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Collection Name: The Papers of Rev. Dr. William Augustus Jones, Jr. (Accession #2007-012)  
Title of Sermon: On Reading God's Writing  
Date: undated  
Original Format: audiocassette  
File number(s): C018\_b  
Transcriptionist: Sheana Corbridge

(organ music plays while one person sings "Amazing Grace")

SPEAKER #1 You know this man stands tall among us because he's a child of the king and his witness has been strong, and our lives have been enriched by his coming. I didn't know that Kentucky and New York could combine to produce such a great song then I realized in one all of these states there is our Lord. We're delighted you're here, God Bless.

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: God bless you. (speaking to singer) \_\_\_\_\_ (??)  
God Has put sweetness in your throat. When I listen to you it evokes serious questions in my own mind concerning the alleged impartiality of God. (crowd laughs) I am happy to greet you tonight. Is that the choir coming in?

SPEAKER #1: Oh, it sounds like it.

JONES: Well, I prefer not to start preaching if they're going to start walking in here. (Speaker #1 laughs) That's one of my idiosyncrasies when it comes to preaching. Is that them?

SPEAKER #1: Is that the choir right there? (inaudible answer in background)

JONES: I have certainly appreciated and enjoyed my stay here with you. This has been a long day and after this splendid testimony by our friend, this may be a good time for the benediction. I'm sort of like this old lady down in Lynchburg, Virginia. I was preaching there once and following the service I asked her, I said, "how are you feeling?" she said, "well it's like this: I'm somewhere between thank you, Jesus and Lord, have mercy." (crowd laughs) That is the choir?

SPEAKER #1: Yeah, they are coming to sit in the \_\_\_\_\_ (??)

JONES: Ok, \_\_\_\_\_ (??) why don't you let all of us sing Amazing Grace along with you?

(recording stops and starts again with congregation singing "Amazing Grace" and piano playing)

SPEAKER #2: (speaking while song still plays in background) \_\_\_\_\_ (??) God can get a whole lot of glory out of these consecrated fingers on these instruments \_\_\_\_\_ (??) (speaker sings and hums to the music for a few bars) Let's let it all happen.

(piano continues to play “Amazing Grace”)

JONES: Perhaps they will enter quietly. I want tonight to lift up the word from the apocalyptic writings of Daniel, chapter 5 verse 25, words familiar to all of us, I'm sure. Here is what it says, “And this is the writing that was written, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,” “And this is the writing that was written, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.” I've given title to this text. I want to talk about, “Reading God's Writing.” “Reading God's Writing.” It seems that God has always had his problems with government. A surface examination of the Bible and of history, reveals a series of sharp contradictions between the palace and the pulpit. Historically and presently, the preacher and the potentates have been involved in some grave moral contradictions. We really should not be surprised, for Paul put it plainly when he said, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” It seems that the political order is permeated by the arrogance of power. It is present at every level of government from the county seat to the nation's capital, from the courthouse to the White House. The question is often raised, why do rich men want to be rulers? And the answer is really quite simple. Rich men desire to rule in order to preserve present power and to accumulate new power. Lord Acton rightly advised us of the dangers of power when he declared, “power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.” Examples of this grim, gruesome reality dot the entire highway of the human pilgrimage. Every now and then God has had to deal with a despot, topple a throne and overturn a tyrant. He forbids mere mortals from snatching his glory. He has warned humankind, “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God. My glory I will not yield to another.” Few men can really stand the atmosphere of the heights, very few men learn lessons from the depths. Most being lifted from obscurity to prominence, have real problems with the peaks. When the devil desires to destroy a man, he carries him not down to the depths but up to the heights. That's what he tried to do even with Jesus—and it's difficult for most of us to handle ourselves in the heights and in the political or governmental realm, the peak problem is most acute. For rulers have a way of becoming intoxicated by their own importance, of becoming drunk with power. That's what happened to a sixth century B.C. monarch named Belshazzar. He was ruler of Babylon the great, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and son of a man named Amel-Marduk. He was third in succession in the Babylonian dynasty which Isaiah called the scourge of Palestine. His grandfather before him had made the fatal error of trying to play God and ended up eating grass like a beast of the field and having to acknowledge Jehovah as the only sovereign of an everlasting domain. His father had some regard for the eternal, but Belshazzar lost all sense of propriety. It reached its zenith one fateful night. King Belshazzar had a party. It was a royal banquet, a gluttonous feast, a sumptuous spot for a thousand of his followers. His wives and his concubines were all in attendance. The colossal palace at the foot of that bridge which spanned the Euphrates was lit up by laughter. Revelry and frivolity, Belshazzar was both host and toastmaster. It was a gala affair. The river beneath sparkled with light radiating from the palace windows. Everybody who was anybody was in attendance. That is, with the exception of God's crowd and that's what made a glad affair a sad affair. It was a godless party, and any godless affair is a dangerous affair. Any godless affair is an ungodly affair. I'm afraid of anything that attempts

to exclude the eternal. Belshazzar's Godless party was in progress, wine flowed like water. The king himself became intoxicated and then in a state of utter mockery, he sent for the gold and silver vessels which his grandfather had taken from the temple in Jerusalem many years before. The holy vessels, sanctified to sacred purposes were turned into chalices and darkness in the hands of a sinful crowd at a wild party and God didn't like it. Heaven got upset. Angels became enraged. The throne of God shook with tumultuous fury. Heaven said, "Belshazzar! That's enough, you've gone too far." Mercy said, "I've gone as far as I can go." Justice said, "it's moving time. I've got to move." And God crashed the party, without invitation God came to Belshazzar's party and when he made entry, things got peculiarly quiet. The revelry hushed, the band stopped playing, the dancing stopped, wine ceased to flow—everybody got sober right now. God, God, God came in one of his mysterious ways. He took one of his angels and transformed that angel into what looked like fingers on a man's hand and God put writing in those angelic fingers. With the speed of an infinite eagle, those angelic fingers entered the king's palace and began to write on a wall in the banquet hall. It was a short message, simply said, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." You see God can send a major message with limited language. Now, my friends I've never seen angelic writing. Perhaps I've seen the results of such writing. But in all candor, I have never seen angelic fingers at work. I'm sure I've seen the aftereffects. God might have used angels to write his presence in the earth when he piled up mountains, scattered the deserts, laid out the planes, and scooped out riverbeds so that waters could make their way to the rolling sea. God might have employed angels to paint the rainbow in all its myriad colors about the shoulders of a dying star. God might still employ angels to move out each day at evening time and hang up the purple drapes of the night and pin them together with multitude in the stars. Yes, I've seen the finished work of angels, but I must honestly confess that I've never seen writing by angelic fingers. I've seen the tragic results when men and nations have disobeyed God and with my eye of spiritual discernment, I'm sure that I see God writing right now. It's judgment time in the land. Angelic fingers wrote on a palace wall, people stopped partying. Belshazzar started trembling, "what's happening here this, this is strange! I've never seen anything like it. I see writing on my wall, but I can't read it. I need help I've got to know what it says and what it means. Get my interpreters, bring in the fortune tellers and the palm readers and the soothsayers. I got to know what this peculiar hand has written on my wall." But nobody could read it. Godless men and the godless society could never read God's writing. That was one of Mr. Nixon's problems. He couldn't read and he didn't have anybody around him who knew how to read. I'm sorry to say it but my friend Mr. Graham was close to him, but evidently, he couldn't read. Norman Vincent Peale of my city was one of his spiritual advisors but evidently, he couldn't read. There were no readers around Mr. Nixon. Well, the party was over. One man's madness turned the social function into a horrible nightmare. One man's mockery spelled disaster for an entire nation. God wrote words on the wall. Now my friends, God is always right. My slave forefathers understood this far better than their slave masters. I'm amazed at times when I consider their spiritual sagacity with a strange genius that had to be God-given, they sowed high and sang "he sees all you do and hears all you say, my God is writing all the time." There were times when God writes in big bold boxcar letters with powerful punctuation marks but when does God write most profoundly and with most exacting judgment? Well, Belshazzar's father gives an answer. God writes a judgmental word whenever we profane the sacred and mishandled the holy. You know there are some things so sacred, so sacrosanct, so holy that we dare not misuse them. If it's a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of God, it ought to be regarded as holy ground. Jesus has declared, "my house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer. Don't you dare turn it into a den of thieves." If it's a personality called to perform the purposes of God, that

personality should not be mistreated. God is a warm touch, not mine anointed, do my prophets no harm. If it's a little child reflecting the moral purity of the shadow, we dare not place stumbling blocks in the child's pathway, but Jesus has advised us whosoever offendeth one of these little ones. Tis better than a millstone be placed about his neck, and he be cast into the sea. You don't proclaim the holy and get by that that was one of Belshazzar's errors. He used holy vessels for corrupt purposes. For the temple had been destroyed. The vessels were no longer at Jerusalem, but they were still holy. Once God sanctifies something, it's forever sacred. Jesus said concerning his sheep, did he not, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man be able to pluck them out of my herd." I tell you what God makes sacred, he does it forevermore. Belshazzar's second tragic error was his substitution of I for thou. Martin Buber has rightly reminded us that life is significantly more than me, myself, and I. Life has an ultimate connection. We're hooked up to the eternal. There is a God somewhere, jealous about his prerogatives and selfish concerning his sovereignty and he gets angry at any who would usurp his power. There is a thou who's responsible for every it and for every "I", and when I try to absolutize this "I", I deny him who made me "I". I am not the master of my fate; I am not the captain of my soul. I'm tied to him who is thou. It is thou who rocked me to sleep last night. It is thou who watched over me all night long. It is thou who woke me up this morning. It is thou who started me on my way. It is thou who's blessing me right now. David understood the I/thou relationship. Beneath the Palestinian sky he looked up at the marching canopy of the heavens and said, "thou alone makest me to lie down in safety. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, thou annointest my head with oil." Belshazzar ignored the infinite, tried to escape the eternal, and attempted to ground God in his own being and God had to write on the wall and when God wrote, the king could not read. He shook and trembled with fear. Consternation gripped the crowd, women shrieked, and men screamed. So loud was the commotion that the queen mother who wasn't at the party came down to inquire. When she was informed concerning the problems, she spoke up quickly and said, "King, calm yourself. There's a man in the kingdom who's acquainted with the holy. There is a man in the kingdom who connects the infinite with the ultimate. His name is Daniel, and if I were you, I'd send for him." Now Daniel was in retirement from everything except religion. For 23 years since Nebuchadnezzar's death, he'd been living in retirement. He spent his days in prayer and meditation but when things really get tough the people in trouble want to see a God-man. They pull Daniel out of retirement and brought him to the palace and ushered him into the banquet hall. Belshazzar was mighty glad to see him. "Daniel, I've heard about you. Daddy and granddaddy used to talk about you. I understand that you can interpret dreams and resolve doubts. Daniel, I've got a penmanship problem. There's some writing on my wall and if you read it and tell me what it means, I'll take good care of you. I'll give you a royal robe. I'll put a golden chain about your neck. I'll make you third ruler in my kingdom." Old man Daniel answered at once, "King, you keep your gifts. Give your rewards to another. I'm not selling. I'm not for hire. Don't you try to influence my interpretation. I'm a preacher, now I've got to preach it's not trading time it's telling time. Hear me King, God blessed your grandfather, and he didn't appreciate it. His mind was lifted up in pride, his heart became hardened, and God had to bring him down. Apparently, you didn't learn from his tragic experience. For you have a number in your heart. You tried to rival God, you profaned the sick and mishandled the hope. So, it's judgment time. Now King, that partial hand was sent from God himself. I know you can't read it, but the message is plain to me. I can read the writing. I know my father's writing. King, it's postmarked \_\_\_\_ ?? I can read it. Why, I learned how to read my father's writing a long time ago. I learned to read in my father's house back in Jerusalem. I was taught that the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous but

the way of the ungodly shall perish. I can read my father's writing. It says 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin' and King, this is what it means: God has numbered and finished your kingdom. You were weighed in the balances and found wanting, and finally your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. You are numbered, you are weighed, and you are divided. That very night Belshazzar was slain, died in his own blood and the glory that was Babylon's went down like the evening sun. Well, God is still right and the question tonight, \_\_\_\_\_ (??) and the question tonight, Christians is this: can you read God's writing? Now there's nothing wrong with his writing. His language is not difficult to decipher. The problem lies in our ability to read. There are too many of us who are reading below grade level. If you know the Lord, you ought to be a good reader. You ought to be able to read some of the signs of the times and if you've been with God for a long time, you ought to be a real good reader. You ought to be teaching somebody else how to read. You ought to know your father's writing. I want to be able to read God's writing, I don't want to be read, I want to read. I want to know what my father's doing. I want him to warn me of coming dangers. I want to hear the drum beat of impending doom. I want him to show me snares and pitfalls and stumbling blocks. I want to walk in the light as he is in the light. I tell you I want to read God's writing, but in order to read it you've got to be in the family. You've got to love the Lord. You've got to love everybody. You've got to serve the son, you've got to pray without ceasing. It's got to be every day, every hour. Let me feel that cleansing power. You've got to stay in touch, and you must stay in tune. You've got to hold on to the horns of the altar, and if you stay close to God, I declare unto you he'll show you things that others cannot see. Yes, he will! I know he will! Have I got a witness? (crowd responds "yes!") God will open the eyes of your soul. He'll shield you from hurt, harm and danger. He'll not only write you a letter from heaven, but he'll even talk to you. As the slaves used to say, "my God don't speak like a natural man, but he speaks so the saints do understand." I'm glad tonight that God puts truth where the faithful can get hold of it. I'm glad tonight that I don't have to hear from heaven by the way of Washington. I'm glad tonight that I can hear from God anytime and anywhere. Yes Lord! Well, Belshazzar had his gold, but Daniel had his God. The King had some trinkets, but Daniel had the truth, and the word declares that you can have it too. Just trust in the Lord and do good and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct your path. Don't forget that God is still in charge. God is still on the throne. This is my father's world. He still walks in the virgin purity of the morning. He still marches on the somber clouds of the evening. God, commands battalions of angels who do his bidding. God! My God! Do you know him tonight? (crowd responds, "oh yes!") God can simply speak to his archangels and earth, sea, and sky will line up in solemn procession and march while heaven's orchestra plays the "Hallelujah" chorus. Yes, my God can \_\_\_\_\_ (??) of the brightest crown, but if you belong to him, he'll keep you as the apple of his own eye. So, I make my way through the years of my life singing as I go. "When the storms of life are raging, stand by me, when the storms of life are raging, stand by me, when the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me. Yes! In the midst of tribulation, stand by me in the midst of tribulation, stand by me. When the host of hell assail and my strength begins to fail, thou who never lost a battle, stand by me. Yes! Stand by me! Stand by me!" (Jones is quoting lyrics to the hymn "Stand by Me") Thou! Do you know him? who is thou? Thou! The ancient of days, Thou! The shepherd of my soul. Thou! Determiner of my destiny. Thou! Rock of ages. Thou! Thou my everlasting portion, more than friend or life to me, all along my pilgrim journey, savior, let me walk with Thee. (Jones is quoting lyrics to the hymn "Thou my everlasting Portion") Yes! Oh, yes! Jesus! Come here Jesus! Jesus, I see you marching. You've been marching for a mighty long time. Where are you coming from

Jesus? I'm coming from Eden. What have you got on Jesus? These are thy garments from \_\_\_\_ (??)  
I don't see anybody with you Jesus. No, I'm treading the \_\_\_\_\_ (??) alone. How long will you  
march Jesus? Till every knee bows and every tongue confesses, that I am Lord. What then Jesus?  
Well, they're gonna be gathered from the north, south, east, and west and sit down in my father's  
kingdom at a better table in a fairer land but it's reserved only for those who can read the father's  
writing, and this is the writing that was written, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." Can you read  
God's writing? Let us pray.

The creation of this transcript was generously funded by Jennifer Jones Austin.