

The Handwriting on the Wall
Daniel 5:13-31, Trinity Sunday XV
September 24, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....People often ask the question, Which is the true church? Which church has the truth, and how do we know? This is a good and fair question. But what is the answer? The answer is this: the true church (visible) is that church which faithfully preaches and teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The True Visible church truthfully and faithfully teaches all that God teaches us in the Bible. It only follows then that false churches preach and teach one or many things which are contrary to what the Bible teaches. But how do we know then which is right and wrong, which is true and false? What then is the standard by which we judge all the churches of the world? Or what is the tool we use to determine if one church or the other is teaching the truth or falsehood? The answer here is THE BIBLE. All of us need to look at this whole world around us through the eyes of Holy Scripture. In like manner, all the churches and denominations of this world must be judged according to the teachings of the Bible. For the Bible is the Word of God, it is God's perfect revelation, IT IS THE TRUTH, given to all of mankind in order that man might be saved from his damnable sins. This Word of God which God gave to you says in John 20:31, "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." God wrote the Bible that you might believe in God's own Son, Jesus Christ. By believing in Him you have life through His name! You could say that the Bible, is God's handwriting on the wall!

The king of our lesson today was named Belshazzar. King Belshazzar, King of Babylon, read the handwriting on the wall with his own eyes. In the verses previous to our text we see Belshazzar throwing a party for his nobles, wives, and concubines. At the height of the party, at the height of Belshazzar's revelry and drunkenness, he commanded his servants to bring out the golden vessels which his father had stolen from Solomon's temple. Remember these vessels had once been used in service to the True God of Israel. Now evil Belshazzar used these golden goblets to get drunk. The Bible says, "They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." This was a horrible and blasphemous thing for Belshazzar to do, and it made God very angry for the Bible says, "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." Dan. 5:4-5 Suddenly now, in the middle of the party, Belshazzar and all his guests literally see the hand of God Himself writing on the wall! The True God of Israel reaches down from heaven and writes mysterious words upon the wall! Belshazzar is now terrified. His happy, merry, and drunken face now changes into terror. His whole body started shaking so terribly that his knees knock together. He

wonders "What is the meaning of all this?" Having lived an evil and rebellious life against God, Belshazzar would now be judged. He could read the handwriting on the wall. MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

I. False prophets will only falsely interpret God's handwriting. This handwriting upon the wall was the Word of God. Belshazzar wanted to know the meaning. "Then came in all the king's wise *men*: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." These "wise men" of the king were his astrologers, soothsayers, and magicians. They were the false prophets of the day. In truth they were agents of the devil, spokesman for the "Prince of this world". They practiced Satanic devices and the wicked arts of the occult. God would not permit these false prophets to interpret the writing. God kept the meaning of the writing so secret that they could not even lie or make up a meaning. God would only permit his true prophet Daniel to interpret the writing.

In our world today we must recognize that there are both true and false prophets. Let us first talk about false prophets. Jesus warns us, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Mt. 7:15 But how do we recognize false prophets as wolves? Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." You will know them by their teachings. False prophets will naturally teach things which are false. Ah, but then how will we know if something is false or true? We will recognize what they teach to be false, if we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's Word daily. You see, the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, is "God's handwriting on the wall" for us to use. If you do as Jesus says, and you learn to "beware of false prophets", then you will be serious about studying God's Word in order to know God's truth. None of us should be content with the knowledge that we have been raised "Lutheran" all our lives, nor should we be content with having gone through the catechism once or twice in our teenage years. That is not enough. Adults should go through both their catechisms and Bibles DAILY. If we by sheer laziness sit on our laurels and think that since we have the truth, we do not need to further study our Bibles or catechisms,....truly if we think that way, we are bound to fall! Jesus says "Search the Scriptures". 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Brethren, I cannot overstate or make my words too strong here. GOD'S WORD IS THE SOLE AUTHORITY BY WHICH WE JUDGE, RECOGNIZE AND IDENTIFY FALSE PROPHETS. God's Word is the standard, the ruler, the yardstick by which we measure and judge whether or not one is a true or false prophet. Therefore if a so-called "prophet" comes to you and tells you that you must listen to him because he had a dream, or a vision, or a revelation from God, DO NOT LISTEN. In Jeremiah 14:14 the Lord says, "The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination,

and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart." False prophets always claim to have the "spirit" of God, and they will always appear to know the Scriptures well, but in the end they are liars and deceivers. God says, "Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD." Jer. 23:32

II. God's prophets faithfully bear witness to the True Prophet Jesus Christ. Let us then thank God that He has sent us a True Prophet, who has faithfully revealed to us all of the important councils of God.. The name of the True Prophet is Jesus Christ. As our Prophet, Jesus "revealed Himself by word and deed, and by the preaching of the Gospel still reveals Himself as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world." (Catech. Q. #132) If you want to know God then, if you want to know who the true Lord is, listen to the True Prophet Jesus Christ who revealed Himself first to mankind in a way quite contrary to our way of thinking. Jesus revealed Himself to all mankind first as a little babe born in Bethlehem. God took on human flesh. He also revealed His love toward us in a way quite contrary to our way of thinking. His love is seen by His crucifixion upon the cross! On the third day He rose again!

This same Prophet, Jesus Christ, spoke to that evil king Belshazzar through the mouth of the lesser prophet Daniel. Daniel had been called by God to bring God's Word to the ungodly Chaldeans. And you notice that Daniel did not care for the gifts that Belshazzar offered. He did not speak God's Word for money, power, or influence. He spoke God's Word in order to serve God and man. So today true prophets of the Lord do not preach or teach to glorify themselves, but they glorify Christ and preach the Gospel that souls may be saved! Daniel now stood before king Belshazzar, and he would faithfully interpret the meaning of the handwriting on the wall.

Daniel explained to the king that it was the Lord God who had given to his father Nebuchadnezzar all of his earthly power. Moreover when Nebuchadnezzar became exalted in pride, God took his kingdom away from him, and punished Nebuchadnezzar with insanity. "His heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen." God smote the king of the land with madness. Until "he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men." Once Nebuchadnezzar repented, God restored his right mind to him. Now Daniel says to Belshazzar, "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven." It is not as if Belshazzar didn't know better. He did. Knowing the life of his own father he should've repented. But he didn't. Daniel says, "the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." The very life of Belshazzar was in God's hands, and yet Belshazzar did not glorify God! Thus the handwriting on the wall! MENE, MENE, TEKEL,

UPHARSIN: which means, numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. In the scales of God's justice, Belshazzar was found lacking. He would not repent nor believe in the True God, so now his kingdom would be divided and given to another! "That night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

You know the worst part of this whole lesson is that Belshazzar could've been saved. He could've been like the thief on the cross, who in his final moments before death, repented of his sins and believed in Jesus. God, through Daniel, could've said to Belshazzar, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise!" But this didn't happen because Belshazzar didn't repent! After hearing the interpretation, Belshazzar simply rewarded Daniel! That same night God not only took the kingdom away from Belshazzar, but God also took his life! The Bible says, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul." Belshazzar lost his own soul, because he refused to repent, and he refused to listen to the True Prophet, Jesus Christ.

Beloved of the Lord,.....what are the lessons we can learn today from Daniel and Belshazzar? First, let us learn to number our days. We live in a Time of Grace in which God for a limited time permits sinners to live though they deserve death. While we can rejoice that some people come to faith in the nick of time just before death (like the thief on the cross), this is the exception - not the rule. When Belshazzar mocked the Living God he had no idea his soul would be required of him. Another lesson for today is to beware of false prophets. Not all that is preached by the prophets is truth. The only way we can discern then what is truth and what is error is God's Holy Word. Your Bible then is God's handwriting on the wall. If you read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word, if you study your Bible and your catechism, you will be able to recognize and avoid false prophets. The Holy Spirit will help you, if you trust in His written Word. And our final lesson for today, a lesson that we learn from Daniel and Belshazzar, is that Jesus Christ is the True Prophet, the Living Word, our Savior. His Word is truth! How good our Lord is to us, to send us this glorious Prophet who not only preached the Gospel message of deliverance, but His own life was the Gospel message of deliverance! Your Jesus, Your True Prophet died to set you free from sin, death, and the power of the devil! He triumphantly entered into that grave and put to death death itself! His death gives you life! His resurrection brings you peace! Therefore rejoice that God in His abundant mercy has given you the True Prophet Jesus Christ, whose Gospel Word continually feeds your soul. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." God's Word, the Holy Bible, is the Gospel Handwriting on the wall which delivers you from all sin. These things "are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Amen.