

Belshazzar's Feast in its Application to the Great Exhibition

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[Only articles not found elsewhere are shown here.]

While Jeremiah was left at Jerusalem to witness the course of moral corruption there, and to warn of coming judgment, and while Ezekiel was among the remnant in the place of discipline or of righteousness on the river Chebar, Daniel is set among the Gentiles, even at Babylon, to learn the history and the ways of the Gentiles, or the world.

We may see this in his first six chapters, which constitute the first part of the book. In Daniel 1 we see the Gentiles, or the world, set up. Then in Daniel 2 we get the same system, the world, in its political career onward to the kingdom, figured in the great image, seen in all its parts, from its head of gold to its toes of iron-clay; and judged, in the appointed hour, by the stone which becomes a mountain, to occupy the scene of power all the world over, with an untransferable kingdom. Then in the four following chapters, the stories of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius give us the moral course of the world. In Nebuchadnezzar we get a persecuting power, connected with human religion or idolatry. The king sets up an image and demands the worship of it on pain of the fiery furnace. The righteous refuse and suffer. In Belshazzar we get the easy, worldly, self-indulgent thing, with contempt of religion. The king makes a feast, worshipping all that which ministered to his pleasures. The righteous are utter strangers to it all. In Darius we get a persecuting power again, but it is in connection with self-exaltation. The king makes an interdict that none are to be treated as God but himself, for so many days on pain of the lion's den. The righteous again refuse and suffer.

These are plain and sure distinctions in the progress of Gentile iniquity. And it may strike us, I judge, very clearly, that we are present rather in the day of Belshazzar. Persecution and idol-service gave character to the preceding day, and persecution and deification of man to the day which followed; but all was easy indifference, with thorough satisfaction in the present things of the world, in the day of Belshazzar. Refusal and consequent suffering form the path or history of the righteous in the times of the idolatrous, persecuting Nebuchadnezzar, and of the self-exalting, persecuting Darius; but in the times of Belshazzar, perfect and thorough separation is the place of the saints of God.

There is a voice for us in all this. Daniel is not seen at the feast. And there is one, though not in his strength yet much in his spirit, who is absent also — the queen, the king's mother. The king is ignorant of the man of God who was then in his dominions. He is also unmindful of the doings of God which had been in the same dominions in the days of his father. But the queen has recollections and knowledge of these things, and she is a stranger to his feast.

Is not the question then with us to be this: Who is the separated one now? Who is going to the king's feast, or who, in the light of the Lord, is separated from it? The present is in easy, self-indulgent, worldly moment. The gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of wood and of iron, are praised. All the capabilities in the world to make a feast are produced, and displayed, and gloried in. Social accommodation and social delights are the great object. Man's works, the fruit of his skill and the resources of his country, adorn and furnish the scene. and are the host of the feast, that which gathers and entertains. Man is providing the joy of this awful hour in the world's history — awful indeed, not in the judgments or sorrows which are upon it, but in the moral principles which are quickening it. The captivity of Zion was heedlessly forgotten by Belshazzar, and the vessels of God's temple were

profaned. The operations of His hands were not considered, but the wine and the tabret were in his feast. So now; the rejection of Christ is by common consent forgotten, that man may meet his fellow, greet him with a common joy and with a common welcome, because they are all of one earth, of the same world, of kindred flesh and blood; and all God's claims on His elect and testimony against the world are thrown together as what for a season must be passed by, till the feast-day is kept.

Where then, again I ask, is the separated one? Where is Daniel? Where is the king's mother? The feast does not attract either of them, though they may be in different measures of strength. Daniel knew the character of it before the judgment of it was pronounced. He does not wait for the fingers of the man's hand to put him into his place in relation to it. He is not moved by the mysterious writing on the wall. Sudden destruction, as a thief in the night, does not come upon him. He and his companion, though "a weaker vessel," are, in the spirit of their minds, in the place from whence these fingers were sent — they were "children of light as children of the day." The judgment upon the feast had no terror for them, for they were not at the feast. They had judged it already. Their separation was not sleep. "They that sleep sleep in the night, and they that are drunken are drunken in the night." But they were no more indifferent to it than taking their pleasure at it. Their separation therefore, as I said, was not sleep. In a divine sense they watched and were sober (1 Thess. 5: 3). In the separated place Daniel knew the judgment of God about it all, long before the writing on the wall announced it to the world. All this is full of meaning for us.

I am not going to say that the form of evil which Belshazzar's day presents is the worst. Nebuchadnezzar set up an idol before that day, and Darius set up himself after it. The fiery furnace was heated for the saints in the former reign, and the lion's den was open for them in the latter. The day of Belshazzar witnessed nothing of this. The abomination in the plain of Dura did not demand worship then, neither did the royal statute forbid worship toward Jerusalem then. But still there is something in Belshazzar himself, if not in his day, which especially provoked the Spirit of the Lord. Daniel can feel for Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar is brought to a right repentant mind, and the judgment of God is reversed. Daniel too, can feel for Darius, and Darius is seen in humbled gracious meltings of soul, and we can all pity him — pity him when we see him unwittingly involved in results which a moment's vanity and easiness of nature had led to. But from us Belshazzar gets no kindly movement of heart, from the Spirit of God in Daniel nothing but stern rebuke, and from the hand of God nothing but swift destruction, the fingers on the wall announcing it, and the sword of the Median executing it; "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

He was the easy man of the world. He despised all religious fear. What he worshipped was his pleasures, the gods of silver, of brass, and of gold, the vessels which could fill out his entertainments and make provision for his lusts. He did not summon the world to either his idol or himself, but to his board and to his holyday. Nebuchadnezzar makes an image, Darius a royal decree, Belshazzar a feast. But Jerusalem and her sorrows are forgotten, the temple and its furniture despised. The wonders which the God of Jerusalem and of the temple had freshly wrought in the land were all a dream or a fiction with him, and the very spoils of His house he can use in making merry with his friends.

This was easy worldliness — the heartless way of man who can forget God's wonders, and the rejection and humiliation of Christ. And all this is terrible. The harp, and the pipe, and the tabret are in such feasts; but the operation of God's hands are forgotten. Till now the vessels of God's house had been held in some fear and honour. But now they are profaned and made to serve the lusts of the king. God had ordained them to witness the separation of His priestly nation, and His own worship in the midst of His people; but the king makes them the instruments of his sport.

And what, I ask, is the effect to deck out the world, to enjoy it, and to boast of it, while Jesus is rejected by its citizens? Is it not a thing in kindred spirit with this? The rejection of Christ is forgotten yea, despised; for that is gloried in and displayed which continues the word, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Is not this somewhat of taking of the choice vessels of God's house, in the very day of their captivity, to make merry with them?

The present moment may surely thus remind us of Belshazzar's feast. God's of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, and of wood are praised; the resources and capabilities of the world are displayed, thoughtless of its rejection of Christ. And are any of the captivity at the king's feast? Israel was captive together with the vessels of the temple. Would any of them be so thoughtless as to make merry with the king who was despising the spoils of that house? Would any of the servants of the rejected nobleman take part with the citizens in setting forth the wonders of their blood-stained land? (See Luke 19)

The mind turns with these thoughts to the present moment. It cannot refuse to give itself, in some sort and in some measure, to the subject of "The Great Exhibition." It would not be fit that it should be indifferent to it; for it is no common sign of the time and ought to be morally judged.

It will be pleaded for; no doubt of it. It will be said, that it is designed to encourage brotherhood among the nations, and to promote the great business of social comfort and happiness as wide as the human family. But, I ask, are these God's objects? God has scattered the nations, and never proposes to gather them till He gathers them to Shiloh. God would have us strangers here, "content with such things as we have," without making it our business to increase or improve them. God would have us testify against the world in its present condition, and therefore neither flatter it, nor reconcile it to itself, nor glory in its capabilities. The Exhibition is therefore in full collision with the mind of God. Christ exposes the world; the Exhibition displays it. Christ would alarm it, and call it to a sense of judgment; the Exhibition makes it on better terms with itself than ever.

It is indeed a mighty advance in all the apostate reprobate principles of man. Efforts of a like kind we may be familiar with; but they are commonplace in comparison with this. As prophets speak, touching advance in the ways of evil, this is indeed "adding drunkenness to thirst."

I regard all admiration of it as a step in the way to "wonder after the beast." That will be but a further expression of the same mind; and how serious, if evangelical religion be sending its contributions to it or becoming one of the Exhibitors at it! Deep must be the infatuation. To tell the world one day what it is in God's esteem, and the next day to become one of the wonderers after its resources and capacities! Admiration like this savours of worship.

Like the old prophet at Bethel, when a saint is in a place or a position unwarranted by the call of God, the enemy will find easy occasion to use him. Still I own, when I think of it, it is to me wonderful that a Christian should find satisfaction in this thing. That it is an awful advance in the development of those evil principles which are to mark the day of Christendom's ripened iniquity, I have not the least doubt.

The Lord of old scattered the nations. (See Gen. 11) This was judgment on a bold attempt of theirs, when they were of one speech and one language, to make themselves independent of God. And has He reversed that judgment? There is indeed an appointed time when it shall be reversed. Jerusalem shall be a centre, and Shiloh a gathering object. The nations will flock to Zion, there to see the King in His beauty. And none of them there, we may say, shall appear before the Lord empty. The tributes of all the lands shall beautify the place of God's sanctuary. The fruits of Midian and of Ephah shall be there, — gold and incense from Sheba, the flock of Kedar and the rams of Nebaioth, the glory of Lebanon, the forces of all the Gentiles. All shall flock there, like doves to their windows and kings

shall minister there. Gold too shall be for brass, silver for iron, brass for wood, and iron for stones. All shall be for glory and beauty in the earth then. But this is still future. This is for "the world to come," after the Redeemer has come out of Zion, and turned away ungodliness from Jacob. See Isaiah 59 and Romans 11.

The reversing of the judgment of scattering at Babel is left for the kingdom of God at Jerusalem. He that scattered must gather. He is Lord of the nations. "The powers that be are ordained of God." It is His pleasure that they should be scattered nations still; for one universal monarchy is appointed of God for Jesus only — as it is written, "every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." "His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

The name of Jesus was, indeed, proposed as a gathering object in the day of Pentecost. Tongues were then cloven as they had been at Babel. But it was to reunite what had been already severed. But this proposal, like every other on God's part to man, was disappointed. The hard unbelieving heart did this. And what is man now proposing? He who refused God's proposal to gather to Jesus, in the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, is proposing to gather to himself. He will exalt himself as at Babel. He will be independent of God. He will be like the Most High. The beast will issue his decree on pain of death, his mark will be received on the forehead, and all the world will wonder after him. (Rev. 13) This is in the prospect of the world's history. He who will not let Christ be exalted will surely seek to exalt himself. And such an one is man.

Isaiah, anticipating in the Spirit the last days, warns the people of God against saying "a confederacy," in common with the world around them. (Isa. 8) And I ask myself and others, do we in deed and in faith receive these notices from the prophets? Do we judge that man will thus exalt himself and confederate — thus gather round himself? And if we treat these warnings of the character of the last days as divine, can we doubt from all we see and hear, that man has already begun to practise his hand in kindred attempts, in efforts which shall issue in all this?

The facilities and the speed in linking the nations one with another is now well known. It is used and gloried in. And what is this "Great Exhibition" but another trying of his skill in forwarding the main leading purpose of man's heart? No doubt it suits the spirit which is moving all this, to have it under the sanction of religion. When he can use for his own ends, nothing suits the devil better. He would fain have had Christ exalt Himself under the sanction of Psalm 91. And again, and again, he would have acknowledged Christ, had He allowed it — as the spirit of divination would have witnessed to Christ's servant, had he received it. (Acts 16) But this could not be. The beast, however, will have his false prophet. He will use religion for his own ends. But divine religions takes us only into God's ends. And it teaches us this (with the authority of the real intrinsic holiness of such a principle): we can have no fellowship with that against which we are called to testify. (Eph. 5: 11)

Nor can we say that the judgment we form on this matter is a small or an indifferent thing. It is not so. The subject is well fitted to exercise the judgment of a saint of God. It is eminently so, I believe. His mind generally will be much affected by his sense of this thing and his decision respecting it. The mind can become dull. The eye gets dim betimes. And if such a process as that be going on, the next attempt of the enemy finds us less prepared. And I ask, Is not all that dangerous, when delusions are multiplying as they are and as they will?

We are counselled to buy eye-salve of Christ, that we may see. That is something beyond or beside faith and confession of the gospel. Laodicea had the common faith, and in a sense boasted of it, but Laodicea wanted eye-salve. And sure I am that let this great shop of the world's ware expose what it may, that eye-salve is the very thing which will not, cannot be had there. It is the article which would

detect the whole character of the place, and it could not therefore be bad there. It is a palace. Man is not enthroned there as God, it is true. Things among the children of men are not quite ripe for that yet. It is not a temple where man sits, showing himself as God. (2 Thess. 2) But man's works are displayed there. Man's art is enthroned there, and man expects to be admired and wondered at there, and thousands enter it (as another has observed) in the spirit of doing homage to man. It is a mirror in which the world is reflected in a thousand attractive forms, and the unworldly humbled, earth-rejected Jesus is forgotten. Jesus may be named there, it is true, but an unworldly Jesus is practically forgotten there.

It is indeed as I surely judge, solemnly, awfully significant. It is full of the spirit of the last days. This palace for man's productions to be gazed at, is but a stage before the temple for man himself to sit in — and admiration of it is getting a generation ready, morally ready, to "wonder after the beast." One is amazed that any Christian can find the least satisfaction in it.

This Exhibition (for it calls itself by that significant name) in its way shows all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. It does not hide this. It professes to do this. Like John Bunyan's Vanity Fair, there is the Italian row, and the German row, and the English row. It has human skill and resources in all variety and from all lands. It presents the kingdoms of the world, and "the glory of them." And who, I ask, was it that did this before? The Spirit led the Son of God into "the wilderness," a place of strangership and pilgrimage — but the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

The world, according to the scriptures of God, is a lost and a judged thing, it is incapable of recovery. The word of God does not, in a single passage of it, warrant the thought that it can be advanced or cultivated for God. He has judged it — though in grace the judgment tarries, and the long-suffering of God is salvation. But the world is a system past all hope of recovery, till the judgment be executed. But confederacy is an attempt to fix the world in its present condition, to settle it, though it be in departure from God and enmity against Christ. This was the thought at Babel of old.

Separation of His own out of the world is God's way now. And this separation is the deepest and most thorough judgment that could be passed upon the world. This is a more complete judgment of it than by the waters of the flood, or by the plagues of Egypt, or by the sword of Joshua. The withdrawal or separation of all that God owns bespeaks final thoughts about the world, and not merely a purifying of it from present corruptions, as by the waters of Noah, in order to put it on a fresh trial. The trial of it is over, the judgment of it is pronounced, and the delay is but for the salvation of the elect. The attitude of the Church, that is, separation from the earth, and heavenly calling, tells us of the full moral condemnation of the course of things here. And thus the Church judges the world. Her position and calling does so.

The "servants" of the departed "nobleman" very well know that the country of the "citizens" has very great resources, and very great capabilities; and they know that in due season such will be both used and displayed. But they cannot allow this thought while that country is as it is now — stained with the blood of their rejected master. The cry, "We will not have this man to reign over us," is ever in their ears. And with that cry from the land, can they, in company with the "citizens" who raised it and still keep it up (for the character of the world, as we have said from scripture, is unalterably fixed), be occupied in investigating and producing the treasures of their country and the skill of its people, and glory in the thought of the common advancement?

They cannot, when alive to the character of the place where they are, and awake, as they should ever be, to the cry which followed the rejected Jesus as He left it — they cannot. The cup of the Lord's

indignation is to go round the nations, and they must drink it. An awful reverse this will be from Belshazzar passing the wine among his courtiers and concubines in the cups of the Lord's house. And solemn it is in those nations feasting and praising the gods of gold, and of silver, of iron, of brass, and of wood while such an handwriting as that, is on the wall against them. If not on the walls of the palace, it is in the books of the prophets.. (Psalm 75; Jer. 25)

Incorruption, I can say, cannot inherit corruption, The spotless Jesus cannot hold an unpurged dominion. The woman of Revelation 17 glorifies herself, and lives deliciously in the earth during that very time in which the judgment of God is awaiting it; but the bride of Revelation 21 does not become manifested in the earth till it has been cleansed and is ready, not for the judgment of the Lord but for the presence of the glory.

There is infinite moral distance there. The world must be judged ere it can be adopted of God. The earth must be purified before it can be furnished and adorned for Him. This has been again and again transacted in the progress of the divine government. Noah, God's saint and representative, took the earth to rule and to enjoy it, but it had previously passed through the purifying of the flood. Israel, God's people and witnesses, took the land of Canaan to possess and enjoy it, but it had been judged by the sword of Joshua. And according to these types the earth is to be cleansed; out of the kingdom is to be taken all that offends and does iniquity ere Jesus will take the power.

Ornament and furniture well becomes it, for it is the Lord's footstool. Eden had not only its plants, and trees, and fruits, and flowers; but its gold, its bdellium, and its onyx stones. Solomon, in typical days of glory, trafficked in all desirable riches. And the millennial Jerusalem will receive all the treasures of the provinces. (Isaiah 60) But the present age is not millennial, the earth is not yet an extended Eden. Corruption is not judged; the things that offend and do iniquity are not taken away, nor is there any divine commission to that end. The field of tares is not to be cleansed now — it waits for the angels and the time of harvest. The saint submits to "the powers that be," knowing that "God" will stand in the congregation of them for judgment in due season (compare Rom. 13: 1 with Psalm 82: 1).

It is despite of the holiness of God, we may therefore say, to be presenting this evil world in its ornaments and furniture, in its resources and capabilities, as this Exhibition is doing. And it is also despite of the wrongs and sorrows of Christ. The citizens who have cast outside their city and country the blessed Son of God, are exhibiting what their country can produce, and what their hands can skilfully weave and fashion. I ask, could a servant of such a rejected Master, aid and encourage such things? Could he be a servant a moment beyond the time that he thus practically forgot his Lord's rejection here? He could not. He might, indeed, be a useful member of society, and serve his generation in their generation well; but a servant of Christ (properly speaking) he could not be if once he forgot the world's rejection of Christ; and acceptance of the invitation of the citizens (19) to come and seek to rejoice with them in the resources of their country and the skill of their people would at once be such forgetfulness.

The sorrow and the humbling of a saint is that he remembers the rejection of his Master so coldly and acts on that great fact so poorly. But to have it estranged from the soul so as to consent to take part with the citizens from one end of the world to the other, in a great confederated effort to display the world as a wealthy and desirable place — to do this in full and hearty fellowship with all, on the ground of the common humanity, is confounding light and darkness, Christ and Belial. The language of the whole thing is this — We will forget, at least for a season, the claims and the sorrows of Jesus, and have a holyday with the world that has rejected Him.

Has so little "eye-salve" been bought of Christ as to leave the saints in such a blinded condition

of soul as this? "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." When Daniel and his companions entered the place of the Gentiles, they carried one purpose of heart with them, that they would not defile themselves with the king's meat (Dan. 1: 8). He knew not what this might cost him, but this was his purpose. He had bought this eye-salve of Christ, ere he stood among the uncircumcised. And in the strength of the Lord, he and his dear companions stood. The fiery furnace and the lion's den witness the victory of men strengthened by Christ. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." And so at Belshazzar's feast. Daniel entered it is a conqueror, as afterwards he entered the lion's den. He had no affinity with the feast — not a bit. He was, in the day of it, as we have seen, a separated man. But he was called to it, and he entered the banqueting hall as a conqueror. The king who was there promised to make him "the third ruler in the kingdom." "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another," said the servant of Christ. He was as much a conqueror in the day of the feast, as he was in the day of the lion's den.

Noble attitude of a saint of God! Could such a man have accepted an invitation to the feast? Morally impossible. And "the eye-salve" which Christ had supplied him with, disclosed its further virtues, as he stood in that palace of the world's enjoyments. There was nothing in the language of the writing on the wall beyond the astrologers of Babylon more than beyond Daniel. Not so much, I might say. At least the words were as familiar to a Chaldean as to a Hebrew. But the wise men of Babylon, the scribes of Belshazzar's court and kingdom were not equal to interpret them. They were morally incapacitated. A single eye to Christ alone can do so to this day — the "eye-salve." If we test a thing by any test but Christ, we shall misinterpret it. It will appear fair, and good, and desirable, if we try it by its relationship to the welfare of society, or to the advancement of man and the world; but if we look at it in the light of a rejected Jesus, its bloom will be found to be corruption. Standing in the festive hall, Daniel traces the whole scene in Babylon at that hour in relation to God. He rehearses before Belshazzar God's way with Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar's way with God, and then Belshazzar's own hardness and infidel pride in defiance of Him who had wrought the wonders. This was Daniel's key to the writing — of course, I know, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But still this was the prophet's moral apprehension of the king's feast. He judged it in reference to God — and what could the end be, but awful and sudden destruction? The writing must speak of judgment, and though the lords and the captains, the wives and the concubines, sport themselves in the king's hall.

"Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." It is blessed so to do, but it is hard. We judge of things in reference to ourselves, and not in reference to Christ. We think rather of the world's improvement than of His rejection. We talk of human capabilities rather than of human and incurable apostasy. We want the eye-salve, without which we cannot see — we cannot discover the feast, or read the writing on the wall.

The disciples wanted it on the Mount of Olives, as they looked on the Temple. They saw the building but not with the eye of Christ, not as anointed with the eye-salve. He had seen it, and all that surrounded it, with the eye of God; and costly as it was and beautiful beyond comparison, He had written the judgment of it; yea, on the very wall He had written the judgment of "that beautiful house." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem — your house is left unto you desolate." This was writing with the same divine authority which had sentenced Belshazzar and his feast. But the disciples still eyed the beauty of the stones, and Jesus, in patient grace, but because of their demand, and unanointed eye, had to re-write the doom of that place: "Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down."

Sad to tell of it then, sad to see it now, sad to know, in our own worldly hearts, the secret of all this darkness. We may be sorry to find it thus among disciples, though prepared to get it plentifully

among the children of men. The kings of the earth, the merchants, and the mariners bewail the fall of Babylon, and we wonder not. They judged Babylon in reference to themselves — they had lived deliciously with her. How could they have eye-salve to know her, and to see her with the mind of heaven? God "remembered her iniquities," but they remembered her as one "wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness." They therefore bewail, when heaven rejoices. The lords at the feast tremble, when heaven traces its doom. But sad it is that saints should be admiring the "costliness" which the mind of heaven has already judged.

What words in our ears, beloved, are all these — what writings under our eyes! O for the anointing which Christ has for His saints! O for power in our souls to judge the king's feast, the Gentiles' greatness, the world's advancement, the jubilee of Babylon, in the light of the rejection of the Son of God, in the hearing of that cry, "We will not have this man to reign over us. Then let us ask ourselves, if we have a pulse of affection or allegiance to Jesus, can we glory in this present moment with all its costliness and pleasures?"