

## Sermon – 15/07/2007 pm

### Bad Dreams

Study Text: Daniel 2:1-13

Have you had a dream lately? Maybe you had a nightmare and woke up in fear. What are we to make of dreams? This is an age-old question and a vexed question. Some people dismiss dreams altogether while others are guided by them – even within the Christian community. Scientists analyse impulses given off by the brain in an effort to understand dreams, while astrologers and the like offer to interpret dreams for a fee. We are not going to try and answer these questions just now, but it is interesting that in the Bible we find a number of accounts of dreams being interpreted by servants of the Lord.

Joseph had dreams which he told his brothers – they called him the Dreamer. They had some understanding of what his dreams meant and hated him because of this. It was in Egypt that Joseph used his God-given power to interpret dreams to actually save the nation. The Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him. He called his magicians and wise men but they could not interpret his dream. When Joseph was called he said *it is not in me, God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace* (Genesis 41:16). In a dream God revealed the future to the king but only a servant of God could interpret this for him. Without Joseph the Pharaoh would have remained in his troubled state and his people would have perished.

### An Insecure King

In the second year of his reign *Nebuchadnezzar had dreams and his spirit so troubled him that sleep left him* (2:1). There is some debate about the date at this point. If it was his second year then Daniel's three year training would not have been complete, some say. But the difficulty is not insurmountable, nor is it important.

Nebuchadnezzar was ruler over a vast kingdom. He was a very powerful and no doubt rich man. He could have anything and everything he wanted. But this night he was denied sleep because of a dream. He was a troubled man. He had no peace in his heart. His vivid dream meant something, but what? He maybe sensed it was about the future, his future. He was terribly insecure.

Most heathens live in fear of the unknown future. Do you not see people grasping at any and every piece of information (or misinformation) they can get about the future. The media is full of predictions about interest rates, elections, weather and all manner of things. If you want something more personal you can go to the horoscopes and clairvoyants. I am sure there are dream interpreters to be found also. Nebuchadnezzar had his own band of dream interpreters whom he called this night when he could not sleep.

As much as Nebuchadnezzar wanted to be god and have his subjects worship him, he was only a man. He was bound by the things of this world and this time. 'The horizons of his ambitions always moved with the change and decay of this world'. 'When pagan intellectuals reminded him that they and he were humans and not gods, he flew into a rage and reacted in a way reminiscent of the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: "if there is a God, how can I bear not to be that God?"'.

People who are outside of Christ think of themselves as gods, as rulers of their own lives, as men who determine their own destiny. But dreams can be very unsettling for such people. Remember Pharaoh. Remember Pilate's wife who told him not to touch Jesus because *I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him* (Matthew 27:19). Here we see Nebuchadnezzar similarly troubled.

What about you? Are you troubled by bad dreams? Do you think you are in control of your own destiny, or do you acknowledge a power greater than yourself? Do you acknowledge the omnipotent and omniscient God? Do you know the peace of God in your heart that guards your heart and mind from the anxieties of the heathen?

## A Hostile King

Insecurity and anxiety often lead to hostility. The desire to be god and rule one's own life has a cost. It puts a strain on interpersonal relationships. A king like Nebuchadnezzar would have made many enemies in his rise to power – some of them were still alive. Those who want to be rulers, even of their own lives, tread upon those around them as they seek greater control over their life. They grow to trust no one but themselves.

Nebuchadnezzar called his spiritual advisors and they dutifully came, probably in the middle of the night. But when they came he decided not to tell them his dream. A poor translation in 2:5 ('the thing is gone from me') has led some to think that he forgot his dream but what he said was his decision was firm or he had made up his mind. Why? Why did he decide not to tell his dream?

We know that in the providence of God, Daniel would come forth to reveal the omniscience of God. But at the human level Nebuchadnezzar did not trust his own advisors. He accused them of stalling for time (2:8) and then of conspiring to speak lying and corrupt words (2:9). He had long suspected that their interpretations were 'not worth the paper they were written on' – but then again what could he expect from mere men like himself.

'In his heart of hearts Nebuchadnezzar must have known, as must the magicians themselves, that the religion of Babylon was mere superstition and man made religion' (E.J. Young). This is a profound statement. It occurred to me many times as I watched men make offerings to idols. Surely they know that this is just a lump of clay. We would see students worshipping an idol they had made all morning and then in the afternoon throw it in the river. Did they really believe that such a god would help them in their studies?

Many today resort to all manner of superstition to pass exams, to win matches, to win the lottery and so on. More than twice the usual number of couples were married on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July this year. They thought it was a lucky day and that their marriage would be better for getting married on this day. Such is the desperate search for a happy marriage! Such is the blindness of men and women outside of Christ.

*The Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic* (2:4). Chaldeans seems to be a general term for these magicians and sorcerers. They were probably natives of Babylon and spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language somewhat different to Hebrew. Daniel began to write in Aramaic from this point until the end of chapter 7. Why, we do not know, but maybe because these conversations were in Aramaic, and because the focus was upon Babylonian people. E.J.

Young concludes ‘all in all the solution which seems to be most free from difficulty is that Aramaic, being the language of the world, is used in portions of the book which outline the future history of worldly empires and their relation to the people of God, and Hebrew is used in those portions which interpret for the Hebrews the meaning of the visions of world empires’.

## Only God

Nebuchadnezzar threatened his magicians with death if they did not tell him his dream and its interpretation. His demand was totally unreasonable as his advisors pointed out. Here was a troubled man getting angry and threatening death to his servants because of a dream that he had. Here is life under the rule of Satan in all its horror. Wicked people are too ready to make others pay for their own troubled hearts.

The Chaldeans declared that *there is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter* (2:10). What the king was asking was something only the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh, could tell. They admitted that they were not gods and that there was a power greater than them. Would the king admit this also? Well not for the present. He was furious and ordered that all his wise men be destroyed – including Daniel and his friends (2:13).

These Chaldeans had laid the platform for the Lord to reveal himself through Daniel to this proud and troubled king. He would learn that there is a God who knows all things, even his dreams and the thoughts of his heart.

As the apostle Paul wandered the streets of Athens he saw an altar to ‘the unknown god’. This city was the home of great philosophers like Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. Some acknowledged the existence of gods who could not be known but who they felt they should worship. Even today many people are kept very busy worshipping all the gods just in case they offend any. Paul used this altar as a platform to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. *The one who you worship without knowing, him I proclaim to you* said Paul (Acts 17:23).

Into the midst of a troubled people, people filled with fear because of dreams, because of horoscopes; because of financial woes or political hype this glorious gospel of peace with God through Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. The platform is there for us. People today are troubled at every turn. They are running for help in all sorts of places. Oh that they would come to the light of life, Jesus Christ the Lord.

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