

Pastor Paul Bawden
Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, March 8, 2008
"Feast Or Famine?"
Daniel 5

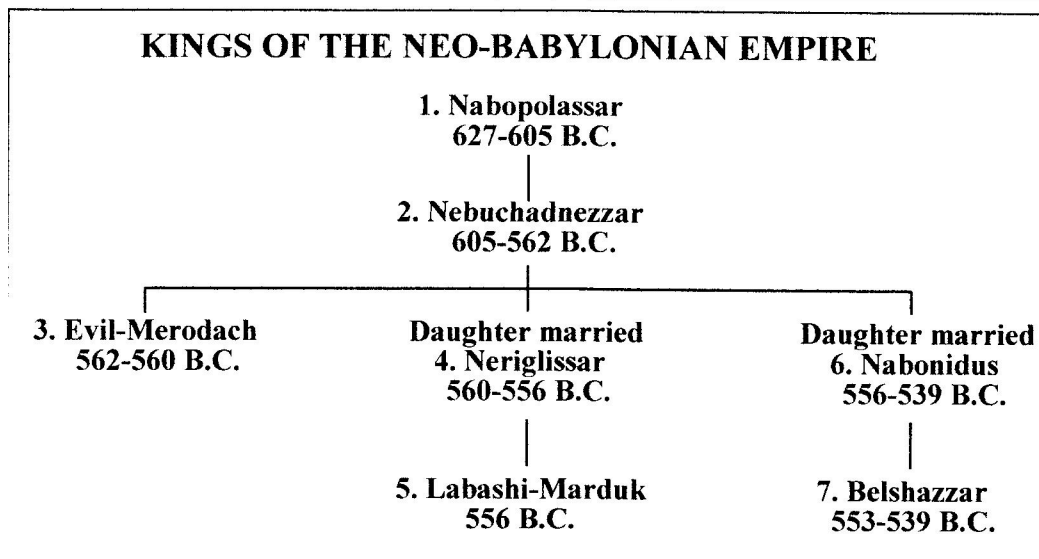
In talking on the phone with a man from another state this week, our conversation eventually turned to the economy. He started telling me about a couple of individuals in business in his area whose lives had been changed drastically by the downturn. It was discovered that one of the individuals in a large realty firm had been involved in fraud. Another person had taken his life due to the economic crisis. Then I mentioned that greed is behind what has happened and is happening in our country. He concurred.

Chuck Colson put it this way in an interview on television recently. America has a money problem, but really America has a moral problem.

The sirens of the world's system have been loud and clear. It doesn't make any difference how you make your money, or gain your power, just do it. Don't worry about the other guy. Do it for yourself, you have it coming. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.

Our text in Daniel 5 today describes for us a man who lived by his selfish desires promoted by the world's philosophy of eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die. Let's see what we can learn from his life as recorded in our text. First let's provide a historical context for the historical happenings in Daniel 5.

This diagram will help us see where we are historically in our study of the Book of Daniel.



Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. He was succeeded by his son Amel – Marduk (the evil Merodach of Jeremiah 52:31). He was murdered by his brother-in-law (Neriglissar of Jeremiah 39:3, 13), who was enthroned in 560 B.C. He in turn was succeeded in 556 B.C. by his son, Labashi –Marduk, who was assassinated that same year by a group that included Nabonidus, who was made king. Two legal documents dated to the 12th & 13th years of Nabonidus record oaths sworn by the life of the king and of Belshazzar, the crown prince. Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, 556-539 B.C. In the Persian Verse Account, it is stated that in his third year, Nabonidus entrusted the kingship to his son Belshazzar, and he (Nabonidus) retired at Tem (in Arabia),

The events in this chapter took place about 60 years after the events in chapter one, and about 36 years after the events after those in Daniel 4. Daniel at this time probably would have been in his late 70s or early 80s.

Notice then the historical happenings in Daniel 5.

I. Man feasts a part from the biblical God (Daniel 5:1-4).

1. The king held a party for a thousand of his nobles.

I understand that a king's party of this size was not unusual.

2. The king was drinking wine in the presence of everyone.

At public feasts, Oriental kings (at least in Persian times) were screened from public sight. Belshazzar's behavior was completely uncalled for. It is felt that he was doing this to gain public notoriety and fame, since his father had already had peaceful exploits to his credit.

Belshazzar may also have been trying to boost morale in the threat of the Persian armies outside the walls of Babylon. Getting drunk at this time, he certainly thought his city, Babylon which occupied about 14 square miles, with a double wall system enclosing a moat between the two walls was impregnable. In fact the outer wall was 87 feet thick, wide enough for four chariots to drive abreast on. It was 350 feet high with 100 gates, plus hundreds more towers reaching 100 feet above the walls.

3. The king gave orders to bring in the holy vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

To top off the party, the king ordered the holy vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem brought in. Evidently, the vessels from the Jerusalem temple had been stored by Nebuchadnezzar (his father, used in the sense of his ancestor, his grandfather) as trophies of war and not used previously (Daniel 1:2).

To bring the holy vessels from the temple into this party of drinking and sensuality was, of course debauchery and idolatry. Belshazzar wanted to show that the Babylonian gods were more powerful than the God of Israel. He wanted to show that Babylon was invincible, which would change shortly.

This pagan king, as his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar was demonstrating that he was superior to the God of Israel. He may have also been seeking to strengthen the nationalistic pride of the Babylonians.

Don't miss what is happening here. When the world feasts on it's own desires and pleasures, it also lays its hands on that which is considered most sacred by the true and living God and changes and distorts what God initially intended.

Take the value of life. What does the world do with life? The very value of life is minimized starting with the moment conception takes place in the womb, when life really begins. Abortion, then is fine.

Take marriage, what does the world do with marriage which God created and established between a man and a woman for life? The world says that marriage can be between a man and a man, and a woman and a women, but it isn't marriage, in the true definition, only an agreement.

Take abstinence before marriage. God says that the relationships between a man and a woman before marriage is not right and harmful for the couple. The world promotes pre-marital relationships scoffing at any idea of abstinence until after marriage.

Take the family, which God ordained. Almost any type of relationships can be a family.

Take the church, which is to be built on the Lord Jesus Christ and His unchanging Word. The world tells us that a church is just a group that gets together for some fellowship. What one believes is not important.

Add to that the creation of the world and the creation of man and woman. Or take the truth and validity of the Bible. The world tells us that we have evolved from a lower form of animal, and the Bible is full of errors.

We truly live in the days of Belshazzar, friends. As the world feasts on its desires and pleasures, it seeks to desecrate, distort, and deny the biblical God and His teachings in His Word.

In fact the world goes so far as to try to make fun of, or even to shut out anyone who brings God and His principles to bear on one's life-style.

How careful followers of Christ need to be so that they are not squeezed into the mold of the world, and lose ones ability to be salt and light for the Savior.

Regardless of what the world is up to in desecrating, defaming, or denying the Lord, God is aware of what is happening in regard to his Person, Power, and Grace. He who watches over Israel neither

slumbers nor sleeps. He who watches over us, never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is always with us watching over us. Note the text.

II. God interrupts man's feast (Daniel 5:5-6).

Note the words, suddenly. Suddenly, out of nowhere seemingly, when least expected, in the midst of all the drunken partying and giving the false gods honor and glory, really acknowledging satan, for he is behind any false worship having deceived the people, the fingers of a man's hand showed up and started writing on the wall.

1. The hand writing could have been on the wall where the national memorials may have been written.

In the archeological ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's palace a large throne room of 56 feet wide and 173 feet long has been found. The king could have been seated in a niche opposite the entrance with white plaster behind it where the hand writing could have taken place.

2. The king was devastated.

In the midst of his drunkenness, he was brought to his senses, seemingly, and his whole body was affected.

3. God will tolerate rebellion against Himself only so long.

Patriotic boasts about man's accomplishments without giving God the credit, the glory, must eventually be dealt with. Belshazzar's time had run out. The day of judgment is about to come. God's day of grace was about to end for Belshazzar and his kingdom.

What a reminder for us today. God's grace and mercy only lasts so long. God will only tolerate rebellion against him for a season. His justice, His holiness must act.

It is the same today. God in his time will act with His judgment.

III. Man attempts to explain God's interruption (Daniel 5:7-9).

1. The king calls in the wise men of Babylon to explain the writing.

2. The king would reward the person who could give the interpretation of the writing.

He would clothe the person in purple (royalty) and have a necklace of gold put around his neck (showing symbolic and monetary value) making him the third ruler in the kingdom of Babylon (After his father and Belshazzar) – giving the one who interpreted the hand writing on the wall great authority.

3. None of the king's wise men could interpret the hand writing.

4. Belshazzar followed the same course as Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:1-6; 4:1-7).

He turned to his wise men for the interpretation. They could not help the king.

Man in himself only understands spiritual truths naturally.

What does I Corinthians 2:14 say?

"But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

From Daniel 5:1-4, we just learned that Belshazzar had the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem brought into the party and used for their drunken and sensual celebration. We pointed out how man has taken what God has designed as sacred and valuable, and turned that into what he can use for his own advantage and glory. Now when something miraculous shows up, he tries to explain it but can't do it.

Taking that a step further, man today has tried to explain away the miraculous today – late dating the events in the Bible to take away the prophetic miracle. Saying that the miracles in the Bible are just nice stories with no historical validity. Saying that what one believes is not important, experience is what matters. In fact any idea of a conversion experience to Christ may be alright for you, but that's your experience, your opinion, for Christ is just one within the many ideas that are out there in our world today.

Man in his own life can not understand the supernatural spiritual truths of the living and eternal God. That's why he rejects them and goes on to establish his own thinking which is here today and gone tomorrow, for it is based upon his limited reasoning ability.

Man in his natural mind cannot understand the truths of the true and living God. As a result he establishes his own way of thinking which rejects the eternal God and establishes his own way which leads down the road to destruction.

IV. God uses Daniel to explain His presence at the feast (Daniel 5:10-29).

1. The queen comes into the banquet room (5:10-12).

Who is the queen? The queen mother, who had influence in the ancient courts (cf. I Kings 15:13 (Maacah); II Kings 11:1-3 (Athaliah); Jeremiah 13:18 (Nehushta (II Kings 24:8)). The mother of Belshazzar, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar came forth when she heard about that the wise men could not provide an interpretation for the hand writing on the wall. Certainly, she would have known of Daniel's involvement with her father. So she recalled how Daniel played such an important role in her father's reign, having extraordinary ability to interpret dreams and solve difficult problems.

She did for Belshazzar what Arioch had done for Nebuchadnezzar, bring Daniel to the king (cf. Daniel 2:25).

2. The king spoke to Daniel (5:13-16).

Note the words of the king here. Perhaps, because Daniel was a Jew, he was not employed by Belshazzar in his kingdom at this time. Evidently, the king had heard of him, or just did through the queen mother. Regardless, the king was willing to have Daniel give the interpretation that his wise men could not give.

Just think. Belshazzar had been dishonoring the God of Daniel, thinking that his gods were superior to the God of Israel. Now he has a man in his presence who has had the ability to demonstrate that his God is superior to all the gods of the Babylonians.

This shows that king Belshazzar is desperate to discover what the hand writing on the wall is.

He is willing to reward Daniel the same as he promised his wise men – clothe him with a purple robe, give him a gold necklace, while making him the third ruler in the kingdom of Babylon, if he can give the interpretation of the hand writing.

This passage also shows us that the wisdom of this world is totally unable to solve the problems of the world. Man has limited knowledge in understanding the past, present, and future.

God's eternal unlimited knowledge, His eternal revelation, which has eternal answers, is necessary to break into man's limited knowledge as he lives in his little box with no way out.

God, then uses Daniel to bring that divine eternal revelation to the king living in his little box of limited knowledge with no way out on his own.

The summary is this way: God's eternal revelation (His Word, the Bible) verses man's limited reason. God's revelation is far superior to man's ways and always wins the face, the conflict, and the battle.

3. Daniel spoke to king Belshazzar (Daniel 5:17-28).

(1) Daniel began by declining the gifts offered (5:17).

Perhaps he did this to let the king know that the gifts did not influence his interpretation of the hand writing. He would, then proceed to give the interpretation of the hand writing.

(2) Daniel gives a strong message to king Belshazzar (5:18-23).

1. Daniel reminds Belshazzar, and probably everyone in the room, of the power that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had bestowed on him by God (5:18-19).

2. Nebuchadnezzar became proud because of his power and might (5:20a).

3. God humbled Nebuchadnezzar (5:20b-21).

Due to his prideful ways, God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, until he recognized that He was the most High God ruler over every realm of mankind, and does what He wishes – is sovereign over all.

4. Daniel tells Belshazzar that his heart is filled with pride (5:22-24).

Knowing all this about Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather, Belshazzar did not humble himself as he did, but Belshazzar exalted himself over the Lord of heaven, bringing the very vessels of the true and living God into

his party using them for their drinking, praising their gods of silver and gold. Belshazzar has not glorified the God who has given him the very life he enjoys.

Belshazzar did not learn from the judgment brought upon his grandfather. Fineberg has said, that one of the most amazing spectacles in the world is how little men profit from the judgment of God.

Read the book of Revelation to see how when the judgment of God comes in that awful period of time known as the tribulation, men don't repent, but curse God.

5. Daniel gives the interpretation of the hand writing on the wall in Belshazzar's party room (5:25-28). (Dare To Be A Daniel).

Nebuchadnezzar heard a voice from heaven while he was outdoors (Daniel 4:31), Belshazzar is inside enjoying his party and a hand writes on the wall. Both of these forms of revelation are not the usual in history, but both of these instances come to leaders of the greatest nation of earth.

God wanted them to know that their power is nothing in comparison to His power. He must be recognized as the true and living God who gives authority for ruling. If that is abused, eventual judgment will come.

So what is the interpretation of the hand writing on the wall which was apparently in Aramaic? There three words, Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.

Mene – numbered – God has number your kingdom and put an end to it.

Tekel – weighed – You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

Upharsin – half shekels – Peres – broken in two or divided – Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians - one part for the Medes and other for the Persians. Paras can also mean Persia which was the dominant kingdom in the Medo-Persian Alliance.

4. Daniel was honored by king Belshazzar (5:29).

The king kept his word by clothing Daniel with the purple robe and putting a gold necklace around his neck making him third ruler in the kingdom of Babylon. That would not last long as the Persians were pouring into the city.

Daniel had certainly given king Belshazzar both barrels in his message to him. Did the king repent. We are not told. If he did, his repentance was too late to keep judgment from falling.

V. God's judgment comes upon Belshazzar and Babylon (Daniel 5:30-31).

That very night Belshazzar the king of Babylon was slain, and Darius received the kingdom. Darius may have been Gubaru, a governor under Cyrus, the king of Persia or Darius may have been another name for Cyrus. As there was the title of honor for the Caesars in Rome or for the Pharaohs in Egypt.

Herodotus and Xenophon testify that the city was entered by diverting the Euphrates River by a canal into a lake giving the enemy the opportunity to enter the city under the gates. The enemy entered to find a drunken party (October 539 B.C.).

Daniel, then, interpreted the dream statue of Nebuchadnezzar which included Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the eventual coming of Christ. Daniel lived to see the power of Babylon and its end as the Persians defeated Babylon and came into power.

VI. Application of Daniel 5 to our lives today.

1. The Bigger Picture

(1) Man in feasting on his own knowledge, desecrates, distorts, and denies who the biblical God is and the value He gives to life in its many facets. His life experiences a spiritual famine.

- (2) Man in his limited knowledge has no understanding of the past, present and future of what's happening in the world. His wisdom gives no insight into what's taking place in the affairs of men. The natural mind has no understanding of the eternal God revealed in Jesus Christ.
- (3) A part from the Biblical Revelation, we have no understanding of the past, present, and future workings of God in history.
- (4) The structures that God has established, namely, the family, government, and the church, Satan deceives, distorts, and attempts to control so he can use them to further his purposes in his battle to somehow defeat the biblical God.
- (5) God has plenteous grace, but the day of grace will one day end. The prideful heart that doesn't repent and turn to God, and the full revelation, accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior, will face God's justice.
- (6) God's judgment on king Belshazzar and Babylon is a picture of what God will eventually do to the world system of Babylon (including all nations) that struts in its pride and denial of the biblical God (cf. Revelation 17-18). Nations full of pride and rebellion against God are weighed on God's scales and found deficient. The Lord always has the last word.

2. Personal Application to our lives on Sunday, March 8, 2009.

(1) There are two options in life.

****A person can feast on man's reasoning and power, which is here today and gone tomorrow,** leaving him without any understanding of the past, present, and future. In fact, Satan is behind that which does not acknowledge the true and living eternal God revealed in Jesus Christ. The evil one has his theology, his philosophy of life, his education, economic, and political ideas. His ultimate aim – defeat the true and living God. It will be a life of spiritual famine.

That's why Paul wrote about those experiencing a spiritual famine. They are people who are always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth (II Timothy 3:7).

OR

****A person can know that there is a different kind of feast available for him or her.**

It is not a feast put together by man, that produces a spiritual famine, but a feast that is provided by the eternal God, providing eternal life and forgiveness. It is the feast that Jesus, the God-man and Savior, talked about.

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever . . ." (John 6:51).

"If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

Then Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (John 6:65).

Jesus Christ through his death, burial, and bodily resurrection, has won for us His eternal life, His eternal drink, by paying the price for our sin, on Calvary's cross.

(2) A person must decide for the feast that Jesus offers him or her.

****Each of us must make a decision to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior.**

The decision is ours as to what we will do with Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Savior of the world, as He died on the cross, was buried, and rose again the third day.

I trust you have made that decision to accept Christ as your personal Savior. If you haven't made that once-for-all decision to accept Him as your Savior, I encourage you to do that today. If you know the Lord personally, then I trust you are becoming more like the Lord in your life each day.

****Each follower of Christ lives not by man's bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God** (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

That's why Jesus said that the words that He spoke were spirit and they were life. Where do we find the Lord's words? Of course in the Bible.

The Bible is different from Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report. The Bible is different from Reader's Digest, the daily newspaper, and the news on the internet. The Bible is different from any Bible Commentary.

The Bible is a supernatural book with a supernatural message with supernatural food for our lives so that as believers in Jesus Christ we be strong in the Lord in our inner spirits, and we can show forth the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's why Paul told the young pastor Timothy probably in his 30's, All Scripture is God breathed, inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16).

I'm sure we would agree with that, but to make the word of God part of our lives, we should be in the Word of God on a daily basis.

I trust you have a time to be in the Word each day, to read a chapter, or meditate on a few verses – to let God's Word speak to you, not just as an intellectual exercise but you meeting God, and He meeting with you – plus having a time of prayer with your Lord.

It's easy to forget that when we read the Bible, it is God speaking to us. Perhaps we should think of the Bible as God's love letter to us. I remember that before Ferra and I were married, I was in seminary in Dallas, Texas, and she was in school at Bethel College in St. Paul, MN. We would write letters, and I could hardly wait to get a letter from her, and then I would immediately open it and read it. How exciting was that. God's Word should have that same expectancy for us, we can hardly wait to read what God has for us today.

So I am here today, to encourage you to keep on having your feast – spiritual bread and water in God's Word each day, if you are involved on a daily basis.

If you are on the road a lot, get a CD of the Bible and listen to God's Word as you travel.

I know we all have things to do in the day, but without a feast on God's Word each day, we may soon find ourselves experiencing a spiritual famine in our lives, attitudes of not caring about God and what He wants us to do, not treating others like Christ would, or not having a desire to become more like Christ.

I would also encourage our young people to be in the Word of God each day. Start reading in the book of John or John's first letter. Or get yourself a good devotiona. Josh McDowell has a wonderful devotional for teenagers.

Dads and Moms lead your children into having a time in God's Word each day. Spend time each day with them as they are smaller so they will see the value of being in the Word of God each day. There are all kinds of helps at the Christian bookstore.

Think about Daniel. As a young man, perhaps in his late teens or early 20s, he did not defile himself with the king's food offered to idols, for it was against God's Word to do so.

Daniel continued to be blessed by God, being given the opportunity to present the need to Nebuchadnezzar that he needed to repent and turn to God. As time went by, Daniel stayed true to the Lord as he lived served the king in pagan Babylon. In our text for today, now in his late 70s or 80s, Daniel is still strong in the Lord and the power of His might. He is keeping on going serving His Lord, telling the king Belshazzar that he needs to repent of his sin of pride. Why?

I believe that Daniel in his personal relationship with the LORD, was in the Word of God, knew what it said, and then obeyed what God was telling Him. His courage to serve the Lord and confront the king was that his strength came from God revealed in His Word!!

Feeling uneasy one evening before a major battle in the Pacific, **General Douglas MacArthur** turned to his Bible, which was his regular practice, and read until he felt at peace.

Then the general went to bed and slept soundly, even though the battle the next day would play a significant role in the course of World War II.

General George Washington, our first President and father of our country, said, "It is impossible to rightly govern... without God and the Bible." I understand in his Mount Vernon home, there is a place where morning and evening General Washington knelt to read his Bible and pray.

Another general, Ulysses S. Grant, 18th President, said, "I believe in the Holy Scriptures, and whoso lives by them will be benefited thereby..."

General Andrew Jackson, who became our seventh President, in referring to the Bible, stated, "That book, Sir, is the Rock upon which our republic rests."

The brilliant Sir Isaac Newton, called "the Father of Modern Science,"

may have had the highest I.Q. of any person in history. Unknown to most, he was a Bible scholar and avid student, fluent in ancient languages, and he translated directly from the Hebrew. He was unusually drawn to the prophet Daniel, which he began studying at age 12 and continued until he died at age 85. In fact, The Columbia History of the World, a secular history book, remarks, "At the end of his days he spent more time studying and writing about the prophecies in the Book of Daniel than he did in charting the heavens."

A man in Kansas City was severely injured in an explosion. Evangelist Robert L. Sumner tells about him in his book The Wonders of the Word of God. The victim's face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands. He was just a new Christian, and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. Then he heard about a lady in England who read braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in braille. Much to his dismay, however, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion. One day, as he brought one of the braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, I can read the Bible using my tongue. At the time Robert Sumner wrote his book, the man had "read" through the entire Bible four times.

An unknown writer said, "This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity.

Gipsy Smith told of a man who said he had received no inspiration from the Bible although he had "gone through it several times." "Let it go through you once," replied Smith, "then you will tell a different story!"

Let's feast on God's Word this week, so that we will not have a famine in our walk with the Lord, but fruit to the glory of God, Christ coming through our lives to the glory of God.