

Theme: God is Sovereign over the world, both nations and individuals, and is able to humble the proud and exalt the humble.

## I. Intro - Chuck Colson - Born Again

- A. Chuck Colson - proud, strong, brutal Nixon aide
- B. "I would walk over my own grandmother to re-elect Nixon"
- C. Watergate creates a crisis; he is given *Mere Christianity*
- D. Colson is humbled and converts; *Born Again*
- E. Daniel 4 - God humbles proud Nebuchadnezzar

## II. A Troubling Dream

- A. Nebuchadnezzar at ease has a troubling dream  
I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. <sup>5</sup> I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.  
Daniel 4:4–5
  - 1. Probably late in reign - contented, prosperous
  - 2. As we will see he has finished building up Babylon
  - 3. Suddenly his peace is shattered - another troubling dream
  - 4. The proud strong king is now terrified
- B. The content of the dream
  - 1. The wise men of Babylon fail again!
  - 2. It may be that they know the meaning but are afraid to tell him, but in any event, they fail the king again

- 3. Nebuchadnezzar reaches out to Daniel again  
Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called **Belteshazzar**, after the name of my god, and **the spirit of the holy gods is in him.**) <sup>9</sup> I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, **I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you**, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. Daniel 4:8–9
  - a. Daniel (note Hebrew name) comes to help
  - b. The spirit of the holy god is in him - 2x (also v18)
  - c. Clearly, Daniel/Belteshazzar has real stature in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar by this time
  - d. Nebuchadnezzar still does not understand the true nature of God but he knows that Daniel is a man of God
- 4. The content of the dream
  - a. A huge, impressive, productive tree  
I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. <sup>11</sup> The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. <sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. Daniel 4:10–12
    - 1. Enormous in height, to the sky (like Tower of Babel)
    - 2. The whole earth can see its splendor
    - 3. Full of leaves and abundant fruit, animals take cover and are fed by it
    - 4. Trees like this were common in myths of this time, and often represented kingdoms or rulers. This would be a good sign and fit Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon!

b. An ominous turn in the dream

“In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. <sup>14</sup> He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. <sup>15</sup> But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Daniel 4:13–15a

1. A messenger from heaven commands to cut the tree down! Animals will flee away!
2. This can't be good! No wonder he was terrified!
3. But the stump will remain - is there hope?

c. The dream goes from bad to worse!

Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. <sup>16</sup> Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. <sup>17</sup> The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men. Daniel 4:15–17

1. Him, his, his mind - clearly speaking of a human now
2. Given the mind of an animal - humiliating!
3. This will last for seven times - could be seven years, or just until the man is humbled fully
4. The point: The Most High Is Sovereign! He sets the lowliest of men over kingdoms if He wants!

C. The interpretation of the dream (vv19-33 in 3rd person)

1. Daniel was terrified and does not want to explain it to Nebuchadnezzar until he is told to do so

Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! Daniel 4:19

- a. Daniel knows what it means but hates to explain it
- b. “If only it was about your enemies!” - note Daniel's compassion for Nebuchadnezzar
- c. God's exile people must always have compassion for even those who have brought us trouble, always remembering our own sins and God's mercy toward us.

2. Daniel explains the dream

- a. Nebuchadnezzar is the mighty tree  
you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. Daniel 4:22
  1. Affirms Nebuchadnezzar is great and strong
  2. Affirms the great empire of Nebuchadnezzar
  3. Nebuchadnezzar is great; his problem is he knows it!
- b. Nebuchadnezzar will become like an animal (zooanthropy) for an extended period of time  
You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. Daniel 4:25

1. Apparently, the mind of an animal (v16) means he will begin to think he is an animal and will act like one
  2. Zooanthropy/lycanthropy - the basis for the myth of werewolves
  3. There have been documented cases down to our own time
  4. This would last for so long that he would start to be so unkempt he would look like an animal
  5. He would be humbled to a lowly animal until he acknowledged that the Most High God is Sovereign and He gives kingdoms to anyone He wants.
  6. Nebuchadnezzar must learn that his power and success are not due to his own inherent worth but to the choice of God - and he can be humbled at any moment God desires.
- c. A glimmer of hope - you will be restored
- The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.  
Daniel 4:26
1. You will be restored to you when you humbly acknowledge God rules over you
  2. The same image Isaiah saw for Judah
 

Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, <sup>12</sup> until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. <sup>13</sup>And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land." Isaiah 6:11–13
  3. Nebuchadnezzar will be humbled, but he will also be restored and exalted after he humbles himself before God.

3. Daniel calls for Nebuchadnezzar to repent to avert this disaster
 

Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." Dan 4:27

  - a. Daniel has great compassion on Nebuchadnezzar, so he does not just proclaim the Word, he shows Nebuchadnezzar the way out of danger
  - b. Christians must not only proclaim the truth of the Gospel but have clear compassion and love for those who do not yet believe the Gospel.
  - c. Renounce - break off the yoke of your sins - repent
  - d. Show your repentance by helping the lowly - the opposite of your pride
  - e. God has made this decree - but repentance can avert this disaster (like Nineveh)
  - f. This is not works - repentance is seen in change
 

First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, **I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.**  
Acts 26:20
4. Even though this decree has been announced, there is still time for Nebuchadnezzar to avert disaster, if he will only repent. Will he do so?

### III. The Proud Humbled

#### A. Nebuchadnezzar's pride

Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, <sup>30</sup> he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Daniel 4:29–30

1. Twelve months later - God's patience, or perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had changed for a while
2. As he surveys Babylon, pride wells up
  - a. He had turned Babylon into a wonder of the world
  - b. The wall was massive, and the hanging gardens were one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world
3. He speaks proudly, directly rejecting the warning
4. I have built...my mighty power...my majesty - pride

#### B. Judgment falls - the proud man is humbled

The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. <sup>32</sup> You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." <sup>33</sup> Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. Daniel 4:31-33

1. The words still on his lips...immediately - judgment
2. He thinks, acts, and looks like an animal
3. The proud king is reduced to a lowly beast
4. Pride has brought a great fall (Proverbs 16:18)
5. Fewell - "A man who thinks he is like a god must become a beast to learn that he is only a human being."

#### C. Nebuchadnezzar's sanity restored - A Changed Man

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High... <sup>36</sup> At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Daniel 4:34,36

1. Raised my eyes to heaven - he admits God reigns
2. His sanity was restored - the humble exalted
3. His words recognize God's absolute Sovereignty - pride has given way to praise
4. He was then restored to his position as king

### IV. Applying the Word

#### A. Do I know that God is the Sovereign ruler of all?

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Daniel 4:35

1. Nebuchadnezzar now recognizes and praises the absolute Sovereignty of God
2. God is Sovereign over heaven and earth, with nations and individuals, and His purposes will be done in human history
3. Do I acknowledge and celebrate God's Sovereign rule over the nations today?
4. Do I acknowledge and celebrate God's Sovereignty over individuals - including me?

B. Do I have hope for unbelievers for whom I pray?

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation ...

<sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. Daniel 4:34, 37

1. Nebuchadnezzar now looks to heaven, praises the Most High, praises, exalts, glorifies the King
2. We do not know if Nebuchadnezzar fully converted, but these are hopeful words and certainly sound like one who has come to true faith.
3. Seeing all of this must have been very encouraging to Daniel!
4. This should encourage us as we pray and labor to reach people around us - even when they seem far from God, He may be at work drawing them away from their sin and to Himself!

C. Am I walking in pride or humility?

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, 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.** Daniel 4:37

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:11

1. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we are so tempted to pride!
2. We are wise when we humble ourselves so that we do not have to be humbled by God!

3. Am I walking in humility or pride?

4. Even better - where am I walking in pride?

5. Let the Gospel produce humility in you today!

D. The Table of the Humble King

1. This is the Table of the Humble King

2. Jesus is the opposite of Nebuchadnezzar - He had true power and authority, but humbled Himself willingly!

3. His humility has brought blessing and life to us!

4. Philippians 2:5-11 as a confession of the faith and call to the Table

### Humbling the Strong

Daniel 4 (Daniel 4:1-3; 34-37)

August 1, 2021

Communion

1 Peter 5:5 paraphrase

Teaching keywords: Humility and Pride; Sovereignty of God; kingdom of God; evangelism and missions

May the God who opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, fill your days with His grace and your nights with His favor until your life overflows with blessing so that you may be a blessing to others.

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! <sup>2</sup> It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. <sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

<sup>34</sup> At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

<sup>36</sup> At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, 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. Daniel 4:1–3, 34–37