

“PRIDE GOES BEFORE DESTRUCTION”
LESSONS FROM BABYLON 4
Daniel 4:1-18, 19-37
February 27 & 28, 2021

“Two brothers went away to college. One brother became a farmer. The other became a brilliant, wealthy lawyer. The lawyer brother visited the farmer brother on the farm. He said, ‘I can’t believe you’ve not made anything of your life. You’re out here on a farm. Look at me. Look where I am. I’m on Wall Street. I’m an investor in the stock market. I have clients who are millionaires. Here you are, stuck out here on the farm. I wonder what the difference between us is.’

“The farmer brother then spoke. He pointed out to his wheat field. He said, ‘You’ll see two types of wheat out there, brother. You’ll see the wheat that’s standing straight up. In the head of that wheat, there is nothing. It’s empty. That’s why it’s standing so high. You’ll also see some other wheat that is bent over. That’s because the head is full. It’s full of wheat.’

“Some of us are standing straight up. We are walking tall. However, we are only able to do so because we are empty. Some of us walk a little bent over indicating that we are full. The test isn’t what you have in your pocket. It’s what you have in your heart”¹

Pride always make us think we are better than we really are. We may think that we are really hot stuff, but in reality, we’re just common ordinary sinful people in need of a Savior. We may think that because we are **in** a certain economic class, or because we have our own business, or because we have lots of toys to enjoy, that we are better than someone else. We may even think that because of our position at work we are more important than the one who is on the line. It is human nature to want to be better than everyone else, to be the #1, the best, the most popular, the greatest thing since the invention of the toaster oven. But we really are just like everyone else, no matter what we have, or don’t have. So I want you to consider how you think about yourself today; and as a result of how you see yourself, what you think about everyone else around you.

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 238, #728

We're looking at the series called "Lessons From Babylon," and we are exploring the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (also known as Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), men of Jerusalem who have become leaders in the foreign empire of Babylon after they were taken as captives at the beginning of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar.

From their examples documented in the Old Testament book of Daniel, we have seen the value of standing strong in our convictions and obedience to the Lord our God. These four men have shown us the importance of being willing to stand out as different from others when they know it is standing strong for the Laws of God. They have shown us the importance of being open to hearing from the Lord in order to touch the lives of those around us who do not know the Lord yet. And they have shown us the importance of standing up against popular demands to conform to the ways of this world when those ways contrast and conflict with the standards and guidelines established by the Lord God Almighty.

Today we look at the danger of abandoning God and thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think of ourselves. You heard the first half of Daniel 4 (1-18), and once again we see that God was trying to get King Nebuchadnezzar's attention. First there was a dream showing how great King Nebuchadnezzar was, and what his kingdom would become in the future. Then there was the supernatural protection of three men who dared disobey the king's command to bow down and worship a golden idol, being miraculously delivered by the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego while they were in the fiery furnace.

After these things, you would think that King Nebuchadnezzar would finally be ready to see God's power and majesty in the life of His people. True, after Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were delivered from the blazing furnace the king acknowledged that God was a great God, but Nebuchadnezzar had directed **the people** to recognize their God as THE God. But we have no record of Nebuchadnezzar professing the greatness of God for himself before this. And we have no account of what happened to the great golden idol that he had made. So now, after many more years, God gives him yet another dream in order to get him focused on who is really the greatest of all for himself.

After having the dream, true to form, Nebuchadnezzar calls in the four classes of “advisors” that he relied upon to bring light out of the darkness of their arts. Even as he remembers his dream and tells this one to the fortune tellers, magicians, wizards, and astrologers, they are unable to give him a meaning to it. God had kept the explanation from them, so all they could do was stand there silent once more, baffled by the dream. Not one of them could produce an interpretation for the king’s dream.

It seems that the king had forgotten about one who had interpreted his last dream. Not until Daniel, also called Belteshazzar, comes in, does the king remember that God had given him great insight in interpreting visions and dreams. He addressed Daniel very particularly, “*Belteshazzar, chief of the fortunetellers, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that you understand all mysteries. This is my dream. Tell me what it means*” (Dan. 4:9)

So the king tells him the mystifying dream about a gigantic tree sheltering beasts of the field birds of the air, and supplying food for the birds and all living creatures. Then, he tells him how an angel came down from heaven and ordered the tree to be removed, stripped from all its branches and the trunk cut down, but the stump was left intact, banded with an iron and bronze band. All the animals and birds were driven away. And then it is announced, “*Now let the dew fall on this man, and let him live with the animals and the plants. For seven years he will not have a human mind, but the mind of an animal. This is the decision of the alert and watchful angels. So then let all people everywhere know that the Supreme God has power over human kingdoms and that he can give them to anyone he chooses – even to the least important of men*” (Daniel 4:15-17).

This fantastic dream was given to Nebuchadnezzar in order to get him to acknowledge “The Supreme God” over all people. It was an opportunity for Nebuchadnezzar to humble himself before God, acknowledging God’s giving him the throne of Babylon and the ability to reign as king. It was another chance for the king to consider what God required of him as the king so that by following God’s guidelines and commands, he could continue to rule over the empire of the Babylonians. It was God’s way of inviting Nebuchadnezzar to trust in Him as the One and only God of the world, repenting of his

sinful life, and becoming an advocate for worshipping God alone. But he could not do anything until he understood what the dream meant. So he inquired of Daniel to tell him the meaning.

Listen to what Daniel tells the king, and what the king does with the interpretation. This is Daniel 4:19-37. (READ Daniel 4:19-37)

Daniel is very uneasy about telling the king the meaning of his dream. He knows the importance of the dream, but may wonder about how King Nebuchadnezzar would take the interpretation. Surely it was troubling news, and if the king didn't like what was told to him, he could order Daniel's death. It had happened before. But the king braced himself to hear the foreboding news, and encouraged Daniel to proceed.

God had given Daniel the special skill of interpreting dreams and visions, but to tell a brutally powerful king that he will be losing not only his kingdom, but also his sanity, is a very bold thing to do. God was using Daniel to prepare Nebuchadnezzar for what might happen if he did not change his ways and humble himself before the Lord God. Takes us back to the days of Moses confronting Pharaoh, telling him that he was not a god, but that His God was God. And it makes us think about Jonah going before the king and people of Nineveh, declaring to them the destruction of the city unless they repented. Great boldness and courage was needed in order to prepare the people for what could happen.

So Daniel proceeded to explain to the king, "*You are the tree, tall and strong. You have grown so great that you reach the sky, and your power extends over the whole world*" (Dan. 4:22). Once more God is letting Nebuchadnezzar know that he has given him great power and authority over the whole Babylonian empire. Success was his because God allowed him to rule. All that he accomplished was because God allowed it to happen. But pride had enveloped the king, and he began to think that he had done all of it on his own, by his own power, by his great wisdom, and for his glorification.

But God does not allow people with pride to remain in their positions for very long, unless it is to bring consequences to them for it. God had hardened Pharaoh's heart so that by him turning away from the truth of God's ultimate power, God could be glorified in it. And such was the same with King

Nebuchadnezzar. God would show His greatness to the king and all the people by working with the pride of the king, and disciplining the king as a result of it.

“But Daniel did not smooth over the matter, but spoke plainly. There and then he preached righteousness to the king. A very good sermon it was too that he preached. If we had more of the same sort now, it would be better for us. He entreated the king: ‘So then, Your Majesty, follow my advice. Stop sinning, do what is right, and be merciful to the poor. Then you will continue to be prosperous...’”

He told the king that “just as the tree was hewn down and destroyed, so would he be stripped of power and robbed of strength. Daniel told him that he would be driven from among men and would have to live and eat with the beasts of the field. But the kingdom would revert to him in the end, just as the great watchman had spared the stump of the tree.”²

Repentance was required to enable the king to continue in his position of power. Humiliation was needed in order to move the king from his proverbial “high horse” so that he could see God’s involvement in the whole situation. Had Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and repented of his sin and given glory to God for all that He had given to him, who knows but the calamity may have been abated. But there was no repentance, no sign of the king humbling himself to the Supreme God of the universe. When the king received the interpretation of the dream, it was almost as if he said to Daniel, “Well, that was interesting. Thank you very much for helping me understand the dream. That is all. You can go now.”

The king would have nothing of Daniel’s warning, and he continued to live in any way that he wanted. And a year passes from that afternoon warning of Daniel, and the king “*was walking round on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, and he said, ‘Look how great Babylon is! I built it as my capital city to display my power and might, my glory and majesty’*” (Dan. 4:29-30). So puffed up with pride, the king gives no credit or thanks to God for what achievements had taken place. He claims the work as his very own – by his power and might, his glory and majesty – was everything accomplished. It was as

² (Dwight L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, [Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, Revised Edition, 2018] pg. 36)

if he was taking credit for the rock that made up his city wall, the stone that his palace consisted of, the beauty of the garden plants that had been arranged in the hanging gardens, as if he, himself, had created all of it so that everyone could worship him in it. At that moment, Nebuchadnezzar was claiming to be God, and that was where he got himself into trouble.

God does not delight in ANYONE taking His place as the author and creator of universe. Anyone else taking credit for what He has done is a form of plagiarism, taking credit for someone else's work. So at the very moment that Nebuchadnezzar claims ownership of all that he sees, God touches his mind, and it is sent spinning, departing from him instantly. All reason is removed. All rational thought leaves, and Nebuchadnezzar is left a mad man, driven from the rest of humanity, forced to live as an animal in the wilds of the wilderness. The greatest of kings was totally insane.

And it doesn't take us very long to see that our own world today has gone the same direction. Don't people talk as if their accomplishments are of their own doing? Don't we completely wipe God out of any equation for any results? We've tried to take God out of every arena, to proclaim ourselves as the ultimate power and authority over the earth. And don't we disregard every warning given to us by God calling for us to repent and turn from our own wicked ways? God has touched our own minds and driven us completely insane, too.

So let me ask, "What would it take for God to get YOUR attention?" What would it take for God to demonstrate His greatness and power and authority to you? What consequences do we need to suffer in order for us to put God back onto His throne as God of All Creation? Would it be a flood? A storm? An act of violence? Political unrest? The dismantling of our nation? The death of a loved one? The loss of our positions or jobs? The forfeiture of property and possessions? Drug addiction? Arrest and conviction of a crime we have not committed? A debilitating accident resulting in paralysis? An inoperable illness or disease? What could possibly shake us to our very core to the point that we might recognize that we have little to no power outside of what God has mercifully granted to us? What might God do in our own life to get us to look at Him?

You see, God does not delight in our rebellion against Him. He does not relish in our turning away from Him. He does not rejoice in our giving up His laws and commandments to go our own way and do our own thing. No, God desires that we acknowledge that He is God. He rejoices in our obedience to His commands. He delights that we choose to follow His will and His Way. He celebrates and blesses those who submit themselves to His authority and power so that all they do brings Him glory and honor.

It was after these seven seasons that Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses once more and recognizes God's true place in the scope of all things. He says, *"I looked up at the sky, and my sanity returned. I praised the Supreme God and gave honor and glory to the One who lives forever. 'He will rule forever, and His kingdom will last for all time. He looks on the people of the earth as nothing; angels in heaven and people on earth are under His control. No one can oppose His will or question what He does'"* (Daniel 4:34-35).

Nebuchadnezzar was taken so low that all he could do was to look up. And when he looked up, he saw the Holy, Awesome, and Almighty God reigning over all the earth. He saw the puny attempt we make at putting ourselves in God's place, and he realized that without God, we are absolutely nothing but wild animals. Given his sanity back, Nebuchadnezzar praised God and gave Him the honor and glory that are rightfully His.

Having been humbled to the point of finally identifying all of God's goodness, Nebuchadnezzar is graciously restored to his position as the king of Babylon. But his perspective was no longer the same. He had been transformed and he then states boldly, *"And now I ... praise, honor, and glorify the King of Heaven. Everything He does is right and just, and He can humble anyone who acts proudly"* (Dan. 4:37).

When someone is praising God with their whole heart, it is a sign that they have had an encounter with the One and Only Holy God. It is good to see the change that takes place in their life, for God will synthesize and create a totally new person from the wrecks of destruction. Where pride always

leads to destruction, repentance and confession of sin always brings renewal and restoration of life and love and hope and peace.

Oh, that our church today, that our nation today, and even our world today, would come to the understanding of the greatness of God. Oh that people all over the globe would humble themselves before Almighty God so that He might transform their lives and recreate them into objects of His delight. Oh, that we would give up our selfish pursuit of being #1, better than everyone else, pridefully boasting of what we have, or will accomplish through our own wisdom, or strength, or power, or authority. Oh, that people of every status, and every position, would humble themselves before the God of the Universe, in order to praise Him for who He is and what He has accomplished.

God is certainly able to use us to be the ones who bring the message of new life to those around us. We, like Daniel, can boldly proclaim the message of warning to our own society, pleading with them to acknowledge the power and authority of God over all the earth. But we must first have our own encounter with our Awesome Almighty God so that we affirm His glory and honor His ways. Dare we ask God to *“examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me and guide me in the everlasting way”* (Psalm 139:24-25)?

What would it look like for us to seek the Lord our God and ask Him to establish us like Daniel in our own day, so that we might stand in our own communities like mighty oaks of faith, able to win even the mightiest leader over us back to God? What might God do through us to transform our own world as we humbly submit ourselves into His service to be used by Him to confront the atrocities of our own day?

The pride of our world today needs to be confronted and overcome. If we are willing, God can use even us to bring about the transformation of our world so that all people sing praise and honor and glory to the Almighty God. Father, mold us today into bold witnesses to our world, so that even the greatest leader might come to Salvation as we stand strong in our faith in You before them. Take our lives and let them be consecrated to Your work today, Lord, in Jesus' precious Name. AMEN.