**GOD IS ABLE TO HUMBLE THE PROUD**

July 9, 2017

Daniel 4:1-37

Key Verse 4:37 “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

The last couple of weeks we have been learning about King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from Daniel chapters 2 and 3. We are finishing up the story of this King in Daniel chapter 4. God had great mercy on Nebuchadnezzar, and he was trying to teach him that God is the Sovereign Ruler. But Nebuchadnezzar never accepted it. He had to learn the lesson in the hard way because of his pride. The most destructive word in any language is the word pride. Pride damned Satan and his angels. Pride has damned men throughout human history. Pride is destructive because it breaks that first and great command that we ought to have no other gods before God himself. God is to be the first and only God. God is the only one to be worshiped, the only one to be praised, the only one to be served. I heard that pride can be illustrated in terms of the difference between the nature of a dog and a cat. If you pet a dog, he wags his tail and looks up at you adoringly --- he’s thinking, “You must be a god!” If you pet a cat, he allows you the privilege, and he is thinking “I must be a god!” Nebuchadnezzar had the mind of a cat! In chapter 4, King Neb tells his own strange --- and kind of horrifying --- story of what pride did to him. Let’s learn that a holy and godly life is to humbly acknowledge God’s sovereign rule in our lives.

**First**, Glorifying self. Look in verses 4-5. “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid.” It’s like he was saying, “I was just hanging out, minding my own business” when I had a dream that made me afraid. To make a long dream short: King Neb dreamed about a huge tree that could be seen all over the world. The leaves were lovely, the fruit was abundant. Wild animals could take refuge under the branches. Then a holy messenger shouted that the tree would be chopped down, leaving only a stump. The messenger went on to say something really strange. Look at verses 15b-16. “Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.”

King Neb didn’t know what all this meant, but he knew it was BAD news. The dream terrified him. Once again, King Neb called on his magicians to interpret the dream. When they failed, he turned to Daniel. He said, “None of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” (18)

Then Daniel stands there for a little while and doesn’t say anything. The king spoke and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Daniel answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” Here we can see Daniel’s great shepherd heart for Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel must have prayed for Nebuchadnezzar for many years, perhaps 30 years. Daniel had to tell him something he did not want to tell him. This is how we should talk to others about God’s judgment. There was a large gathering of noted people in London, England in the 19th century. Among the invited guests was a famous preacher of his day by the name of Caesar Malan. A young lady played and sang charmingly. The preacher went up to her after her music and said, “I thought as I listened to you tonight, young lady, how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if your talents were dedicated to him.” “You know, young lady, you are a sinner in the sight of God. But I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses you from all sin.” The young lady was offended and was angry at him. The preacher replied, “Lady, I mean no offense. I pray God’s spirit will convict you.” The young woman couldn’t sleep that night. The words of the preacher appeared rang through her mind. At 2:00 in the morning, she got up and grabbed a pencil and a piece of paper. And with tears running down her face, this young lady, Charlotte Elliot, wrote these words. “Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bid’st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come.” Because one preacher was compassionate enough to tell the truth, one soul was saved. So Daniel cared, but he went on anyway and spoke the thing that he had to speak. And what did he say?

Daniel told the King in verses 24-25, “This is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” That is the key phrase. The whole chapter is set to teach that truth, that everybody may know that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men. No man can set himself up above God. Verse 32 also says, “The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Verse 34 says, “Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.” The theme is to recognize that God is the ruler in the kingdom of men. When you don’t realize that, you are in trouble. This is a warning to us who may never rule any empire other than the little one we invent for ourselves. The poem, “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley expresses the kind of pride that people usually admire. There was a rugby movie which took this title to represent an unconquerable attitude. If we look at the Poem itself, we can see a clear description of the human pride setting itself up against God. Notice how inspirational the words sound but how the meaning sets itself up against God.

“Out of the night that covers me

Black as the Pit from pole to pole

I thank whatever gods may be (unbelief)

For my unconquerable soul. (pride)

In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance (unbelief--no providence)

My head is bloody, but unbowed. (pride)

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade

And yet the menace of the years

Finds, and shall find, me unafraid. (pride)

It matters not how strait the gate

How charged with punishments the scroll. (unbelief)

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.” (pride)

If King Neb had been a Poet, he could have written that poem himself. People still admire that kind of defiant, self-sufficient, prideful attitude --- but it doesn’t impress God!

Look at verse 27. “Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Daniel pleaded with King Neb to repent of his pride. Maybe King Neb took this advice for a little while --- but a year later, here is what happened. Look at verses 29-30. “As the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” This pin-points that King Neb’s big sin was PRIDE --- He was completely glorifying himself! Of course, if anyone had an excuse for pride, it would be King Neb. He ruled the greatest, most wide-spread and powerful kingdom in the entire world --- possibly in all of history. But he failed to realize that in the eyes of God, Pride is never a small matter. 1 Peter 5:5 says, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

Look at verse 33. “Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from the people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.” The dream came true --- and it was a nightmare! The great and glorious Ruler… so sure of Himself … so feared and respected --- This powerful King --- was reduced to the status of a dumb animal, grazing on grass. Until God brought him down, everybody was impressed with King Neb. People still tend to admire a “self-made man” --- someone who faces life with supreme confidence --- someone who doesn’t need anyone --- especially not God.

**Second**, Glorifying God. Finally – in verse 34 - we get to the happy ending of this horrible nightmare. After 7 years, God gave Neb’s life back to him. “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.” From that time on, King Neb gave Glory to God. Look at verse 37. “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

What happened to King Neb was unique --- I have never heard of anything quite like it --- a King eating grass for 7 years like an animal. The official name of this disease is called boanthropy. But on the other hand, the spiritual experience it represents is more common than we would like to think.

I read a story of one father. He didn’t believe in God himself, but he said, “I like my kids to be at church. It’s good for their moral development.” This guy was an upstanding, well-respected man in the community. He was a good husband and father --- a professor at a near-by college. But it wasn’t long after that he turned into a grass-eater. What I mean is that he threw everything away --- his wife, his relationship with his kids, his reputation --- for the sake of an affair that ended up lasting just a year or two. Unfortunately, we have all seen people who do this kind of thing. They are like King Neb --- living in their “palace”--- all content and prosperous --- convinced they are “master of their fate – captain of their soul” They may give a “nod” to God --- but they don’t need his help. And then all of a sudden --- they look across the fence and spot some “greener grass.” The next thing you know, they have jumped the fence and started grazing. We have all seen it happen. We scratch our heads and ask ourselves, Why would they ruin their lives … just for Grass? And “grass” could be any of a number of things … an affair, an addiction, some sort of perversion or entertainment ... but whatever it is, they go after it like a goat goes after grass.

Have you ever tried to talk sense to someone who is in a “grass-eating” phase of life? It is like talking to a wall … or to a dumb animal. There seems to be no rational understanding at all! We watch them make a mess of what had been a good life, and we wonder, “What are they thinking?” Well, that is the point --- they are NOT thinking … they are not that different from old Nebuchadnezzar. If we are honest, most of us have had a “grass-eating” phase of life in our past. We look back and wonder, “What was WRONG with me? How could I have acted like that? What was I thinking?” And what saved us from that messed-up behavior was the same thing that saved King Neb. It was purely God’s grace: We lifted our eyes to heaven, and our sanity was restored.

There are so many lessons we can take from King Neb’s odyssey. But this is the most important one. We have some place of hidden pride that is holding us back and that has the potential to bring us down. That is the thing about pride. It is usually hidden. After all, if we knew we were eating grass, we would stop! C. S. Lewis once wrote, “If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud.” Pride is an insidious sin because we are too proud to admit our pride. But pride --- especially hidden pride --- cuts us off from God’s blessings. We can be secretly proud of our reputation, our family, our self-control, our career, our talents, our possessions, even our status at church. We can even be proud of our humility! Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any areas of hidden pride. When we lift our eyes to heaven, God will always restore our sanity so we can live a life that gives glory to God. Someone said, “Pride is a form of spiritual insanity. It is claiming credit for ourselves that belongs to God alone.” Anything we accomplish in this world would not have been possible were it not for God enabling and sustaining us. Pride is essentially self-worship. Pride is a preoccupation with self. It is thus very fitting that the middle letter in the word is “i.” Pride is all about “me, myself, and I.” So even as the word “pride” is centered upon an “i,” the sin itself is also centered upon “I.” That is why we give God the glory in any situation—He alone deserves it.

A holy and godly life is to humbly acknowledge God’s sovereign rule in our lives, and walk in humbleness.