

UPSIDE DOWN: FOCUSED
Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
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TEXT: Daniel 2

How many of you like roller coasters? What do you like about them?

I really didn't have a lot of opportunities to ride a roller coaster growing up – but when I did go to Six Flags over Texas as a child, my mother didn't like roller coasters, so I just chose to sit with her and let my brothers and father go.

But in 1978, I went with a bunch of church friends to Six Flags. And that was the year that the Shock Wave roller coaster was brand new. At the time, it was said to be the tallest, longest, and fastest double loop roller coaster in the world!¹ One of the guys I really liked in the church youth group convinced me that I really needed to go on this amazing ride. He assured me that I would love it! And since I was trying to impress him, I made the decision to go. And - oh my goodness – the fast twists and turns were one thing. But what really got me was the turning upside down on the loops – not just once but twice. I was afraid I would fall out of my seat. It was one of the craziest decisions I made. And I can tell you that I will *never* make that decision again! I don't like that feeling of being insecure and unstable and upside down!!!

I read somewhere that you don't get sick at your stomach or have problems on roller coasters if you just stay focused on the track in front of you – so you can anticipate what is coming. But I must admit, I had my eyes closed throughout most of that ride!

But focus may be just the ticket for getting through the twists and turns and upside downs of a roller coaster! I know it is certainly true for our upside-down world we are living in – filled with such fast-paced twists and turns. We are certainly living in times of change and upheaval. And what we used to know as “normal” may never be “normal” again. What we are in great need of is full focus on our unchanging God who will get us through this crazy and uncertain times.

In our sermon series on the Book of Daniel, we learned last week that when Daniel was a teenager, how his world turned completely upside down when he and his friends were forced into exile into the land of Babylon. His former life was gone – everything he had known in Jerusalem had disappeared. Now he was being trained to think, act and be like the Babylonians. They had even changed his name Daniel to a Babylonian name, Belteshazzar. But they couldn't change his heart – and his commitment to the Lord. As we heard last week, in chapter one, Daniel was determined not to defile himself! He made a commitment to live faithfully. That really needs to be the first decision we make as well. To keep our focus on the One true God and refuse to compromise our convictions in this upside-down world we are facing.

Daniel was completely focused on God and knew that God was his superpower. And that focus really affected all his life – but especially in the next story we hear about Daniel. Turn with me to Daniel, chapter two and let's discover how Daniel responded to a really big

challenge, really of life or death. Now this is a really great story – and a longer one. We aren't going to be able to cover every verse today – so I really encourage you to read the whole chapter later today!

Let's start off by looking at the first few verses and get the background of story. Beginning at verse 1 of chapter 2.

¹One night during the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had such disturbing dreams that he couldn't sleep. ²He called in his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers, and he demanded that they tell him what he had dreamed. As they stood before the king, ³he said, "I have had a dream that deeply troubles me, and I must know what it means."⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "Long live the king! Tell us the dream, and we will tell you what it means."⁵ But the king said to the astrologers, "I am serious about this. If you don't tell me what my dream was and what it means, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be turned into heaps of rubble!"⁶ But if you tell me what I dreamed and what the dream means, I will give you many wonderful gifts and honors. Just tell me the dream and what it means!"¹⁰ The astrologers replied to the king, "No one on earth can tell the king his dream! And no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter, or astrologer!"¹¹ The king's demand is impossible. No one except the gods can tell you your dream, and they do not live here among people."

Well, King Nebuchadnezzar was furious that they couldn't tell him his dream so he ordered that all the wise men must be executed...and that included Daniel and his friends!

Now look what Daniel did. When Arioch, the commander of the guards, came to kill them, Daniel *"handled the situation with wisdom and discretion."* He didn't panic – he didn't give up in despair. Rather he remained calm and asked for more information -- and then went immediately to talk to the king. And amazingly, the king allowed him more time to be able and tell the king what his dream was.

Living in an upside-down world can be confusing and overwhelming. When we hear the "bad news" continually on the TV or social media, it can be easy to lose our focus and end up reacting impulsively – and maybe even coming to the wrong conclusions. We need to remember to stay calm and keep our focus – and gather more information and take our time and pray about the situation.

And that is exactly what Daniel does next. Look at verse 17:

¹⁷Then Daniel went home and told his friends Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah what had happened. ¹⁸He urged them to ask the God of heaven to show them his mercy by telling them the secret, so they would not be executed along with the other wise men of Babylon.

It is so important to have the prayer support of our friends! We really can't live faithfully in our upside-down world without prayer – we need the power of God! And we need the prayers of others to intercede for us! That's why we put such a big emphasis on prayer at our church. We need each other! Praying with and for each other can help us to be more focused

and draw us closer to God... enabling us to find the help we need and the answers we are looking for.

And that's what happened to Daniel. Look at verse 19. *"That night the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven."* And then what follows is a wonderful prayer of praise from Daniel – and he describes who God is. God is the one that controls what happens in the world. He's the one who gives wisdom and reveals secrets - not the gods of the Babylonians. And He has given wisdom and strength to Daniel. Daniel's focus was on God and what great things *God* has done – not on how great and mighty *he* was now that he knew the king's dream. Daniel was humble and grateful – and he thought of others.

Notice verse 24. Daniel goes to find Arioch and says, *"Don't kill the wise men. Take me to see the king."* Now, he could have said, "I've got the answer. Don't kill *me*." But Daniel thought of others – even those magicians and fortunetellers that didn't know the one, true God. And what we discover at the end of the story, all of those wise men were spared. Daniel kept his focus on God and knew that those lives of the wise men were important to God, as well as his own.

As we live in this upside-down world, where there is so much hatred and division and confusion about what is the truth. Do we care as much for people around us – especially those with whom we disagree? To live faithfully in this chaotic and crazy world, we need to be looking at others as children of God that God cares for deeply....and not just looking out for ourselves.

Daniel definitely keeps that same focus and humility as he went to tell the dream to the king. Look at verse 27. Daniel says to the king: *"There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians or fortune-tellers who can reveal the king's secret. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets and He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future."* Daniel does not take the credit – but gives God the glory. Living faithfully means keeping your focus off yourself and on God, giving Him glory and honor.

So, Daniel is able to tell the king every part of his dream and then interpret it for him. Now this dream is pretty spectacular, and the interpretation is pretty powerful BUT we don't have time today to go through all the parts of the dream. We talked about it for a good portion of our Bible Study last Wednesday night and still didn't cover it all.

Let me just sum up the dream quickly by saying it was about a large statue of a man that was covered in various metals – the head being gold, the shoulders and arms silver, the chest and abdomen – bronze and the legs of iron and the feet made of iron and clay. And then there was a mountain, from which came a big rock which came and smashed the statue – crushing it to dust. And then the rock became a mountain that covered all the earth.

Each of those different sections described on the statue point to worldly powers, beginning with the head of gold that represented the Babylonian kingdom. Every kingdom would eventually be conquered and then destroyed – with a new kingdom to rule. And all

these kingdoms mentioned in the dream were kingdoms from the future – from the Medes and Persians to the Greeks and then to the Romans. All the kingdoms fell and were destroyed.

But ultimately, in the end, there will be one kingdom that will stand. Look at verses 44 & 45 – where Daniel interprets that part of the dream. Daniel says: ⁴⁴“*During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered. It will crush all these kingdoms into nothingness, and it will stand forever.*” ⁴⁵*That is the meaning of the rock cut from the mountain, though not by human hands, that crushed to pieces the statue of iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold. The great God was showing the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true, and its meaning is certain.*”

And what is that rock – not made of human hands? That is the rock we know as Jesus Christ. Jesus is that rock that the builders rejected that has become the chief cornerstone. (Matthew 24:22) He is the solid rock upon which we build our faith – our firm foundation. He will one day come to judge all the nations and God’s kingdom will be established – and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Every other kingdom will pass away but God’s kingdom will rule forever!

So, what does that all mean for us? It means we can live with confidence and trust – as Daniel did. Unshaken by the all the unsettling changes in our culture. We don’t have to fall into despair thinking that everything is falling apart in our world. As David Jeremiah puts it: “*We don’t have to spend our time griping and grappling with hopelessness. Daniel didn’t lose heart. He evaluated everything with the end in mind and stayed calm and confident under stress.*”² We can live faithfully when we keep our focus on God and know that the future is in His hands. Christ will one day return, and His kingdom will endure forever! And finally, our prayer that we say every Sunday will be at last answered: “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.*”³ That is our focus – our prayer – and our hope!

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

RESOURCES

¹Shockwave. <https://www.sfotsource.com/rides/shockwave>

²David Jeremiah, *Agents of Babylon*. Tyndale House, 2015. Page 81.

³IBID. Page 77.