

God alone knows, God alone reigns

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, your word is living and active.! Now picture this.

You just hit send on a message, a message that matters. It could be your job application, the one that you've spent weeks perfecting. It could be a pitch for a project you've poured your heart into.

Or maybe it's an email to your doctor about a troubling symptom. Or maybe after days of pep talks and sleepless nights, you finally decided to find out how that person you like really feels about you.

But now you're waiting. Actually, it's probably more accurate to say you're sweating. Because you don't know what's coming.

Will I land that role or not? Is this symptom serious or not? If they don't like me back, am I even likable or not?

[1 : 28] Your future is this great big unknown. It is all a great big mystery. And you can't help but feel this great big knot in your stomach as you ponder what's ahead.

You see, the unknown future has a way of unsettling us, doesn't it? When we don't know how our health, our finances, our relationships, our studies or our kids will turn out.

When we can't even see the next step on our own path, anxiety starts to creep in. Because an uncertain future feels threatening.

That's why we worry. It's why we grasp for little ways to feel like we're in control. It's why we might obsess over health articles telling us which vitamins to take.

Or keep refreshing the weather forecasts or traffic updates. Because somewhere deep down, we tell ourselves, The more I know, the more I can shape my future.

[2 : 37] And brothers and sisters, that craving isn't new. Babylon knew it well too. Yes, in many ways, their world was a far cry from ours.

Diaz was a world with no books, no internet, no satellites. But at the heart level, they were just like us.

For as we will see in a moment, even the mighty Babylonian king feared the unknown. He hated the idea of not knowing what was coming.

He too wanted control. And those fears are what Daniel too will address today. You see, this morning, our passage is going to answer a crucial question.

When the future is unknown and even threatening, where do we find our safe harbor? Daniel too reveals that there is only one place to drop anchor in God himself.

[3 : 45] Because he alone knows the future. And he alone reigns over it. That is the one big truth we will unpack today.

But before we get to that, the Bible also wants to make the opposite point very clear right from the start. That is, we don't know, for we do not reign.

That is our first point today from verses 1 to 13. We don't know, for we do not reign. Our story begins with Nebuchadnezzar, and let us not forget who he is.

This is the king of Babylon. And his era is considered the Babylonian Golden Age. It's not hard to see why. After all, this is the guy who went up against the Egyptians and the Assyrians and successfully defeated both.

This is the guy who has the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, on his CV. So this is the number one guy of the number one superpower in the world.

[5 : 00] But here's the irony. He can't even get a good night's sleep. Verse 1 tells us he has vivid dreams.

Dreams that cause him to toss and to turn and wake up in a cold sweat. And that reminds us, doesn't it, that human power is never as great as we think.

You could be someone with vast armies at your command, and yet be someone who can't even control what goes on in your own head when the lights go out.

But why has this dream got King Nebuchadnezzar's heart thumping? Because this dream seems to be about his future. You see, Babylonian and traditional Iban culture have this in common.

In traditional Iban culture, dreams are often seen as real events. For example, the Sarawakian writer, Goda Mowi, tells us one legend of a man named Uyud Anad Kalanang who dreamed that he received a charm to become a great war leader.

[6 : 14] And when he woke up, the charm was right there in his hand. And Babylonian culture viewed dreams in very much the same light. They believed dreams could literally spew over into the real world because they were messages from the gods.

And Nebuchadnezzar isn't stupid. He knows that this massive statue in his dream must mean something big. What if that statue is him? If this dream becomes reality, it means some stone is going to come crashing down on his kingdom.

So, are the gods perhaps warning him of some coming rebellion? Some assassination plot? The king has no idea. And that's the point.

He simply doesn't know. Even though he's a king, the future remains a total mystery to him. And that, more than anything, is what's keeping him up at night.

But that doesn't stop him from trying to find out. After all, he is king, right? He has resources. He has the best astrology department in town.

[7 : 36] So, verse 2, he summons them. And verse 4, they swagger in with their smart business suits and polished smiles, saying, Oh, you caught your majesty?

No problem. Tell us your dream. We will tell you what it means. But now the king throws an unexpected bombshell.

Verse 5. Actually, don't just interpret the dream for me. Tell me the very dream itself.

Otherwise, there's going to be a very nasty end for all of you. But if you do succeed, then a fat bonus and a duttog ship is calling your name.

So what are you waiting for? Tell me. And suddenly, all these cocky astrologers began to break in a sweat. Because guess what?

[8 : 35] This is way beyond their skill set. They don't remember the lecturers covering any of this at astrology college. I mean, up to this point, all your clients have told them what the dream was.

And then they, not wisely, they flip through their dream manuals and confidently give an answer. But to figure out someone's dream without them saying a word?

Impossible. You see, even the best of the world's wisdom has limits. There is no way to know what isn't revealed.

But hey, they are the best in town, right? So they need to save face. And they try to buy time by doing what we all do when the boss gives us an impossible task.

Pretend we didn't hear. And so verse 7, once more they replied, Let the king tell his servants the dream and we will interpret it.

[9 : 41] Your majesty, let's just follow the normal protocol, okay? But this only makes the king angrier, verses 8 and 9. He thunders.

Stop trying to blow smoke into my eyes. Do you guys know? Or do you not? If you don't, you are so doomed. And of course, they don't.

They are doomed. But why is he so insistent, you might wonder? Aren't the astrologers making a reasonable request?

But you see, it turns out Nebuchadnezzar has figured something out. Anyone can make up some meaning for a dream if they are clever enough.

Just because you can give an interpretation doesn't mean you have actual supernatural insight. And so given that his dream seems to be about his future, he must be satisfied they are telling the truth.

[10 : 50] He must test them. If he is to trust what they say, they must tell him something only he could possibly know.

The dream itself. Only then will he be convinced they have divine knowledge and insight. But now the astrologers then expose.

For what are we now seeing? We are seeing the limits of human knowledge and wisdom. So far, no one actually knows anything. The king doesn't, which is why he has used his authority to summon all these so-called wise men.

But these astrologers, turns out they don't really know either. And they are forced to admit as much. Verses 10 and 11. There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks.

No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult.

[12 : 02] No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans. And that is the key lesson of this opening scene.

We don't know, for we don't reign. None of us are God. And so we can't read minds, neither can we map out the future.

These are things that belong to God alone. There is a realm of knowledge and wisdom that is inaccessible to us unless God chooses to reveal it.

Now, of course, we can try to reach for such knowledge. Isn't that what King Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do throughout these first 11 verses?

That's why he invested so much time in training these astrologers and magicians. And isn't that true still today? That's why people still pay good money to go and see the Bomors and the Manangs and the fortune tellers.

[13 : 07] Or, if we think we are above such superstition, that's why we pay good money to listen to the political commentators, the economic forecasters, and the cultural analysts.

Because they all claim, in one way or another, to map out the future. They are paid to tell us, here is what is going to happen, so here's what you need to do.

But here is the plain truth. Although Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful king, in the end, his power is limited. He may have invested deeply in his department of astrology, but ironically, he doesn't ultimately trust the end product.

Indeed, he ends up so fragile and paranoid, verse 12, he orders them all to be executed. But what is the point of this display of power?

It still doesn't solve his problem. He is still left with his deep-seated anxiety. Powerful as he is, he cannot know.

[14 : 23] You see, this is what we must remember. Whoever you think is the most powerful or wisest person today, the Donald Trumps or the Elon Musk, even they are mere mortals.

Even they don't have access to all the answers about whatever tomorrow might bring. Indeed, history shows us that whenever we try to predict the future, we often get it badly wrong.

Take Henry Morton, the head of a technological institute in the 19th century, for instance. Now, when the light bulb was invented, what did he say?

Ah, everyone acquainted with this light bulb will recognize it as a conspicuous failure. Oops. Or take the banker, who a century ago boldly proclaimed, ah, the car is just a fad, the horse is here to stay.

Double oops. The reality is, no matter how smart we are or how much information we consume, we cannot map out or control the future.

[15 : 39] And it isn't a weakness, it's just a function of the fact that we are creatures, not the creator. We do not reign. So when it comes to facing the unknown future, that is the first step we must take.

We must acknowledge we don't hold our own futures in our hands. Now, of course, that's exactly why we then get anxious, isn't it?

But thankfully, as we read on in the story, we discover, we can say, praise God, because he alone does know.

That's our second point for today, from verses 14 to 29. Praise God, because he alone does know. You see, the magicians are half right.

It is true that there is a God who alone can reveal things. So let's go meet him. In verses 13 and 14, Daniel and his friends discover that they too are to be executed.

[16 : 52] Imagine that. You're minding your own business. You're not part of this inner circle of astrologers when, out of the blue, you suddenly discover your future is about to be cut short.

And if I were in his shoes, I suspect I would either plead for my life or protest my innocence. But Daniel does neither.

Instead, verse 14, he asks for more time. Not so that he could hatch an escape plan or figure out how to scheme his way out.

No, it's so that he can head straight to the one who knows it all. Verse 18. And that's the point.

You see, we might be dying to know how did Daniel even get an audience with the king? And how did he succeed in getting more time when the astrologers have already failed?

[17 : 55] But the passage doesn't bother telling us because that is not its focus. It simply wants us to know when the pressure is on, don't plot or panic, but pray.

And that takes great courage, doesn't it? I mean, these guys are literally on death row. And they know what this king is like.

He's the guy who crushed their nation, tore them from home, and left cities in ashes. They know what he's capable of. But in spite of that, Daniel says, we go to God.

Why? Why? What is it that gives him such strong resolve? Verses 20 to 23 tells us it is because he is utterly convinced God alone does know.

You see, once again, notice what the passage does and doesn't tell us. It tells us in verse 19 that God reveals the meaning of the dream to Daniel, doesn't it?

[19 : 11] But it doesn't actually tell us at this point what the contents or the meaning of the dream are. I mean, again, if we're reading the story, that's what we're all dying to know, right?

But the text zooms past all of that to dwell on Daniel's words of praise to God instead. In other words, this portion of Daniel 2 is focused more on the fact that it is God who knows rather than on what that specific knowledge is.

And this is confirmed when we look at how Daniel prays. Notice he doesn't start by thanking God for telling him about the dream, which is what we might expect.

instead, he starts by praising God for who he is. Look at verse 20. Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever.

Wisdom and power are his. Because that is the main point of this section. Praise be to God because he alone does know.

[20 : 33] He alone is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom doesn't belong to you or me or the smartest person you know. It is God.

And so he knows how to write the script. He knows verse 21 when is the best moment to change times and seasons. He knows when is the best time for kings to rise and kings to fall.

He knows how every plot twist should go because he is the all-wise God. And it is up to him whether he wants to give us the spoilers or not.

Verse 21 again. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him.

And in this case that is what he does for Daniel. He reveals the dream to him. Now this doesn't mean therefore that God will reveal and will necessarily reveal every plot twist of world history or our personal journey to us.

[21 : 50] Rather the big point is even if he doesn't tell us we know that God knows he even knows what lies in darkness and that is meant to reassure us because it means even if your future is this great big unknown even if it is all dark to you you follow a God who knows what is in the darkness and who can shine a light through it and with him you can walk into that future without fear for although God does not necessarily always share all that he knows with us he does share generously of himself that's what Daniel realises and praises God for as well look closely at what he says in verse 20 he declares wisdom and power are his and then just a few verses later verse 23 he says you have given me wisdom and power the all wise and all powerful

God shares himself with us indeed isn't that what the New Testament also reveals for Jesus says the same to us the Holy Spirit's power is yours need wisdom need strength James 1 and 2 Corinthians tell us just ask as long as you remember this wisdom and power all comes from him not us and that is the same message Daniel would deliver to the king in verses 24 to 28 in verse 27 as he stands before the king he makes it clear he is but a mere mortal he too can't help the king decipher his dream he doesn't know the future but here is the difference maker verse 28 there is a

God in heaven who reveals mysteries once again before he even gets to the contents of the dream he wants to make it crystal clear to King Nebuchadnezzar and to us it is God alone who knows and that is why my friends when uncertainty hits when leaders fail when there are troubles and tariffs and tensions everywhere and the future feels like a fog don't be anxious for we can always turn to heaven we may not always know the what's and the whys but God does but that can't be the entire story because what use is a God who might know the future but who has no power to do anything about it what use is a God who doesn't reign well turns out that's what

Nebuchadnezzar's dream is all about there are lots of details but ultimately the big point is really simple the reason God reveals this dream to Nebuchadnezzar and to us is so that we understand we can anchor ourselves in him because he alone reigns that's going to be the third point of our story today from verses 29 to 49 we can anchor ourselves in God because he alone reigns so let's find out what is in this dream look at verses 31 to 35 there is a huge statue dazzling and terrifying in its appearance and interestingly made up of different materials which go from more expensive to cheaper there is a head of gold a chest and arms of silver a stomach and ties of bronze legs of iron and you get the picture but what does it all mean let's look again this time from verse 36 onwards as we move down the statue from the head of gold to the other parts of the body we discover they each represent kingdoms that will rise after

Babylon and if you are someone who is interested in biblical prophecy you might get all excited at this point trying to figure out which part represents which kingdom is this Persia is Greece and there is a place for that especially in the second half of the book hopefully by then I'll be well informed enough to help you make some sense of some of that but notice here in chapter 2 Daniel doesn't name them in fact he shows almost zero interest in the second and third kingdoms they barely get a mention except in verse 39 in fact I believe both Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar in their lifetimes never ever discover the identity of all these kingdoms So that tells us the main point of the dream isn't really about identifying which kingdom is which so if that isn't the big idea what is it's quite simple really

[27 : 51] God is telling us whatever kingdoms these are none of them will last that's the headline all human kingdoms will one day end yes they will all have their moment in the sun but one day they will be gone for God alone reigns that goes for Babylon too God is telling Nebuchadnezzar right now Babylon looks indestructible right after all you've just defeated Judah and you've plundered its temple but God says don't think you will reign forever for did you notice that little phrase at the beginning of verse 39 after you such an innocent phrase and yet it contains such significance because it is saying

Babylon you won't be around forever after you another kingdom will replace you indeed even right now Nebuchadnezzar is not in charge but God God alone reigns because look at verse 37 at first glance it sounds like Daniel is saying Nebuchadnezzar is the top dog right oh your majesty you are the king of kings!

the God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory but look carefully what is actually said you are king but only because the power you have was given to you by God that's repeated in verse 38 God is the one who has placed all mankind in your hands so the only reason you are on the throne is because God has decreed it to be so it is God who actually reigns and if you aren't sure about that God says well look at verses 34 and 35 while you were watching a rock was cut out but not by human hands it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them then the iron the clay the bronze the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on the trashing floor in the summer the wind swept them away without leaving a trace but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth wow so here we have one small stone that is not part of the statue it is not shaped by human hands so that means it is divine in origin but that little stone is what will bring the whole statue crashing down and that stone grows it will become a mountain not just in

Babylon but it will fill the whole earth so what is that stone verse 44 tells us it is a kingdom that will never be destroyed but will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end while it will itself end the all that God says to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar is the future he is going to bring about but here is what's so amazing you see do we already see such a kingdom do we already see a king with such power and authority the answer according to the new testament is yes for right at the height of the Roman empire when all the kingdoms mentioned in Daniel 2 would have already come God's son comes to earth contrary to what the astrologers say in verse 11 he comes to live amongst humans and he says he comes as the king of the eternal kingdom and he comes as a stone amazingly that is rejected but that is exactly how the kingdom is established as psalm 118 verse 22 tells us the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone for this kingdom is different from all the kingdoms that came before him it comes not by violence but through a cross it doesn't achieve a temporary military victory but an everlasting victory over sin death and the devil and this is confirmed by

Jesus' resurrection and now his reign starting in Jerusalem has gone from there to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth indeed this stone is being added to daily to grow into something greater as 1 Peter 2 verse 4 to 5 puts it as you come to him the living stone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ and this kingdom never fails it has stood and grown while Babylon Persia Greece Rome the

[34 : 00] Byzantine Empire the Mongol Empire the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire have all fallen that's what God wants us to know that is the mystery God has now revealed to us Jesus has won the victory he is on the throne and he is with us in the darkness yes today there are still human kingdoms that resist him but here is the message of the future in a nutshell they won't win because Jesus will one day reign fully and forever so my brothers and sisters what can you do when the future feels like a fog and anxiety begins to creep in what can you do with that knot in your stomach Nebuchadnezzar saw part of the answer in verses 46 and 47 he fell on his face and acknowledged that Daniel's

God must be the God of all gods because he has revealed the mystery he knows and he reigns and that is a good start and yet we must go beyond what Nebuchadnezzar did you see once Nebuchadnezzar heard he was the head of gold he was satisfied because he realized the stone wasn't coming to strike him but some kingdom far in the future and so he felt oh I'm okay and although he acknowledged Daniel's God he never bothered to ask how can I align myself with this God how can I truly anchor my life in him he acknowledged the truth but didn't actually live by it as will become evident in the subsequent chapters and we can be the same we can be impressed by

God's power and knowledge but still try to build our lives on our kingdoms of gold on our careers our wealth our reputations but today we cannot plead ignorance God has revealed to us the mystery he has revealed to us the mystery of the gospel that the crucified Jesus is the king who reigns forever and ever and it only makes sense to build our lives on him so why anchor yourselves in what will be blown away like chaff no when the future feels uncertain the wisest thing to do is to anchor yourself in this God he alone knows and he alone reigns so you don't have to fear you don't have to keep sweating over that next test result or that email because when our

God is the king who knows the end from the beginning and who has done everything to make you part of his eternal kingdom you know he is your safest harbor so let's be like Daniel and let's turn to him now let's pray heavenly father i just want to pray this morning for all those who fear the great unknown i pray for those who today might be fearing what will happen to their kids who are struggling academically or mentally or perhaps who have wandered away spiritually i pray for those who fear how they might survive any coming recession or job insecurity for those who fear they might remain lonely for all their lives because of their single status for those who face health problems or who fear for the health of their loved ones i pray that they will all find in you a safe harbor because they know jesus reigns and this morning i also pray for those who don't fear who think that they are in control of their own lives father i pray that you will reveal to them otherwise that you alone know and you alone reign pray all this in the name of christ amen