

Daniel 4

Pride Goes Before Destruction

Suppose I told you Saddam Hussein posted a story on the internet in which he related a very personal experience. He explained how for seven years, he lost his mind and lived in the Middle Eastern desert existing on wild plants and grass. At nights he slept in the open air, and in the morning his body was drenched with dew. His shaggy hair grew until it reached his waist, and his fingernails looked like eagles' claws. In essence, he lived like an animal, unable to think or reason like a human being.

And then one day, Hussein came to his senses. His mind was restored. He bathed, clothed himself, cut his hair, and trimmed his nails. He then returned to Baghdad and once again became king of Iraq. However, he was a different man. He acknowledged for the whole world to hear that the "gods" he had worshiped--power, sensuality, and money--were all false and a reflection of his own arrogance. He even explained that his view of Allah was a distorted and false view of deity. He proclaimed that he now worshiped the one true God--the God of the Bible, the God of his ancestor Abraham.

His final words were gripping. He admitted his pride and proclaimed: "Now I, Saddam Hussein, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

You'd probably look at me and say, "Ed that's impossible! That's another one of those internet myths and urban legends."

But that's exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon- the man who is Saddam Hussein's hero and who reigned centuries before in the territory that became modern Iraq. God humbled this great king and ruler.

Turn with me to the biblical account. Daniel 4 pg 859

This is one of the few chapters of the bible written by someone considered to be on the outside - a non-Jew, non-Christian. It's that press release of sorts, written by Nebuchadnezzar.

I. No One is Beyond the Love of God

Read vs 1-3

Have you ever wanted to share your faith with someone but you felt they were too rich or powerful to be open to the gospel? If so, this should encourage you. Here's a man who literally was at the top of the heap. He was the king of the most powerful and expansive kingdom of the early 6th century BC. And God brought him to this place where he made this royal proclamation of his faith. How did it happen?

Turn with me to the middle of chapter 4 beginning with verse 29

I. No One is Beyond the Love of God

II. But remember, God Hates Pride and Arrogance

And pride and arrogance were the hall marks of Nebuchadnezzar's life.

Read vs 29-30

Nebuchadnezzar was a great and powerful man with a huge ego. And no wonder. It's very possible that the king's location may have been the famous "hanging gardens." The Babylonian gardens were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Hoists had been built to raise water from the Euphrates River to these elevated yards. A double-wall system encircled the main city. Its inner wall was twenty-one feet thick and reinforced with defense towers at sixty-foot intervals. The outer wall was eleven feet wide and also had watchtowers.

Later Nebuchadnezzar added another defensive double-wall system. It ran for seventeen miles and was wide enough at the top for chariots to pass. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Babylon was undoubtedly the most magnificent (and probably the largest) city on the earth.

Nebuchadnezzar had at least three palaces at Babylon. His principal residence measured a mind-boggling 630,000 square feet. Even Bill Gates' home can't match that.

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

PRO 8:13 God says, "pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate."

God hates pride. And at this point Nebuchadnezzar is full of pride.

What can we learn from Nebuchadnezzar's statement about the nature of pride? You can see at least two parts to pride. One is found in the word "by" and the other in the word "for".

First, he says (v. 30), "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built BY my mighty power." Then he says that he built it "for the honor of my majesty." BY my power and FOR my glory! That's the heart beat of pride.

"By my mighty power" means: I love to think of myself as the cause and origin and controller and source of all my greatness. When I see what I have built I love to savor the fact that my intelligence and my initiative and my power were the cause of this greatness. It came from me and through me.

So pride gets its pleasure from being independent, and self-determining and self-sufficient. "By MY mighty power I have built this great Babylon."

Then Nebuchadnezzar adds, "FOR the honor of my majesty!" "I have built this great Babylon BY my power and FOR my glory." In other words pride is driven by desire for the glory that men ascribe to human achievements. Pride loves to think of itself as the source of great achievement and the recipient of great praise.

What we can see here the essence of pride: the enjoyment of self-sufficiency rather than God-sufficiency and the enjoyment of self-exaltation rather than God-exaltation.

Now don't make the mistake of saying to yourself right now, "Well pride is surely not my problem, because I'm a loser. I don't feel self-sufficient at all. And I don't expect anybody to exalt me because I am so ugly or unintelligent or weak. Pride is not my problem."

Be real careful here. Don't let Satan trick you. I didn't say that pride was the achievement of self-sufficiency or the achievement of self-exaltation. I said that pride is the enjoyment of them, the delight in them, the desire for them.

We may see our life as a total failure and feel crushed this morning and still have pride as the driving force of our lives. The very pain we feel at being a failure comes from the desperateness of our desire to look successful and to taste the glory of human praise.

One person can go to a party and brag and boast and draw attention to himself and his achievements. Another person may go to the same party and be so fearful and insecure that he hides in the corner and tries to avoid people. And both may be driven by the unbelief pride.

The strong person doesn't believe the grace of God is needed; the weak person doesn't believe the grace of God is sufficient. And since God is not their portion, man is -- the longed for esteem and praise of man. One person, fearful that he won't get it, hides. Another person, hopeful that he will get it, brags. Same disease, different symptoms. And all of us have it.

Ever since Adam's first sin we have all been born with his disposition. Do you remember what the essence of that first sin was?

It was the abandonment of child-like dependence on God in favor of God-like dependence on self. And ever since then all people everywhere have been born with this sinful nature of pride.

That is bad news, because God hates pride. In Isaiah 2:11 God said, "The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day." God hates pride.

But God also loves proud sinners. Not because of their sin but in spite of it. That's why he sent his Son into the world to save us from the power and the penalty of our pride.

To be forgiven of our sins we must admit our own inability to save ourselves. We have to believe that Jesus died for us and that He alone is the way to heaven. Religion says just the opposite. The word "religion" comes from the Latin "religio" which means to "bind back." Religion always teaches that by some self effort we can "bind ourselves back to God."

and God says you have to renounce all self effort and trust Christ alone. Religion is built on pride, salvation comes through true humility.

Jesus came into the world to convert people from God-like dependence on self to child-like dependence on God. And then he died to pay the penalty for our pride and to show us the way of humility and to direct all our boasting toward God and not toward ourselves.

So God has provided a path that leads from pride to the kingdom of heaven and to eternal life. That's what the Bible is all about. That's what this story in Daniel 4 is about.

God hates pride and arrogance. And look what happens: **Read vs 31-33**

A few weeks ago I was listening to my car radio and there was a quiz show on. The host was asking for definitions of obscure words. One of the words I knew immediately because of this passage. It was boanthropy. Boanthropy comes *Bos*: the genus *Bos*, includes ox, cow, or buffalo; and *anthropos*, which is the Greek word for man. This is a psychological condition in which a man acts like an ox or a cow.

This time its brought on directly by God Himself. Talk about being humbled!
From king to madman.

I. No One is Beyond the Love of God

II. God Hates Pride and Arrogance

III. Though God Hates Pride He is Patient With Sinners

Read vs 4-9

Prior to his madness Nebuchadnezzar had had a dream. This is the second time he's had a troubling dream and the second time Daniel has interpreted his dream. The first was approximately 30 years before. Daniel is no longer a teenager. He's probably between 45 and 50 years old now.

The first dream featured a great image. This one was about a tree.

You can read about the details of this dream on your own, but essentially it went this way. The king dreamt of a tree that reached the heavens and the ends of the earth. A decree from a heavenly being ordered the tree cut down. Only the stump was left. It would stay until seven times passed over.

Read vs 17

This was the dream and Daniel gave the interpretation. He was shaken, but he gave it. Nebuchadnezzar was the tree. He'd be cut down by divine decree for

seven years. During that time he'd eat grass like an ox until he knew that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.

Though God Hates Pride He is Patient With Sinners

What was happening here? God was warning Nebuchadnezzar. God was giving him a chance to deal with his pride.

Read vs 26-27

Consider all the things God has done for Nebuchadnezzar.

Chapter 1, Nebuchadnezzar is a smart political ruler.

Chapter 2, God is showing him that God's kingdom will break man's kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar seems to praise for a little while, but he slips back into pride.

(3) Chapter 3, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego were placed in the fire for not bowing down to the statue.

Then God shows His strength and might, and Nebuchadnezzar then says all these great things about God. But he slips back into pride.

(4) Chapter 4, He's shown this dream dream. It seems he's challenged and impressed by the interpretation, but twelve months later, he slips back into pride. Until insanity finally breaks him.

Notice how patient God is. *He is Patient With Sinners*. But God doesn't always give unlimited chances, does He? I don't know why God gave Nebuchadnezzar so many chances. This is a rare occasion. Jonah only had two chances. He might give you one chance or a hundred chances. But just don't lose your chance when it comes. God is patient, but not forever.

I. No One is Beyond the Love of God

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IV. God Will Respond to Those Who Acknowledge Their Sin vs 34-37

At the end of the appointed time, the king did the only thing he, in his beastly state, could do. He merely lifted his eyes toward heaven. It was his way of

acknowledging that God in heaven is sovereign, and that He reigns over the affairs of men and of nations. His sanity returned, and then with his whole heart and mind he worshipped the Most High God. Unlike mortal men, God lives forever. His kingdom, unlike the passing kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, endures from generation to generation.

Nebuchadnezzar was acknowledging in every possible way the infinite superiority and supremacy of God. Unlike the king of Babylon, God is able to act according to His will, in heaven and on earth. In His sight, those who inhabit the earth are as nothing. How paltry and pathetic the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar now appears in contrast to the glorious kingdom of the eternal, all-wise and all-powerful God.

Nebuchadnezzar's repentance brought about his restoration. Not only did he regain his sanity, he regained his kingdom. He was sought out by his counselors and nobles. His power and greatness increased above that he possessed before his downfall. His final words are those of testimony and worship, addressed to the King of heaven, praising Him for His truth, His ways, His justice and compassion in the lives of mortal men.

At one point in his life Nebuchadnezzar didn't acknowledge God, he didn't worship God, he didn't serve God. God brought him to his knees before Himself, the place where he should have been in the first place.

Notice that Nebuchadnezzar is not bitter at God or angry, he is genuinely worshipping God. Yet it took also 7 years. In God's perfect timing and time (which is what the number 7 is all about: perfection) Nebuchadnezzar stopped railing against God and surrendered to God. And now he is found testifying how great and wonderful God is.

This lesson was a very personal and private intervention of God in the life of king Nebuchadnezzar, bringing him to his knees first in humiliation and then in praise. But it is a lesson for all of us.

The king makes his testimony a matter of public record, even though it does not enhance his reputation.

There are some important lessons in this passage.

(1) *Pride is a form of insanity.* Nebuchadnezzar's experience highlights and illustrates an important principle in the relationship between pride and insanity. Pride is actually a form of insanity. Insanity is a condition in which one loses touch with reality, living in an unreal world. Sanity is seeing things as they are and then living appropriately.

Nebuchadnezzar's pride was insane. His chastening allowed his insanity to ripen and come into full bloom. Holding too high an opinion of oneself and lightly regarding the glory of God is insane. When we fail to live up to our capacity and calling as created by God, we are no better than the beasts of the field. The king's sin made a beast of him. And so does all sin in each of us (PSA 73:22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You).

(2) *Worship is humanities' highest calling.* Worship sets us apart from the beasts of the field. Worship gives us the basis for sanity. If the king's self-focus was the cause of his humiliation, his worship was the turning point for the return of his sanity. Worship is our highest calling. It sets us apart from the beasts. Worship sees God for who He is and man for who he is, and life as it truly is. Worship is the foundation for sanity. When human beings failed to worship God, they began their descent and became no better and not much different from the animals.

Turn to Romans 1:18 Pg 1085 Read vs 18-32

Worship turns us to God in humility, gratitude, and worship, based upon the wonder of His grace. Worship is the way to wisdom, because it humbles us and exalts God.

(3) *Our worship is directly related to our witness.* Daniel chapter 4 is actually king Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony. He tries to share with others what God has taught him. Sharing your faith as a believer should be to the praise and glory of God. It should be an act of worship. Whether those who hear our witness turn to faith in God or not, God has been publicly praised by our witness. A lot of Christians look on sharing their faith as a duty and not as a delight. Their witness is not the overflow of a grateful heart, done as to the Lord, but an obligation. Twenty five centuries later we can learn how to worship and witness from this Babylonian king.

(4) *Salvation should not be separated from the sovereignty of God.* Salvation is by grace, apart from any works. But think about this, the truth of God's sovereignty was king Nebuchadnezzar's primary obstacle. (*Supremacy of authority or rule*). In

our fallen state, we are proud, arrogant, and self-sufficient. We don't want grace. Grace is something that's extended to the helpless and the needy. Pride doesn't want to admit need.

When the king praised God for His sovereignty, he was restored to his sanity and power. I believe it was also at this time that he was saved. And even though the point of the passage is not the salvation of this king, I don't think you can avoid acknowledging the radical change in this man's life. How can an unbelieving man utter the praises that come from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar?

How many unbelieving kings would share the testimony of their pride and their downfall like Nebuchadnezzar did? This man seems to have come to faith in God through the events of chapter 4, and the crucial issue seems to be the sovereignty of God.

The fall of man occurred because Adam & Eve failed to acknowledge and abide by the authority of God. The crucial issue that divided Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders was His authority. Salvation is based upon this vital truth; the Lord is the one who died and rose again, for our deliverance. The One who has all power is the only One who has the power to save men from their sins.

(5) *Authority is not a position of status but a place of service.* There has always been an unbiblical, ungodly view of power. Jesus referred to this. **Turn to Mark 10:42 Pg 980 Read vs 42-45**

Why is power and authority so appealing? We like positions of power and authority so that others under us can serve us. That was Nebuchadnezzar's approach to life. But according to the Bible, God places men in authority so that they can serve those under them. Leadership isn't characterized by status but by service and self-sacrifice.

This applies to those in leadership, but also to every Christian. Every Christian is divinely empowered with a spiritual gift or gifts to serve others, ultimately serving the Lord.

(6) *The lesson God had for Nebuchadnezzar also applied to the Jews.* Nebuchadnezzar's rise and fall almost exactly mirrors the rise, fall, and restoration of the nation Israel. Israel wasn't chosen because of her greatness..

She was chosen in spite of her weakness and insignificance, to serve God and bring glory to Him. When God made Israel a great nation in Egypt and was about to bring them into the blessings of Canaan, He warned them of the danger of pride, cautioning them about taking credit for His grace (see Deuteronomy 6-8). He warned them of His chastening if they failed to obey His laws, to worship Him alone, and to care for the poor and the oppressed.

Israel failed to listen to these warnings and those of the prophets, just like Nebuchadnezzar failed to listen the warning of his dream. And so Israel was humbled by defeat and captivity. Israel, which was to exercise authority in the name of God, was removed from authority. They were scattered among the nations, as Nebuchadnezzar was put among the beasts of the field. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was delivered by acknowledging God's sovereignty and grace, and by worshipping Him, so the Israelites would be delivered and restored.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar's exaltation, humiliation, and restoration should have given hope to the nation Israel. Just like he was put down and later restored, so would they be. The restoration of this Gentile king was recorded to give hope to the humbled, captives of Judah, who would also be restored to their position of leadership in God's economy.

(7) Sooner or later, all mankind will be humbled before God and acknowledge His sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar bowed before God after seven years of humiliation. He became a worshipper of the One true God. He will continue to worship and serve God for all eternity. What Nebuchadnezzar did 2500 years ago, every man and woman will do in the future. All mankind will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Some will do it by trusting in Him as Savior:

Romans 10 says, *"whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

After they die, those who reject Jesus as Savior won't be given another chance to choose Him as Savior. But they will be required to acknowledge Him as LORD:

Philippians 2 says: *... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Let me ask you the most important question you will ever answer: "What have you done with Jesus Christ?" Have you trusted the Lord as your Savior?

I'm not asking, "Do you believe in God?" Years before the events of Daniel chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar had recognized the wisdom and the power of the God of Israel. But he hadn't placed his trust in Him. I am not asking if you know about God. I am asking if you have come personally to trust in Him. To humble yourself before the mighty hand of God and recognize that He alone can provide the robe of righteousness to cover your sins.

In Isaiah 43 The LORD said to Israel: *"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.*

Your response to the Lord Jesus Christ is the most important issue of your life. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God*

The Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."