

# Wisdom and Power are His

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Just as we're getting going, let me ask you a question. What could you buy today with £20,000? While you're thinking on it, let me take you to the city that's in the east of Estonia called Tartu.

Has anyone ever been to Estonia? Yep, two people have been. Excellent. Love Estonia. I don't know why. I think there was a 90s footballer that I loved from Estonia. I've always had a fascination with the country ever since.

It's Tartu, a country, Estonia, a country that before it got its independence in 1991, was under the control of the Soviet Union. A union whose first leader was a man called Vladimir Lenin.

Now there he is on the screen. And what they did right throughout the union is that they put up these statues of Lenin all over the place in order to let everybody know who's in charge.

So in Tartu, they put up this 11-foot statue of him right in the middle of the city square so that all the locals walking past would be under no illusions in terms of who was in charge in Tartu and in Estonia.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] Well, in 1997, years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the city of Tartu, seeking to raise some public funds, put that statue on sale with a reserved price of £9,000.

Now £9,000 today, £9,000 then is about £20,000 today. So if you felt so inclined and your little garden gnome at the front of your garden was feeling a bit lonely, that could have been yours for about £9,000.

Now what is the point? The point is, in words often attributed to 18th century British writer Percy Shelley, is that the earth is littered with the ruins of empires that once believed they were eternal.

Take that in. The earth is littered with ruins of empires that once believed they were eternal. Now maybe you're here today and the present feels a bit rudderless for you.

You look out and it's a big scary world. Climate change, international tensions, corrupt leaders. It was really interesting seeing people's responses to that survey that we put out at the end of last week's sermon.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] And we're going to do the same at the end of this week's sermon as well. Just to hear about the things that are worrying us in the present as God's people. Maybe you're here today and your present feels rudderless.

Or maybe you're here today and if you're honest, your future feels ominous. You don't know what's up ahead. You don't know what's going on in your life. Maybe you're at a junction in your life and you're not sure if you can keep on going.

Well, if that's you here today, and I take it we're all in that mixture somewhere. If that's you here today, then this is all about what the God of the Bible has done to secure our capital F futures.

What he's done in Christ to secure that. And what the Bible always encourages us to do is to grasp hold of what our God has done for us in Christ to secure the future. And as it were, work backwards.

Because this reality has to impact the way that we make decisions in this life. What we do in this life and where we invest ourselves in this life. Knowing that the God of the Bible has the future sorted.

[ 3 : 34 ] The point of Daniel 2 is to tell all of the world where history is heading. And it all centers around the only kingdom that will never be toppled.

And let me take us to the theological truth that's right at the heart of this chapter. And if you're looking for one key verse to get you into this chapter, it comes at verse 20.

Where Daniel praises God for revealing the dream. And he declares this about God. He says, wisdom and power are yours. And so the big word that is right at the heart of this chapter is omniscience.

God of the Bible is omniscient. Now don't be freaked out by that word. Just break it down. Think of omni. Got the omni center down there at the bottom of Leith Walk. Omni just means all.

And scient, that's the Latin word for knowledge. That's where we get our English word science from. So omniscient just means that God is all-knowing. He is all-wise.

[ 4 : 35 ] He is the God who declares the end from the beginning. He is the God who has a monopoly on knowing the future. And while every other rival kingdom rises, at the end of the day, it will fade like the grass and only his will remain.

Now let me just say we can trust a God like this. Because if he was wise but he had no power, he would be pathetic.

But if he had all power without wisdom to come to this God, he would be frightening. But in this God, boundless wisdom and endless power are united together.

And that is what makes him worthy of our fullest trust. And that's the message that's being declared to the world. Because blink and you might miss the little detail at verse 4.

Have a look at it there. Because what changes now in the book of Daniel, and this runs all the way through to the end of chapter 7. What changes is the language that it's written in.

[ 5 : 44 ] We move from Hebrew to Aramaic. Now why is that significant? It's significant because that is the language of the everyday person on the street.

It's the language that as many people in the world as possible can understand. And so what's going on is that the writer of Daniel is saying this is a message that is not just for God's people.

This is a message for the entire world to hear, to know, and to respond to. This is a big news message for the nations of the world. And it's a good news message for the nations of the world.

And so it makes to us two really simple invitations, this passage. And if you take anything from today, take these two invitations home with you.

Here's the first one. And the first invitation is not to overestimate the power of the world. And that's verses 1 to 30. We get back into Babylon at verse 1.

[ 6 : 45 ] And Daniel and his friends, we have to understand, they've just graduated from the University of Babylon. So that three-year period of them being educated in the language of the Chaldeans, that is past.

They've graduated from the University of Babylon. And we learn a bit more about this man, Nebuchadnezzar. I don't know if you noticed it when you read it through. What kind of man is this who is the king?

This man who is deeply religious and superstitious. In fact, if you go to the British Museum in London, you'll find a tablet with an inscription of a prayer that this man, Nebuchadnezzar, made to his god, Marduk.

So he's a deeply religious man. And we've got historical evidence to show us that. But what we learn specifically about him here is that he's a highly ambitious man.

So he's about 30 years old as we hit Daniel chapter 2. And he's on top of the world. He's at the top of his game.

[ 7 : 49 ] He's ruling the world's most powerful empire. He has everything at his disposal. And he's hungry, not just for more power, but he's really hungry and wanting to control that power.

It's what power does to people, doesn't it? It changes them. It corrupts them. They want to keep it. They don't want to lose it. I always love that in Lord of the Rings. I always think Tolkien gets that so right when he talks about the one ring to rule them all.

Doesn't he? That's what the ring does. It darkens the mind, makes them suspicious of everyone else. And that's what power is doing to this man, Nebuchadnezzar.

And yet, isn't it funny that all the power and influence are his. And yet he is a surprisingly helpless man. There's a deep irony in the fact that Nebuchadnezzar is named after the Babylonian god of wisdom called Nabu.

And it's a great irony that he has one dream. And at verse one, not only does this bring on insomnia, but it sends him into a spiral of paranoia.

[ 9 : 01 ] And as many of you pointed out to me last week, there's a Putin-esque streak to him, isn't there? He's deeply suspicious of his personal advisors, of his personal cabinet, of the advisors and the astrologers, the best of the best in this part of the world, in this day, who he's gathered around him to advise him.

And he accuses them, verse five, of trying to pull the intellectual wool over his eyes. And he knows that he's asking the impossible of his counselors. Did you notice that?

Because he wants them not just to tell him the interpretation of the dream. He wants them to tell him the dream itself. I've never played that game around the breakfast table with my kids.

I've always played it. What did you dream about last night? But I've never sat there and tried to guess the dreams. But that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar is asking of his advisors. Do you see this man?

He's deeply suspicious. He doesn't want to give away control or power. No wonder they say, verse 11, this is too difficult for us. Only the gods could reveal this to us.

[ 10 : 08 ] And with that, they're bang on, aren't they? But here is the most powerful man in the world, surrounded by the cleverest people in the world. And do you see how they're completely in the dark when it comes to predicting the future?

And here I think is what we're supposed to understand and maybe even ask ourselves as the readers to this. That maybe real power in this world doesn't lie where we think it does.

And verse 18, they, which I take it is the counselors, they seek out Daniel and his friends, presumably to bring them in on this killing act as well. And notice that Daniel, the first thing that he does when he hears this news, verse 17, do you see it?

He doesn't call a cobra strategy meeting. He gathers his friends and he calls a prayer meeting. Do you see that? There is a lovely, non-anxious presence in Babylon about Daniel.

Non-anxious. And it's not just because he's a cool customer. It's not because he's learned to kind of keep life all together. Because if that was the case, I don't think any of us would be able to stand.

[ 11 : 22 ] And this is all because of who he knows he can turn to in a crisis. The world around about him is panicking, but Daniel is praying.

It's wonderful, isn't it? The world around about him is panicking, but Daniel is praying. And let me just encourage us not to underestimate what God can do with your non-anxious presence in the midst of your workplace and your friends and your family.

When people freak out and you're not freaking out, don't underestimate the power of that witness. I've got a friend, Andy Patterson, who was the mission director of the FIEC for years, worked at Charlotte Chapel.

He's written a great book on evangelism called Ready Evangelism for Everyone. And he just says really simply this. He says, Let me encourage us this morning to play the long game when it comes to evangelism.

You want to take that book? I'll give it away this morning. Please come and grab me. Taught me wonderful things this week about playing the long game when it comes to loving our friends and family and our work colleagues well.

[ 12 : 43 ] But you see how there's a lovely non-anxious presence about Daniel. And at some point, God, and at verse 19 we get this, he reveals this dream to Daniel.

And Daniel gives him all the praise and the glory. And he praises the God who is all wisdom and power. And he quickly seeks out Ariok, who is the leader of the astrologers.

And here are the crux of what Daniel says to Ariok at verse 28. He says this. He says, There is a God in heaven. There is a God in heaven. And that's the message to the world.

That this God is a revealer. That without him, we are clueless as to what life is all about and what's up ahead. We really, really are.

We are clueless. This God is a revealer. Let me just tell you the phrase not to say when you go to the doctors. It's just before I came to see you, I read something on the internet.

[ 13 : 51 ] Let me give you a clue as to what not to say to pastors when you go to see them. Just before I came to see you, I read something on the internet. Because I do this all the time. And what our smartphones do to us in this age is that they convince us that we are omniscient.

That we are actually all knowing. We've got all this knowledge at our disposal. We've got all the information that we could ever possibly want. And what this convinces us of so often is the fact that we can become overnight experts in just about anything.

Did COVID not just prove that? All of a sudden, you didn't need to have an hour worth of medical training in your life. And all of a sudden, you could become an expert into how the country should be handling this.

Friends, let's not overrate our ability to navigate our way through life. Counterintuitively, there is wonderful freedom to be found in not just acknowledging, but resting in the truth.

That whilst we are swimming in information, we are shallow on wisdom. It's a wonderful lesson for us there to both learn and to rest.

[ 15 : 08 ] And we are called to be spiritual Benjamin Buttons. You ever seen that film? It's kind of weird. But it's a good one. This man that as he grows up, he actually becomes younger.

And once you get your head around that concept and how it works, you all of a sudden begin to see, actually, there's a lesson for the disciple of Jesus caught up in that, isn't it? That the older we get, the more we go on in the Christian life, the more like spiritual dependent children we should look.

You know, the people that have made the biggest impact to me over the years are the people I can look at and say, You are way more intelligent than I will ever be. You've thought about things for years and years. And yet when you are asked a question, you are not scared to say the phrase, I don't know.

I don't know. And this invites us to come and admit that we don't know the future, but to place ourselves in the hands of the God who does.

Why has this dream been revealed to Daniel? Do you see him there say it in verse 30? Not because of any wisdom I have, and that should be our attitude. Not because of any wisdom I have, but so that you would know that the God alone, he reveals mysteries.

[ 16 : 25 ] And ultimately that's true, isn't it? In the gospel, we need this God to reveal to us how it works. Who we are, who he is, what our biggest problem is. And the only way that we can be reconciled to this God, it only happens because this God has revealed the truth to us.

This God is a revealer, and this teaches us not to overestimate the power of the world and our own abilities. But the second thing it does is it invites us not to underestimate the wisdom of God.

Don't overestimate the power of the world. Don't underestimate the wisdom of God. And with this, we take in from verse 31 right to the end of the chapter. And Daniel describes this great image, this mighty statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream.

Imagine that, it's terrifying. Right, dreams freak me out the best of times, but to have a dream like that? This statue, this massive statue with layers to it?

And it's not like Nebuchadnezzar's had too much cheese before going to sleep, is it? There's a purpose behind this dream. And the key thing to this, see to this, is to see that this is the all-knowing, all-wise God telling the world how the future is going to pan out.

[ 17 : 37 ] Now, we're not told specifically in this passage what the different parts of the statue are. You have to wait to get a later on in the book to learn them. But you can read it back in and understand that these different parts, they represent different successive kingdoms that are going to come.

So we have the head of gold there, verse 38. That is the Babylonian Empire. Again, like last week, notice the Lord giving language of verse 37.

Do you see it? Nebuchadnezzar, you're king, not because you've played a blinder. You are king because God has given you power and the kingdom. And you can imagine Nebuchadnezzar loved hearing the fact that he was the head of gold.

You can imagine this is a great start to him being told the interpretation of the dream. What a start. But you work your way down from the head of gold. The chest and the arms of silver are the Medes and the Persians.

They're the kingdom that's going to come after Babylon. The kingdom of bronze, verse 39, is the Greek Empire that's going to come after that. Led by Alexander the Great.

[ 18 : 41 ] If you know your history, that's the man who famously wept, apparently, because there were no more lands for him to conquer. It's a lovely thing to say, isn't it? Fourth kingdom, verse 40, you can make a good case for saying that this represents Rome.

But for now, see the point in this, that the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things. It's always how we should understand and interpret our Bibles. What's the main thing here?

The main thing is for the world to understand that such is the extent of the omniscience of God that he declares things to have happened before they've even happened.

And supremely, he declares that all the kingdoms of the world will be shattered by the kingdom that he establishes. Do you see that little stone that crops up there at verse 34?

This stone that was cut by no human hands. This stone which is going to be the way that God establishes his kingdom and it's going to be one that lasts forever.

[ 19 : 47 ] And it all focuses on this little stone. This unimpressive looking stone. This tiny little stone. Not gold, not bronze, not silver.

This little stone. And it tells you something, doesn't it? That such is God's wisdom that he is going to establish his kingdom not by power and by might, but by his wisdom.

And yet, make no mistake that this is the kingdom that's going to shatter all of the rest. And some 600 years after the events of Daniel, an angel would appear to this teenage virgin girl in Bethlehem and tell her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her and the baby that would be born to her, his kingdom will have no end.

And in many places in the Gospels, you see Jesus refer to himself as the stone. He is the stone that the builders rejected that has become the precious cornerstone.

It's just the first one, the first stone to be laid in the building of a huge temple. That he is going to be the stone of stumbling. That we will just be walking down.

[ 21 : 07 ] You've had that experience, just walking, running down the road and all of a sudden you clip and you fall. You've hit the stone, you've hit over something. That's the image there. He's going to be the stone of stumbling when it comes to understanding how we can be right with God.

That's why people reject him because they don't want to come to God on his terms. And it's fascinating, isn't it? You can't help but draw this conclusion and this comparison.

When you look at King Nebuchadnezzar and how he is, his character, his anger, his fury, his desperation to keep control, you cannot help but contrast him to the king of this stone kingdom and how he uses power.

I think it's one of the most endearing things about Jesus as you read about him in the Gospels is how he uses power and how he uses it to serve and to save people, not to lord it over people.

That's what he'll say to his disciples in Matthew 20, if you want to go away and look at it there. He says that when they're arguing over who is the greatest, when they're thinking about how we get on top of each other to reach the top, he says, no, no, no, the lords of the Gentiles rule over people.

[ 22 : 16 ] But then he has that phrase, not so with you. this king will win, not by might and by right, this king will win by sacrifice.

And through his death and resurrection, God establishes that king and he sets him on his holy hill and he declares to the world, in my wisdom, I have established my king and I've set him there.

And he's done it through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And he's building his kingdom. And this is what I want you to understand this morning. By grace, if your faith is in this, Jesus, by grace, we who have believed have been brought into this kingdom.

And with millions of others down the ages, right across the nations, in Jesus Christ, we have a ruler who will never be toppled from his throne. And one day, this Christ will return and bring in the consummation of his kingdom.

He will come and he will return and he will reign and all wrongs will be put to right. And if that is where history is heading, towards this unshakable kingdom, then friends, we can walk into the future with a God like this.

[ 23 : 34 ] If we know that by grace and through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that we have been given an unshakable kingdom, then no matter what is going on in your life today, you can know that that is how your story is going to end.

You know, just as we close and just to maybe help us think about the application of this passage, let me just tell you about two older men in this church family.

And just to save any embarrassment, we'll just call them Keiko and Marley, okay? And I went to visit Marley recently and he was telling me how he often phones Keiko. And he tells me how the two of them are just, they have a laugh on the phone and they joke about the fact that they're not as fit and as able as they used to be.

And Keiko always ends by asking, sorry, Marley always ends by asking Keiko, what are you up to for the rest of the day? And he just replies, he says, I'll just be here.

I'll just be waiting on the sound. And what he means by that, he's talking about the sound of the trumpet, the sound that will announce the return of the Lord Jesus. And what takes that from being a cute story to a powerful testimony is when you know what those guys have been through in their lives.

[ 24 : 51 ] You know what they've been through, some serious stuff in their lives. And yet I listened to him tell me that story and I thought, thank you, brother, for convincing me that you are fully convinced that at the end of the day there's only one kingdom worth waiting for.

There's only one kingdom worth investing yourself in. There's only one kingdom that's going to stand in the end. And no matter how hard it gets in this life, that will never be taken from us.

That unshakable kingdom that by grace we have been ushered into by this stone king. And so we wait for him.

Let's just close in prayer and I'll close with these words from Isaiah 64. From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear. No eye has seen a God besides you who acts for those who wait for him.

And so Lord, we just thank you this morning for the wonderful truth that the kingdom that Jesus has established will never be shaken. And so Lord, I pray, particularly as we turn to communion now, that you would help raise the eyes of our hearts to him in all his beauty and majesty.

[ 26 : 10 ] Be with us, Father, as we journey on this morning. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen.