DANIEL, A MAN FOR A TIME OF CRISIS

Daniel 2:1-30

Key Verse: 18

“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.”

In the last lesson, chapter 1, we learned about Daniel’s resolution not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. This was his personal obedience to God according to God’s word. While many others young boys were not bothered with such a matter, Daniel could not compromise because of his love for God. In his personal obedience to God, Daniel would not defile himself with the lifestyle of the Babylonians. As for us Christians living in a Babylonian Empire-like world, how critical it is not to defile our gospel faith in our Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection. He offered his body and blood on the cross to forgive us our sins and make us holy with hope in the eternal kingdom of God. The flesh and the blood our King offers are the true royal food and drink we are to take for our eternal life. Praise God for these miraculous food and beverage! He is the bread of life that came down from heaven! We are not to defile our faith in the cross of Jesus.

Chapter 1 can be the foundation for all the following chapters in Daniel - about his life in Babylon and for the prophecies for the kingdoms of the world to the very end time. It could be the times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24) beginning with the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. Of course, God had not forgotten his purpose for the nation of Israel during the times of the Gentiles, for his call is irrevocable (Ro 11:30). The overall prophecy is written in chapter 2. Today we will cover up to verse 30, and think about Daniel, how he acted at the time of crisis. He is a man for a time of crisis.

Verse 1 says, “In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.” Here we are to notice that the three years of training was completed at the end of chapter 1. Then it should be at least the third year of his reign. However, the first year, the year of accession, of any monarch in the Babylonian system was not considered a part of his reign. So, if you look at it from the Jewish perspective, this would have been the third year, fitting together with the three-year period of training, happening immediately after chapter 1.

In verses 2-11, there is a serious discussion between King Nebuchadnezzar and wise men of Babylon concerning the king’s dream. At that time, Babylon rose to be a powerful empire standing over all other nations. Cataclysmic things had taken place. The Assyrians had been wiped out, the Egyptians had been decimated, never to rise from their own ashes. The land of Israel had been devastated and her people taken into captivity and never returned. Judah was now in the process of its dissolution. As the one who established such a powerful kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar mind turned to things to come as he lay in his bed (v29), probably thinking, “How long will my kingdom last? Can my successors be powerful enough to maintain this kingdom, since I will not live forever?” There is a story about Roman General Scipio. At the battle of Zama in 202 BC, a Roman army led Publius Cornelius Scipio defeated the Carthaginian army led by Hannibal. After the victory, when Scipio saw Cartago burning turning into ashes, he cried because in it he saw the future of Rome that in the same way Rome would be destroyed. He knew the cycle of the kingdoms of the world in history. As a brilliant king, Nebuchadnezzar must have thought of such a thing and fell asleep. Then God gave him the answer in his dreams. He had dreams, but one particular dream troubled him most. The word “troubled” in verse 1 means a very deep disturbance.

He summoned magicians (scholarly, fortune-telling, and occultic), enchanters (putting someone or something under a spell), sorcerers (spiritualists or mediums talking with the dead), astrologers (star-gazing and determining one’s destiny according to the arrangement of the stars) and Chaldeans (the leading group of the empire). And so everybody came together with all of the scholarship that was available, with all of the occultism that was available, with all the demonism that was available, with all the human wisdom that was available. He got the brains of the kingdom. The king asked them to tell what he had dreamed of. He wanted to know what the dream was. Then they, particularly the astrologers, spoke out saying that they would interpret the dream once the king told them what it was. They say that at that time in Babylon, there was a dream-reading system. They had massive libraries. Their dream manuals have been found in archaeological studies. Surely it was out of man’s desperate effort to try to figure out the unknown human world, though their predictions could not be trustworthy. Now of course, it’s all a bunch of hocus-pocus (meaningless talk) they really didn’t know. But they had tried in their human ingenuity to devise a clever system. Anyway, the wise men of Babylon were sure that they could interpret the king’s dream, if he would tell them the dream.

However, the king insisted that he would not tell the dream and rather demanded that they told him the dream; otherwise they would be severely punished by being cut into pieces. Probably the king forgot the dream. And in the Orent it was considered ominous to forget a dream. It means the gods were angry with the one and he was really panicky. Or the king intentionally did not tell the dream to see how credible these wisemen were. In either case, the king would not let this go. He had to really know the interpretation of his dream by any means. The king was determined and inflexible.

The conclusion of the wise men of Babylon was this: “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 gods, and they do not live among men” (10, 11). They confessed the limitation of the human wisdom, although they were in a situation in which their lives would be gone soon. What a sorrowful and tragic human limitation and dilemma!

In our time also, there are prognosticators, crystal gazers, people who read horoscopes, futurists, tea-leaf readers, all trying to get a hedge on tomorrow, to figure out what is going to happen. Since they do not know God, whenever somebody in our society wants to know what’s going to happen in the future, they pull together all human wisdom and try to figure it out. They try to predict the future in economics, meteorology, nuclear war, spaceship, AI, etc. They present their best predictions with the probability of 50%. Yet, in fact no one can be completely sure of the future, despite scientific and amazingly developed technology. But the Bible is very clear. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly…”

Although what the astrologers said was true, the king could not admit it in his frustration and desperateness. At this the king was made so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon, which meant that all the brains would be gone from the country. 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 was a Babylon-wise crisis which included Daniel. All were in panic, but not Daniel.

Even in this situation Daniel did not fear the king, but only God. Then he could have wisdom and courage. He asked Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, who had gone out to put to death the wise man of Babylon, “Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. The king was very sensitive of delaying the time, yet Daniel asked for time, being assured of interpreting the dream, not just hoping the situation would change. Daniel’s asking for time was different from that of others. The king could sense the difference and gave the time to Daniel, the very thing he would not give the others.

Subsequently, what did Daniel do? Verses 17 and 18 say, “Then 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.” At the time of crisis, Daniel had friends, spiritual friends with whom he could share his prayer topics and pray together. Surely, first of all, Daniel solely depended on God. And also he wanted to pray together with his friends in this matter. They were all in the same life situation and they had one same spirit, relying on God.

Daniel urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning the mystery. Interestingly, the word “mystery” or “mysteries” is written 10 times in the Old Testament, and 9 times in the book of Daniel (in this chapter 8 times, 18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47 (2)) and 1 time in Job. Job 11:7-9 says, “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave (*Sheol*)—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.” And here the word “mystery” is written. Daniel knew that what the king asked for was a mystery, which no man on earth could perceive as the astrologers had said. But Daniel had connection with the God of heaven, so did his friends. Only God could solve the mystery. Daniel could approach the God of heaven along with his friends, pleading mercy from the God of heaven, who can reveal the mystery to the men on earth. What a powerful tool they had in life!

Life is full of mysteries, for any one’s life is uncertain. Also, when we think of our lives, God has lead each one in his mysterious way till now. However, no one knows what will happen in the future of our lives, furthermore where the whole world is going. But the God of heaven knows everything. All are in his hand. He is the one who knows and sees the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come”). The whole world is in his hand, let alone each one’s life. A Psalmist confessed in Psalm 119:168, “I obey your precepts and your statues, for all my ways are known to you.” Psalm 139:3 says, “You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” Job confessed in Job 23:10, “He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” Provers 5:21 says, “For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths.” Humans have partial view of things;God sees with the full view and examines all the paths of each man.

At the time of crisis, most people are helpless and at a loss. Then what a grace it is that we can approach the God of heaven in Jesus Christ. We can say that Christianity is the religion of mystery and revelation. It is impossible for unrighteous sinners to reach the righteous God. As S. Daniel shared his message, the foundation of all religiosities in the world is trying to placate with God with human effort. Yet, it is impossible. But God revealed a way for sinful human beings to come God in the gospel. Romans 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last” and 3:21-22, “Now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known…This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” The gospel is the mystery (Eph 6:10). Paul made great effort in his life to make known the mystery of the gospel. Through faith in Jesus Christ men can be made righteous and the righteous will live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Habakkuk 2:4). Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 2:8-10, “None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God…No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints in Ephesians 1:17, “God…may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” The gospel is the mystery and Christ is the mystery (Eph 3:4). Through the Spirit of revelation we can know him and no him better. Christian life is to know the mysteries of God one after another, on the foundation of the mystery of the gospel and going deeper in it. Thank God that through the study of Revelation we could know what is coming in this world very clearly, the beast kingdom including “MYSTERY OF BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”, followed by Christ’s kingdom.

The life of the Christian is to live faith and to live by the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 20). The life led by the Spirit is very much related to our life of prayer. Particularly, at the time of crisis God wants us to come to him and know the mysteries in life also one after another so that we can be prepared for his purpose to be accomplished in our lives. We can approach him, sometimes alone and other times together with our friends in Christ Jesus, pleading for his mercy. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” And Psalm 123:2 says, “…our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.”

What is the result of the prayer? It is written in verses 19-23: “During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said: ‘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 with 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 known to us the dream of the king.’” May we especially know that wisdom and power are God’s. He is omnipotent and omniscient. He changes times and seasons. He can change our hearts and the hearts of those for whom we pray. He also changes adverse times into favourable times.

Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, ‘Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.” In this passage, the phrase “the wise men of Babylon” is written 5 times (12, 14, 18, 24). As we thought of Daniel’s prayer, in his pleading for mercy from the God of heaven, it was so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Here he also said, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon.” We cannot overlook Daniel’s shepherd heart for the wise men of Babylon. God uses a man with such a heart preciously.

Finally, Daniel had a chance to stand before the king. When the king asked Daniel, “Are you able to tell my what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”, Daniel replied, “No wise men, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come…” Daniel clearly testified to God to the king. He continued, “As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries sowed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.” Daniel was truly a man of God and at the same time he was a humble man before God.

May we be men and women of crisis by pleading mercy from the God of heaven for the revelation of mysteries in life one by one, for ourselves and those who are under our care.