

Pride & Humility

May 9, 2021

Daniel 4:28-37

Happy Mother's Day! I'm glad you've chosen to join us on this Mother's Day/graduation weekend. Such holidays and special days always put me in a bit of a quandary. Do I preach a special sermon for the occasion or do I preach as we always do so visiting family can get a true taste of who we are? Today, I've chosen to preach the next sermon from our study of the book of Daniel. Daniel 4 is where we are in the text, so Daniel 4 is what I'm going to preach. I assure you that this does NOT reflect a diminished view of motherhood! Indeed, motherhood is a high calling, made painful because of the fall and yet given great status in Scripture and by Jesus Himself. So, welcome all mothers!

We pick up the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's second dream in chapter 4. He has had the dream, Daniel has interpreted the dream and now we find out "the rest of the story." Here is how it turned out. It is not really a pretty picture. You would think that with all that he has experienced, King Nebuchadnezzar would have learned his lesson, changed his ways, put his trust in the God of Scripture. That is what we would hope for. But that is not what happened. He took the exact opposite route. He again was filled with pride (the root sin of this whole story and perhaps book) and God takes action, the precise action He warned in the dream.

And, as predicted in the dream, at the end of the 7 years of judgment, King Nebuchadnezzar is miraculously restored to sanity, to humanity, to power. What we have in these verses is his own personal account of what happened and

what was his response. As I read the text, notice his perspective, his true and right words, and the absence of Daniel. Indeed, this is HIS story, not Daniel's. Daniel is nowhere to be found. These are the words of a man who was horrifically humbled and then restored with a new and right perspective. May we all learn from King Nebuchadnezzar this morning. READ Daniel 4:28-37.

Main point: Pride is a direct and serious insult to God. Expect to be confronted by Him for it.

This does not mean we should all expect what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. But it might actually be worse! King Nebuchadnezzar was restored. Thankfully for him, God was using him as a demonstration of His power. The truth is that pride is the first and core sin for all of us. The core perspective of Scripture is that God is all everything. By comparison, we are all nothing, like grass, like dirt, like vapor. Pride, by definition is us thinking WE are all that. It is an affront to God. It robs Him of His glory. It takes what He has done and ascribes it to us. That is offensive, for us to take credit for that which He has done. It is sin, serious sin.

As such, we should expect Him to deal with it, confront it, judge us for it. We should perhaps hope that He would show mercy and restore us as He did King Nebuchadnezzar. We must know that He doesn't have to. But the message for today is that you ought to take your pride seriously. Know that God does. Swallow your pride and give God the glory He deserves. You don't want to be sent out to live with the cattle... or worse! (2 parts)

I. This is what happens to the proud: they are humbled. vv. 28-33

We know this is true, that God humbles the proud and lifts up the humble. It is clear from Scripture. And yet, we continue in our pride I suppose because we do not believe that God will actually follow through on humbling us. Here we have an example of when He chose to do exactly that, He humbled the proud great King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian empire in the days of Daniel. He did it to prove His point that there ought be no pride in accomplishment and power, that there is One who is sovereign even over the greatest of kings. He is the God of Scripture. He has warned the King of what awaits him should he not repent. Here we see that it DID happen to him.

v.28- All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

There it is, the dream, the interpretation of the dream by Daniel, the warning from Daniel concerning the message of the dream. All of what had been foretold then took place. Again I remind you that this is all told from the perspective of the king himself. He is telling us that Yahweh followed through on His threat. It happened.

29 At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

Don't you just cringe reading these words? Aren't you sitting there saying, “No, O king live forever! Don't say such a thing!” We read them and instinctively know what is going to happen, especially after being warned that it

was going to happen. To be warned and then to go out and do the very thing warned against, that in itself is perhaps the most prideful thing you could do. In this case, a full year transpired between the warning and the statement. Perhaps the king took the warning seriously for awhile. We are not told. All we know is that after a year, the king finally went back to his old ways, he spoke out of the core of his being. We pick up the story with him surveying the results of his work from the roof of his grand palace. He looks out over his creation and declares it not just good, but great. His words, his perspective is certainly cringe worthy, "I have done great things! Look at all that I have built! Aren't I great!!! Only the greatest, most powerful king in all the world could do what I have done. Wow! Look at me!"

31 While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, 32 and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."

This time the king hears a direct, clear voice from heaven, from the God of heaven. Notice the time marker, this happened while the words were still in the king's mouth. In other words, it happened in real time, while he was saying it. This is what judgment looks like. This is what judgment could always look like: you do something wrong and you're instantly struck down. The only reason why it does not happen that way is because God is gracious, wanting people to repent. But I remind you of what I suggested at the beginning. We take such a delay as an indicator that God is not serious, that our sin is no big deal to Him. We flaunt our rebellion rather than use the delay to become humble.

So, in this case, He did what He always could do. He brought instantaneous judgment upon proud king Nebuchadnezzar. As of that moment, he lost his kingdom, he lost his place among men, he lost his sanity, he lost his diet of privilege, even his diet as a human being. He would from that point on for a period of 7 years live among the beasts of the field. He would live like and be treated like the oxen, the cattle. His reign as mighty king was over. The message is going to have to be drilled into him that there is a Most High God who rules over men and gives positions, power, and greatness to whomever He pleases. You, O king live forever, will learn this lesson! (And since we are reading all of this from the perspective of the king, we know that he will eventually get it.) But for now, enjoy eating the grass of the field for the next 7 years, O great king, live forever!

33 Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

I actually read where there is a name for this condition, but essentially he became like a beast. His hair grew out in crazy ways, his fingernails and toenails grew out in crazy ways, his body toughened up to endure life with no protection outdoors. I can only imagine what he would have looked like during these years. I'm sure it would have been gross, disgusting, causing us to wonder if he was truly human.

And yet, we know that this condition was only designed to be temporary. God was not judging him in the ultimate sense. It was designated to be for a set period, 7 years. After that, God had a plan for him. True judgment would have been permanent. But as we covered last week, God showed to one and all who was sovereign by actually restoring the deranged man back to sanity, back to

power. There was a redemptive purpose still to be fulfilled in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Pause: I'd love to spend the next 15 minutes in silence, for God to speak to you about your pride, reveal it to you. That would be awkward, but oh so valuable. As I suggested last week, we ALL have an issue with pride, we ALL do. It is the core human sin! The only question is whether we recognize it and then deal with it. But know that it is there. The story of King Nebuchadnezzar is written down in Scripture for us. It is designed to warn us. Resume.

II. This is the perspective of the humbled: blessed be the Most High God, whose reign and kingdom are without limit. vv. 34-37

When we have been humbled, this is what it looks like. Once more, these are the words of a once proud king who was not Jewish, did not follow the God of Scripture. It reads like a psalm of David. But it is written in the hand of a foreign godless king. This is what being humbled will do to you.

34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason 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 endures from generation to generation;

There it is! His perspective has changed. Figuratively, he looked up. He saw himself as beneath the God of heaven. This is what we have waited for the whole time. Mighty King Nebuchadnezzar, beast of the field, finally acknowledges that the God of Scripture is over him. He has been humbled.

Then we notice what comes out of his mouth: a blessing of the God of heaven. This blessing does not come from a sense of superiority but of inferiority. This is not a father blessing a son, but a subject pronouncing his blessing upon his king. He honors Him, pronounces good wishes toward Him, declares His attributes and authority. He confesses that the God of heaven, the Most High God is eternal, He DOES live forever unlike the king. He rules over a kingdom which will exist forever. Are you catching that this is the central feature of not only the story but the whole book? We saw the same thought in the first dream, that there would come a kingdom which would crush all human kingdoms and rule forever. Finally, King Nebuchadnezzar humbles himself before such a king, acknowledges the superiority of such a kingdom, a superiority which shows itself not just in the end but in each generation. Every generation needs to acknowledge that the Kingdom of God is superior over every human kingdom because the King is superior to all human kings. This is a central message of the book of Daniel. And then we remind ourselves that these words are a declaration not from Daniel, but from King Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, Daniel is not even in the text. Just as the last story, the fiery furnace was the story of the three friends, so this story is the king's story, with him in the center, told from his perspective. He wants everyone everywhere to know that there is a God in heaven who was, who is, and who always will be ruling over His creation, including the kingdoms of men.

35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

I often teach a basic way of studying Scripture, looking for what a passage teaches us about God, what it teaches about us, and about how people like us can have a relationship with a God like that. We see all of that here in this passage. God is great, eternal, sovereign. By comparison, we are nothing, helpless, with no standing before Him, no right to question Him. We have a

relationship with Him characterized by humility on our part and lifting up on His part. We bless Him, He lifts us up. We refrain from priding ourselves in what we have done and instead give Him thanks for what He has done for us. We get rid of our pride and instead see ourselves as under His authority. Yes, this is a loaded passage. We are not in a position of saying to God, “God, what were you thinking!!!”

36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

We can't help but see the difference in perspective from the beginning of today's text to the end. The king started by priding himself in all of his accomplishments, glorying in all that he had built. But now, he sees himself as the recipient of a kingdom, of majesty, of splendor. It has all been given to him, not built by him. He gives thanks and praise to God for blessing him with even more than he had before. He declares that God is good, right, just. His power over men is complete, God can lift up and chop down as He pleases. Indeed, He often does so to the proud to make the point. This sounds like a psalmist reflecting on an ordeal...and it is. It just so happens that the psalmist is unexpected: King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian empire, the mightiest king of his day. And mighty he was. You can google the dug up remains of his empire. Just look up the Ishtar gate and imagine a whole city which looked like that. This is what he built. But a sovereign over him humbled him, took it all away, made him lower than human, and then raised him back up. He went from highest to lowest to even higher. And here he bows before the One who is sovereign over Him. What a beautiful lesson for us all!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will be ever vigilant in identifying and rooting out our pride.
- 2) We will not conclude that God's delay in dealing with our pride is a sign that it is no big deal.
- 3) We will view ourselves as a blessed people, not an accomplished people.
- 4) We will bless and lift up the Most High God who is sovereign over us.