriedly brought them there.” It is interesting to study the concept of time in the Bible. God's time is not our time – He is often slower. But here – they needed an answer quickly – and they got it – and they move quickly to pass the information on. Sometimes slow is the path – and other times –you have to move on something quickly or you have lost the opportunity. God knows that – and in your life there are times God moves quickly and he expect you to, and times when God asks you to wait and you have to be patient. The wisdom is to know the difference. Don't wait if God is calling you to act, and don't act if God is calling you to wait.

Finally, sixth, verses 26-30, in response to the king's curiosity about Daniel's claim to know his dream, Daniel gives **proper credit** to God. He sounds a lot like the magicians – no one can tell a dream that has occurred, but there is a God who reveals mysteries – and He has made this known, verse 30, not because I have any more wisdom than anyone else, but because God has chosen to reveal himself now through me. God gets the credit, not Daniel for this revelation. That shows great character – when you are able to assign credit and glory to others and not exalt yourself.

Daniel is the paradigm of wisdom – Prudent, asks permission, prays, praises God, is prompt and gives the proper credit. I wonder which of these are on your mind today? There is much application here for you and I.

Conclusion / Application

But the lesson today is that a King had an impossible request – it was impossible for the wise men of Babylon – it was impossible for the false gods of Bablylon – but what is impossible with men – is very possible with God. I would like to end by sharing with you a poem I wrote for today's message - called "Impossible."

*Some things are impossible for women and men
Our knowledge and strength - both come to an end.*

*To tell a mountain - "Go into the sea!"
For a rich man to trust in God and believe?
For a woman so old to bear a new life,
To wash away sin from this dark world of strife?*

*These things are impossible – they just can't be done.
Unless we get help - from Jesus, God's Son.*

*God's power moves mountains with a simple command
The rich trust in Christ - not their wealth or their land.
"Nothing is impossible!" the angel proclaimed,*

And old Elizabeth gave birth – John was his name.

*Mary also gave birth to an impossible child.
God dwelling with us, in joy and in trial.
And the child grew up to do impossible things
The lame could now walk, the dumb could now sing!*

*But God came to die – “Impossible!” you say?
But He died for your sins when you went astray.
It was impossible, you see, for the blood of a lamb
To forgive all your sins – but Christ’s blood – **it can!***

*But yet there is one more impossible thing
It was impossible for death to hold onto our king
With power and glory, Jesus rose from the dead
And He lives now today – he did just as he said.*

*Our lesson today is that impossible things
Are indeed possible – with the help that God brings!*

Let’s Pray