

The Dream and the Theme!

Daniel 4:10-33

¹⁰“These *were* the visions of my head *while* on my bed:

I was looking, and behold,

A tree in the midst of the earth,

And its height was great.

¹¹The tree grew and became strong;

Its height reached to the heavens,

And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.

¹²Its leaves *were* lovely,

Its fruit abundant,

And in it *was* food for all.

The beasts of the field found shade under it,

The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches,

And all flesh was fed from it.

¹³“I saw in the visions of my head *while* on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴He cried aloud and said thus:

‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,

Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.

Let the beasts get out from under it,

And the birds from its branches.

¹⁵Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth,

Bound with a band of iron and bronze,

In the tender grass of the field.

Let it be wet with the dew of heaven,

And *let* him graze with the beasts

On the grass of the earth.

¹⁶Let his heart be changed from *that of* a man,

Let him be given the heart of a beast,
And let seven times pass over him.

¹⁷ ‘This decision *is* by the decree of the watchers,
And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know
That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,
Gives it to whomever He will,
And sets over it the lowest of men.’

¹⁸ “This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since 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 God *is* in you.”

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. *So* the king spoke, and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you.”

Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, *may* the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!

²⁰ “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be* seen by all the earth, ²¹ whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— ²² *it is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

²³ “And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, *bound* with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times 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 They

shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

²⁶“And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump *and* roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

²⁸ All *this* came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”

³¹ While the word *was still* in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³² And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”

³³ That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.

Our text today is a lengthy text, and it concerns the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar that is dealt with in the Book of Daniel. Last week I spoke about how Nebuchadnezzar has since the very first chapter of Daniel been exposed to God and his wondrous works through Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar has acknowledged God with lip service, he has recognized that God is great and yet prior to this chapter he has acknowledged God in the second person. He has been Daniel’s God, and he has been the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and yet until we get to Chapter 4 we see no evidence of a changed heart for Nebuchadnezzar himself.

Remember he acknowledges wisdom and the spirit of the holy God within Daniel, and yet there is still no recognition of God as being his God. It is only when we get to chapter 4 where we see the pride of Nebuchadnezzar brought into submission to the God of Daniel. We spoke about this last week, but pride is a struggle for all of us, but many of us struggle with pride in different ways. Some people have pride that manifests itself as arrogance. These people are constantly pointing to themselves and or demanding recognition for the things that they have done. I know we have all encountered this type of pride, and it seems to me on reading and re-reading this chapter that this is the kind of pride that Nebuchadnezzar struggled the most with.

Listen to verse 28 of chapter 4:

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

Even after Nebuchadnezzar had been warned by Daniel about his dream, only 1 year later, the text says 12 months, Nebuchadnezzar began to look at all that was his, and all that God had given him and he forgot to give praise and thanks to God. His focus was on what he, Nebuchadnezzar, had done by his mighty power. His pride in this instance was focusing on his strengths and not giving praise to God.

There is another type of pride that we may be less familiar with, and I believe this manifests itself as a false humility. An example of this is when we know what it is that we should do and yet we use false humility to get out of a task. God tells us to do something, and rather than do it we make excuses for why we cannot. Again, the problem here is that we are focusing on ourselves, and not on God.

I believe this is addressed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. The Apostle Paul was a person who was full of knowledge. He knew God's word, he was full of zeal and the temptation for him to be ensnared by pride was very real. But notice he is given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to buffet him, lest he would be exalted. Hear the passage:

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above

measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I find it very interesting that nowhere in the text are we told what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was. There are many who believe it was a physical ailment of some kind. Scholars tell us that Paul had bad vision, perhaps this was his thorn in the flesh, I don’t know what it was, but I know why it was. It was to keep Paul from exalting himself.

But notice what the text says: *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* I think it is important that whatever this thorn in the flesh was Paul never used it as an excuse to not do what God called him to. To not do is just as much a pride issue as to do.

When someone offers to help you and you refuse ask yourself why I am refusing this persons help? Very often we will see it comes down to pride. I remember many years ago a dear sister, an older lady in the church gave me a card and it had a \$100.00 bill in it. I needed the money. But in my pride I attempted to turn it down. You see, I did not see it this way, but when I refused the gift, I was telling her I was too good for her charity. I remember my grandfather took me aside and chastised me for allowing me pride to get in the way of allowing God to bless this woman.

Very often when people aim to help us we resist because we are covetous and prideful over our positions. Pride takes on many forms but at the heart of pride is focus on ourselves and not focusing on God or on His people.

The title of the Message today is “The Dream and the Theme.” The Dream part makes a lot of sense, but what do I mean by the theme. The theme is the overall theme of the Book of Daniel. The theme of the Book of Daniel is that God is sovereign over all things. In the context of this passage that means he is sovereign over the rising and falling of the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. And what we are going to see in this passage is that Nebuchadnezzars heart is

changed by the wonder working power of God, and he changes Nebuchadnezzar's heart by causing him to recognize that

You see, Nebuchadnezzar like all people who are full of pride, fail to recognize that it is God who raises up nations and it is God who tears down nations. God is the one who sets up kings, and God tears them down. The unbelieving and prideful heart does not see that it is God that changes the heart of man.

Daniel is one of the books in the Bible that unbelieving scholarship has a difficult time with. After all, many of the dreams and prophecies in this book are written several centuries before their fulfillment. Here is the way the unbelieving scholarly world treats the Book of Daniel. Daniel's prophecies spell out the fall and the rise of several kingdoms, including the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Daniel sees the rise and conquests of Alexander the Great. Everyone knows this, but what the unbeliever does is he reads this and says there is no way this could have been written in the 6th century B.C. and so they claim it had to be written in the 2nd century B.C. Because the problem with unbelieving scholarship is that they are full of pride and they see man as the measure of all things.

We read the Bible either through eyes that trust in self or in man or we read the Word of God as the Word of God. When we read the Bible as mere literature we are following after the footsteps of men like Nebuchadnezzar who believe that he is the reason for the rising or the falling of his nation. In our pride, we exalt ourselves against the one who is truly sovereign.

When Daniel gives the interpretation of this dream to Nebuchadnezzar his words to Nebuchadnezzar are fascinating indeed. Listen to verse 19:

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. *So* the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you."

Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, *may* the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!"

Daniel knew the interpretation of the dream and it troubled him. We do not know necessarily why it troubled him, but I can imagine telling the King that the dream was about the uprooting of his reign could not have been a pleasant task. But this brings up something else that we are going to see a few times in this Book. Just because Daniel was able to interpret the dream, and just because Daniel was privy to the plan and purpose of God does not mean that he was always excited about it. I am not trying to be trite, but very often the prophet of God or the man of God proclaimed news or proclaimed words of God that were troubling to him as well. But as God's prophet, and as God's minister he was not free to alter the message to what he wanted to say, he had to speak the words of God.

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had some inkling of what the problem was because he told Daniel not to worry about the dream or its interpretation, and Daniel prayed that the dream would be about Nebuchadnezzar's enemies. But then he proceeded to tell the proper interpretation. There is a realization that hope alone cannot change God's plan or God's decree.

Daniel then went on in verses 20-25 to tell the king that he was that tree. Remember the earlier dream. Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold. There were than three other kingdoms talked about that were all inferior to the head of gold prior to the rock formed without hands coming along and wiping the whole thing out. Rather than focus on the rock that became the mountain, Nebuchadnezzar focused on the head of gold. Remember that head of gold became chaff and blew away just like the feet of iron and clay. But gold is better than iron or clay and so Nebuchadnezzar focused on his greatness rather than the Kingdom of God.

In this second dream there are no other kingdoms listed. The object that is central is the tree and it is coming down.

²³ *“And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him’;*

Seven times, means seven years here. Nebuchadnezzar is going to be cast down. His kingdom will be taken from him and he will literally graze the fields with the beasts of the earth. Here is a man who has everything and he is being told that he will lose it all, because of his pride.

Now there is something else we see here about Daniel's proclamation of the Word of the Lord to the King in verse 26 and 27:

²⁶ "And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

There is a tendency by some who proclaim God's word to forget that there is good news. The gospel means, after all good news. Today there are many who never pronounce the law of God, they never proclaim God's judgments, statutes, and decrees and because they do this there is never a need for good news. "I'm o.k.. you're o.k., but Jesus can make you a more enjoyable o.k." is what their message is reduced to. But the message that is here given to the king is bad news. He is going to be uprooted. His kingdom is going to be taken from him, but there is also a proclamation that when he finally understands that there is a God in heaven that rules, and when he finally humble himself before God and acknowledge that only Heaven rules ultimately, then, and only then, would his kingdom be restored to him.

This is the reason that the stump was not removed, This was the reason that the roots remained. Nebuchadnezzar would be laid low but he would not be destroyed.

I have, over the years, listened to many sermons and many messages from preachers. Notice I did not say many Bible teachers. I have heard sermons from Bible teachers don't get me wrong, but if the only message that is ever proclaimed is "how you can become a better you," that is not Gospel preaching. The message to Nebuchadnezzar is here is to set aside your pride, and humble yourself in the sight of the Lord.

break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

The text does not tell us what the immediate response of Nebuchadnezzar was to Daniel's call to repentance. But what we do know is that 12 months after these events, we see the realization of this dream taking place. Daniel is not immediately rebuked for speaking the Word of the Lord to Nebuchadnezzar there are some who think that perhaps Nebuchadnezzar made a modest effort to reform and it lasted for about 12 months. But then his pride bloomed in full and all that he had was taken from him.

Here these last verses from today's text:

²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

³¹ While the word *was still* in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

³¹ While the word *was still* in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³² And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

³³ That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*.

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This first portion of this passage we looked at last week. To the unbelieving and prideful man what Nebuchadnezzar is doing at the beginning of this passage seems perfectly normal. The kingdom of Babylon was a great kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar had in man's eyes accomplished amazing things. All he did in this passage was take a moment to reflect on his accomplishments. But to forget where the source of your strength comes from. To refuse to acknowledge that it is God who gives you all things is not a minor thing. We are told in the text that while the word was still in his mouth. A voice fell from heaven and spoke saying, " "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³² And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

We will come to the conclusion of this chapter next week. I will talk then about the watchers and the holy ones in the dream. But for now I want us to look at verse 17 and learn the lesson that is intended from this passage:

¹⁷ 'This decision *is* by the decree of the watchers,
And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know

That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,
Gives it to whomever He will,
And sets over it the lowest of men.’

God does not allow our pride to go unchecked. Some of us have struggled with pride and often the way pride is removed from us is through great trial and hardship. We have to learn to place our trust in God. We know from Hebrews 12:6 that ⁶For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” Often his chastisements are very brutal blows of affliction, but we must remember it is our hard hearts that he is softening. We are learning to trust in him through affliction.

If you are discouraged because the afflictions of God, he is saying to you the same thing that was proclaimed to Nebuchadnezzar: “Give up your foolish pride, stop trusting in yourself and turn to me.”

Never forget that in humbling us, God is performing a marvelous work of his love and grace. By crushing us God is refining us and making us more and more like Jesus Christ. Nebuchadnezzar spent seven very difficult years afflicted by madness and misery and yet because of this affliction he was humbled and brought to a place where his trust was truly in God.

In the 119th Psalm David wrote: Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.

⁶⁸ You *are* good, and do good;

Teach me Your statutes.

⁶⁹ The proud have forged a lie against me,

But I will keep Your precepts with *my* whole heart.

⁷⁰ Their heart is as fat as grease,

But I delight in Your law.

⁷¹ *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted,

That I may learn Your statutes.

I want to close once again by taking us to 1 Peter 5:5-7

⁵Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for

“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Notice the command to be clothed with humility. Humility is learning to trust in God, wherever he leads. Be it in chastisement, be it in affliction, whatever and where ever he leads we will follow and we will be safe in the arms of the one who rules in the Kingdom of men.