

From Pride to Praise

Daniel 4

Daniel chapter 4 is the story of a king, with a lesson for kings and presidents just as valid today as it was twenty-five centuries ago. But I hope you will see today that it's also a story about every one of us. Every proud sinner must learn Nebuchadnezzar's lesson or perish. John Piper says that "What Daniel describes in this story is the pathway of a man from the pride of self to the praise of God through the valley of humiliation. And that's a pathway that every person in the world must walk if he wants to get to heaven and have eternal life."

Ever since Adam's first sin we have all been born with his disposition. Do you remember what the essence of that first sin was? It was the abandonment of childlike dependence on God in favor of God-like dependence on self. And ever since then, all people everywhere have been born with this sinful nature of pride.

That is bad news, because God hates pride ([Pro 8:13 NKJV] **13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.**). In Isaiah 2:11 God said, "**The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, And the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.**" [Isa 2:11 NKJV]. This kind of worldly pride is not from God, 1John 2:16 says, "**For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.**"

Jesus spoke about the evil that is in the hearts of people saying in Mark 7:21-23, "**For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.**"

Sinful, arrogant pride is in every human heart. And although God hates our sinful pride, He also loves proud sinners. That's why He sent his Son into the world to save us from our sin. So Jesus says in Matthew 18:3-4 "**Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**"

Nebuchadnezzar's story will show us that "**God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.**" (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5). Nebuchadnezzar testifies in verse 37, "**Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down,**" (Daniel 4:37).

So let's look at how God moved Nebuchadnezzar from the pride of self to the praise of God. Chuck Swindoll entitles this chapter "Insomnia, Insanity and Insight".

1. The King's Greeting (4:1-3)

Chapter 4 is Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony. Notice how it begins,

**1 Nebuchadnezzar the king,
To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:
Peace be multiplied to you.**

This is the king's personal testimony. He wrote it to "**all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth.**" And Daniel has recorded the king's testimony here for us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is not just the king's story, it is God's story. His focus is on the Most High God, His power and His sovereignty.

2 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.

**3 How great are His signs,
And how mighty His wonders!
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And His dominion is from generation to generation.**

This is the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned from his experiences in this chapter. And it's the lesson that he wants us to learn as well.

2. The King's Dream (Dan. 4:4-18)

Verses 4 and 5 set the scene. The king is enjoying the ease and luxury of his earthly kingdom.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.

Once again, God reveals future events to the king in a night dream (see 2:1-3, 28-29). What the king saw greatly troubled him.

5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

Like before, the king calls in the wise men of Babylon to interpret the dream.

6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

And like before, the wisdom of man fails. These wise men either could not interpret the dream, or they were afraid to.

7 Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation.

So finally Daniel comes in before the king.

8 But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying:

9 "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.

Nebuchadnezzar has learned this much so far in his experiences with Daniel and Daniel's God: the Spirit of the Holy God is in Daniel. And because He is, Daniel does not fear man, but God.

So the king relates his dream. It has two parts. The first part is very positive:

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.

11 The tree grew and became strong;

Its height reached to the heavens,

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

12 Its 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.

Trees were frequently used in ancient times to symbolize kingdoms and great rulers. Ezekiel 17 has a similar picture of the Lord bringing down a high tree and exalting a low tree. Ezekiel 31 speaks about both Assyria and Pharaoh of Egypt as great trees.

So it's not hard to see that the tree seems to be Nebuchadnezzar, a productive, fruitful, flourishing tree. And the whole world was enjoying its abundance and it was feeding and providing for the world.

But the dream had a second part. And this was obviously the part that troubled Nebuchadnezzar.

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. 14 He 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.

**15 Nevertheless 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.**

**16 Let 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.'**

An “angelic watcher” enters the scene, calling for the tree to be cut down. Its branches were to be removed and its fruit scattered. A metal band was to be put around the stump, prohibiting its growth. The “tree” then become a man, living in the open field among the beasts and having the mind of a beast.

The words spoken by the watcher clearly spelled trouble for Nebuchadnezzar. The words struck terror into the heart of this proud, arrogant ruler.

So the king implores Daniel to inform him of the dream’s meaning.

**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."**

3. Daniel’s Interpretation and Exhortation (Dan. 4:19-27)

From Daniel’s body language, the king must have read that the revelation he had received from the dream was bad news.

**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 prefaced his interpretation with a sincere expression of his love and concern for the king. He wished that the dream applied to the king’s enemies and not the king himself.

Then, according to the order of the dream, Daniel gives the king the good news first.

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.

The king must have swelled with pride when he heard this glowing account of his greatness. But Daniel is not done. Now the bad news.

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.

Daniel reveals to king Nebuchadnezzar that a time of divine discipline lies ahead. Instead of being a great tree, from which the earthly creatures may find food and shelter, the tree will be cut down and join the earthly creatures. Rather than remain as a tree, the king is about to become bird-like and beast-like.

The king will live like this for seven years. The purpose of his humiliation is for the king to acknowledge that God the Most High is sovereign. Then Daniel assures the king of his future restoration.

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.

The basis for his restoration will be his acknowledgement of the sovereignty of Almighty God, who rules in heaven, and who both raises up kings and puts them down. His restoration to sanity and power will come when he acknowledges that he is God's unworthy servant, who has been given power to benefit and bless others rather than exalt and glorify himself.

Verse 27 is a key verse. Daniel goes beyond the dream and its meaning to urge the king to repent of his sin.

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."

Daniel exhorts the king to "break away from his sins" and to "do righteousness," to cease his "iniquities" and to "show mercy to the poor." The king's pride has resulted in the oppression of the poor. The king's humiliation is to be the cure, resulting in justice and mercy.

4. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Humiliation (Dan. 4:28-33)

There is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel's advice seriously. It appears that the dream had no great impact on the king's attitude or actions. Twelve months later, the warning of this dream seems entirely forgotten.

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?"

The thought had no more than passed through his mind when the heavenly decree announced the judgment on the king.

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."

Immediately, the pronouncement was fulfilled. One brief verse describes the king's humiliation and the fulfillment of the dream.

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.

How high this king had come in power and glory; how low he fell in humiliation and dishonor.

5. The King's Praise and Restoration (Dan. 4:34-37)

At the end of the appointed time, the king did the only thing he, in his beastly state, could do. He merely lifted his eyes toward heaven.

34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 is from generation to generation.

35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;

He does according to His will in the army of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the infinite superiority and supremacy of God. Unlike the king of Babylon, God is able to act according to His will, in heaven and on earth. In His sight, those who inhabit the earth are as nothing. How paltry and pathetic the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar now appears in contrast to the glorious kingdom of the eternal, all-wise and all-powerful God.

Nebuchadnezzar's repentance brought about his restoration. Not only did he regain his sanity, he regained his kingdom.

36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me.

So Nebuchadnezzar's testimony is:

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

This lesson was a very personal and public intervention of God in the life of king Nebuchadnezzar, bringing him to his knees first in humiliation and then in praise. What lessons can we learn from this text?

1) Those who walk in pride God is able to humble.

Piper defines this sinful pride as "*the enjoyment of self-sufficiency rather than God-sufficiency and the enjoyment of self-exaltation rather than God-exaltation.*"

Pride is actually a form of insanity. Insanity is a condition in which one loses touch with reality, living in an unreal world. Sanity is seeing things as they are and then living appropriately. The king's sinful pride made a beast of him. And so does all sin in each of us (see Psalm 73:22; Romans 1:18-32).

2) God will go to extraordinary lengths to warn people before judgment.

When Nebuchadnezzar became proud and took credit for divine grace, God warned him through Daniel. He gave him time to repent and believe. Then God humbled him—not to destroy him but to deliver him, to make of him a humble and grateful worshipper.

3) Man must respond to God's warnings and invitation with belief and repentance.

This text teaches that the opposite of pride in man's strength is praise for God's sovereignty. The opposite of bestial pride is a song of praise to the sovereignty of God.

There is a call to both believers and unbelievers in this chapter. To those that have not bowed their life before God the call is to recognize Heaven rules!! Whether you are prosperous or impoverished you can still be full of pride. Some of you have had warning after warning from God. He has gone to extreme lengths for you to see that He is offering grace. How will you respond? Will you humble yourself before God and call upon Jesus Christ to save you from your sin?

To those of us that call ourselves Christians we must understand that God's sovereignty and grace are not simply a call to worship services, they are a call to complete surrender, to give our lives as living sacrifices in service to God so that people all around us can see that heaven rules and that Jesus saves.