

Message #6
Daniel

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PRIDE COMES BEFORE A FALL
DANIEL 4

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The Guardian newspaper labeled the State of the Union Address on Tuesday night "Pride Is Coming Back." During the 72-minute speech President Biden declared "**Pride is coming back because of the choices we made in the last two years.**" He was directly speaking about pride in our country. But he went on to claim credit for all the wonderful advances that our country has made in the last two years. There is nothing new about building up one's accomplishments in the State of the Union Address. Most presidents do it.

In order to be a president or leader of any country a person has to have a pretty strong ego, I suspect. The danger comes when we have leaders who are egocentric, who are primarily concerned about themselves and their well-being at the expense of the people whom they govern. When we look around at our world, we can find extreme examples of that. In North Korea the three generations of Kim dictators have expected to be treated as gods. They have expected the worship of all of their people. Kim Jung Il declared in his selected works: "**...today our country is a brilliant beacon, a 'model socialist country'... which the whole world looks to with respect, and our people take pride before the whole world in being the most dignified and the happiest and the most diligent and heroically talented people in the world. Our people enjoy all this glory and happiness because they have the great leader.**" (Anybody here rather live in North Korea?)

In Russia Vladimir Putin has regarded himself as the savior of the Russian people. He surrounded himself with yes-men. So when he invaded Ukraine, he made the unfortunate discovery that his military was a whole lot weaker than he thought it was, and his intelligence operation was much less effective than he expected.

I can think of at least three men in our congregation who have had to spend time in the Middle East with our military forces dealing with another ruler who had a definite pride problem. Although Saddam Hussein was a member of the minority Sunni branch of Islam, he saw himself as the savior of the Iraqi people. Surrounding himself with yes-men he thought that he could easily defeat the armies of Iran. That produced a bloody stalemate.

Then he set out to rebuild the Babylonian Empire. He poured a ton of money into rebuilding the city of Babylon. He had an estimated 80-100 palaces. (PROJECTOR ON-- BABYLON PALACE) He had one built overlooking the city of Babylon, which he was reconstructing before he got into a war with the US and its allies. When he learned that Nubuchadnezzar had his name inscribed on many of the bricks of the ancient walls of Babylon, Saddam Hussein had this saying inscribed on some of the bricks of the rebuilt

wall of Babylon (SADDAM HUSSEIN PLAQUE): **“In the reign of the victorious Saddam Hussein, the President of the Republic, may God keep the guardian of the great Iraq and the renovator of its renaissance and the builder of its great civilization, the rebuild of the great city of Babylon was done in 1987.”**

Saddam Hussein saw himself as a kind of reincarnated Nebuchadnezzar. He had himself pictured with Nebuchadnezzar on Iraqi coins, (NEBUCHADNEZZAR SADDAM HUSSEIN COIN) Like Nebuchadnezzar, Saddam Hussein was a cruel man. He killed thousands and thousands of dissidents. He brought war to neighboring countries.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Jerold Post is a psychiatrist who served for a time as an analyst for the CIA. He wrote this about the Iraqi leader: **“In pursuit of his messianic dreams, there is no evidence that he is constrained by conscience; his only loyalty is to Saddam Hussein.”** (*The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, Chapter 15, Jerold M. Post, University of Michigan Press, 2005)

Like other dictators Saddam Hussein surrounded himself with yes-men. There was just one exception to that. He had a Christian Air Force General by the name of Georges Sadas who told him the truth. Saddam had a love-hate relationship with General Sadas. For a while he had Sadas imprisoned. But he respected him for telling him the truth. So it was that his ancient forbear Nebuchadnezzar had a truth-teller in his administration, a guy by the name of Daniel.

The Bible says that all of us humans have this tendency toward pride. Most of us are just not in the position that these rulers have to cause as much destruction. But this pride deal can rear its ugly head in our homes, in our schools, in our businesses, in our governments, and even in our churches. We are going to see today what lessons we need to learn about it from the story of Nebuchadnezzar.

The Bible says that the southern kingdom (PROJECTOR ON--- BABYLONIAN EMPIRE 3) of the Hebrew people called Judah had strayed far from God by the seventh century BC. So God raised up the Babylonians, including their most famous leader, Nebuchadnezzar, to discipline His chosen people. The Book of Daniel says that King Nebuchadnezzar credited his good fortune primarily to his own ability. So God used Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to teach this Gentile king that the Lord God of Israel is the sovereign God of the lands of the Middle East and of the entire world.

In #2 God enables Daniel to describe and interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that plagued him. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar is shown that the God of Israel is an all-powerful and all-wise God. In #3 God rescues Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace, and the Babylonian king is presented with the truth that YHWH, the God of Israel, is the Lord of nature and history. He can override the will of even the strongest ruler.

Yet Nebuchadnezzar still has not acknowledged YHWH’s sovereign authority over his own life. So here in #4 Nebuchadnezzar is confronted with his own frailty and

weakness. He is brought to realize that he is a man and not God. In his discovery we will find lessons for us.

I.

The first 27 verses of the chapter describe GOD'S WARNING TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR (I. GOD'S WARNING TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR). We quickly recognize that #4 appears to be Nebuchadnezzar's own account of the events that happened to him. It is an amazing testimony--- a Gentile king acknowledging the supremacy of a foreign god, the God of the Jews. The words of this evil king are included as part of the Bible.

Verse 4 says that Nebuchadnezzar was at ease and flourishing in his palace. In v. 30 he reflects upon his many accomplishments as king. So the time setting is probably the latter part of Nebuchadnezzar's long, 43-year reign. By this time he had finished most of his military conquests and had completed many of his building projects.

In v. 5 we discover that the king had another dream. This one makes him fearful. The Aramaic word that is used indicates great fear. So he calls in his advisors to have them interpret the dream for him. They are either unable or unwilling to do so. Perhaps they realize that the dream means something bad for the king, and they simply don't want to upset him by telling him something bad.

Daniel then comes in. He must have been well into middle age by now--- perhaps around 50. Nebuchadnezzar still calls him in v. 9 "chief of the magicians." Daniel has served the Babylonian government for well over 30 years. The king still has confidence in him and believes that Daniel can interpret his dream. So Nebuchadnezzar describes the dream.

After the king finishes the description of the dream, v. 19 says that Daniel "**was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him.**" He was genuinely upset by what he heard. Daniel goes on to say that he wishes that the dream applied to the king's enemies rather than to Nebuchadnezzar. But he does proceed to interpret the dream for him.

The large tree represents Nebuchadnezzar. He has grown and become great, and his dominion stretches to the ends of the civilized world. In the dream Nebuchadnezzar sees an angel come down from heaven and chop down the tree, which means that God will take away his position from him. The roots and the stump shall remain, and a band of iron and bronze shall be put around it.

Daniel says that this means that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom will eventually be restored to him. In the meantime he will live like one of the beasts of the field. He will even eat grass like a cow or an ox. This will continue for "seven periods of time," according to v. 25.

In #7 v. 25 the Aramaic word for "periods of time" refers to years, and it may have the same meaning here. Nebuchadnezzar's rule will be restored to him, according to v. 26,

only when he recognizes that it is Heaven, that it is YHWH who inhabits heaven, who rules.

Such is the meaning of the dream. Notice the admonition that Daniel adds in v. 27. He urges the king to break away from sins by doing righteousness and showing mercy to the poor. Nebuchadnezzar's basic problem is a presumptuous and arrogant pride. Two of the ways in which this pride is manifested are deeds of unrighteousness and failure to show mercy to the poor.

Prideful people often establish their own code of conduct, and they become insensitive to the plight of other people. Everything is about me. Ted Turner the founder of CNN once described the Ten Commandments as being "**a little out of date.**" He continued, "**If you're going to have ten rules, I don't know if [prohibiting] adultery should be one of them.People who think like us may be in the minority, but we're the smart ones.**" (*Washington Times*, 9/1999)

Nebuchadnezzar also operated by his own set of rules. He was a master builder. Probably he used thousands of slaves to carry out his building projects. He didn't care about how the slaves were treated.

II.

Verses 28-33 describe King NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE (II. NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE) in action and the Lord's response to it. God has delayed the predicted judgment of the king. But twelve months later he is walking around on the roof of his palace when he says in v. 30, "**Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?**"

From the human perspective Nebuchadnezzar indeed had reason to be proud. (BABYLONIAN EMPIRE) His empire occupied most of the civilized world. There was relative peace. He had absolute power. His word was law.

The city of Babylon itself had been developed by the king to be an architectural masterpiece. (BABYLON AND MOAT) Writing a hundred years later the Greek historian Herodotus, who visited the city, said, "**The city of Babylon is situated on a large plain. It is square in shape, and each side is fourteen miles long, so that the complete circuit is 56 miles. It is built like no other city known to the Greeks.**"

Much of the city was surrounded by a moat. There were two sets of double walls. The outer wall of one set was 23 feet thick. It may have been as tall as 40 feet. The Euphrates River ran through the city. One bridge was 288 feet long. There was a seven level ziggurat that was almost 300 feet tall. So far the remains of 53 significant temples have been discovered.

Nebuchadnezzar built the famous Hanging Gardens (HANGING GARDENS) to please his wife, who was raised in the mountains of Media. The gardens were planted on a tall building so that they were visible outside of the tall walls of the city. Hoists were used to

bring up water from the Euphrates. The Greeks regarded the gardens as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

The streets of the city were paved with stone. The main street through the city was paved with limestone slabs 3 1/2 feet square and red and white marble stones each a little over 2 feet square. On each one the name of Nebuchadnezzar was inscribed. (BABYLON WALL) On the walls of the street on either side were 60 colorful lions painted on with enamel. Archaeologists found one inscription by Nebuchadnezzar that reads, **“The fortifications of Esagla and Babylon I strengthened, and established the name of my reign forever.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

But beside the interpretation of the prophetic dream by Daniel, there was evidence all around Nebuchadnezzar that should have warned him against such pride. An archaeologist by the name of Paul Ferguson writes, **“He had forgotten that all of the bricks were made of mud. He had also forgotten the affirmation made at his accession that all he possessed came from one deity. He had not remembered that his father had represented himself on a monument as the ‘son of nobody,’ helpless without his god, He had failed to notice two streets below him called ‘Bow Down, Proud One’ and ‘May the Arrogant Not Flourish.’ He did not even recall that one of the names of his palace was ‘The Place Where Proud Ones Are Compelled to Submit.’”** (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Sept. 1994, p. 321)

It was this presumptuous pride of the king that led to God’s judgment. When God announces His judgment the king begins to act like an animal. Psychiatrists today would classify his behavior as lycanthropy, or zoanthropy--- both terms are used to describe mental illness in which people act like animals. It is a rare disease, but a famous Old Testament scholar by the name of R. K. Harrison describes an individual that he once visited in a British mental institution whose behavior was just like that of King Nebuchadnezzar. (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 1116)

Most rulers in Nebuchadnezzar’s condition would have been replaced in office. But apparently he was not. Perhaps Daniel was involved in maintaining the stability of government while the king was in his deranged condition.

When Saddam Hussein’s government was overthrown by the US and its allies, the Iraqi leader fled for his life and ended up in a degraded condition like Nebuchadnezzar (PROJECTOR ON--- SADDAM HUSSEIN). This Iraqi leader who claimed to be a kind of resurrected Nebuchadnezzar likewise had a humbling experience as he hid out in a hole in the ground until he was finally discovered by American forces.

III.

In any event vv. 34-37 describe NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION. The king apparently has enough wits about him to repent of his sin and turn to the God of Daniel for mercy. For according to v. 34 it is when he raises his

eyes toward heaven that his reason returns to him. He acknowledges his sin and God's sovereignty.

Is Nebuchadnezzar truly converted? There is some debate about that. But his actions and words that follow sound like those of one who has truly come into a relationship with the living God.

The first thing that he does is to praise God. According to v. 34 his own testimony is: **"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..."** In v. 35 he acknowledges the finiteness of man: **"...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?'"**

Nebuchadnezzar's authority is returned to him, and he says that he is blessed with even greater greatness than he had before. The king concludes his decree with the painful lesson that he learned: **"...those who walk in pride he is able to humble."** Nebuchadnezzar learned that the pride of man ultimately leads to the judgment of God.

IV.A.

(IV. THE APPLICATIONS) Let's consider then THE APPLICATIONS that this story has for us, keeping in mind the two basic questions that the Book of Daniel answers.

First, is God worthy of our trust? (IV. APPLICATIONS A. IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST?) In light of the lesson today that question itself is perhaps a bit presumptuous. It may convey the idea that somehow the status and authority of God are dependent upon some decision that we make about whether we should trust the Lord. God is God. He is absolute, sovereign. His sovereign purposes are not thwarted by our decisions. He will accomplish His will in one way or another.

In Job 33:14-18 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOB 33:14-15) Elihu says, **"For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. 15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, (JOB 33:16-18) then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, 17 that he may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; 18 he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword."**

God spoke once to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. Only Daniel, the servant of the Most High God, could tell the king what that dream was about and what it meant. But Nebuchadnezzar would not submit to that God. God then spoke a second time to Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord miraculously delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace before the king's eyes. He still refused to acknowledge God's sovereignty. So finally God spoke again. This time Nebuchadnezzar was humbled to the point that he submitted himself to God's authority. In a similar way the proud Saddam Hussein, who saw himself as a second Nebuchadnezzar, was humbled. To our

knowledge, however, he never submitted himself to the true God of heaven.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

Nebuchadnezzar learned the same lesson that the nation of Israel was supposed to learn. Many times God revealed Himself to His people. Many times He warned them to turn back to God. But because of the southern kingdom's continued apostasy, He finally humbled them by sending them into captivity in a pagan empire called Babylon.

He deals with some of us in the same way. Have you ever noticed that in churches and Christian organizations there are usually more women involved than men? Why is that? I believe that it has to do with pride. We men generally--- not always, but generally--- have more of a problem with pride, with ego. We like to be independent. We like to be self-reliant. We want to be like John Wayne. We are tempted to proclaim with Frank Sinatra "I did it my way." **"For what is a man, what has he got/ If not himself, then he has naught/ To say the things he truly feels/ And not the words of one who kneels/ The record shows I took the blows/ And did it my way."**

Some time ago a Christian businessman by the name of Howard Butt wrote an article ("The Art of Being a Big Shot") in which he said this: **"It is my pride that makes me independent of God. It's appealing to me to feel that I am the master of my fate, that I run my own life, call my own shots, go it alone. But, that feeling is my basic dishonesty. I can't go it alone. I have to get help from other people, and I can't ultimately rely on myself. I'm dependent on God for my next breath. it is dishonest of me to pretend that I'm anything but a man--- small, weak, and limited."**

Is it pride that is keeping you from trusting in God? Is it your own unwillingness to admit that you are a dependent creature, a sinner who is in need of a Savior? If you have never placed your trust in God's Son--- the Lord Jesus Christ--- you ought to. For man's pride will ultimately result in God's judgment for those who do not trust Him.

We who are Christians ought to trust Jesus as Lord. We ought to be obedient to Him. Presumptuous pride in us may result in God's discipline. He disciplines us not because He hates us but because He loves us as a perfect Father who wants his children to develop qualities of godliness.

B.1.

Is God worthy of our trust? Yes, He is--- because He is sovereign. The second question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN AN OFTEN GODLESS SOCIETY? (IV. A. B. HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN... 1. WE SHOULD RESPECT...) The example of the godly statesman Daniel teaches us first that WE SHOULD RESPECT THOSE IN AUTHORITY. Daniel had been appointed to high office by Nebuchadnezzar, but it still could have been easy for Daniel to write off this pagan king. Nebuchadnezzar did some pretty bad things, including to Daniel's fellow Jews.

Nebuchadnezzar had been given dramatic evidence of the sovereignty and omnipotence of God on several occasions. But he had rejected the true God. He continued to worship the Babylonian gods, and, perhaps more than anything, his own ego. He was an arrogant, Middle Eastern king. He treated many people like things.

Daniel, as the king's top advisor, saw that. Nebuchadnezzar's behavior was contrary to Daniel's way of dealing with people. It was contrary to the standards of the true God. He could have kept quiet after interpreting the dream, or he could have told Nebuchadnezzar that he was getting what he deserved.

But Daniel didn't write him off. He respected the king. He cared about him. When he understood what the king's dream meant and said that he wished that it applied instead to his enemies, he seemed to do it with sincerity. In v. 27 when he respectfully urged the king to turn from his sins, he was sticking his neck out. It was a dangerous thing to tell a Middle Eastern dictator to clean up his corruption and start showing concern for the poor. A person could lose his life for less than that. But Daniel did it because he respected and cared for the king.

Centuries later it was a Christian air force general by the name of Georges Sada (GEORGES SADA) who spoke truth to Saddam Hussein. Sada showed a certain amount of respect to the civil ruler, even though that ruler was a pretty evil man. It was Georges Sada who intervened in protecting US and allied pilots who were shot down and captured by the Iraqis. If not for his intervention, they probably would have been executed.

A principle from Roman 13 shows up here again. Christians are to be subject to the governing authorities, since they are ultimately in their positions because God put them there. According to 1 Timothy #2 we are to pray for them. If we cannot respect them because of their character, we at least need to respect them because of their position.

2.

Secondly, in an often godless society WE NEED TO BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY. (IV. A. B. 1. 2. WE NEED TO BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY) The pride of man leads to the judgment, or discipline, of God. George Steinbrenner was the owner of the New York Yankees for 37 seasons. During that time the Yankees won seven World Series championships and eleven pennants. Steinbrenner once bragged, "**I will never have a heart attack. I give them.**" On July 13, 2010, the day of the 81st World Series, George Steinbrenner died of a sudden heart attack.

(ROMANS 12:3) In Romans #12 v. 3 the Apostle Paul writes, "**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**"

There is a danger that we can have too low a view of ourselves, to think that we are nothing, that we are worms. Christ did not die for nobodies, he died for creatures who are made in God's image.

However, the primary danger that Paul seems to be concerned about among Christians is pride. What we need in an often godless society is a realistic view of who we are as Christian men and women. We are mortals. We are dependent creatures. From the perspective of eternity we live for such a brief time upon this earth. The only thing that will have any eternal benefit is a life lived in dependence upon God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

I am blessed with good health. In the midst of a family that has health challenges and dealing with parishioners who have health challenges, occasionally the thought enters my mind that I am somehow better than these others because I have good health. But it is a lie.

In the fallen, information-driven society in which we live, we are regularly provided with the moral failures of other people. The temptation toward pride that confronts us Christians is to think that we would never do that. We are too good to commit that kind of sin. That is a dangerous temptation.

I came across a story about a woman who was walking across the countryside in Switzerland when she encountered a shepherd tending his sheep. Lying next to the shepherd on a pile of straw was a sheep that did not appear to be well. She asked the man about the sheep. He replied, **"His leg is broken." "How did that happen?" "He was my most wayward sheep. He didn't like to follow me, and he was often leading the other sheep astray. One time he almost went over the edge of a cliff. So I broke his leg. The next day I offered him food, but he tried to bite me. So I waited two more days and then brought him food. This time he took it and even licked my hand. When this sheep is well, it will be the model sheep of my entire flock. It will listen to me. It will follow me. And it will be obedient."**

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the Good Shepherd." Those of us who have trusted Him as our personal Savior are His sheep. We are dependent upon our Shepherd, more dependent than we realize. We are dependent upon the Lord for our very next breath and our very next heartbeat. It is only when we realize how dependent we are that we will be able to make an impact upon an often godless society. The question is not really, "Is God worthy of our trust?" but rather: "Will we trust the sovereign God who is there?" And then: "Will we walk in humble dependence upon Him?"