

Main Idea: In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar shares with us two personal accounts of how God impacted his life. We'll see that God used five activities in order to bring this man into a right relationship with Himself.

- I. The testimony of a person God brought to himself (1-3).
 - A. God is great.
 - B. God is great in my life.
 - C. I want God to be great in your life.
 - II. The transformation of a person God brought to himself (4-27)
 - A. God blessed him with prosperity (4).
 - B. God terrified him with a dream (5-18).
 1. He saw a fruitful tree.
 2. He saw a fallen tree.
 3. He saw a humbled stump.
 - C. God shocked him with a message (19-27).
- Take Inventory: When God is getting my attention, I should...
1. Receive His Word.
 2. Repent of my sin.
 3. Resolve to please Him with my life.

Scripture Reading: James 4:1-10

"Humbled by the Most High." That's the title of this morning's message.

How does the Most High humble someone? How does God get a person's attention? Certainly, the omnipotent God of heaven is not locked into a set routine, and throughout history has utilized a variety of means.

If we would travel today to Bristol, England, we could visit the home of William Tyndale. There we could see the church where this man first lit the fires of the Reformation in Britain by translating the Bible into English so that every "ploughboy in England could read it."

Not everyone was impressed by Tyndale's efforts, namely the King of England, so Tyndale was forced to flee from England and smuggle his Bibles from Germany. Eventually he was arrested and burned at the stake. His dying prayer was, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." God answered Tyndale's prayer. Within two years, King Henry VIII required every church to have an English Bible! God used William Tyndale to get the attention of the king of England.

About ten miles from Bristol is the community of Kingswood.² In the 1700's, Kingswood was just that--the Kings' wood. It was inhabited by a wild group of people that terrorized the surrounding communities, until one day when George Whitefield stood and preached in the open air, and was later joined by John Wesley. Through the preaching of God's Word, conviction swept the 1,500 coal miners who gathered, and white streaks washed down their coal-blackened faces as they heard of God's grace to sinners. The whole community was changed the day that God got their attention.

God is a gracious, saving, pursuing, sovereign God. He has means, and uses those means to get our attention. Before we look at how He did so in Nebuchadnezzar's life in Daniel 4, I want to probe this question further.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

² This account is relayed by missionary Steve Mann in a prayer letter twenty years ago.

Overview: How does God get our attention?

When God by His grace does His transforming work, He has two objectives in mind.

1. *He brings us to our knees.* Until we see our need, we'll never appreciate what the Savior has done for us. I may come to Him "Just As I Am," but that doesn't mean I may come with the intent on remaining "Just As I Am".

God's objective is to bring us to the point where we fall on our knees in recognition of our utter depravity and spiritual bankruptcy, and humbly admit, "Lord God, You are holy, but I am a sinner. Have mercy on Me. Have Your way with me." The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3)."

2. *He brings us to Himself.* The beauty of the gospel is that God picks up a sinner off his knees, and gives him a royal robe and inheritance. He does not want us to cower before Him, but to walk humbly with Him. He brings sinners to Himself, and adopts them as His children, on the merit of the redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus died for sinners. He paid the penalty for their sin. Then He defeated death and is alive today, and saves the sinner who simply humbles himself and asks.

Ask and you will receive, said Jesus.

And that's how God magnifies the glory of His grace. He gets a person's attention. He brings a person to his knees, and then draws that person to Himself through faith in Jesus. And then that person begins to live life the way it was meant to be lived, for the honor of the Most High.

Has God captured your attention?

This morning, we're going to consider the true story of what God did to capture the attention of a proud, self-sufficient, stubborn man named Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar himself shares the story of how God humbled him. First he shares his testimony in verses 1-3, then tells the transformation process God used in verses 4ff.

I. The testimony of a person God brought to himself (1-3).

Let's read the first three verses of chapter four, "King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation."

The first thing that strikes me when I read these words is that they sure don't sound like words coming from the same man we came to know in chapter one, or chapter two, or even chapter three. Something's happened to Nebuchadnezzar!

What happened? That's what he tells us in chapter four. In the first three verses, he gives us the abbreviated version, and from verse 4 through verse 37 he shares the extended version.

Notice that chapter four is actually a speech, a public statement, issued by Nebuchadnezzar to all people (1). It's a personal account, a written testimony of what God did in his life. There are three points which Nebuchadnezzar shares in his testimony (not a bad model for us to follow in sharing our testimonies, either).

A. God is great.

Verse 2 again (AV), "I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the High God has wrought." He identifies God as the "High God." Remember, Babylonian culture was saturated with a polytheistic worldview. They believed in the existence of many gods. But in his testimony, Nebuchadnezzar shares that he learned an important lesson.

There's only one "High God." There's only one God who is truly great. He's in a class all by Himself.

How great is He? The king gives us a brief glimpse of God's greatness in verse 3, "His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation." He is great, and the purpose of a testimony is to tell about His greatness.

B. God is great in my life.

The NIV captures the king's testimony in verse 2, "It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me." That's quite a statement coming from the lips of this man. He's not always viewed the LORD God that way.

In chapter one, he saw the God of the Jews as inept, a "god" who was too weak to prevent his people from being conquered by the mighty Babylonians. And even though his view of God shifted in chapters two and three, and he began to respect the God of the Jews, the Lord still was not personal in his life.

Until chapter four. Now, Nebuchadnezzar says, "It's my pleasure to tell you what the Most High God did FOR ME." God is now personal to Nebuchadnezzar.

Is He personal to you? He can be. He desires to be. He took Nebuchadnezzar through quite a process in order to be great in his life.

What did God do to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention? According to verse 2, He used "signs and wonders" to impact the king's life (we'll learn what those "signs and wonders" were later in the story).

Nebuchadnezzar learned one valuable lesson about God which he shares in verse 3, "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." That's an amazing admission from the most powerful king in the world! What was it that brought this once proud, self-sufficient, prosperous man to such a conviction?

Simply put, God got his attention. Which bring us to point #3.

C. I want God to be great in your life.

This is the purpose for which he shared his testimony, as he specifies in verse 1, with "all people, nations, and languages." Nebuchadnezzar is saying, "God is great, and He changed my life. What He did for me He can do for you. What He has become in my life I desire to see in your life."

Paul later wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." People who are wealthy, powerful, and influential don't see their need for God.

But Nebuchadnezzar did. Why? It was nothing he himself did. It was what the Sovereign God did. God got his attention by stripping him of his wealth, power, and influence.

It's amazing to watch what our great God can do by His grace. He changes people. Yes, He changes their habits, but more than that, He changes their hearts. He takes a self-focused man like Nebuchadnezzar and gives him a God-focus in life.

And Nebuchadnezzar wanted the world to know.

Lehman Strauss made an important observation, "Whenever God truly saves a man that new convert becomes a witness. If you have no witness, it is doubtful that you ever experienced a conversion."³

So there's the testimony, verses 1-3. How did God do it? Part two...

³ Lehman Strauss, p. 114.

II. The transformation of a person God brought to himself (4-27)

Beginning in verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar shares his spiritual biography with us, telling us not only the "good" parts that would make him look good, but the humiliating parts as well. His aim in sharing his story is to give honor to God, not to himself. He informs us that God reached him by intersecting his life with five activities. We'll look at three this week, and the final two next week, the Lord willing.

A. God blessed him with prosperity (4).

Verse 4 states, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous."⁴ Things couldn't have been better for Nebuchadnezzar. He not only lived in Babylon, one of the most fabulous cities of the ancient world, but he ruled Babylon. He was wealthy, secure, and content, on the top of the world. There was not an earthly pleasure out of his grasp.

He had it all, and indeed, God had allowed him to have it. Nebuchadnezzar reminds me of a lot of people in our day. God has blessed them, but they seldom give credit to whom credit is due. Nebuchadnezzar left out one eternally significant detail from his life. The love of the world crowded out the love of the true God.

Until God acted. First, God blessed him with prosperity.

B. God terrified him with a dream (5-18).

Verse 5, "I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me."

God has ways of disturbing the comfortable. Here's how He did it with the king.

First, He sent a dream, or more accurately, a nightmare which literally terrified Nebuchadnezzar (the expression is much stronger in the original and indicates extreme fright⁵). Next, after waking up, the king lay on his bed in inner turmoil, with his thoughts troubling him.

His reaction is recorded in verses 6-7, "So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me."⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me."

So the king issued a decree for the wise men of Babylon to come and interpret his dream. They came, but were unable to help (this time he even told them the dream in contrast with ch 2).

Then Daniel entered the scene. Verse 8, "Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)."

So why does Nebuchadnezzar keep going back to his pagan wise men who have constantly let him down in past crunch times? Why didn't he call for Daniel first? We're not told, but my hunch is it's something pretty basic. Human beings are slow to leave old patterns. We just don't want to change, until the Lord does something to jolt us out of familiar patters.

The reality is that our actions reveal what's going on in our hearts. So we can *say* we believe that God is powerful and great (like Nebuchadnezzar did in ch 3), but what we *do* when we're in trouble tells the truth on us.

⁴ In the AV, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace."

⁵ Walvoord, 99

Who or what do you turn to first when you're in trouble? Lehman Strauss is right again when he writes, "How apropos this story is to our times! Men become troubled, and in their fear, what do they do? They run to a psychiatrist, or a psychologist, or a lawyer, or a politician, but they will not go to a true servant of God who can lead them to the Word of God."⁶

Psalm 118:8 reminds us, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man." Psm 1:1 states, "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly."

Is it possible to have a godly reputation in a pagan work environment? Daniel did. Notice what Nebuchadnezzar had to say about him in verse 9, "I said, 'Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians⁷, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.'"

To what did the king attribute Daniel's excellent reputation? *I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you.*

Can people tell from your life that God is holy? I didn't say "odd," or "outdated," but "holy." Can they tell He's radically different, pure, supreme, and true from watching the way you live? Do they see that He is that in your life?

People could tell with Daniel. So beginning in verse 10, the king told Daniel his dream, specifically three scenes that he saw.

1. *He saw a fruitful tree.* Verses 10-12, "These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed."

2. *He saw a fallen tree.* Notice verses 13-14, "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.'"

That's strange, a great tree chopped to the ground. It gets stranger.

3. *He saw a humbled stump.* Listen to verses 15-16, "But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. 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."

There's a significant change in the text beginning in verse 14, from the neuter pronoun "it" to the personal pronoun "his." When Nebuchadnezzar described the tree, he said, "*Its* leaves were fair, and *its* fruit much (12)." But when the angel described the stump he did so in these terms (15), "Let *him* be wet with the dew of heaven."

The tree became personified. The stump represented a man, and that man was Nebuchadnezzar.

With the spectacle of the stump still before him, Nebuchadnezzar heard the messenger tell him the intent of the dream in verse 17. "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most

⁶ Strauss, p. 119.

⁷ This was intended to be a compliment, and could be translated "scholars"; Walvoord.

High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.”

Don't miss the words "sovereign" and "kingdom" used here (and repeated throughout the chapter). The issue is *control*. Who's in control in the world? Who's in charge? Nebuchadnezzar thought he was. He lived as if he were. Until in a terrifying dream, God got his attention and reminded him who really was in control.

Which brings us to the third activity by which the Most High got a hold of Nebuchadnezzar's life.

C. God shocked him with a message (19-27).

The king's tone began to change in verse 18, “This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belshazzar, tell me what it means, for 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.”

Upon hearing the dream, here's what happened to Daniel. Verse 19, “Then Daniel (also called Belshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him.

Why was Daniel troubled? For two reasons. First, he knew what this dream might mean for him. To have to tell a dictator like Nebuchadnezzar the tragic news contained in this dream could send him into a tirade, and cost Daniel his life.

Yet personally, I don't think that was the reason Daniel was troubled. I think it was because he truly was loyal to this king he had served for some three decades. Daniel truly desired the best for Nebuchadnezzar.

Notice the exchange in the second part of verse 19, “So the king said, ‘Belshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.’ Belshazzar answered, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!’

You say, "Wasn't Nebuchadnezzar an ungodly, pagan ruler, and didn't he deserve the punishment that was coming?" Yes. "So why then would Daniel even care?"

In our age when even Christians are cynical in their attitudes their political leaders, that's a good question to consider. Daniel cared because no matter how wicked his ruler was, he knew God had put him there. He knew the truth of Romans 13:1, "For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." That's why he supported his king.

Let's take this to heart. If Daniel were alive today, I'm pretty sure he wouldn't talk about our president the way we often do. Or our senators and representatives and governor and local officials. *There is no power but of God.*

That doesn't mean he would support their sinful decisions, nor should we. But you get the sense he truly cared for the man who ruled over him.

And what a difference it would make if the leaders of this country knew that the followers of Jesus truly cared for their well being.

Again, Daniel would not have approved of decisions made by a leader which violate God's moral Law. And he would be willing to lay down his life if his leader asked him to do something that compromised his commitment to God (as he did in chapter 6). But though he would differ with an ungodly ruler, he would still respect that ruler to the honor of God. And how could he? Because he knew God would deal with that ruler.

Just like He did with Nebuchadnezzar.

Notice the shocking message God sent to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel. Verses 20-22, “The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for

all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds—²² Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.”

Then verses 23, “Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’”

You are the tree!

Then Daniel became even more specific in verses 24-26, “This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:²⁵ 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.²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.”

So there’s the message. God made it clear He was going to humble Nebuchadnezzar. The mighty king was going to be reduced to the mentality of a beast. He would literally leave the palace and eat grass in the pasture for seven years until he learned to acknowledge the most fundamental reality of life.

The Most High is sovereign. That’s verse 25, “until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign.”

Victor Hugo⁸ tells the following account of Napoleon and the battle of Waterloo. On the morning of the battle, the little dictator stood gazing upon the field of battle as he told his commanding officer the battle strategy for the following day.

"We will put the infantry here, the cavalry there, the artillery here. At the end of the day England will be at the feet of France and Wellington will be prisoner of Napoleon."

After a pause the commanding officer said, "But we must not forget that man proposes but God disposes."

With arrogant pride, the little dictator stretched his body to full height and replied, "I want you to understand, sir, that Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes."

Hugo then wrote this, "From that moment Waterloo was lost, for God sent rain and hail so that the troops of Napoleon could not maneuver as he had planned, and on the night of battle it was Napoleon who was prisoner of Wellington, and France was at the feet of England."

Do you know people like Napoleon, like Nebuchadnezzar, proud, self-sufficient people who refuse to acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign? I do. All of us would do well to remember the teaching of Scripture which says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)." And, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Pet 5:6)."

The greatest of men is but a pawn on the chessboard when compared to the "only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

⁸ as told in Strauss, 124-5

So how did Daniel finish his message to the king? As any would who cares for the soul of another. He extended an invitation.

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.”

Now there’s a tough subject to talk to someone about, particularly a person who has authority over you. His sin. But Daniel didn’t shy away from the subject.

It reminds me of John the Baptist with King Herod, and Paul before Governor Felix, for both men of God confronted their leaders face to face regarding their sin. “Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison,” says Matthew 14:3, “because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for John had been saying to him: ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’”

Similarly, Acts 24:25 says, “As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, ‘That’s enough for now! You may leave.’”

How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to Daniel’s confrontation of sin? We’ll see next time. But God didn’t preserve this story so we could talk just about Nebuchadnezzar. This is for us. So let’s take inventory.

Take Inventory: When God is getting my attention, I should...

I should do three things. These grow right out of what Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar to do in verse 27.

1. *Receive His Word.* “Wherefore, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee,” as the AV puts it. In other words, if God is trying to get your attention, don’t ignore what He is saying. Receive His Word.

“But as many as received Him,” says John 1:12, “to as many as believed on His name, to these he gave the right to become children of God.”

2. *Repent of my sin.* “Renounce your sins by doing what is right.” This isn’t salvation by works. We are saved by believing in the one who is righteous, Jesus Christ.

But what happens when you truly believe in the One God sent to rescue you from your sins? What happens is, you renounce your sins and leave them behind, by the power of Christ.

And who truly believes in Christ? The person who *says* he believes. James says no, that faith without works is dead. When faith in the Most High is real, there will also be repentance, as Daniel here insists.

But not just turn from sin. Something else must happen. Turn *to* something.

3. *Resolve to please Him with my life.* “Renounce your sins *by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.*” There’s what needed to happen in this king’s life. For Herod, it was leaving his adultery. So too for Governor Felix. For Nebuchadnezzar it was using his position for righteous purposes, for demonstrating kindness to the oppressed.

Do that, says Daniel. “It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

Did God get Nebuchadnezzar’s attention? We’ll think about that next time, but the real question, however, is this. Does He have yours, and mine?

If not, then receive, repent, and resolve.