

WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING

"TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." Daniel 5:27

What a dramatic and interesting story we have here! Babylon was a wonderful and magnificent city. When the site had been selected for Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who was the most magnificent builder the world ever saw, employed two million men for the construction of the walls around the city. According to Herodotus, the Greek historian, he put into the walls of his capital alone more than five billion solid feet of masonry. They were so thick and so high that they were considered impregnable. There were twenty-five gates of solid brass on each side of the city, which was fifteen miles square. From each of these gates a street ran straight through to the gate on the opposite side. Also, the great Euphrates River flowed through the city. There was a large and beautiful temple in the center of the city, which had many towers and wonderful hanging gardens. The city was equipped with towers and temples and palaces and pleasure-gardens correspondent to its greatness. These wonderful hanging gardens were one of the wonders of the ancient world. Babylon represented human achievement and earthly glory.

Preceding the feast of Belshazzar, the province had been overrun and the capital had been assailed by a great army from the north under Darius the Median. But for some strange reason, the enemy had apparently withdrawn. It had been taken for granted that the siege was abandoned. Consequently, the whole city was given up to rejoicing and every type of riotous excess. Belshazzar set the example, and the others immediately followed suit.

Belshazzar embodied in himself the spirit of godlessness which made Babylon what it was. He was a great lover of pleasure. His whole conception of life might well be summed up in the statement, "Eat, drink, and be merry." He had his own idea of what a king should be and do. Although it had not been customary for the king of Babylon to invite his friends to a feast in the palace, Belshazzar decided to do so and thus overthrow custom and cast conventionality to the winds. He determined to impress others with his new position and his kingly estate. His attitude was, What is the use of a palace without pleasure, or of money that patriotic subjects have provided if it does not yield mirth? Inflated with pride on account of his newly acquired power, he planned a royal banquet as a sort of inaugural ceremony the like of which had not been known before in all his kingdom.

As the shadows of this particular evening began to gather, and the lights began to flicker here and there throughout the beautiful and wonderful city, the palace was ablaze with dazzling lights as the necessary preparations were being made for a great feast. In response to an invitation from the proud and dissolute king one thousand lords -- who included his boon companions, his gorgeously clad bodyguard, and his imposing courtiers -- and the women of the royal harem assembled in the vast banquet hall of the palace. Observe the throng of lords and mighty ones as they enter. See the flashing jewels on the fingers, the arms and the necks of the Babylonian beauties as they mingled with the lords at the tables. The laughter grew louder with the increased consumption of wine. As the strains of seductive music, which was played by the court orchestra, filled the banquet hall, the dancing women wriggled between the tables with the sensual contortions of the oriental dance. It was what the world calls "a great time," but the outstanding characteristic of the occasion was debauchery.

The music and the wine, the flashing ornaments and the thin robes, the delusion and the false enchantment of the dizzy scene took away all reason from the revelers. There was nothing too sacred for them to profane, and Belshazzar himself took the lead in the

blasphemy. Excited with wine, he was anxious to make some grand display of defiant and blasphemous desecration. The intoxicated guests wanted some fresh sensation and Belshazzar was ready to provide it. He commanded that the precious gold and silver vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar before him had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, he brought in and filled to the brim with red wine in order that all might drink out of them. In dishonoring them at this heathen feast, they would thereby dishonor God, to whose service they had been dedicated. The king was adding impious blasphemy to his other sins by prostituting the sacred vessels of God's Temple to this unholy use. The vessels were brought in as he commanded. Then at his bidding and following his example, those courtiers and concubines drank from the sacred vessels. They drank a toast to "the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." It was a shocking piece of sacrilege. It was a mockery of the living God, which caused His wrath to be kindled against the king and the nation.

But "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." While the orgy was at its height, the excluded God thrust Himself upon the attention of the besotted king. At the very moment when their sacrilegious revelry was at its height, to his horror the king saw the fingers of a man's hand writing steadily and purposely on the plastered wall in letters of living light words that blazed and burned. With dramatic suddenness the revelry ceased. The music came to an abrupt end. The loud laughter on the pallid lips of the assembled guests died away. Something like a creeping paralysis seized the king and his subjects. When he saw those ghostly fingers moving along the wall and engraving those Hebrew characters, which he could not read, he knew that it was ominous in its import and that it had to do with him. Like one who had seen a vision of dreadful portent, he grew pale. His countenance changed, his thoughts troubled him, and he trembled like the aspen before he knew the meaning of the writing on the wall. Concluding that the hand and its grim lettering had to do with him, consternation seized the king. Beadlike perspiration came out on his brow, and the goblet fell from his hand as if it were filled with liquid fire.

Belshazzar called for the wise men of the kingdom -- astrologers, soothsayers, magicians and mediums -- to read the writing, but in vain. The writing in a strange tongue that none could interpret was God's way of showing His superiority over all other gods. After they had failed to decipher God's writing, the queen suggested that Daniel be invited to interpret the handwriting on the wall. She said, "There is a man in thy kingdom," and God always has His man, you may rest assured. Daniel was one of the chief men of the nation, but he did not attend functions of that nature. He never acted on the theory, "When in Rome do as the Romans do." He did in Babylon just what he did in Jerusalem. That was why God kept on using him.

Oh, the suspense until Daniel arrived! And when he came it was to read the burial service over a dying king and a dying dynasty. It wasn't a very polite thing to do, but Daniel stood before the king and told him what a sinner he was for using the vessels of God's house in the praise and worship of his heathen gods. He informed him that the writing on the wall was a warning of imminent judgment, both upon himself and upon his kingdom. Instead of humbling himself, repenting of his sins, and honoring God, he had done the very opposite, and had thereby brought on himself the wrath and judgment of God, and had sealed his own doom.

The words of doom were heard in awe and silence by Belshazzar and his lords. Then, suddenly, there was the loud blast of a trumpet, the sharp words of military command, and the rush of the feet of armed men as the soldiers of Darius charged up the grand stair-

way and burst into the banquet hall. Swords flashed under the candelabras; groans, shouts, curses and pleas for mercy rang through the hall; and soon a thousand nobles and their women lay dead in the slush of mingled wine and blood, and among them lay Belshazzar. When the sun rose the next morning the famous city was painted red and the king's blood had helped to supply the paint. It is a solemn fact, even though men, deny, reject and utterly disregard it, that God will call men to an account for their evil deeds sooner or later. They may get along for a while in their sins and wickedness, but they will at last be called into account.

Belshazzar had riches and pleasure and honor and glory. He was absolute master in the greatest palace and the greatest city in the world. But with all his splendor and luxury he lived a wretched life. He lifted himself up against God, but while he was yet in the height of his power and glory his days were numbered, his character was weighed and he was found wanting before the infinite judge. And what in his life worth to the world now, except to warn men not to live as he lived?

The same God counts the days of life to us all. He weighs our character, our conduct and our motives in the balances of infinite truth. And there is no deficit so damaging as that which is charged to one who is found wanting before God. How tragic it is to be found wanting when God weighs motive, character, soul and life; to be found wanting when judged by the most compassionate, indulgent and generous Friend; to be found wanting in love to Christ, when He died on the cross to draw all hearts to Him; to be found wanting in the fruits and joys of a holy life, when God bestowed ten thousand gifts and instructions to help us to be saved and to gain great rewards; to be found wanting in a hope sure and steadfast when God takes away the soul from the body; to be found wanting when the book of life is opened and the eye of the Great Judge turns to see whose name is written therein. Whatever you do, see to it that no such fatal deficiency shall be found against you when the last account of your life is balanced before God.