

I want to read something to get us started. “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

That was proclaimed to the American people by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, and in it, he speaks of pride – not pride in our nation per se, but a very sinful and dangerous pride where people are too preoccupied and consumed with themselves and turn away from the God who made them.

This morning, as we continue in the book of **Daniel**, we are going to see this same kind of pride in King Nebuchadnezzar. Now if you recall from last week, Nebuchadnezzar set up a nine-story golden image in the desert, and he summoned the “*who’s who*” of his empire to attend a dedication service – there were thousands of people there, and when the band played, it was commanded that everyone in attendance was to bow down and worship the image.

On cue, the band played, and everyone bowed down to the image just like they were told to do – everyone but three young Jewish men – Daniel’s friends, named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They remained standing and they stood out. When it was reported to the king, the king confronted them and gave them a second chance to comply, but these three refused, and they were immediately tossed into the fiery smelting furnace that was on site. That should have been the end of the story, but the story was just getting interesting. In the furnace, these three suffered no harm, it was just another day in the park for them, and they were not alone. A fourth had joined them in the fire who represented the presence of God. Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t believe his eyes, and he called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to come out before the thousands in attendance. After an inspection of the three, the king declared to all that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was the Most High God, and anyone who spoke anything offensive towards their God would be torn limb from limb.

Well, some thirty years have come and gone since the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar is approaching seventy and Daniel is probably in his mid-fifties, and that brings us to the next chapter – the only chapter in the Bible written by a pagan king.

So, if you have your Bible turn to **Daniel 4** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

¹Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: “May your peace abound! ²It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³“How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.

This is the opening of an official document – a decree given by Nebuchadnezzar to the people of his empire that covers the known world, and in his decree – a decree that takes up the entire chapter, the king gives his personal testimony of how the **Most High God** has dealt with him.

Now, think about that for a moment. This entire chapter comes from a pagan king, it's divinely placed in the Bible, it's written to all nations and to all peoples of the earth, it's originally written in Aramaic – the common language of the Gentiles, and it's written because the king wants the whole world to know what God has done for him.

It appears that Nebuchadnezzar has come to know and trust the one true God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. It sounds like the king is a changed man, and in many respects he is. **So, what happened to this guy?** Well, the king tells us himself beginning with **verse 4** where he writes,

⁴“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ⁶So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

Written in first person, Nebuchadnezzar tells us that he was content and prosperous. His enemies had been subdued and all appeared calm. He was successful in everything he touched, living in total comfort – and lying in his bed one evening – he had another bad dream – a dream that terrified him.

So, the king summons all of his wise men – he seeks answers from the exact same people who don't have answers, and he tells them the dream to get their

interpretation of it, but just like the last time – these wise men were completely useless, but fortunately for the king, an answer is on the way.

Beginning with **verse 8**, the king tells us,

⁸ But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, ⁹ ‘O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation. ¹⁰ ‘Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. ¹¹ ‘The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² ‘Its foliage was 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 sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it. ¹³ ‘I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. ¹⁴ ‘He shouted out and spoke as follows: Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ ‘Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ ‘Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast’s mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ ‘This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.’ ¹⁸ This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.’

Daniel comes before Nebuchadnezzar and the king addresses Daniel by both his Hebrew and Babylonian name. The king identifies Daniel as the **“chief of the magicians”**, or we might say the *“head magi”* – he’s been in that position for many years, and the king says he knows the **spirit of the holy gods** dwells in Daniel, and remember, this is a personal testimony from a pagan king. At that point in his life, the king still believed in many gods.

So, Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel his dream, and he begins by saying he saw a tree – a tree that was mighty and strong. This tree touched the heavens and spread all over the earth. It was a beautiful tree and it provided food and shelter for everyone, to include all the beasts and the birds. But into his dream, there comes a **watcher** – in Aramaic a heavenly being – an angel with a message who shouts, chop down the tree and cut off its branches and strip them bare. The angel says, allow the animals and the birds flee, and let the stump remain in the ground, bound with iron and bronze. Then the angel begins to talk as if talking about a person, and he says, let **his mind be changed** from that of a man to that of a beast until seven times pass by. Lastly the angel proclaims, this is a verdict from heaven so that the living may know that the Most High God is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth, and He gives these kingdoms to anyone He desires, even to the lowliest of people.

That’s something we need to remember as well. No matter who is running a nation, it is God who ultimately rules the kingdoms of men. The powers to be on this earth are ordained by the sovereign God in heaven – ordained for His purposes and His plans. It’s the work of God and we must not forget that.

Anyway, Nebuchadnezzar finishes telling his dream, and all eyes are now on Daniel, and beginning with **verse 19**, this is what we are told.

19 “Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.’

It appears that Daniel had grown fond of Nebuchadnezzar over the years, and after hearing the dream, Daniel sits quiet for a while, stunned and alarmed at what he had just heard. He just sits there, saying nothing, but the king wants an answer.

Belteshazzar replied, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth ²¹ and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged— ²² it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth. ²³ In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots

in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,”²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.²⁶ And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.²⁷ Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’

In summary, Daniel says, “*O king, I wish this dream was about your enemies, but it’s not. It’s about you. You are that tree. You are mighty and strong, and your vast empire extends over all the earth, but a declaration has come down from heaven against you because you have taken credit for it all. You will be chopped down, disgraced, but a stump will remain – it’s a promise that one day you will reign again. Then Daniel explains to the king that he will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals. O king, you will lose your mind and think like an animal and live like one.*”

Now, I will talk about what is being described here in a few moments, but suffice to say, Daniel is not claiming that Nebuchadnezzar will be physically turned into an animal. That’s not what he is claiming, instead, the king will think he is an animal and in turn act like one, and this will go on for seven years until the king finally acknowledges that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms of the earth. So, Daniel has revealed some hard truth to Nebuchadnezzar – his pride has serious consequences, and in closing Daniel tells the most powerful man on the earth to repent. Repent right now, humble yourself, and it could be that you miss this terrible humiliation that is to come.

Well, the king admits he does not repent, and that brings us to **verse 28**.

²⁸ “**All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.** ²⁹ **Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.** ³⁰ **The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’**

³¹ While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' ³³ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

A year goes by after the dream, after Daniel's interpretation, and nothing had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently, Daniel was wrong, maybe it was a false alarm, but one day the king was up on the roof of his palace gazing over the city of Babylon – a city that was 14 miles square, the walls around it were 56 miles long, 320 feet high, 80 feet wide, wide enough for four chariots to race across the top. The mighty Euphrates River ran through the middle of the city to feed the many gardens and orchards within its walls. From the roof, Nebuchadnezzar could see the Hanging Gardens of Babylon he created for his wife – one of the seven wonders of the world, and from a distance, he could also see the nine-story golden image glimmering in the sun. It was all a sight to see, and Nebuchadnezzar said to himself – **'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' –** and as he spoke those prideful words, a voice from heaven was heard and just like that, a patient God kept His promise and it happened just as Daniel had said.

So, let's talk about what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, and it might surprise you that what occurred is an actual mental disorder called "*boanthropy*" – and trust me, I had to look it up. *Boanthropy* – *bo* for bovine and *anthropy* for man, is a rare psychological disorder in which a person believes they are a cow or an ox. In this condition, the person thinks and acts just like a cow or an ox. They walk on the ground using their arms and legs, and they develop a craving for the same plants a cow or an ox might graze upon.

In 1946, Dr. Raymond Harrison of England recorded his experiences with an actual case of boanthropy. He observed that the patient spent the entire day roaming the asylum grounds from dusk till dawn eating grass and drinking out of puddles of water like an animal. He added that the patient's only physical abnormality was the lengthening and the matting of his hair and a thickened condition of his nails.

For his sinful pride – the pride he admits to, this was the punishment for Nebuchadnezzar – it would last for seven years, and although we are not told, I am going to assume that Daniel, in his capacity as a ruler in Babylon – the head magi – intervened and related to those people who needed to know that the king would be returning and so, if they liked their limbs attached to their bodies, they should not do anything stupid in the king’s absence.

Seven years go by, and that brings us to **verse 34** where we are told by the king,

³⁴“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward 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 and everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ ³⁶At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

We are told the king raised his eyes toward heaven – he looked up in humility and submission, and everything for him changed. His sinful pride changed to sincere praise for the one true sovereign God in heaven, and if you notice in **verse 36**, Nebuchadnezzar says that his kingdom was **restored** and he was **reestablished** meaning the king finally recognized the Most High God did it all for him.

That is the last we hear about Nebuchadnezzar, but his lesson continues. Pride is a very serious matter to God, and I’m going to read from **Proverbs 6:16-19** to show you just how serious it is.

¹⁶ There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Now if you noticed, on top of the hate list are *“haughty eyes”* and just for clarification, that does not mean God hates eye shadow or mascara. That’s not it. *Haughty eyes* is a figure of speech which describes a prideful arrogant person who considers themselves above others and ultimately above God. *Haughty eyes* describes a prideful person who looks down on others and ironically looks up to heaven and in essence proclaims – *“I don’t need You God.”* No wonder God hates it.

Now, I doubt anyone here would say they don’t need God in their lives – but actions speak louder than words, and sometimes our actions and our attitudes and our decisions might suggest just the opposite.

As believers, we will say we need God in our lives, but we can also live our lives in such a way as to suggest He really doesn’t matter. *“It’s all about me. I can run my own life, in my own wisdom, by my own strength, with my own abilities and talents – on my own terms – in my own way – without God.”*

That’s the sin of pride, God hates it, and the biblical answer for pride is humility – humility modeled for us by Jesus Christ himself. Humility comes from recognizing God for who He really is and centering our lives around Him. It comes from seeing ourselves as God sees us, and it comes from thinking about ourselves less and thinking more about others.

So, as Daniel might say, *“humble yourselves or you might be humiliated,”* and if one day you are mooing in the morning and have a craving to graze on our property – well then, mosey on over near the retention pond – I hear the hay is better over there.

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