

Humility Over Self-Importance:

Nebuchadnezzar's Wake-Up Call

Take your Bibles and turn with me to the Book of Daniel, chapter four, verses one and three.

Nebuchadnezzar the king,

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

Peace be multiplied to you.

2 *I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.*

3 *How great are His signs,*

And how mighty His wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

And His dominion is from generation to generation.

This passage is unique in the Bible because it revolves around the proclamation issued by King Nebuchadnezzar and incorporated into the Book of Daniel for obvious reasons. What's about to happen here is a graphic illustration of Job chapter 33, verses 14 to 18.

14 *For God may speak in one way, or in another,*

Yet man does not perceive it.

15 *In a dream, in a vision of the night,*

When deep sleep falls upon men,

While slumbering on their beds,

16 *Then He opens the ears of men,*

And seals their instruction.

17 *In order to turn man from his deed,*

And conceal pride from man,

18 *He keeps back his soul from the Pit,*

And his life from perishing by the sword.

Why did Job say, "in order to turn man from his deed and conceal pride from man"? God hates pride. God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar in one way and then another, just as Job had said. God spoke to him once in the dream recorded in chapter two, and he spoke again in the miracle of the fiery furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Self-importance

But Nebuchadnezzar, in his pride and arrogance, continued in his willful way until God spoke the third time. Aren't you glad that God keeps coming back, even though he didn't heed the voice of God until he was utterly humbled? Face it. It's better to be humbled than destroyed.

God's goal is to keep man's soul from the pit and his life from perishing.

I like that even though Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest king on earth, he still wasn't satisfied. He wanted more. He sought divine honors and placed his will against that of the Lord. Then, the same God who had allowed him to be made high is about to bring him low. God raises up and God sits down.

Nebuchadnezzar takes a little time to share his personal testimony with the nations of the world. "I thought it good to declare the signs and the wonders that the Most High God has worked for me."

The word, sign, comes from an Aramaic word meaning "that which points something out." God gave a sign. Nebuchadnezzar says, "I want to share with you events in my life that point to the existence and the power of God." He's no stranger to the greatness of God. He's experienced it firsthand. For a pagan king, he has a pretty good handle on theology.

In these three opening verses of chapter four, the king declares God's kingdom, first of all, to be eternal.

And his dominion endures from generation to generation.

His kingdom isn't confined to a single moment in time, and God's workings in human history are consistent with his nature. God's kingdom. God's rule. God's

dominion transcends all generations. Why? Because his character is consistent. Yesterday, today, and forever. God doesn't change; you can build your life on that foundation.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Interpretation

"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house and flourishing." It was the best of times. He's got a palace, and everything is great. We find Nebuchadnezzar here at home, probably in his bed chamber. He's settling in for a great night of sleep in a secure place.

Historically, he's conquered all of his enemies. No human hand dared to rise against him. But remember, God can deal with ungodly men when human resistance can't. No man anywhere is untouchable, unreachable, or unshakable to the invisible hand of the Almighty God.

God knows exactly where he is, and God's going to pay him a little visit. Listen. When God wants to talk to you, he can wake you up. When God wants to talk to you, he can give you a restless spirit so you can't sleep.

Pretty soon, his snoring turns into screaming, for he says in verse five,

I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

In verses six and seven, he calls for the wise men who once again proved absolutely useless. Every time he calls for the wise men in Babylon, they fall flat.

They did not make known to me its interpretation. v7

Finally, in verse eight, reinforcements come.

But at last Daniel came before me...and I told the dream before him, saying:

And in verse nine, he says to Daniel,

I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you. Explain to me the vision of my dream that I have seen and its interpretation.

The dream comes in four parts. First of all, you have a tree in verses ten through 12. Number two is the messenger in verses 13 to 15. In verse 16, the dream expands to include a man who will lose his mind. Number four. Verse 17 gives us

the reason behind the dream. God's purpose in this dream is to demonstrate to this mighty King that God is the Most High, sovereign, and the ultimate promoter and demoter. Promotion comes from the Lord. Do your job, do it right, put your whole heart into it, and God will honor that.

The Consequences of Pride

The same God that can raise up can bring down, and that's about to happen here in this story. As Daniel listened, God interpreted. Daniel knew exactly what the dream meant. In verse 19, the Bible says,

Then Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, was astonished for a time, exactly one hour, and his thoughts troubled him.

Okay, Daniel's before Nebuchadnezzar, and God shares the interpretation of the dream. He asked the court for a recess because He had to step back to regroup his thoughts and regain his composure.

The King picks up something. He senses that Daniel's rattled. He's hesitant because he says to him, "Do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you. Tell me what it is. What did you see? Tell me."

Daniel says something. It's tenderhearted. He says, "Let me start by saying that I wish one of your enemies could have had this dream."

"The tree, mighty king," in verses 20 to 22, "represents you and your mighty empire, a kingdom that has expanded across the entire civilized world and has offered protection and food to people all over the earth. You, sir, are the tree. The messenger is the angel of the Lord who has come down from heaven. He commanded in verse 23, "Now watch, chop down the tree and destroy it." It's as if we can hear all of heaven shouting together. "Timber! Oh, mighty king, you're coming down!"

God will intervene in this mighty king's life, and the Lord will humble him. How? Nebuchadnezzar is going to lose his mind, literally. He is going to go insane for seven years."

Then, according to verse 26, when the king acknowledges that God reigns, God will restore him." That's the dream. Then Daniel offers some free advice in verse 27. He says, "Let my advice be acceptable to you. Break off your sins by being

righteous and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." So, in light of this dream, Daniel advised him to repent.

Did Nebuchadnezzar, you know, take Daniel's advice to heart? Apparently not, because 12 months later, he is still filled with pride and arrogance. Listen to what he says in verse 30.

Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling in my mighty power, and for the honor of my majesty,

He's feeling pretty good about himself. Well, Nebuchadnezzar has reason to boast as he surveys the city. Let's take a little tour. Let's visit Babylon. The wall around Babylon was 350ft high and 87ft wide. The city had 100 bronze gates, and when the sun shone, it looked like liquid fire. Oh, man.

Nebuchadnezzar married the princess of media and moved her to Babylon. She hated it. She said it's too flat. She had grown up in the mountains of media. So what does he do? Some scholars believe he built her a mountain in the city, now known as The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Is there any wonder that as he walked around the royal palace he'd say, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" And you know what? Those words were still in his mouth when God's judgment fell. Verse 33 says

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Get that picture in your head. Can you imagine the contrast in his lifestyle as the CEO of Babylon? Talk about downward mobility. He went from walking on the palace roof to eating grass on all fours like cattle.

God reduced the most powerful man on earth to mental and emotional instability. Not for a day, a week, or even a year, but seven years. He will be away from the throne, his kingdom, and everything he had accomplished.

When a person denies the reality of God, that is a workable definition of insanity. The fool has said in his heart there is no God. We look around the news today and see a craziness that has just settled on our planet. That happens when you leave God out of the picture.

Nebuchadnezzar Redeemed and Restored

Now it's time for some good news. In verse 34, it says,

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,

And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation.

His reasoning was gone. He was face down in the dirt, living like an animal. But he lifted my eyes to heaven, and his understanding returned.

Nebuchadnezzar learned three crucial lessons from these turbulent times. First, he learned about the dominion of God. He had declared it early on, but now he knows it. He's experienced God's dominion and control over human events. God is in charge of the world in which we live. It looks like chaos and confusion, but God knows exactly what's happening.

Secondly, he learned about the desire of God. God does what he pleases with the power of heaven and with the people on earth. Look at verse 35. He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among earth's inhabitants. That means that God will accomplish his will, purpose, and plan. Nothing can stop God from being God and doing what God chooses to do.

Third, he learned about the distance of God. He learned it the hard way, but he learned it. No one can restrain his hand or ask him, what have you done? He came to understand that the ways of God are often a mystery. We can't always fully understand his thoughts. That's why faith is so desperately needed. Sure, we can ask the questions. We've all gone through difficult times, times of confusion, times where even our faith has wavered a little.

Sometimes, there's simply no answer that we get back in return. During those seasons, we have to trust and believe that God is working behind the scenes for our good and his glory. Our faith has to rest upon that foundation.

With those lessons learned. Nebuchadnezzar concluded by praising the Lord in verse 37.

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

That was the statement that God wanted him to learn. It was a truth that he wanted him to experience. God can put down those who walk in pride.

No matter what you accomplish, you've got to give all the honor and all the credit to the Lord who enabled you to do it. If God raises you up, if you climb the corporate ladder, if you get a big promotion on your job, a big payday, come on, praise the Lord.

When somebody compliments you or thanks you, say, you know what? God is good. Thank them, but acknowledge that God and his hand and presence in your life enable you to do what you do.

Choose Humility

Here's a question about this story I've read many times: Why did God choose to humble Nebuchadnezzar? Surely he wasn't the only proud and arrogant person on the planet.

If God would choose to drive everybody insane, what a world we would have. We wouldn't have to buy a lawnmower. Everybody would be eating grass. So, why, God? Because out of all the kings of the earth, Nebuchadnezzar is by far the mightiest of them all. He represents earthly authority, power, and might. It's as if God were saying, look, if I can humble him, I can certainly humble you.

The Bible says, Humble yourself in the eyes of the Lord. If you're a child of God, and you love God, and you know God loves you, and God's done something great in you, and he's elevating you, then humble yourself because it's much easier for you to humble yourself and less painful than God coming down to humble you.

Sometimes, I wonder if sometimes when people stumble or fall, that's maybe the hand of God trying to bring them back to reality. You know, I was doing so well. Why, all of a sudden, am I in a slump? Could that possibly be God?

Lessons about Self-importance

What lessons can we take away from today's account? First of all, whatever draws me closer to God is always right. Number two: God is looking for repentance. It's the key to being restored. Number three: Our lives are in the hands of God. Number four is life does not consist of the things we accumulate or the projects we accomplish. And number five is it pays to walk humbly before God unless you like eating grass on all fours.

We have a lot of reasons to be humble. God loved us so much that he gave himself. God doesn't just work on Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, or during Bible studies. God goes to work with you. God goes to school with you. God wants you to be more successful than you want to be.

Sometimes, it's hard for God to find somebody who will accept his gifts and walk humbly. Maybe he can't pour all the blessings upon you that he wants to because he knows it will destroy you ultimately. You'll get cocky and arrogant. He hates that. Let that not be said of us who bear his name. We call ourselves Christians. Are we like Christ? He came as a servant. He didn't come as a king but as a servant to minister and lay himself down. Do you want to be great in the Kingdom of God? Be a servant. That takes humility.

Walk humbly before your God. Tuck that away. Carry that message with you all the way home and all week long, and for the rest of your life.