

“God Only Knows”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 18 June 2023  
 Text: Daniel 5:18-30

Are we, Christians, sufficiently transformed for anyone to notice that we are Christian.

Am I transfigured by my faith in Christ? Transformed by my relationship with Christ?

God only knows. He is the teacher, the authority and I am His humble student. I am always learning, but He knows. There is more mystery in a blade of grass than I can master. God only knows why clover clasps its hands at vespers time, and unfolds them and turns toward the rising sun. God knows metamorphosis, the orientation of the earth, the roots of mountains and plummet the depths of the seas—or the ether of outer space. He has distributed light, in all its mystery and variety, throughout space and over matter. He is king of the shadows that result, their rate of movement and diurnal elasticity lengthening in opposite directions! But overall, from the applause of clover to rising and setting suns, He knows and He rules. In things natural, yes, and in human history. History is His flowerbed; He plants, and prospers there what He freely wills. While we stake tomatoes, He makes tomatoes! There are things I do not know and things that we do not know. God only knows. He knows and I am not self-determined. My freedom of will is contingent at best, not absolute . . . This I know, I am not God, He alone knows who I am—He shapes me, He formed me, and He alone knows me. AND HE DOES.

Also, besides the pages in the book of nature, it is revealed to us, in His written word, that He chooses and rejects. He bestows **sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty**. He bestows, appoints, dethrones, removes and foreclosures on whom He will when and where and how He will. I see, note and observe things like photosynthesis, heliotropism and the metamorphosis of a butterfly—yes, monarchs of a different order(!) emperors in fact!—God know the world as it truly is . . . in its fullest reality and deepest sense. Life is more than a photoshoot, or a filming. Nebuchadnezzar ate grass and clover, but what he ate he knew not; neither in mind or heart. He was no Solomon, if he learned anything and wrote them down as proverbs, we have no record of them. His confession of faith? We do have that . . . inscribed by holy men in Holy Scripture: **the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes**. Let us visit again the context where an ancient king is held accountable for his spiritual effrontery and offensive sin:

**18 [a]O king, the Most High God granted [b]sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. 19 Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every [c]language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. 20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so [d]proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. 21 He was also driven away from [e]mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. 22 Yet you, his [f]son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, [g]even though you knew all this, 23 but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His 2house before you, and**

you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 Then the [h]hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. 25 “Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘[i]MENĒ, [j]MENĒ, [k]TEKĒL, [l]UPHARSIN.’ 26 This is the interpretation of the [m]message: ‘MENĒ’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 ‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 ‘PERĒS’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and [n]Persians.” 29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the [o]third ruler in the kingdom. 30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 [p]So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two<sup>1</sup> .

The words written there (on the wall) are *mene*, which means “numbered,” *tekēl*, which means “weighed,” and *parsin*, which means “divided.” God has numbered the days of your kingdom and has brought it to an end. He has weighed you on his balance scales, and you fall short of what it takes to remain as a king. So God has divided your kingdom between the Medes and the Persians. (CEVersion) Who did that? God ordained that—*He chooses whom He will, and rejects as well.*

Belshazzar held God in contempt, he defiled holy things (turning holy vessels into drinking cups to serve his drunkenness!) and this is effrontery, sinful defiance. No wonder God is offended at him . . . and us when we behave so poorly! It is, in his case, also terminal folly! When he makes Daniel third in authority and apparels him in purple—these gestures tell us more about Daniel than they serve to redeem the king. He makes an end of himself and God cancels him (casting body and soul into hell?)—he didn’t learn from God nor his father and his disdainful, arrogant ignorance took him out. Is this his diploma? Is this not what we reward these days at all too many graduations?! Ideas, like actions, have consequences! That party night was a terrible night for Belshazzar—it was also his last night. That night he was slain. Time had run out for the king. He had no time for repentance and reform! Before that moment comes to any of us—as it must come—I have a few pressing, or urgent questions for us: Are we living in a transfigured state in my domain?

---

<sup>1</sup>Footnotes

- a. Daniel 5:18 Lit You, O king
- b. Daniel 5:18 Or the kingdom
- c. Daniel 5:19 Lit tongue
- d. Daniel 5:20 Lit strong
- e. Daniel 5:21 Lit the sons of man
- f. Daniel 5:22 Or descendant
- g. Daniel 5:22 Lit inasmuch as you
- h. Daniel 5:24 Lit palm of the hand
- i. Daniel 5:25 Or a mina (50 shekels) from verb “to number”
- j. Daniel 5:25 Or a mina (50 shekels) from verb “to number”
- k. Daniel 5:25 Or a shekel from verb “to weigh”
- l. Daniel 5:25 Or and half-shekels (sing: peres) from verb “to divide”
- m. Daniel 5:26 Lit word
- n. Daniel 5:28 Aram: Pāras
- o. Daniel 5:29 Or triumvir p. Daniel 5:31 Ch 6:1 in Aram

Why do I ask? I ask because if a king can be held accountable as the word describes that he is, called out for his sinful rebellion, do we vainly imagine that we shall get a pass?! Assuredly, we shall not. This past week I had an accountability session myself. And it came about as I prayed about Belshazzar, and was exposed to the testimony of Jordan Peterson recounting his encounter with the Holy Spirit, a divine encounter. Another contribution factor was that in my current bible study of Romans I have come to Romans 1:18: **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth** (about the reality and moral existence of God as manifest in creation?).in unrighteousness. If you have the ears to hear it, just hearing Romans 1:18 is enough to instigate a night of accountability. And, as God would have it, providentially, I was led to the testimony of Pastor John Mulande which teed off, so to speak, on this very verse. What would God have to say to me through all of this? Prayer, study, Peterson’s encounter and Mulande’s testimony . . . literally God’s *instruction for me in the night*—in conscious time (studying) and beyond (through dreams, mental processing, or integration while in repose).

**Psalm 16:7 I will bless the Lord who has counseled me;  
Indeed, my [a]mind instructs me in the night.  
8 I have set the Lord continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.  
9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will dwell securely.  
10 For You will not abandon my soul to [b]Sheol;  
Nor will You [c]allow Your [d]Holy One to [e]undergo decay.  
11 You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures  
forever<sup>2</sup>.**

Verse 7 requires some explanation; it is **the Lord who counsels me . . . in the night**; but the word translated mind is literally kidneys which in David’s day meant “the inner man,” or what we might call the heart, or soul. The Lord counsels, the soul instructs in the night. The most likely meaning of that phrase is “while I sleep,” a 2condition and not a designation of time of day. Verses 9 & 10, as included, are deeply connected to Pastor Mulande’s testimony. Fear of God, of the wrath to come, of full accountability are, according to him, operations of divine love! They are sent to awaken us, to bring us to our senses, and to our true selves—something God alone knows and God alone can reveal to us.

So let’s ask the first urgent, or pressing question: Are we, Christians, sufficiently transformed for anyone to notice that we are Christian<sup>3</sup>? Does your life support your claim to know the truth? To know Christ?

**2 Cor. 13:5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you [a]fail the test (are unapproved)? 6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves [b]do not fail the test.**

---

<sup>2</sup>Footnotes

a. Psalm 16:7 Lit kidneys, figurative for inner man

b. Psalm 16:10 I.e. the nether world

c. Psalm 16:10 Lit give

d. Psalm 16:10 Or godly one

e. Psalm 16:10 Or see corruption or the pit 4

<sup>3</sup>Or if we were tried as followers of the Way, would there be enough evidence to convict?

Or, are we truth transformed enough to show, to demonstrate (as witnesses of the truth) we even believe in God?!

It's radical to assert these days that truth exists; let alone to assert further its transformative influence and power! I am proof that truth exists and matters. And as a corollary, I am proof that the word of God not only exists, not only that we have bibles, but that what is proclaimed in the Bible has actually intruded itself, injected itself into me, heart and mind, body and soul! I will show my age and say, "If truth does not exist, nothing else matters." Being a truth-seeker has defined my whole academic life, from high school on up past two Master's degrees in anthropology and theology! I wasn't after information, or knowledge even—I was seeking the truth. Seeking salvation is not the same thing and that search was hidden from me until my mid-twenties—then I learned that the truth was a person, not an abstract noun!

Are we Christians in any apparent, or recognizable way?

When I heard Jordan Peterson say (on a YouTube podcast), "You aren't sufficiently transformed for me to believe that you believe in God! So I struggle to believe the story you are telling me (meaning the whole narrative of Christ's redeeming work in me) because you, your being and your living, are insufficient testimonies to the truth you are claiming to affirm." Who you manifestly are, Jordan says, makes you "incredible!" I cannot tell what you believe from how you live out! To bear such interrogation even indirectly, is a dreadful, but inescapable aspect of authentic self-examination. ***Both our identity and our witness are out there***—like fruits and vegetables on the racks at farmers' market! To this marketplace, the world comes shopping . . . observing, checking you out. Noticing your color, scent and state of ripeness. There "green" is not necessarily a commendation! In a real way, green ideology has become a slaughterhouse of wicked imagination: people are the problem . . . let's eliminate them then, those who survive the genocide will live happily ever after! Put an end to reproduction and all will be well. Fornication, yes, progeny, no! Dreadfully contrary to the intentions of God in creation but self-destruction is become a survival mode, a noble cause to which you must assent. Never mind the cliff. Once you're off it, the steepness and destruction will not matter any more. If you blow the dam, the water is lost and a torrent of demolition is loosed. Help the GNP, have an abortion, commit suicide . . . Stop burdening us with you! Bye.

That is not what we are called to! And, as much as we might dread and seek to elude it, we are Christ's display. And Christ in us is the only hope for a dying, misdirected world.

Back to Belshazzar. Ouch I feel for the king who had plenty of instruction but little judgment!! I am no king, but I am a child of the King. I have a whole book of instruction; but have I internalized that truth?

Well, let's ask a second pressing question: Am I transfigured by my faith in Christ? Transformed by my relationship with Christ? Are my works the fruit of the Spirit? Is my heart humble? Are my eyes of Him—like heliotropic clover!—or elsewhere?

Or, am I to be weighed in the scales of divine assessment, and found "wanting," by "insufficient testimony?!" Does my faith make no discernible difference in who I am, or how I live—because others are weighing my profession against my life, against my persona? What are they to conclude but that I am faithless, or a hypocrite?

Jordan went on, naturally enough, to indict the church for the sexual abuse—plain old fornication—and for the covering up of that abuse; as well as the perpetuation of that abuse by relocating the abusers rather than charging them with sex crimes and putting them out of circulation!

How can those who name the name of Christ even do such things—any of it? It is not only inexcusable; it is ungodly. Un-Christlike! Who could sit under such persons? Yet are believers vetting their church leaders? If marital infidelity is present, how can such persons be trusted not to prove faithless in some other dimension? Are their article of faith, covenant and practice just words on a page? Read but not implemented?

*I listened several times to Jordan's testimony of encountering the Holy Spirit.*

That's where I found these questions about transfiguration and transformation. I was struck by his cry: "There's no limit to what would happen if you acted like God existed . . . if you acted that out fully." Please note the verb is "would happen," not "could happen." Oh, if we would leave behind saying we are Christian and live out our faith! ***There s no limit to what would happen if we did!***

Jordan reported that after studying, meditating on a mandala<sup>4</sup> for three months, it was as if the heavens opened up in his living room and he visualized clouds of glory and light—like a force descending upon him, as if God were peering down on him—he was in paradisiacal conditions, conditions which were and are transformational. It was, sadly, "a gift he wasn't prepared to entirely receive and the Spirit left him saddened."

Peterson was changed by this in the spring of 2023—he now considers himself a Christian and it is apparent. The objective reality of God and the narrative reality of Christ met and melded in that moment! ***God only knows what the world is really like . . . so God did to Jordan what only God can do!*** Children are leaving the church, he says, because of:

1. Lack of seriousness (not a whole life matter) by adult Christians
2. Lack of integrity (blatant Christ betrayal and hypocrisy)
3. Lack of follow-through (unloving hatefulness) The fault lies with us, not them! All it takes to convert the lost is a demonstration of the real thing. We ought to be more real than Coke! And healthier, too.

How humbling it is to admit that. God only knows what the world is really like. Let's embrace that truth!

Science claims to know what the world is like, but the sciences don't! It postulates and it supposes what God alone knows. I thought that I knew (or could know), I aspired to that level of knowledge, but I do not have it . . . not yet. I reviewed Jordan's interview on June 8th and 9th. I was struck by the significant pauses, the false starts, the frank admission that he could hardly find the right words. I can so relate. Why did Belshazzar not have an encounter like Jordan's? Perhaps he was too distracted. Too busy with folly and idolatry and fornication! Perhaps he did and wrote it off as indigestion! He recognized the power of God in Daniel but couldn't find any spiritual life

---

<sup>4</sup>mandala, (Sanskrit: "circle") in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, a symbolic diagram used in the performance of sacred rites and as an instrument of meditation. Encycl Britt. A mandala is a geometric configuration of symbols. In various spiritual traditions, mandalas may be employed for focusing attention of practitioners and adepts, as a spiritual guidance tool, for establishing a sacred space and as an aid to meditation and trance induction. Wikipedia

in his profane, worldly heart. He did not see fit to honor God and suppressed the truth in unrighteous pride and arrogance.

Now I must relate that I studied this interview<sup>5</sup> when my devotionals were taking me through two topics: “the fellowship of suffering,” and “the conversion of Saul” under the general heading of The Authority of Jesus Christ. The main idea seems to be that we enter into the fellowship of suffering with Jesus and as we do so we are both transformed and we get acquainted with Jesus through our afflictions. ***We get to know our true selves as we get to know Him—simultaneously. Suffering and self-realization are in tandem!***

And this definitely ties in with the “rough treatment” of the apostles (Acts 5) where in verse 41 we read: **rejoicing that they were counted worthy of suffering shame** (The imprisonment and beatings instructed them in who they are as apostles.) **for His name**. Oh, so this is how one apostles!!—in a verb sense.

**11 You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy; I  
n Your right hand there are pleasures forever**

Shaming is very familiar territory these days especially for the half of the country which is not progressive in its leanings—or those who dare to stand up to, disagree with and dissent from leftist ideologies in our government, schools and businesses. Those who support boycotting from Bud Lite, to Targets“ ’tuck wear,” are routinely mocked and shamed by the media and, quite recently, have been designated as “terrorists.” Being labeled “racist” didn’t satisfy the haters, or *The Southern Poverty Law Center*. Some liberals hold us in hateful, open contempt in words I won’t repeat lest they get some traction from repetition! You’ve heard them—repudiate them in your hearts! What good does name-calling do? The biblical term for this is revilers. (1 Cor. 6:10) The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God! (v. 9 bribers, extortioners and liars also do not make the mark either!)

*Besides*, we are called to rejoice over this treatment, not get indignant—for we are privileged to suffer for Christ’s sake! Those who don’t know him need to . . . need to know Him through our words and witness in our sufferings.

The conversion of Saul goes down like this: Saul ironically is carrying letters to the synagogues of Damascus—arrest warrants for the followers of the Way, I say ironically because the letters of Paul written later were all about freedom and liberation! I do not see any notation that he was on a horse. What we do find is that **he fell to the ground** after **seeing the light** from heaven and **hearing the voice** of Jesus which voice it is recorded those with him heard; they were perplexed by it, **hearing the voice**, but **seeing no one**. It is also not recorded that Saul, about to be Paul, actually saw Jesus, at first: it was a voice, calling him out—rather like what Daniel reports about the writing on Belshazzar’s wall! Saul has a vision, like Peterson, and in a subsequent vision, Saul sees **a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hands on him so that he might receive his sight** (after three days of blindness).

Remember, Paul’s response to this? “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (The Lord does answer that question. But there is something prior—not what Paul is to do, but what he is to

---

<sup>5</sup>“I Had Vision And The Holy Spirit Spoke To Me”, Jordan Peterson BREAKS down... - YouTube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

become: **a new creature in Christ**, with a pure heart!) I think that we fail to grasp how we are “sinners beyond our comprehension.” We have no idea how bad we are, until God reveals, in His goodness, what we actually are! Only God knows the heart. God assesses the heart, examines it—He alone understands it. And in His mercy He renders us good for bad! He transforms us from Saul’s to Paul’s.

Ananias, of Damascus, gets his marching orders. **Go** (to Saul in Straight Street), **for he is a chosen instrument/vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.** And those things will include shaming, beatings, stoning and imprisonments. Strictly speaking, legally, most if not all of the apostles were jail birds, or felons after becoming Christians! And so many brothers and sisters were imprisoned early on, that visiting them rose to the top of the list of things that Christians do as unto the Lord. Paul was included in **the fellowship of suffering** that we all share in Christ.

*Saul sees the same great light that Jordan saw!* Saul has an encounter with the divine just as Jordan did and it changes the trajectory of one’s life. Seeing the heavens open is not as uncommon as it is rumored to be. This kind of encounter is transfiguring. It will not do to limit it to Jesus’ altered appearance which enable the disciples to see Him for who He truly is. We’ve sung about this in the “Battle Hymn of the Republic:” “With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me<sup>6</sup>.”

Only God knows . . . the world as it really is. I believe that I have shared my experience of encountering Jesus at a conference for healing in Walden, Mass. He looked at me—that life redeeming look!—and said, “I am going to your enemies’ house, to communicate forgiveness to them; but you are standing in the way.” After I stepped aside, He smiled at me, the unforgiveness was gone and I have never been the same since. That is both how it works, and how it is supposed to work. Jesus perfects the work that He begins in you to glory of the Father through the fellowship of suffering.

**Amen.**

---

<sup>6</sup> Here is a credible testimony by a woman, Vivian Avilles. I will cite it in its entirety: I love reading these testimonies. We all have experiences with God, but we cannot always (or at all) feel or sense these. I have studied the Bible since I was a child, yet, when I was touched by The Holy Spirit while having tremendous pain due to my fibromyalgia, I couldn't understand what had just happened

It wasn't until a couple weeks later when I'm telling my coworker what had happened, when all of the sudden it was like someone had slapped me, and I realized it had been The Holy Spirit. . . I tell you, that day I had asked God to let me die if I was to live my life in pain, and all of the sudden my body took a fetal position, started to tremble in a way I could not control it, and I felt this amazing energy starting from my neck, all the way down my spinal cord, and as the pain was disappearing as this energy would slide down..... I remember, I was in total shock I wasn't in pain anymore, and I got off my bed and started jumping and running around the house). It was absolutely AMAZING.

I had to ask God to forgive me for not recognizing his love for me at that moment. If there is anyone whom knows real pain, That is our Savior Jesus Christ. He went through tremendous pain for all of us, so he took pity on me, and took away the terrible pain I was having that day. I could go on and on regarding how God has had mercy on me, but I want to say this: God is not looking for perfection, He is looking for us to recognize him through our free will, and accept his ways to a point where we can feel love even for the person or persons who do not love us back.

God bless you all

Be kind to Vivian, remember, we have three versions of Paul’s testimony in the New Testament