

Daniel 4 - Pride

December 30, 2012

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting through the Internet. I hope you enjoyed a great Christmas. We began studying the book of Daniel for our Christmas series, and we will continue to work our way through this exciting book in the new year. This morning, we are at Daniel 4. Turn in your Bibles to that chapter. If you didn’t bring a Bible, it is found on page 740 of the pew Bible.

While you are turning, I want to begin with a true story. King Louis XIV was one of the longest-reigning monarchs of France. He died in 1715 after 72 years in power. He built one of the most elegant and lavish courts in Europe. He also had a huge ego problem. His famous saying was, “*I am the state.*” He liked to be referred to as King Louis the Great. When someone adds “the Great” to their name, you know they have a massive ego issue. King Louis was not the first to try adding the phrase “the Great” to the end of his name. There was Herod the Great, Alexander the Great and a number of others who thought of themselves as God’s gift to the world.

King Louis planned his funeral so he would be remembered for his greatness in death, just as he was in life. He was laid to rest in a solid gold casket. He planned his funeral so when his casket was brought in, all other candles in the church would be blown out. The only candle in the room that would remain burning was the one on top of his casket.

As the court preacher, Bishop Massilon rose to deliver the funeral oration. As he climbed the stairs to the pulpit, he felt something was wrong. He descended the stairs, walked over to the casket and blew out King Louis' candle. Then he climbed back in the pulpit and began his message with these words, "Only God is great; only God is great."¹

That was a gutsy move, but it is true. Daniel 4 is very similar to this story. It is a chapter that teaches us about the greatness of God and about the enormous danger of pride. For some of us, our pride is obvious, like Tony Stark in the movie "Iron Man." For others, our pride is well hidden. It doesn't matter who we are, everyone struggles with pride. It is no respecter of temperaments or personalities. You can be the boss in the corner office or the new employee on the shop floor and pride will still be your struggle.

Before we put our fingers in the text, let's do a little review. In this series, we said there are two great lessons in the book of Daniel.

- **God is large and in charge** --- Nothing is out of his control. Nobody is beyond his reach. Nothing happens that he does not ordain for his glory.
- **Obedience matters, especially in small areas when nobody is looking** --- God honors those who honor him. Compromise in little areas suffocates God's hand of blessing in our lives. That doesn't mean God is a genie in a bottle where our obedience puts him in our debt. It is just a general rule of thumb that as God's people delight in him, he delights in them.

¹ Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.

In chapter 4, we see how large and in charge God is of everything and everyone. On one level this is a story about human pride, on another, it is a story about God. It is a warning to all of us not to get too preoccupied with ourselves and our little kingdoms.

We will look at the text under four headings. 1) God is great in his warnings. 2) God is great in his patience. 3) God is great in his discipline. 4) God is great in his mercy.

God is great in his warnings.

Daniel was taken from his homeland in the sixth century B.C. when he was a teenager. He was taken as a P.O.W. to Babylon, which is modern day Iraq. As far as we know, he never returned. He lived to be an old man. He wrote this letter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to remind the Hebrew exiles that God still loved them. He was still in control. No matter how bleak the circumstances looked in Babylon, they could still trust him.

As far as I can tell, by chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar already made two professions of faith. These professions sounded good. If you were a Jew in Babylon, you would be thrilled with each of them.

The first is in Daniel 2:47, after Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It sounded like he turned to the God of Israel.

The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Daniel 2:47 (ESV)

This conversion didn't stick long because in chapter three he went back to building statues and commanding everyone to worship them. After throwing

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, into the furnace and witnessing Jesus' supernatural protection of them in the flames, it sounded like he converted again.

Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God." Daniel 3:28 (ESV)

By the time we get to chapter four, it is obvious that his previous conversions were bogus because his heart didn't change. He was still filled with hatred toward God. Nebuchadnezzar was still living for his own program. His life existed to bring himself glory.

This is a reminder that just because somebody attends church or says the right words at youth group, that doesn't mean they have experienced a genuine conversion. This king went through what looked like two legitimate professions of faith but his heart never changed. He was filled with pride. The proof of a changed heart is a changed life, not a perfect life but a changed life.

Why did Nebuchadnezzar quickly forget the miraculous interventions in his life that we studied in chapters two and three? I think his success and comfort helped destroy him as it cultivated a heart filled with pride. Pride will squeeze any remnants of spiritual life within you.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. Daniel 4:4 (ESV)

Nebuchadnezzar achieved what only a half dozen people in all of history have obtained. He was the absolute unchecked monarch over everything. Every people group in the world that he was aware of, he conquered. He built Babylon,

the largest city in the world up to that point in history. Babylon was not like New York with dirt and dust; it was beautiful. It featured the hanging gardens of Babylon, which was one of the seven wonders of the world. There was no Senate, no Supreme Court, no House of Representatives to keep Nebuchadnezzar in check. He had absolute and total control of everything. That is a kind of power and authority most of us cannot comprehend. That kind of success can choke out your spiritual life.

Success is an incentive for pride. We are no different; it is just that we are simply operating on a smaller scale.

Here is how it happens. When we experience success, the first thing we want to do is focus attention on ourselves. Success makes us think we are the author of our own destiny. We were successful because we worked harder. We are smarter. We deserve it. It is all about us. Success makes us satisfied with ourselves.

How should we handle success to keep it from killing us? The God-honoring way to handle success is to turn it to God. If it wasn't for God giving us our brains, the connections we have with our friends, the parents who helped us, the health and strength we need to succeed, we wouldn't have success. When we experience success, all the glory needs to go to God. It is so easy to give the credit to yourself. That is what Nebuchadnezzar struggled with. It is what we struggle with.

The application for us is when we have success and comfort, that can be a spiritual danger zone. First, be aware of it. Second, constantly credit God for

the success and let it drive you in worship to him. If it doesn't drive you in worship to him, it will drive you to worship yourself.

Even though Nebuchadnezzar already went through this twice before, God, in his love for him, once again called him to repentance. He did it through another dream.

The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you." Daniel 4:10–18 (ESV)

One thing I want you to notice is in verse 6. Nebuchadnezzar was still a polytheist. When he had this dream, why didn't he call Daniel? He called all the other enchanters, Chaldeans and magicians to interpret his dream. It was only when they came up bone dry on the interpretation that he turned to Daniel. Even when Nebuchadnezzar turned to Daniel, look at verses 8 and 18.

Nebuchadnezzar said that the spirit of the holy gods was in him. It is plural! How many times had he been through this?

What he did was demote the God of Israel to be just one of the gods he worshipped. This is very common. It makes God safe. It allows our pride to flourish. When George Reginetter goes to India later this month, he will share the Gospel with Hindus. Their first reaction will be “Sure, no problem, another god to worship. I will throw him in the bucket with the rest of them.” Hindus have no problems worshipping another god because they worship between 3,000-30 million different gods. That doesn’t count. Jesus isn’t just another God. He is the only God. The hardest thing to get a Hindu to see is they have to dump everything else and worship Jesus alone. There is only one true God.

It is not just Hindus that struggle with this. We struggle with this. It is easy to worship a boyfriend or a girlfriend along with Jesus. It is natural to worship a sport along with Jesus. It is easy to worship a hobby along with Jesus. The more successful we become, the more natural it is to worship ourselves along with Jesus.

When we worship ourselves or our accomplishments, that is called pride. It is arsenic to our souls. Many times God is merciful to us when we are caught in a prideful web of our own making. He doesn’t annihilate us. He sends us warnings, like he did to Nebuchadnezzar. That warning may prick our consciences when the Word is preached. It may be a recurring thought in the middle of the night that we know we don’t want to face. God is great in sending us warnings about what pride does to us.

If God is sending you a warning this morning, don’t ignore it.

God is great in his patience.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,’ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 4:19–28 (ESV)

This was a gutsy move on Daniel’s part. I think other wise men in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom suspected this interpretation but they didn’t have the guts to say it. It did not win friends and influence people.

I want us to notice God’s patience. He warned Nebuchadnezzar in the dream and through Daniel. After that, God didn’t whack him but gives him 12 months to repent. Isn’t God gracious? He doesn’t always do this, but many times he is so patient. The question is, will we repent?

Some people here this morning have secret sins that nobody knows about but you and God. Nothing has happened. You think God is ignoring you. You

think you are getting away with it. You aren't. The only reason God hasn't disciplined you is because he is patient with you. He is giving you an opportunity to repent.

...because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 1 Peter 3:20 (ESV)

God was patient with people in the days of Noah giving them an opportunity to repent before the flood. God's patience came to an end. God was patient with ancient Israel when the Jews sinned before he took them into captivity in Babylon. He is being patient with you. Repent before he disciplines.

God is great in his discipline.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?" 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, 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." 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. 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; 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?" Daniel 4:28-35 (ESV)

Notice the words on Nebuchadnezzar's lips. He said Babylon was built by his power and for his glory and majesty. Nebuchadnezzar said it was all about him. He was Nebuchadnezzar the Great.

God decided to discipline him for his pride. God made him insane. Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and thought he was an ox or some kind of a cow. This may sound far-fetched but I looked it up and there is a mental disorder where people lose their minds and think they are animals. They eat grass like an animal. They act like an animal. They make the sounds of a cow and live with the cows.

What a complete reversal of fortunes! Nebuchadnezzar woke up as a brilliant man who was the undisputed ruler of the world. He went to bed in the pasture with everyone wondering what to think about him.

How long did this last? It says seven periods of time. That could have been seven months. It could have been seven seasons, which would have been a year and a half. It was probably not seven years, but that is a possibility. One thing is clear. It was a long time.

Why was it a long time? God was doing a spiritual root canal. He was deeply humbling one of the most prideful people on the planet. Why did he do this? Was it because God hated him? No. God loved him. A deep humbling is often times the only way to cure us of deep-rooted pride.

When God deeply humbles his children, it is because he deeply loves them. God cannot use us mightily until he breaks us deeply. A long and deep period of brokenness tears pride out of our lives by the roots. If you have been through one of these, you know what I am talking about. You would never want to go through one of these times again, but you wouldn't trade the changes that time in your life made. After you are humbled, you know that every ounce of

success in your life is a gift right from the hand of God, not yourself.

Nebuchadnezzar went through one of these times of brokenness.

Look at the changes this brokenness brought into his life in verses 34 and 35. After God restored Nebuchadnezzar's sanity, was he still a polytheist? No. Did he think life was about him and his glory? No.

What I think is incredibly exciting about Daniel chapters one-four is they start out with Nebuchadnezzar slaughtering the people of God because he thought he was in control. By the end of chapter four, he gave up polytheism and became a Christian. The man who thought he conquered God was conquered by God.

This teaches us that nobody is beyond God's reach. It doesn't matter how evil they are. It doesn't matter how far away from God they have strayed. We should pray that God will get ahold of their heart and convert them. God loves to take people who are ultra-hard against him and turn them into passionate followers. This is what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. It is what happened to Paul. When we see the evening news and we read about people who kill children, don't pray that God will destroy them. Pray that God will have mercy upon them. Pray God will break into their broken and prideful lives and bring them to Jesus. That is what God loves to do.

God is great in his mercy.

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. 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. Daniel 4:36–37 (ESV)

What I find amazing is how the story ends. God didn't keep Nebuchadnezzar in a state of humiliation forever. God is so merciful. He not only gives Nebuchadnezzar his mind back, but he restores to him his worldwide kingdom and makes him more successful than ever. At first, that may not grip you. If you are on top of the world and you lose power, everybody grabs for your position of authority. If they can, they kick you out of town or they kill you. That didn't happen in this story. After Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation, everybody wanted him back. That floors me. It could only be a god thing.

Nebuchadnezzar got the message loud and clear in the last verse.

Those who walk in pride, God is able to humble.

In my studies I ran across another king that had a similar story. He lived 100 years before Nebuchadnezzar. He was every bit as egotistical and probably more evil. He was the 13th king of Judah. His name was Manasseh. He was involved in astrology, witchcraft and large doses of the occult, and he burned his own children as a sacrifice to a pagan god. He murdered numerous people to stay in power. 2 Kings 21 says he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. He had the distinction of being known as the most wicked king in Judah's history.

We are told that God warned him. God was patient with him. God eventually disciplined him. The King of Assyria came in, put a ring through his nose and hauled him off to Assyria. God, in his great mercy, gave him another chance. We are told in 2 Chronicles 33:12-13 that Manasseh humbled himself greatly while in Assyria. The Lord was moved by his prayer. God had great mercy upon him.

The end of the story is he got restored to power. He went back to Jerusalem and led a revival!. Talk about a shocker when he showed up and he was preaching. Everybody ran for cover. They couldn't figure out what happened. Every once in a while, God reminds us just how large and in charge he is when he takes the most evil, lost and wicked pagans on the planet and transforms them into passionate followers of Jesus.

Conclusion

This morning, I don't know what stuff is on your rap sheet. I don't know how prideful you have become. This text may be a warning from God for you. If you think life is about your glory, like Nebuchadnezzar did, this is your warning. Repent. God will probably be patient and give you ample opportunity to repent. If we don't repent, rest assured, he will eventually discipline us, because he loves us.

Some of you may think God cannot forgive you. If God can forgive Nebuchadnezzar and Manasseh, he can forgive you. That is the Gospel.

My friends, we aren't great. God is great. He is great in his warning; he is great in his patience; he is great in his discipline, and he is great in his mercy.



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