

Sermon—November 27-28, 1999  
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Daniel: Thriving in a Hostile World  
Daniel 2

## Knowing God When the Bottom Drops Out

Have you ever had one of those weird flashbacks where you are doing something and suddenly the neurons in a buried part of your brain gets stimulated and you remember an event in your life that you haven't thought of for years? Some of you for decades. Of course, there are a few of us now who are old enough that the only memories we have are decades old. We just can't remember where we put our keys five minutes ago.

But I was at a Starbuck's recently stirring up a decaf grande cappuccino with chocolate. I love the choices that are available to us in America right now. I am standing there stirring my decaf grande cappuccino with chocolate and this part of my brain gets stimulated and takes me back to another time when I was stirring. Only this time I was about nine years old.

I woke up early. I used to wake up much earlier than anyone else in my house. And I decided that I wanted some orange juice. We used to use frozen orange juice and so I opened up the can and dumped it in a glass jar. And then I filled the jar with water and I began to vigorously stir the frozen orange juice. Apparently, there was some manufacturing defect in the jar and as my spoon banged around on the bottom of the jar, making sure that all that frozen orange juice got stirred up, the bottom of the jar fell out and orange juice spilled all over the counters, down the cabinets and all over the floor.

Now, when you are nine years old and you have just spilled orange juice all over the place, you come up with your best guess of how to clean it up. My best guess was to spray dishwashing liquid into it. You know, to clean the mess up and to cut the stickiness. About the time the dishwashing liquid and orange juice sufficiently mixed themselves up on the floor my little dog decided to run through and spread the dishwashing liquid and orange juice around most of the downstairs. And no, for those of you who were wondering, I did not kick my dog.

Now, I begin with that story of the bottom dropping out of the bottom of that orange juice jar because it serves as a nice metaphor as we continue in our series from the book of Daniel on preparing for the millennium. Certainly no one knows what the new millennium will bring – whether the economy and country will just continue to click along with the greatest peace-time expansion of economic opportunity in our nation's history. Certainly the government is painting very rosy pictures of the future. But no one really knows when and if the Wall Street bubble will burst.

About a month ago I received a book in the mail by a man named Peter Warburton, who is one of England's most respected financial commentators and was a past winner of several economic forecasting awards. He is an economic advisor to one of England's most prestigious banking houses. And so this leading English economist and I became acquaintances last summer when I was doing some conferencing in the UK. He sent me his book, just published, called "Debt and Delusion." The thesis of Peter Warburton's book is that [if I can put it simply] the central banks, the US Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, the German Deutsche Bundesbank – the central banks concerned with bridling inflation have led them to turn a blind eye to the danger of rapidly increasing debt. And

it is, at least, this man's belief that the financial conditions right now on the eve of the millennium created by central banks around the world exactly mirror the financial conditions that have created previous economic collapses. This award winning English economist believes that the bottom is about to fall out from western economies.

Now, no one knows. That is one man's opinion. But the fact is that we are sitting on a mountain of government debt and personal debt. The fact is that even in a rising economy, personal bankruptcies are at an all time high. And the amount of debt that is over 90 days past due has tripled in the last two years.

Now, again, no one knows – and I am not prophesying difficulty or disaster. There are some troubling signs on the horizon. There are a number of foreign nations that are on the verge of complete collapse, not the least of which is the former Soviet Union. And no one yet knows whether Y2K will be just a hiccup as the government says, or something more significant. I personally don't think that it is going to be huge, but no one knows.

Nevertheless, as we prepare for this new millennium, what would we do if the doomsayers are right and the bottom did fall out of our national economy? It has happened before. It almost certainly will at some point happen again. Surely some combination of international political instability, debt crisis, maybe a huge natural disaster – an earthquake in California, a mammoth hurricane down in Florida – some combination of events could put us over the edge. What would you do if the bottom fell out?

Let me make this more personal, less global, less political and less economic. I will just share with you some of the ways the bottom has fallen out for people that I know and

love. A dear friend of mine, who is my age and in whose wedding I served as best man, was diagnosed with a brain tumor several years ago and died at the age of 41. A 7-year old neighbor was diagnosed with leukemia and then died. A dear friend's relative was killed in a car crash. A first cousin a few years younger than me committed suicide. A pastor's daughter suddenly found herself pregnant outside of marriage. Some faithful Christian friends watched their daughter's marriage collapse after just a couple of years and a big wedding ceremony. A friend had her heart broken when her fiancé suddenly and without warning called the engagement off and would not take her phone calls.

The bottom can and does fall out of our lives. And when it does, what is it that we have to hold on to? The other day when I was flying back from California, God spoke to my heart and very clearly said, "Rich, prepare yourself for personal crisis."

Oh, no. Is the bottom going to fall out?

There is a wonderful little book that was written about 40 years ago called "The Knowledge of the Holy." AW Tozer began his book of meditations on the attributes of God with these words: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has been ever greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God."

What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing that could be said about you. More important than your income. More important than any degrees attached to your name. More important than your family situation or your

current state of health. What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing that could be said about you.

Or let me put it a little differently. When the bottom falls out of your life and it will at some point – if not in the immediate future, then in the mid-term or long-term future – when the bottom falls out of your life, the only question that you need to positively be able to answer is this: Do you know God?

Now, of course, evangelical Christians are trained to say, “Yes, of course, I know God. I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” That is what we are trained to say. But I wonder how many of you feel that you know God well enough to deal with life when the bottom falls out? Where in your recent experience have you found yourself dealing with heartbreak or disappointment or shock differently because you knew God.

J.I. Packer, in his wonderful book called “Knowing God,” makes the important point that there is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. See, you can know a great deal of theology and have lots of correct ideas regarding God. You may actually lead a small group or Bible study. You may be great in finding your way around the Bible. But that is not the same thing as personally knowing God. So many of the lessons that we have in our mind regarding God are second-hand lessons. They are not firsthand lessons. We have heard about God through preaching at a church service or on the radio. We have gotten secondhand lessons about God through Christian books. We may be listening to Christian tapes. Perhaps we have gone to a counselor. We have Christian friends. We are part of a small group.

This isn’t bad. This is all good stuff. But knowing God secondhand is light years different than knowing God firsthand. Do you know God’s faithfulness firsthand in a

time of crisis? The bottom fell out and you did look to God and he was faithful? Or are you afraid of the bottom falling out because you are afraid that God cannot ultimately be relied upon in a time of crisis? Do you know his faithfulness firsthand?

Do you know God's discipline in your life firsthand because you resisted him or rebelled against him and you felt his disciplining rod bringing you back to him? Do you know God's discipline firsthand or do you still like playing near the edge of the cliff believing that God really won't do anything and you can thumb your nose at God forever?

When we talk about knowing God – not just knowing about him, not knowing him secondhand, but knowing him in the way that will sustain us through crisis, the Bible uses a word that really sums up a personal knowledge of something. It is the word "taste." In Psalm 34 the Psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Taste. You can't get any more personally involved with something than by tasting it.

You have a recipe that you have downloaded from the internet or you read a recipe in a cookbook. You might even look at a wonderful picture, one of these mouthwatering pictures of a dish. You can watch the dish being prepared on TV. You could even walk into the kitchen and smell the dinner cooking in the oven. But you have not fully experienced food until you taste it.

When the Bible wants to describe what it means to have a deep personal knowledge of God, it uses that sense of ours that denotes the greatest amount of personal dealing. The Bible says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Don't just have right ideas in your head. Don't just listen to secondhand lessons taught by someone else. You don't know the reality of God's being until you are so personally connected with his friendship and

his love that you can taste it. When the bottom falls out, you need to know God so closely that you can taste his friendship.

My message this morning is called “Knowing God When the Bottom Drops Out.”  
Let’s pray.

Daniel 2:1-13

“In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, ‘I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.’ Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, ‘O king, live forever. Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’ The king replied to the astrologers, ‘This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.’

Once more they replied, ‘Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’

Then the king answered, ‘I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.’

The astrologers answered the king, ‘There is not a man 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. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.’

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.’

This is a story of a troubling dream. Verse 1 says, “In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.”

You might recall that Nebuchadnezzar was a Babylonian king at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC and it was under his leadership that the Jewish city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple sacked. Jewish captives were taken away from Jerusalem and Judah to live in captivity in Babylon, which is in modern day Iraq. Among the captives that Nebuchadnezzar took back to Babylon was a young man named Daniel.

So we pick up the story in v. 1 and it says, “In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.” In v. 3 he says, “I have had a dream that troubles me [literally – that makes me anxious] and I want to know what it means.”

Here is a powerful world leader. He rules the entire Middle East. He won one of the greatest military victories of the ancient world when he defeated the nation of Egypt in battle at a city called Carchemish in 605 BC. Yet, despite his power, his position in the world, his military victories, he is troubled by a dream. Why?



Well, the dream shows a gigantic statue [we will see it in just a moment]. But in his dream he saw this gigantic statue that was suddenly toppled over by a large rock and shattered. The message of the dream of which he was at this point only dimly aware, is simply no matter how great you are, everything about you will pass away. It doesn't matter who you are, what your position in life is, how secure you have everything laid out for the future, how much insurance you have – at some point, the bottom is going to drop out.

Here is this king. Everything he does is designed to preserve his life and his reign. He has professional assassins at his disposal to kill potential threats. The king has wine tasters and food tasters in case someone is trying to poison him. He has body guards night and day who have taken loyalty oaths. But none of that can keep him from this dim awareness that the bottom is about to drop out, that his life is like a sand castle on the seashore and with one great wave it will be washed away without a trace.

You know, everyone in the world has a haunting sense somewhere of our own impermanence and morality. We are not invulnerable. Our lives in this world are very fragile. We are getting older. The years are piling up. Like Nebuchadnezzar we hear the message, “The bottom is about to drop out.” What are you going to do about it?

Let me say a few things about dreams in the Bible. There are over 130 references to dreams in the Bible. And the Bible acknowledges that many dreams are simply the product of a man or a woman's imagination. The Bible never suggests that every dream you ever have is significant. We need discernment in figuring out which dreams are significant or not. And even if you felt that a dream was significant, the Bible is clear that most dreams are symbolic. The problem that many people have as they consider

their dreams is that they take the imagery of a dream very literally. So someone appears in your dream and you think the dream must be about that person, when often that person represents something to you.

This century has seen an explosion of interest in dreams with the rise of psychoanalysis and Freud's theories. Probably the most common theory today regarding dreams is one proposed by a psychologist named Calvin Hall. He suggests that dreams are the result of some unfinished business in our life. We have an unhealed memory or unresolved feelings – something that has not been quite finished in our waking life – and so we complete the work emotionally in our dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar may have felt troubled in the early years of his reign. His kingdom was not yet secure. There is a wrestling going on in his waking hours emotionally and so he may be working this out in his dreams. But we discover in this story that Nebuchadnezzar's dream is not just the product of his own emotional life. Instead, in this instance, Nebuchadnezzar's dream is a vehicle for God speaking to him.

You don't need to turn here, but I want to read to you from Job 33 beginning in v. 14 because Job 33 contains for us perhaps the best biblical theology of understanding dreams from God. You have a dream. You wake up and the dream feels like it has special significance. It was not just one of those crazy dreams which are the result of too much pepperoni pizza. Your dog is not talking to you in German. There was something significant in the dream. So what should you do? You write it down. Note the various details that you can remember. Write down any associated emotions. Were you excited? Were you fearful? Were you troubled? And then ask God, "Is this dream from you?" Before you interpret it, "Are you speaking to me through the dream?"

Job 33 says, “For God does speak. Now one way, now another. Though man may not perceive it – in a dream, in a vision in the night when deep slumber falls on men when they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings.”

One reason God speaks through dreams is to warn us, to tell us that if we go in a certain direction, something terrible is going to happen; to warn us about a coming crisis to you or your children, your family. It says, “He may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings to turn men from wrong doing.”

God not only warns through dreams, he gives guidance. He turns us from one path to another. God also disciplines us, it says, to keep us from pride. And he may even deliver us through a dream to preserve our soul from the pit, our life from perishing by the sword.

So you write down your dream and you pray over it. God may want to warn you. God may be speaking to you in a dream to give you guidance. He may be speaking to you to discipline you or to deliver you from some danger.

Now because Nebuchadnezzar does not know God, what does he do? He turns to the experts. V. 2, “So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed.” These guys had these books which helped them interpret various symbols in dreams. And so when he called them and said to them that he had had a dream and was troubled by the dream, they said, “Great. We are just your men.”

V. 4, “Tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it for you.” And of course today we would immediately rush to go to a psychologist or psychiatrist or pick up a

book in a bookstore on dreams and their interpretations and they would run through all the various symbols of what a dream could mean. The problem with many experts (not all) is that they are often completely out of touch with revelation from God. They can play around with human interpretations of symbols in your dreams. They can sit and talk with you about your emotions and unresolved conflicts and unhealed memories – sometimes with wisdom and sometimes with lots of creativity. But there is no way to verify the experts' interpretation of the dreams. There is nothing objective about their interpretation.

So Nebuchadnezzar proposes a little test. He says in v. 5, “This is what I firmly decided, if you don’t tell me what my dream was and interpret it I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.”

Now, that is the way to deal with a bad counselor or psychiatrist. Don’t just stop payment on your check, cut them into pieces and reduce their houses to rubble.

See, Nebuchadnezzar decides to test them and says to them several times, “Tell me the dream and then interpret it.” Now, the experts confess what the problem is in v. 10. “The astrologers answered the king, ‘There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks. No king however great and mighty has ever asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they do not live among men.’” Now that is a key verse in this chapter. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they do not live among men.

Companies spend millions of dollars on expert counselors and try to spot trends. Political pundits love to handicap political races. There are guys who will sell you for a

few dollars their top picks in Sunday's football games. I always think to myself, "If these guys are so smart, why are they selling their picks in the football games, why not just bet on them themselves and clean up?" But there are futurologists, economists, people who think they can understand the future. Experts who claim to know everything.

But these astrologers in ancient Babylon are on to something. Unless you really know God, there are lots of questions in life that you cannot answer. See, there are all kinds of data that no one but God has. You are trying to deal with a child who is in trouble. You have a kid who is in trouble and you take them to the experts. The experts can give you some general wisdom about disciplining your child. They can give you general wisdom about communication, about childhood development. But the problem is the experts don't know the heart of your child. Only God can search the depth of a child's heart. Only God knows what is going on inside of a child's mind and spirit. Only God can evaluate the effects of various kinds of childhood traumas and difficulties and the effect of past influences on a child. The experts take us just so far and then we need to know God.

You are trying to figure out what to do in a dating relationship – whether to really take this relationship to the next level and get engaged. Should we move forward? There are lots of positives. You talk with the experts and they give you general counsel about relationships. Your friends give you counsel about what they see in you and what they see in your partner. But you are also aware of the fact that many marriages fail and you are struggling with whether to make a bigger commitment.

Well, if you don't know God, you are always going to go into the future with profound fear. Unless God speaks to your heart, how do you have confidence that

something is going to work out or not? There are some things in life, there are some depths of knowledge, especially when it comes to fixing something or something in the future, that require revelation from God. The experts will just get you so far.

Well, you see the king's reaction to his experts' failures. In v. 12 it says, "This made the king so angry and furious, [the fact that they couldn't tell him what he had dreamed because they didn't know God] that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So a decree was issued to put the wise men to death. Men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death."

How do people respond when the bottom drops out, when they are in crisis, when something frustrates them in terms of achievement of one of their goals – how do people respond? Like the king they might fly into a rage. Watch people talking with an airline ticket agent when the announcement has just gone out over the loud speaker that their flight has been cancelled and that there are no more flights for the rest of the day. Consider how you deal with the pressure of being stuck in traffic or being delayed because you can't find your keys or being delayed because someone should be picking you up, but they aren't there yet and you are late for an appointment. How is it that, apart from God, people deal with even minor crises or minor frustrations? They fly into a rage.

Are any of you like that? Pounding the dashboard of your car? Yelling at a ticket agent? Screaming about why someone was late to pick you up? If you find yourself flying into rages because you are frustrated with the way circumstances are working out, at the level of the flow of your life's circumstances, you do not yet know God. You do not know God as the one who is in control of the moments of your life, the one who is in control of delays and disappointments, if you fly into rages. People are so out of touch

with their anger. The fact is it is nothing outside of us that causes us to rage, it is what we bring to our situations that causes us to rage. Our lack of inner peace, our lack of knowledge of God gets translated into broken relationships and shouting matches and angry emails and threats and physical violence.

Some of you wonder why you have had a series of broken relationships. You can look back at your life and see broken relationships with your parents. Some of you have broken relationships with your children. Some of you have broken marriages, broken friendships. We almost always believe that the problem is with the other person. The problem is out there; it's how they treated us. The fact is that very, very often there is something broken inside of us that gets projected out that breaks into our relationships with others. We bring brokenness into our worlds and so things break down.

Now, apart from God, we are going to have a lot of less than healthy responses to the bottom falling out. Let me suggest real quickly three responses that people have to the bottom falling out when they don't know God in the way they need to.

One response to crisis is to seize control, to take charge. A crisis hits and you put on your Mr or Ms Fix-It cap. You develop a set of strategies. You implement certain plans. You take control. You take charge. If something is wrong, you fix it. This is the typical response of males. Apart from God it can be terribly frustrating for people who are sharing a crisis with a man – a girlfriend, wife or child. Here is my crisis. Here is the pain I am feeling. Often the male response is, "Here is what you need to do. Let me fix this for you." No reference to God. No need to gain God's mind. No need for revelation. Life is a big chess game and I can move the pieces around the board as well as anyone.

Some people don't take charge at all. Instead, they collapse under pressure. They sink into another depression. They sleep all day or pull away. They have learned to adopt a manner of total helplessness. They don't say, "I can do it all" they say, "I can't do anything. I will put off making all decisions. I will be like a deer frozen in the headlights." Some people curl up into a ball and try to hide when crisis hits.

Some of you, and you will know this well, when the bottom falls out, they don't take control or collapse, instead you just compromise through some kind of escape. The bottom has fallen out and you take an emotional vacation by medicating yourself. You say, "This is too much pressure. I can't handle this right now, so I am going to reach for my drug of choice." It could be the bottle. It could be sex. More work. Surfing the net. More food. More TV. Another move to another city or another church or another relationship. Another guy, another woman.

Let me ask you something – let's make this personal and apply it to our own lives. How do you typically respond to unexpected crises? How do you typically respond? Do you rage, blow up? Do you take control? Do you collapse? Do you compromise by escaping into some type of diversion? How do you typically respond?

I want to continue with Daniel's response. Vv. 14-19:

"When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, 'Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?' Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went into the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. The Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the



God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven...”

Daniel didn't rage. He didn't plan out his strategy to fix the problem. He didn't run to the experts or curl up in a ball. He didn't say, “Well, I might as well eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow I die.” Instead in v. 18, he turns to his friends and he urges them to plead for mercy from the God in heaven concerning the mystery. Daniel's first response to the bottom falling out in life and this threat hanging over him is to pray and to ask his friends to join him in prayer.

What we see in Daniel's life, because he knew God, is that in crises his first response is to pray. And you will see that in this book, as we go through it, Daniel is constantly hitting his knees. You know, prayer means that you give up trying to live life on your own, whether we are talking about a relationship hunt, job hunt, or you are searching for another account or dealing with something in your kids' lives. You stop trying to do life on your own. Prayer says, “I see that I can't fix everything. I can't heal this issue. I can't make this other person respond the way I want them to respond. I can't get this relationship to work. I don't have the insight or wisdom to figure out this particular issue. I don't have all of the data.” We pray because we live in a God centered world. Prayer simply acknowledges that the world does not revolve around us and our solutions to crises. The world revolves around God.

Let me share with you a letter from a real guy in the church. I will just change a couple details. This fellow some time ago said essentially, “Pastor, for two months I have been doing everything possible I know to get back on track. I tried to get a job. I

have used every skill I have. I have searched the want ads. I have hit the bricks and called all of my contacts. I have mailed resumes and driven what seems like a million miles. Nothing is happening. I was so wound up in job hunting I didn't realize how spiritually dry I was. I dragged myself to my men's group and we were talking about my job search. Someone asked me about my devotional life and then it hit me. My devotional life was absolutely zero. At church I would get in and out as fast as I could, so I wouldn't waste any job hunting time. In the midst of my crisis, I needed God more than ever, but I wasn't even giving him the time of day. Then I realized that I heard God say to me, 'Stop trying to do this your way. Depend on me. Talk to me. Listen to me.'

He says, "Ever since that moment it was like I woke up. And I have been praying regularly and it is unbelievable the difference that that has made. Suddenly, God has opened doors for me that I never dreamed would open up. But even more, I realize that God will provide for my needs even if all the doors shut. For the first time in my life I know what it feels like to be totally confident in God."

Do you know what it feels like to be totally confident in God before you pick up a phone, before you call a friend, before you worry. Are you trained to respond to Christ by hitting your knees and praying?

And, of course, Daniel not only prays, he praises. It says, "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. 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 in him. I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers; you have given me wisdom

and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made know to us the dream of the king.”

In the midst of crises one of the truly neglected weapons is praise. You are really having a hard time. You are struggling with depression. You are struggling with anxiety. Life has just absolutely slapped you in the face. But you start giving glory to God. You consider, like Daniel, who God is and what God is. You consider the wisdom of God. And you think back to all the times in your life when God proved wise.

Do you see God’s wisdom played out in your life? Do you see God’s wisdom in unanswered prayers of yours? Have you ever stopped and said to God, “How wise it was of you to not have answered that prayer.” How rarely is it that we thank God for not answering one of our foolish requests.

God, thank you that you shut the door that I wanted open. Like the old Garth Brook’s song where he says, “Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” He talks in the song about how he begged God to give him some girl as his wife. And then as the relationship faded he met the woman who was now his wife. He met his old flame and realized what a precious gift God did give him, so much better than the gift he wanted.

Have you ever thanked God that some doors have shut in your face – to jobs, to relationships? Can you say about God’s dealing in your life, “Lord, you have been wise in allowing this pain to come to me or this pain to come to someone I love because I can see in the midst of this pain, even now, that you are working out the goal for our lives. And I know the goal for our lives and my life is not that we be happy and trouble free. The goal for our lives is not that we never experience crises or the bottom dropping out. The goal for life is that I become a better person, that my loved one, my friend, my child,

my spouse learns how to honor you in all things. That the goal for life is that we learn how to trust you in difficulty. That I become more dependent on you. Less self-centered, more others-centered and God-centered.”

Do you praise God for his wisdom? Do you see God’s wisdom in leading you to your spouse? In leading you to Columbus? In leading you to your current job? In leading you to this church? Do you see the wisdom of God as you look back over all the twists and turns of your life and recognize there was the hand of God? Can you say regarding Jesus Christ, “You really are the world’s expert on how life is to be lived. You are wiser than all of the counselors, all the experts. Jesus Christ, you are wiser than all of the media and all of the pundits and all the psychologists. When you say something, you have the competence to say it.”

You are in crisis – start praising God for his wisdom. You are in a crisis. Start praising God for his power and his omnipotence. Praise be to the name of God forever and forever; wisdom and power are his.

Here is Daniel. He is facing the threat of death at the hands of a raging king. He is confronted with an impossible situation, trying to figure out the content of a dream that is not told to him. He is living in a foreign country. He is a stranger in a strange land, trying to live a godly life in Babylon. He considers all of the things stacked against him and he says to himself, “I can’t imagine how this could work out, but God is omnipotent. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. With God nothing is impossible.”

At a certain point, after you have considered the difficulty of a certain situation, after you have weighed and measured and looked at every angle of a crisis, at a certain point, you need to stop and consider the power of God to change things. If God can set up

kings and depose them, if he can arrange the events of history, God can handle the crises in your life and in mine. If God can speak the whole universe into existence, if God can create the sun and stars, if God can raise his son, Jesus, from the dead, then God can hold you up when the bottom falls out of your life. In crises don't just pray, praise. Start praising God for who he is and what he is and what he can do and what he has done.

And Daniel recognizes God's reign. He speaks to the king about the king's dream. And we will finish with this. In the dream there was a statue with a head of gold. And Daniel says to the king in v. 31, "You are that head of gold."

In the dream we read in v. 31, "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 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 broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing 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.

This was the dream and now we will interpret it to the king. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold."

This picture of a statue is the picture of four successive kingdoms. The first kingdom, the head of gold, is the Babylonian kingdom. And after you another kingdom will arise,

inferior to yours. [Daniel was prophesying the rise of another kingdom after Nebuchadnezzar – the rise of the MedoPersian kingdom. We will see this a little later in the book of Daniel.] Next a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. [He is talking about the kingdom of bronze, the Greek kingdom, under Alexander the Great] And finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. [The kingdom of iron is Rome.] But just as you saw that the feet and the toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.”

In Rome there were the seeds of Rome’s own destruction. At the foundation there was moral and spiritual decay that eventually led to the destruction of Rome.

And finally, Daniel says, “In the times of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.”

Daniel points out to the king that it doesn’t matter what kingdom rises and falls on the earth, eventually the whole earth is going to be filled by the kingdom of God. It doesn’t matter if England rises and then the British Empire falls. It doesn’t matter if the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the millennium we are entering, will no longer be the American Century, as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was. It doesn’t matter that the Soviet Empire has fallen or the Romans or Greeks. Daniel is predicting a time when God will reign on earth, even as he now reigns in heaven.

When the bottom falls out, you not only praise God for his wisdom and his power, but praise him for his almighty reign over all of history and over the details of your life. Nothing catches God by surprise. Whatever trauma you have suffered, or will ever experience, whatever difficulty you have encountered in the past or in the future, whatever pain you have experienced or fear – nothing in your life has ever or will ever take God by surprise. Nothing catches him off guard. He is in control of all things.

And do you know what he invites you to do today? He invites you to surrender yourself to him. To stop trying to make your own way through crises and difficulties. You don't have to explode in rages anymore. You don't have to seize control. You don't have to collapse in depression. You don't have to escape into some drug of choice.

Instead, draw near to God. Taste and see in your life that the Lord is good. God invites you to know him, especially in the midst of crises. Go to him in prayer and repentance.