

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.

For instance 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 (this account is relayed by missionary Steve Mann in his recent prayer letter). 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. How does He do it? We're going to see this morning how He did it in Daniel 4, but first, allow me to give you a concise overview.

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 (Mt 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.

That's how God gets a person's attention. He brings a person to his knees, and then draws that person to Himself. Has God ever done that in your life? If He has, a second question is in order. Does He have your attention right now?

***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.

This morning, we're going to consider the true story of what God did to get the attention of a proud, self-sufficient, stubborn man named Nebuchadnezzar. How did God get Nebuchadnezzar's attention?

Proposition: 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 impacted by God (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 impacted by God (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).

Response (27): 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.

I. The Testimony of a person impacted by God (1-3)

Let's read the first three verses of chapter four, "Nebuchadnezzar, the king, unto all people, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the High God has wrought toward me. How great are His signs! And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is 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 4-37, 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.

V 2 again, "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 world-view. 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 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 v 3 (NIV), "His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation." He's 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 v 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 v 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 v 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 this 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 v 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 Cor 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? Because 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 this observation (114), "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." The first account in Daniel 3 is the testimony...

II. The Transformation of a person impacted by God (4-27)

Beginning in v 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 impacted him by intersecting his life with five activities (We'll look at three this week, and the final two next week).

A. God blessed him with prosperity (4).

V 4 states, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace." 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 refuse to 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.

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

V 5 "I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." God has ways of disturbing the comfortable! Here's how He did it with the king.

First, He sent a dream, more accurately, a nightmare which literally terrified Nebuchadnezzar (the expression "made me afraid" is much stronger in the original and indicates extreme fright; Walvoord, 99). Next, after waking up, the king lay on his bed in inner turmoil, with his thoughts troubling him.

His reaction, recorded in verses 6-7, was to issue 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 (8).

By the way, 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? For this simple reason. Mankind is slow to leave old patterns.

The truth is that our actions reveal our hearts. 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. Who or what do you turn to first when you're in trouble? Lehman Strauss is right again when he writes (119), "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."

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 walketh 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 v 9, "O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians (this was intended to be a compliment, and could be translated "scholars"; Walvoord)."

To what did the king attribute Daniel's excellent reputation? V 9 tells us, "Because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubles you, tell me the visions of my dream..." 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, and true from watching the way you live? People could tell with Daniel.

Beginning in v 10, the king told Daniel his dream, specifically three scenes that he saw.

1. *He saw a fruitful tree.* Here's the LB description of the tree (10-12), "I saw a very tall tree out in a field, growing higher and higher into the sky until it could be seen by everyone in all the world. Its leaves were fresh and green, and its branches were weighted down with fruit, enough for everyone to eat. Wild animals rested beneath its shade and birds sheltered in its branches, and all the world was fed from it."

2. *He saw a fallen tree.* Again the LB (13-14), "Then as I lay there dreaming, I saw one of God's angels coming down from heaven. He shouted, 'Cut down the tree; lop off its branches; shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit. Get the animals out 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 vv 15-16 (NIV), "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 v 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 v 17 (NIV). "The living may know that the Most 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 God impacted Nebuchadnezzar's life.

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

Upon hearing the dream, here's what happened to Daniel. V 19 "Then Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar, was perplexed for one hour, and his thoughts troubled 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, so much so that he would say in v 19 (LB), "Oh, that the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my Lord, and not to you!"

You say, "Wasn't Nebuchadnezzar an ungodly, pagan ruler, and didn't he deserve the punishment that was coming?" Yes. "Why then would Daniel even care?" In our age when even Christians are cynical in their attitudes toward 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 Rom 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.

Can I speak frankly? I feel quite confident that if Daniel were alive today, he wouldn't tell political jokes about our president. Nor would he laugh when others did. He wouldn't delight if tragedy struck the family of a politician who differed with him.

True, 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 in ch 6). But though he would differ with an ungodly ruler, he would still respect and support that ruler to the honor of God. How could he? Because he knew God would deal with him. Just like He did with Nebuchadnezzar.

Notice the shocking message God sent to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel. V 20 "The tree that thou sawest... (22) It is you, O king." The message was this. God 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 an important lesson. V 25 "Till thou know that the Most High rules."

Victor Hugo (as told in Strauss, 124-5) tells the following historical 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 surrender their lives to the Sovereign Lord. 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 a chessboard when compared to the "only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

Guess how Daniel finished his message...With an invitation!

Response (27): When God is getting my attention, I should...

I should do three things that Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar to do in v 26.

1. *Receive His Word.* "Wherefore, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee." In other words, "If God is trying to get your attention, don't ignore His Word. Receive it."

2. *Repent of my sin.* "Renounce your sins by doing what is right (NIV)." This isn't salvation by works. We are saved by believing in Christ alone. By how do you *believe* in Christ? Merely by *saying* so? James says no. Daniel says make a break with your past.

3. *Resolve to please Him with my life.* Daniel concludes (NIV), "It may be that then your prosperity will continue." Did God get Nebuchadnezzar's attention? We'll see next week. The real question, however, is this. Does He have yours?