

## **How To Not Be A Fool**

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Daniel: Thriving in a Hostile World

Daniel 5

I have been doing a series from the book of Daniel that I have called Preparing for the Millennium. As I have told you throughout this series, I am not talking about preparing for the Millennial Kingdom, nor do I think that Daniel is primarily a book concerning the future of the world. But I do think that as the clocks roll over, we have the opportunity now to take stock of where we are as a country and where we are as a church. With the change of the calendar, we have an opportunity, as well, to take stock of where we are, as individuals, spiritually with God.

Of course, the political races are beginning to heat up in this presidential election year. I don't know how you feel when you listen to a politician, but about half the time I will say to my wife, "This person must think that we are all fools. He must think that we don't know the most basic principles of economics, that we know nothing of history, that our attention span is not longer than 30 seconds, so we forgot what they said a week ago or what they did six months or a year ago. This politician must think that we are complete fools." So if you wear the right shirt or position yourself well in the right photo op setting, you stand in front of a big American flag and tell pastors that you are a Christian, you will be able to get all of the votes of the foolish people who were born just last night, who just fell off the turnip truck, who don't want to do any real deep thinking about anything. Fools, I think to myself. These people must believe that we are fools.

Sadly, the politicians and the marketers and the public relations people are often accurate in their assessment of the American public. We often do act and think foolishly. The enemy of our souls, Satan, understands that.

I had a vivid picture in my mind's eye the other day as I was praying. It was of one of those shell games that they used to play on the streets of New York. You know, the games where they would put a pea under a walnut shell or whatever and they would say, "Find where the pea is." The tourists would put their money down believing that they are going to take this con artist, who is running the shell game. And this poor sucker, this fool, is quickly separated from his or her money. Well, I had a picture in my mind's eye the other day as I was praying of one of those shell games. And I remembered thinking to myself, what is that Lord? I felt like God said to me, "That is what Satan does with people over and over again. Put your money down again. Bet again on what is a sure loser. Invest your energy. Invest your life again on what won't work. Do the same thing again and again and again, even though it is totally dysfunctional, try again." And we line up in front of Satan's shell game, going through the same bad behaviors,

the same harmful attitudes, the same self-destructive habits. And having come to our senses just a little bit, he says, "Would you like to try again?" And we say, "yes."

Alcoholics Anonymous has a wonderful definition of insanity. They say insanity is doing the same behavior over and over again expecting different results. That is what many of us do in our lives. We date the same kind of person over and over again. You keep going back to an alcoholic husband who doesn't change and end up miserable. We make the same mistakes with our kids. We give ourselves to the same kinds of addictive patterns. We jump in bed with our boyfriends or girlfriends. We do the same bad things with our studies or our work. And yet, we expect different results from the same behaviors.

As we look at Daniel 5 today, we are going to be looking at the life of the classic fool, a man named Belshazzar. My job as a pastor and a preacher is to try to be at least one of the people in the community that calls you to a different way of thinking about Babylon. My job as a pastor is to challenge you to adopt viewpoints and behaviors and beliefs that spring from the deeper wisdom of this book called the Bible. In our post-Christian culture, as the politicians and the marketers and public relations people and every con artist wish to reduce you to your most base instincts, we are going to talk today about how not to be a fool. Let's pray.

Daniel 5:1-9

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.' Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled."

Let's put ourselves in the place of King Belshazzar. Imagine you are at an office Christmas or New Year's Eve Party. Everyone is having a great time. They are

laughing and drinking. They are maybe even making a few off color comments. Just a little bit of blasphemy. You know, folks are just getting a bit sexually suggestive, flirtatious. The music is blaring. Maybe they have one of those mirrored balls on the ceiling that is spinning and the lights are flashing. Everyone is feeling just a bit tipsy and talking a bit loud and laughing just a little too much.

Suddenly, an unexpected guest shows up at the party. There is a disembodied hand that writes a message to the assembled guests at the party on the wall right by the spotlight. You see this hand suddenly appear. It is totally weird, totally frightening, totally unsettling. You are at the scene.

Now, let's go back in history for a moment. For many years scholars could find no independent records of this Belshazzar, whose name is recorded here in Daniel 5. It was considered one of those many errors of the Bible because scholars knew from history that the last Babylonian king was a man named Nabonidus, not Belshazzar. It is a funny thing about the many so-called errors of the Bible. Their number is reduced, progressively year after year, as more discoveries are made in archeology as we discover more ancient tablets and documents and papyri. As a result of some archeological finds by digs at the ancient city of Babylon, scholars found numerous cuneiform tablets and other documents which mention Belshazzar. And apparently, Nabonidus was the last Babylonian king, but he was the father of this Belshazzar and he left the city of Babylon, in fact he left the whole empire, to his son Belshazzar to rule. It was under Belshazzar, this son, that Babylon was finally taken. So Nabonidus and king Belshazzar served alongside of each other as co-regents, partners, as kings if you will.

And that is why, interestingly, we have a hint of this in Daniel 5 when we read in verse 7, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." And again, in verse 16, "If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." And again in verse 29, "At Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

Why third highest? Why not, as in the days of the Pharaoh, he made Joseph the second highest? Or in the days of Queen Esther, the king made Mordecai the second highest in the land? Why the third highest? Because there were two kings – Nabonidus and his son, who was ruling in his place, Belshazzar - so again, we have this amazing testimony to the Bible's accuracy even down to the smallest historical detail.

Now, let me tell you what was happening on the night that Belshazzar decided to throw this big banquet. According to the Greek historians Herodotos and

Xenophon, outside the walls of Babylon stood a Persian army that was laying siege to the city of Babylon for two and a half years. But the walls around Babylon were high. At some places they were 350' high. And they were thick. At some places they were 87' wide. These walls surrounded a huge area. So large was the city inside the walls of Babylon, that the Babylonians were able to cultivate their own crops within the city walls. They had cattle grazing. The river Euphrates flowed through the city and supplied water for the cattle and the people and the crops. They could not be starved into submission. And the war machines of the day could not batter the walls down. Belshazzar was on top of the world and felt incredibly secure behind his high walls. He could look out from one of the towers and laugh at the Persians and shout "I am not afraid. Nothing can harm me. I am secure." He could thumb his nose at his enemies. He believed he could thumb his nose at God and so he said, "Tonight I am going to throw a big party and enjoy myself. Nothing can touch me. Nothing can harm me."

But then there is this disembodied hand on the wall writing a message. What is the message? Verse 25: "This is the inscription that was written: Mene, mene, tekel, parsin. This is what the words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two."

When he felt so secure, when he felt nothing could touch him, when he was at the top of the world, that very night Belshazzar was slain. Indeed, that very night the city of Babylon was invaded by the Persians. And the Greek historians tell us how the Persians did it. Some of the engineers in the Persian army came up with a plan. The river Euphrates flowed under the walls of Babylon, and that was what was used inside the city to water the crops, to give water to the people and the cattle. Well, the engineers in the Persian army diverted the water from its natural flow. Once the river bed was dried up the Persian army marched under the wall on the dry river bed into the city. And the Greek historians tell us that no one was watching because instead everyone in the city was partying and drinking. According to the historians, the king of the Babylonians was slain and Babylon was sacked—a sudden surprise attack from out of nowhere, totally unanticipated.

Here was this person who believed he was secure behind his walls of protection. And Proverbs 6:15 came true in his life. "Disaster overtook him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed - without remedy."

You know, I have been thinking about the number of people who are at the top of their game and who suddenly and quickly fell. In the 1980's there was an investment banker named Michael Milken who worked on Wall Street for the investment banking firm of Drexel, Burnham, Lambert and who in the mid-1980's was considered to be the greatest banker in America since JP Morgan. Michael Milken came up with a new investment vehicle called Junk Bonds.

Michael Milken was a great salesman. He began selling these Junk Bonds, which were used to finance many of the corporate takeovers in the 1980's. And Michael Milken began earning quite a bit of money for Drexel, Burnham and Lambert. And he began earning quite a bit of money for himself. In 1983 he made 46 million dollars. In 1984 a hundred and twenty-four million dollars. In 1985, 135 million dollars. In 1986, 295 million dollars and in 1987, he made in a single year for himself, not just what his business netted, but his personal salary was 550 million dollars in 1987. Here is a man who made more than 1 billion dollars in four years. He was on top of the world.

And then a man named Dennis Levine was arrested on charges of insider trading, which was for Michael Milken the rough equivalent of what the Watergate Break-in was for Richard Nixon – the beginning of the end. And Dennis Levine named names. He named Martin Segal, who also named names. He named Ivan Boesky, and the prosecutor there, a person you may have heard of, a man by the name of Rudolph Giuliani, essentially put a gun on the table and he said to Ivan Boesky and Dennis Levine and Martin Segal, "You pick up the gun and kill yourselves or I will. And you name more names or you will only wish you were dead."

And then a name came up – Michael Milken, a guy who was the biggest wheeler and dealer in Wall Street history. And a 98-count indictment was drawn up against Michael Milken, who was sentenced to ten years in prison, fined over a billion dollars, stripped of all of his assets. Proverbs 6:15, Disaster will over take you in an instant. Suddenly destruction and that without remedy. 1 billion dollars couldn't protect Michael Milken. The firm Drexel, Burnham, Lambert went bankrupt. All of its assets were sold off.

I think of the Shah of Iran. He lived under America's military protection. He had three thousand cars including 370 identical Mercedes Benz Coupes. He had Lamborghinis and Rolls Royces and jewelry and art and treasures. He lived under American protection, like Belshazzar, secure behind his fortress walls. And then this religious cleric, this Ayatollah Khomeini, comes back from his exile in Paris, and the Shah has to flee the country, dying of cancer a few months later in Egypt.

To this list we could add Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, Imelda, with her thousands of pairs of shoes. In an instant, they were pulled down from power. And the communist dictators of Eastern Europe, and Jim and Tammy Faye

Bakker, who bilked their Christian supporters out of 160 million dollars. They were on top of the tele-evangelism world. In Jim Bakker's book, he writes, "At a meeting with Jerry Falwell, Falwell outlined how I should resign from all three of my positions at PTL - as president, chairman of the board, and pastor of the church. Within 24 hours I lost my ministry, my life's work and my will to live. Overnight I went from having a worldwide ministry with several thousand employees to having no ministry at all and being an unemployed pariah."

And just recently the president of Hillsdale College, George Roche in Michigan who published the most popular conservative newsletter in the country, a newsletter called *Imprimis*, with a circulation of nearly 1 million subscribers, and who lashed out at the moral decline of America saying, "Honor and virtue are increasingly rare commodities. Cheating and lying have become acceptable." This same president of Hillsdale College, who was a darling of conservatives in America and of Christians, recently had to hastily resign his office after it was discovered that he had carried on a 19-year affair with his son's wife, who, increasingly despondent over her life, killed herself.

Belshazzar. Michael Milken. The Shah of Iran. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. George Roche, the president of Hillsdale College. John Belushi. Andy Kaufman. Thousands of Christian pastors and leaders and ministers and lay people all at the very top of their game, when they hear the word of the Lord, "You have been weighed in the balance and you have been found wanting." Or in the words of Jesus' parable regarding the rich fool, "Fool, tonight your life is required of you."

What does that say to you and me? It is appropriate that we meditate long and hard over the fall of people who are like us. I cite these examples not because these people are unlike us, but because they are like us, tempted to believe that God would turn a blind eye to continual sin and arrogance and pride. The Bible, in dozens of places, says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If you don't want to be a fool, understand that simply because you have accepted Christ into your heart, or prayed a prayer, or you go to church, or you read the Bible, doesn't give you a "get out of jail free" pass with God. Yes, the blood of Christ and faith in his blood will save us from eternal hell, if indeed, we have a real faith. But judgment in this world, losing everything – the esteem of others, the love of your wife or husband, your ministry, your reputation, your money, your health – this is a real possibility for Christians.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God cannot be mocked, Paul writes. God sees what no one else sees, in secret. And so reflecting on God's power and greatness, we would wish to avert God's hand of judgment by turning from our sins. If you are involved in a relationship that you know God doesn't approve of, a behavior you know God wants you to stop, if you have become ensnared by bitterness, by unforgiveness, by pride.

And Belshazzar was not only secure and proud behind his massive walls of protection. He was also a blasphemer. His particular sin, it says in Daniel 5:2, "While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and the nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone."

Blasphemy and idolatry. We see it in verse 23: "You have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven," Daniel says. "You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways."

Blasphemy is a word that we no longer hear except in occasional references to fundamentalist Muslims, who claim that Allah has been blasphemed. We have lost this as one of the great sins that a person can commit. It means to dishonor God in your speech or your actions. To dishonor the things associated with God. Here Belshazzar uses holy vessels that were used in the temple of God for worship. He uses them to get drunk with. He toasts his Babylonian gods.

And so, when people misuse the image of Jesus or the cross and they put it in pornography or they put the cross in urine, or they use excrement on a religious painting to express mockery or contempt for holy things and holy beings, that is blasphemy. Politicians blaspheme when they use God's name or the name of Christ simply as a convenient way to gain votes. At election time you will quickly find that every politician in America has been converted and always walks around with their Bible, whether their church preaches from the Bible or not; it doesn't matter. When you use the holy things of God – the Bible, the cross - for some purpose other than God, for some base purpose like political gain or economic gain. When people use Christianity to gain clients or use a church or contacts in a church to sell a product, there is at least some blasphemy.

I remember as a 20 year old, newly married young man, a couple in the church that we were going to invited us out. Marlene and I were really excited because we were very involved in our campus fellowship and now that we were a newly married couple we thought we ought to also be involved in the church where we were attending. But most of the people in the church were quite a bit older and this was the next youngest couple that we knew. And so we thought, "Oh, this is going to be a great way for us to get connected in the church." We were really looking forward to going out with this couple. So we had them over and Marlene made some coffee and we served cookies. It turned out that he didn't want my

friendship; he just wanted to sell me an insurance policy. He used Christ's church to make a buck.

There is nothing wrong with selling insurance. It is a needed product. I have life insurance. I have car insurance and I have health insurance. And the insurance salesmen that I have dealt with over the years have been honest and helpful. There is nothing wrong with investment counsel, nothing wrong with nutritional advice, or pots and pans or clothing. But what is wrong is when someone uses church relationships – relationships formed here to solicit clients and make a buck. Be careful if you find yourself marketing something to a friend. We are using the holy things of God – his body – to serve some other God, money.

And you know, even though blasphemy has this archaic ring to it, I think it is a word that we ought to recover and a sin we ought to often repent of. Of course, we hear blasphemy all the time through the media. John Lennon in his famous news conference said, "We are more popular now than Jesus Christ." Or James Cameron, a director of the Titanic at the Academy Awards a few years ago, holding the Academy Award up and screaming into the microphone, "I am the king of the world."

Well, friends, we don't have to be that shocking or vulgar. Whenever we dishonor God by using him to serve our other gods – the god of economics, politics, business, a relationship that we are trying to pursue – or whenever we treat God's word as one opinion along side of other opinions, we blaspheme. Yes, I know what God's word says about divorce and how he hates divorce, but you have to understand that my therapist tells me it would be very unhealthy for me to stay with my husband. I am very depressed and unhappy and our marriage is going nowhere. I have decided, as Ann Landers puts it, that I would be better off without him or her than with him or her. And so I get on with my life. Whenever we say, "Yes, I know what God's word says, but..." we blaspheme God.

And when we blaspheme God we become fools. That's what Romans 1 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images."

Have you ever gone before the Lord and confessed to him not only the sin of greed or lust or divorce or using your relationships to make a buck or using your Christianity to gain acceptance, have you ever confessed to the Lord the sin of blasphemy – dishonoring God by equating him with all the other gods that we serve. Dishonoring God by simply putting his word along side of every other word, as one opinion among many, misusing God's name and attributing it to your own ideas, your own thoughts? Have you ever confessed to God the sin of blasphemy? Because this sin makes us foolish in Babylon.



And so does the neglect of history. Daniel 5:18-22:

“O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, through you knew all this.”

Do you understand what Daniel is saying to Belshazzar? You had the example of your father, Nebuchadnezzar. You saw the way God dealt with him and yet, you didn't learn. You didn't respect the lessons of history. The philosopher Hagel said nearly 200 years ago, “The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

The Bible frequently encourages us to learn from history. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul cites example after example from the Jewish Exodus and then says to us, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages come.” We are told to learn the lessons of history. But we live in a time that is almost entirely ahistorical, in the sense that we care nothing about the past, and don't think as postmodernists do that we can learn anything from the past. In fact, if you want to be sure of being confined to the trash heap of irrelevance, use words like tradition and the wisdom of the ages, and what our forefathers believed. To be considered dated and old fashioned is one of the worst crimes you can commit on the eve of this new millennium.

We love what's innovative. We love what's trendy, new, updated. We are almost completely ignorant of history and totally insensitive to the real feelings, the real values of people in the past. The only thing we want to see today is a reflection of our thinking and our values. We see it continually in movies that are set in the past.

Marlene and I were dragged along with the rest of the 6 billion people on the planet to the movie The Titanic several years ago. The only thing I said throughout the movie, along with being impressed by the incredible sets, was how utterly ridiculous the premise of the movie was and the language and thought processes of the people who were supposed to be living in Edwardian England. Because amazingly, back 90 years ago, those people had exactly the

same values as England under Princess Di and Fergie and America under Bill Clinton. Back then, they all supported Women's Lib and personal autonomy and premarital sex on your first date and women swearing like sailors and young men quoting Bob Dylan. C. S. Lewis called it chronological snobbery, because we are later in time we believe we are somehow better and our values are better.

I would call it becoming a fool. Belshazzar was a fool because he was unwilling to learn the lesson of history regarding God's dealing with his forefather Nebuchadnezzar. And we are fools when we don't learn from the past.

We in America today believe that we can have a strong military composed of people who have weak characters and weak sexual ethics. There are several politicians running for higher office now who are advocating the elimination, or at least the modification, of the military codes against adultery. They are Victorian, outdated and unworkable. They are advocating allowing openly homosexual soldiers to serve, eliminating the don't ask, don't tell policy, which is only 8 years old. We are such fools.

Does any politician have a clue that a major reason for the British defeat during the American Revolution was the sexual debauchery and moral weakness of British leaders and troops? Washington's first act as General was to raise American moral standards by banning the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing among American troops. He said, "We can have little hope of the blessing of heaven on our arms if we insult it by our impiety and folly." He insisted that troops regularly go to church. That there would be regimental chaplains and that troops be disciplined for gambling and any other vice of immorality among officers and soldiers in his command.

The British lived by an entirely different standard. The British Army at the beginning of the war was commanded by General Sir William Howell, based in New York. Time and again, he had no interest in attacking the American troops whom he could have destroyed because he was absorbed in adultery with his mistress, Elizabeth Loring, the wife of a British Commissary Officer. American Tories used to sing a song about General William Howell.

"Awake, arouse Sir Billy,  
There's forage on the plain  
Please leave your little filly  
And open the campaign"

John Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich and First Lord of the Admiralty, was in charge of the Naval War against the American Rebels. He was known for leaving his office for 24 hours at a time and going to the gambling halls. His servants brought him a hunk of meat between two pieces of bread and, thus, the sandwich was born. But Montagu was particularly notoriously addicted to pornography. And he had pornographic scenes of the 12 apostles built into stained glass windows in one of his country estates.

The Secretary of State in charge of the land war, a fellow by the name of George Sackville, who was a promiscuous homosexual, who at one crucial point in the American Revolution, neglected to sign orders to send the British troops against Washington's very vulnerable Army because he was rushing off to hook up in a homosexual liaison with one of his lovers.

And so it goes up and down the entire British leadership. We are fools if we believe that we can be militarily strong and have troops who are morally weak. We must respect the lessons of history. The lesson of history is that sex is a big deal and must be kept within the bounds of monogamous marriage.

There is an extraordinarily dreadful book written recently by a 24 year old woman named Wendy Shallit called *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*. And in her book, Shallit describes how our profound loss of the virtue of modesty, our stripping away of every principle, decorum and respect, for the power of sex has left women so profoundly vulnerable to attack and harassment in our country. Every other young woman has been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted. Every other young woman. It is profoundly difficult to be in a high school or college or work situation as a young woman now and not be harassed or groped or grabbed.

Just recently there was a news report about four Bronx boys, the oldest only 9, who ganged up on a 9-year old classmate and sexually assaulted her in a school yard. The girl's parents and sisters were outraged when the traumatized third grader was told to wash out her mouth and was given a towel wipe. If you have a teenager or if you are an adult young man or young adult woman, you are in your 20's, I would encourage you to pick up *A Return to Modesty* by Wendy Shallit and think about learning the lessons of history regarding sex and modesty.

But we are such fools. History teaches us that unless we value all of life as sacred, we are capable of incredible cruelty and we ourselves will be destroyed. There was a recent radio broadcast by a nurse who works at a large Midwestern hospital associated with a certain church. She said when she took the job she thought that they wouldn't practice abortions because it was a church affiliated hospital. She discovered that in this particular hospital, they were doing live birth abortions at the end of second trimesters of women's pregnancies between 18-24 weeks. This particular hospital was giving women drugs, opening up their cervix and delivering babies alive. And then offering to the babies what they called "comfort care". They would wrap the babies up in blankets and offer to let the parents hold the babies before they died. If parents declined, nurses sometimes would hold the babies or they would sometimes put them in back rooms until they died sometimes eight hours later.

We are such fools, if we think that a lowering of values and the sacredness that we place upon life will not eventually destroy us all. Sadly, the church, which

ought to most of all respect history, has been corrupted by our Babylonian captivity so that we, like Belshazzar, don't respect the lessons of history. We Christians most of all ought to love history because our Christian faith is not a philosophy that some professor thought up in some library somewhere. It is not a bunch of myths. Our Christian faith is not like some story about Hercules or Zeus or Thor. Our Christian faith is built on a real historical person named Jesus.

If you had a time machine and were able to go back 2000 years in history and you landed in ancient Palestine, you could look up a real person named Jesus who came from a real city named Nazareth, whose ruins you could really see right now and visit on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. And you could meet real people like Herod and Pontius Pilate, under whose governorship Jesus was murdered. And if you were there by virtue of your time machine on the day that Jesus was crucified, you would see a real man being nailed to a real wooden cross. And if you went up to that cross and rubbed your hand on it, you would get real splinters in your hand. And if you were there a few days later, you might have had the opportunity to visit his tomb and you would see it really was empty and you might have the glorious experience of seeing the real Jesus really raised from the dead.

But we are such fools today in the church. We know almost nothing of our glorious history, of the heroes of faith – men and women, who followed Christ in ways so much better than the ways we follow. Who have so much to teach us about prayer, about humility, work, marriage, truth. But like the rest of the culture we have lost our sense of history.

Let me give you one example. Back in the 1960's a mainline church became very enamored with politics. Pastors were preaching politics from the pulpit week in and week out. The mainline church became aligned with left wing politics and with Marxist liberation movements. They became enamored with faddish trends and psychology and therapy. They became enamored with faddish trends in management. Do you know what happened? Millions and millions of people left the mainline church in the 1960's, 70's and 80's because they got sick of all the politics and of going to church and finding a message that was no different than the message they could read in the New York Times or the Washington Post or Time Magazine or see on some news show on TVerse. Just a reflection of themselves back in the church. They said, "Forget it" and they left.

The evangelical church, because it has no sense of history – do you know what it did in the 1980's and 90's? It repeated the same mistakes of the liberal mainline church. The evangelical church got itself wrapped up in politics and wrapped up in faddish, psychological therapies and faddish management techniques.

I said at the beginning of this talk that insanity was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Here we are on the eve of the millennium, millions of people, as they look at Christianity, say, "I am not into that

because it is so political.” We are fools when we don’t learn the lessons of history.

And we are fools when we don’t learn the lessons of our own personal histories. Listen, we don’t have to go back to the Revolution, like Belshazzar repeating the same mistakes as his parents. Young people, if you are a teenager and you have an older brother or sister who is passionately following Jesus Christ and is doing really well, learn the lesson of their lives and follow them. If you don’t have an older brother or sister, but you see someone in their 20’s that is living a godly life and is a few steps ahead of you in age, but you like the way they are living and you respect their life, then get close to them and learn from them. Learn from other people’s mistakes. If you see some people’s lives who have crashed and burned because they walked away from God, learn from them. Belshazzar couldn’t learn from the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar. But you can learn. If you are in your 20’s and you are just starting off in marriage, find some couples whose marriages have endured over the years, who really love each other, who have great kids, and learn from them. Invite them over to dinner. Don’t be fools, making the same mistakes as your parents, as friends around you. If you are a newer Christian – less than 1 year or 2 years in Christ – you have the opportunity to learn by getting involved with another older Christian in a disciplining relationship and getting involved in a small group.

Daniel, by way of contrast, wasn’t a fool. He was wise. We read in Daniel 5:10, “The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. ‘O king, live forever!’ she said. ‘Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! There is man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”

What was Daniel like? It says in verse 11 that he had the spirit of the holy gods. That is the pagan perspective. We would say that he had the Spirit of the Holy God. He had the Holy Spirit. He was controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God was the driving force of Daniel’s life.

How do you live in Babylon? How can you not be a fool? One key is to be dominated and controlled by and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Daniel, by this time, is probably in his 70’s. He has been faithfully following God since he was a boy. How did he keep going? How do you keep going? When you are in a school that has an anti-God philosophy, or you are in a workplace that has an anti-God philosophy, when you are drenched with media and messages that are anti-God in their orientation – how do you keep going and not conform?

Lesson #1 – You consciously yield yourself to the Holy Spirit every day. What I do just about every morning, almost with my first thought in the morning, is to turn to the Lord as I am waking up and confess that I cannot do life without him today. I say, “Jesus, I need you right now. I confess to you I can’t do life today without you. I will be a burden and not a blessing. I won’t be able to encourage others. I won’t be able to love others. I won’t be able to speak for you. I will have no patience. I will have no forbearance. I won’t be able to subdue my flesh. Unless you come and fill me.” In the morning I consciously ask the Holy Spirit to fill me.

And as the Holy Spirit prompts you, or checks you regarding something you are going to say or do, immediately respond and obey. The Spirit will exercise more domination over you. If you want to be wise in Babylon, be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often associated with wisdom in the Bible.

If you want to be wise in Babylon, maintain an excellent testimony with outsiders. This queen, probably the queen mother, speaks about a man who was said to have insight, intelligence and wisdom. He had a keen mind, knowledge and understanding. Think about your reputation with those outside of the church. How are you doing in school, students? Do you pursue excellence or just blow it off? If you want to live well in Babylon, a major area of discipleship for you is to pursue excellence and a great reputation with those who are not in the church. Do you have a reputation for excellence in your work? Do non church-goers look at you and think to themselves, “There is a really hard working, honest person that I respect”? What is your work record like? Do you get phenomenal reviews or just average or failing reviews? Are you sought out by non church-goers for counsel about marriage, family life, life in general? Are you a wise person? Do you make it your aim to have an excellent reputation with outsiders?

You become a wise person by hanging around with the wise. Daniel is always seen with his three friends. Proverbs 13:20 says, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harms.” Who are you hanging around with? Who are your friends? Your closest confidantes? People that you date? People you receive counsel from? If you don’t want to become a fool, then hang around with wise people, people whose life and character you can respect and say, “Here is a person who is really godly. I want to hang with them.”

Fill yourself up with God’s word. Psalm 19:7 says, “The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.” There is so much in the Bible about not being fools, but becoming wise.

Be filled with the Spirit. Be filled with God’s Word. Fill yourself with good fellowship. And live life as if the God of the Bible really existed. It is the fool, Psalm 14 tells us, who says in their heart, ‘There is no God.’ And we are fools if

we live as if the God of the Bible, who is all knowing and all powerful, and all good, and all in control, and all merciful, and all gracious – we are fools if we live as if that God did not exist. Do you want to be wise? Live as if God, who is revealed in the Bible, really exists and one day you are going to have to give an account to him. Let's pray.