



THE STORY WE TELL

Today we're thinking stories. We all tell ourselves a story: a narrative by which we understand the world and our place within it. And that story is important, because what we tell ourselves (what psychologists call our 'mind-chatter') can affect how we think, speak, and act. E.g. if you tell yourself you're useless, or ugly, or insignificant, what are you going to act like? Like you are. Equally, if you tell yourself other people are useless, ugly, or insignificant it will affect how you act towards them.

Now the world is full of narratives, not all of them good. And if we're going to change them, we need to have a firm grasp of the alternative.

Which brings us to:

Daniel 2

Ch2:4 - ch7 are written in largely 6th century BC Aramaic, the 'universal language' of the Persian Empire. I.e. this is a message 'for the nations.'

But the chapters also form a symmetrical structure, like this:

Ch2 corresponds with ch7
Ch3 corresponds with ch6
Ch4 corresponds with ch5

So, what is the message, the narrative of ch2 (and also ch7)? That's what we're going to figure out today.

Who here has ever played the kids' game, rock, paper, scissors? Scissors cut paper, paper covers rock, rock blunts scissors, etc. The story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream looks similar: king, statue, prophet, rock.

The order matters. Let's have a look at each:

1) King. The story begins with Nebuchadnezzar having a dream, an apocalyptic vision, that reminds him of his place in the universe. And he's so scared he summons his wise men and puts them to the test by demanding that they tell him not just the interpretation, but the dream itself. Just to make sure they're not making it up.

Now this is a man who's been brought up to believe this story is all about him. A bit like your average 21st century westerner. And it's not a good place to be. Why? Because there's only room for one God in this universe, and that's the one who created it (we can't do that).

But it's also an empty place, a dark place, a deceitful place, a destructive place. And the only way is ... down!

All of which means Nebuchadnezzar needs a wake-up call: a change to his narrative. And so do we.

2) Statue. Nebuchadnezzar's dream involves a statue made up of 4 sections, each composed of a different element, and representing 4 successive world empires. And as you go down the statue there's a material downgrade, from strong to average to weak to unstable:

- Head of gold: Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar II.
- Upper body: Media.
- Belly of bronze: Persia.
- Legs of iron / feet of clay: Greece / successor states.

The dream is saying, "Your empire is not going to last. And neither will theirs." I.e. everything is passing. Music comes and goes. Entertainment. Fashion. Technology. Even morality. But God, He lasts forever.

The point is: Christian, don't let a temporary, disintegrating world write your narrative. Do what Daniel did: let God write it!

3) Prophet. Only 1 man can interpret the dream: Daniel, "one of the exiles from Judah." What made Daniel different? So different that Nebuchadnezzar was willing to listen? So different that God was willing to speak?

- He understood the language.
- He had a reputation for wisdom.
- He believed in the power of prayer.
- He used the gifts God had given him.
- He was a part of the King's life.
- He understood the narrative.

That's what made him different! You might think "I'm a small fish in a very big pond." But God has put you where you are to be a prophetic voice. To point people to a world that lasts forever. A world they could be a part of!

Who knows what difference *you* might make? To *them*?

4) Rock. A mere pebble. And yet, the greatest wrecking ball of all time! It demolishes the empires that come before and grows to become a global mountain. What is this rock? No doubt Nebuchadnezzar believed it was him. According to Josephus, the Zealots believed it was them.

In reality, it's the Kingdom of God. Ultimately, it's Jesus.

But. Jesus fulfilled this in a way people did not expect. Born in a stable, to ostracised parents, from a despised people, in a backwater of the Roman Empire. He lived His life with the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed. He smashed the kingdoms of this world by allowing them to smash Him. And then ... He rose from the dead.

Jesus inverts the world's definitions of power. Think John 16: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart: I have overcome the world."

And because *He* has, *we* will.

Know That Story Well

So, king, statue, prophet, rock. And like the materials in the statue, this list becomes less and less glorious while at the same time becoming more and more powerful. The kingdoms of this world always like to think their stories will last forever. The message of this chapter is there's only 1 story that will: the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom of love, grace, truth, humility, justice. The best story of all.

As Daniel says in his hymn of praise in vs20-23: "You have made known to me what we asked of You; You have made known to us the dream of the king."

AKA the better narrative.

Some of the narratives we hear today are pointless: they mean nothing and go nowhere. Others are downright bad for us. You and I have been given the job of sharing a better narrative than the world has to offer. So ... what is that narrative? Could you tell it?

To remind yourself of that narrative, here are a couple of questions:

- What difference has Jesus made to us, i.e. the world? What difference *will* He make, when He returns?
- What difference has Jesus made to me, personally? What was I like before Jesus? What am I like now?

There's your better narrative.