



Desperate Faith

Daniel 2:1-30

Have you seen any episodes of the TV show called Undercover Boss? This is the show where CEO's of large companies work undercover in their own companies to get a taste of what the average employee goes through on a daily basis. The concept is a good one, I think, because how many times have you thought that your boss needs to walk in your shoes for a week to see what it's really like. I only watched one full episode and the owner happened to be a strong believer. When he wasn't sneaking around his own company disguised as an average Joe, they showed him in his home praying with his family and talking about his spiritual values. At the end of the show he gave a \$50,000 franchise to one of his managers as a reward for his hard work.

We can wish that we all had bosses like this man but the truth is that all of us struggle in the workplace from time to time. And when I say "workplace" I mean whatever it is that God has called you to do right now—that is, your vocation. We have lost sight of this important word—*vocation*, which literally means "a calling." Your vocation or your calling will include the sphere in which you spend the most time. For most of you this will be the workplace, your job. For others your calling is in the home as a mother, wife and for some, a homeschool teacher. Still others have a current vocation as a student. If you are in third grade or pursuing a college degree, your current vocation is that of a student.

Let me make a very important distinction here. Your vocation is not your purpose in life. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, your purpose is to bring glory to the Father in all that you do but your vocation is the arena in which you fulfill your purpose. Do you see the difference? We get really confused and frustrated when we think our calling is our purpose. If you think that your purpose in life is to be a welder or plumber, or whatever pays the bills right now—whatever is your primary calling—I can guarantee you that you will live much of your life dissatisfied and

will see only the daily grind of your job. But if your purpose is to bring glory to the Lord through your vocation, then it doesn't matter what your vocation is and in the end, it doesn't matter if the circumstances of your vocation is good or bad.

In the second chapter of Daniel we will begin to see Daniel play out his calling and his purpose and in the process I think we will find several applications to our own calling and purpose in life.

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. 2 Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." 4 Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. 6 But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation." 7 They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation." 8 The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm— 9 if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation." 10 The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. 11 The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." 12 Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. 13 So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. 14 Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. 15 He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. 16 And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

17 Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, 18 and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 19 Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.

*21 He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;
22 he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.*

*23 To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise,
for you have given me wisdom and might,*

and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter."

24 Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation." 26 The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" 27 Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: 29 To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. 30 But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

Like most of the book of Daniel, this is a familiar story to most of us but the details are fascinating. First I want to focus on Nebuchadnezzar. One unique thing about Nebuchadnezzar is that out of all of the pagan and evil kings throughout Scripture, he receives more attention than anyone with the possible exception of Pharaoh in Moses' day. He is a key player in almost half of the book so the Lord must have wanted us to understand the importance of his role. So we begin with Nebuchadnezzar's vocation.

Nebuchadnezzar fits the classic role of a mad scientist—a person who is brilliant but is also borderline insane. I can guarantee you that if you think your boss is bad, he or she doesn't hold a candle to the king of Babylon. Of course it all started with that dream of his. It was an extremely vivid and troubling dream, one that kept him awake all night. That's the first clue to trouble—the king was exhausted. If I don't get enough sleep, my grumpiness factor rises up the scale pretty fast so that was part of the issue, but not the heart of the matter. God gave the king this dream and it troubled him greatly.

Now if you or I have one of those nasty, crazy dreams, chances are that we would be troubled when we woke up but we wouldn't spend much time trying to figure out what it all meant. If the flying pink elephant in your dream sat down and had a conversation about your favorite flavor of ice cream and then he began chasing you through the forest and you fell off of a cliff, that would be more or less standard fare for us. We might share the dream with our family at the breakfast table but that would probably be the end of it.

But Nebuchadnezzar lived in a culture where dreams were very significant and the content and power of this dream pressed mightily upon the king. He was convinced that it was extremely important—and he was right! The king didn't know that God had given him the dream but he did know that it was very important. But since he was a pagan and did not know the Lord, his solution to the problem was a pagan solution. He called in the Dream Team, which in this case, was not a bunch of Olympic basketball players but literally a dream team—a team of magicians,

astrologers and enchanters who were expected to interpret his dream. Any guesses as to where these men received their training? They most likely graduated from the same training program that Daniel went through. Since dreams were very important in this culture it was also very important to have reliable dream interpreters on your staff. This was just common sense. If you own a car repair clinic then it is imperative that you have good quality mechanics on your employee team.

Do you get the sense that the king had much confidence in his dream team? Here's the tricky part. If you believe that dreams have great significance then it follows that you must have good dream interpreters and certainly the king would have had the best in the land, in his mind. But you get the feeling that the dream team produced a mixed bag of success. They probably did the same thing that so-called dream interpreters do today. They had a sort of manual of dream interpretation where certain objects were associated with a particular meaning. In fact, such scrolls have been found in the ancient world.

We all know what the typical astrology reading looks like, don't we? Astrology is kind of like opening a Chinese fortune cookie. The advice is of such a general nature that it could apply to most anyone in any circumstance. Astrology predictions use general categories like relationships, money and jobs that can be massaged to apply to anyone. The power of these predictions always lies in the level of belief of the one reading them. If your worldview tells you that the astrology prediction you read in the newspaper are usually very accurate, then you will tend to put a lot of significance in them. The same was true for Nebuchadnezzar and his dream team must have done a fairly good job at dream interpretation, but not so good that he had full confidence in them.

So he devised an impossible demand—first tell me the details of my dream and then tell me the interpretation. It would have been an impossible demand but what made it borderline insane was the punishment of death for failure. Didn't I tell you that your worst boss is a thousand times better than this guy?!

Though the king's demand sounds like the raving of a mad man, a request so cruel, unusual and severe, it is also brilliant in its quest for truth. Nebuchadnezzar obviously depended on his wise men for advice and counsel but he also must have known that they were not always trustworthy and prone to false interpretations. His demand or test would have immediately gotten to the heart of the matter. Or we could say that the brilliant part had to do with how he planned to find the truth, but he could have stopped with handsome rewards for the one who could tell him both his dream and the interpretation. In one sense, the king was seeking after "the truth." He did not want more hocus pocus, mumbo jumbo, boiler plate dream interpretation. But the crazy part entered in when he promised death and dismemberment to those who failed. The dream team understandably responded like they did in verse eleven. *No one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.*

Should you and I attach much significance to our own dreams? A few weeks ago I dreamt that Ethan hit a two run home run on his little league team. Early in the season he wasn't hitting that well so I thought that would be cool if he could do that. Just for fun, I mentioned the dream to him that morning before his game. His second at bat was a nice long hit into the outfield and he took off running the bases. He rounded third plate and headed for home but got caught in a

pickle between third base and home plate and was eventually tagged out. I guess you could say that my dreams don't have any significance, right? However, at his very next at bat he hit a solo home run. So this must mean that I my dreams can predict the future, right? ☺ All that this story illustrates is that how easily we see what we want to see.

We do have to be careful because I would not want to say that God never speaks through our dreams. In his first sermon in Acts, Peter quoted from the prophet Joel. *And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams* (Acts 2:17). We are most certainly in the last days so we can assume that dreams and visions could possibly be a part of the way in which God will guide his children in the same way that he can speak to us through prophecy, preaching or another believer. But a word of warning in regard to being guided by your dreams. Never listen to your dreams or any other advice or counsel if it goes against the clear teaching of Scripture. God cannot possibly reveal new revelation that we never had before through a dream. Furthermore, what you follow from a given dream may not be sinful but it may also not be God's will for your life. So in summary, it is possible that God could guide you through a dream. I would not be dogmatic about this point, but I would be extremely careful about it. Furthermore, dream interpretation is not the most important message of this passage.

Daniel's response can be broken down into nine parts and all of them can teach us about God and how this applies to our vocation and purpose in life.

Searched for information—The first thing Daniel did was to seek information and gather the facts. *Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon (14)*. How many conflicts and trouble could be prevented if we simply took our time and gathered facts about a situation? How much gossip could be avoided if we went directly to the source of an issue instead of talking to everyone else about it?

Engaged in respectful dialogue—in the process of gathering the facts, Daniel spoke with prudence and discretion. This is amazing to me since Daniel would still have been a teenager at this time yet he was able to speak to the chief executioner with gentleness and respect. This is one of those lessons that far too many adults have yet to learn. I heard a story of a conflict in a church congregational meeting. The church had been going through some struggles and at the meeting one of the members stood up and said to the elders, "Are we about done with several years of secret meetings"? That was really harsh but the sad part of the story is that the man who said this actually had some really good and helpful things to say but he did not know how to say them with Daniel's prudence and discretion.

Sought wise counsel—*Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions (17)*. You could say that Daniel was seeking wise counsel but in effect he was enlisting his prayer partners. The king sought out pagan counsel and pagan dream interpretation because he was a pagan but how much more should believers seek out one another in times of need.

Petitioned for mercy from heaven—*seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.* This was arguably the most important step that Daniel took. The king has issued an impossible demand. Even the dream team knew it was an impossible task for the minds of men. *The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.*” God did not yet make his dwelling in flesh but he was no less with them. Daniel had all confidence that the answer was a mere prayer away. He knew that God could reveal the mystery but he had no guarantee that he would do so.

But Daniel and his friends did not merely pray. They **prayed until they received an answer**—*Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.* (19). There is a perseverance in prayer that yields results. God wants us to learn perseverance but also perseverance in prayer—an ongoing, moment by moment dependency. Daniel and his friends were more desperate than we usually are because their very lives depended on receiving an answer but in reality, we are no less dependent. In fact, our lack of desperation hides our dependency. In other words, since we don’t feel desperate neither do we feel dependent.

Certain of God’s character—Daniel spoke a beautiful psalm of praise but like it was in this psalm, all psalms of praise are based on the character of God. We praise God for who he is and what he has done. *“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21 He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; 22 he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.* How do you think Nebuchadnezzar would have liked this prayer? Daniel testified that God removes kings and sets up kings so this is language of sedition. This is not the kind of words you speak to a crazy king but it is precisely the kind of language you use in describing the sovereign Lord.

Expressed attitude of thankfulness—*23 To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king’s matter.*” Daniel’s character is sharply contrasted with Nebuchadnezzar’s. The king’s massive kingdom was matched only by his massive pride and in chapter four we will see his massive humiliation as a result. The king was unable to express thankfulness because he was dependent on no one, he claimed that he had built his kingdom on his own.

Witnessed to the supreme power of God—*“Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” 27 Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.* Daniel’s confession of God’s power is surprising for more reason than one. First, if there was ever an opportunity for self-promotion, this would have been the chance of a lifetime. Daniel could have told the king what he wanted to hear and then let the rewards come flowing into his life. But he did not do this. He not only did not take credit but he denied any hint that the answer had come from him. He gave all of the credit to God alone.

We need to understand the boldness of Daniel’s words here. In effect, he was saying to the king, “Your pagan religion is worthless.” No one else in the entire kingdom could do what the Lord

did through Daniel. This was very risky for Daniel because his success brought condemnation upon every other pagan god and pagan magician and enchanter. In one sense, Daniel's success could have been his undoing if the king had taken offense at the superiority of Daniel's God.

But on the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar was a pragmatist at heart. I get the sense that the king did was only interested in finding the most powerful god and he did not really care which god that turned out to be. This is why he devised the insane plan in the first place. Nebuchadnezzar obviously had doubts about the abilities of those in his own court. The king did not want to waste his time with pretenders. He was seeking after real power from a real god.

Ex. Our own form of Christian pragmatism...

Demonstrated humility—*this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living (30)* At this point in time, Daniel is about 17-18 years old. This is probably the point in the life of a teenage boy when they typically expressed the least amount of humility. This is especially true when a teenage boy have great success which makes it all the more difficult to be truly humble and Daniel's humility all the more remarkable.

I hope that you see the link between humility thankfulness. One always leads to the other. Each one builds up the other. If you asked me which comes first I think I would have to say humility because how can you be truly thankful unless you realize that everything you are and everything you have has come from the Lord. However, practicing thankfulness can also develop your humility.

How does all of this apply to your vocation and purpose in life? God certainly does call us to specific vocations but I think overall we need to be less concerned about what we do and more concerned about how we do it. Daniel no doubt had a specific plan for his life. He was part of the royal, noble class of Judah. He lived a life of luxury and his future vocation certainly included being part of the king's court and using his gifts for his home country. Had Daniel risen to become king of Judah, he would have been on par with King David in terms of his godliness and character. However, God sovereign plan took him in a different direction. Daniel could have bemoaned the fact that his life was a mess and nothing turned out the way he had planned.

But instead, he focused on his actual vocation. God had called him to a life of service in a foreign land under a foreign king. It didn't really matter what he did or where he did it. What really mattered was how he fulfilled his vocation. In a similar way, your vocation is not so much about what you are doing with your life but how you are doing it.

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