

On his desk is a simple wooden plaque that reads, "Faithfulness, not success." That motto sits between two heavy, silver "in" and "out" boxes, mementos of a time when success alone was his goal (More Than Conquerors, p. 265).

The silver trays came from his White House days, when Richard Nixon was his hero; the wooden plaque was a gift from a prisoner, and its message captures the essence of the change that's occurred in his life. He no longer lives for success, but to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The story of how God got the attention of this man is indeed quite amazing. Indeed, this is a person who has lived two lives: one in positions of power in the secular world, and the other as leader of a Christian ministry dedicated to the powerless.

He was a captain in the Marines, an administrative assistant to a U.S. senator, a senior partner in a Washington law firm, and then finally, after receiving the call he'd been waiting for all his life, he became special counsel to President Richard Nixon.

Author Ellen Vaughn describes this period of his life (266), "In the White House circle of senior aides to the president, (he) was part of a group of brilliant men linked by the height of their ambitions and the breadth of their egos. His days were a blur of meetings, memos, briefings, jousting with Democrats, Communists, the press, and his colleagues... His reputation as a cold-blooded infighter provided colorful copy for Washington's political-gossip pages; Nixon, who knew a man who could get the job done, egged him on."

And then, God got his attention. Through Watergate, God began to strip him of his pride. Through a friend, God invited him to come to Christ. And through prison, God gave him a new mission in life, for as prisoner #23226, he learned that the Christian life is all about being faithful, not successful.

To God be the glory for the tremendous conversion experience of Chuck Colson.

To God be the glory for *every* testimony of conversion, including ours. Jonah confessed, "Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9)," and whether you were saved *out of* a life of sin, or *from* a life of sin, it's all by the grace of God.

There are few conversion experiences as dramatic as that of the person we find when we turn to Daniel 4. It's the autobiographical account of the ancient king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. This morning, we're going to finish the story we began last week, "How God Gets a Person's Attention."

I would remind you that our aim is not merely to be impressed by how God got the attention of King Nebuchadnezzar (or of Chuck Colson). Our aim is to allow God to use His Word to get our attention so we will leave here giving Him the place He desires and deserves in our lives. What place is that? We'll soon see.

Proposition: In Daniel 4, we see the testimony of how God transformed Nebuchadnezzar's life. God got this man's attention by utilizing five activities (we looked at the first three last week, and will ponder the final two today).

***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.

- I. The Testimony of a person impacted by God (1-3)
- 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).
 - C. God shocked him with a message (19-27).

This Week: Part Two

- D. God humbled him with a tragedy (28-33).
 - 1. He stripped him of his position (31).
 - 2. He stripped him of his power (32).
 - 3. He stripped him of his pride (33).
- E. God changed him with divine intervention (34-37).
 - 1. He was restored to his sanity (34-35).
 - 2. He was restored to his kingdom (36).
 - 3. He was restored to his God (37).

Practical Lessons:

- 1. God hates pride, and so must we.
 - I must not take credit for what God has done.
 - I must give God glory for what He has done.
- 2. God wants us to live for His honor, not our own.
- 3. It is a dangerous matter to trifle with God.

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

Allow me to take a moment to point out the highlights from our previous study.

Daniel 4 is the historical record, the spiritual autobiography of King Nebuchadnezzar (1). In verses 1-3, he gives us the shortened version of his conversion experience, and then provides the details of his transformation in the rest of the chapter.

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

How did God get Nebuchadnezzar's attention? He used a series of five activities.

A. God blessed him with prosperity (4). In v 4, Nebuchadnezzar says he was "at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace." He was the wealthiest, most powerful man in the world of that day, and God allowed him to be so. But the king failed to honor God for his blessings.

B. God terrified him with a dream (5-18). We should probably call it a nightmare. One night, as Nebuchadnezzar relays in v 10, God frightened the king with visions of a tree, a fruitful tree that became a fallen tree and eventually a humbled stump.

The king was befuddled by what he saw. He called for his wise men (6), but they were no help. Then Daniel came and listened. What the man of God heard left him speechless for an hour (19), not because he was confused by the dream, but because he grasped full well God's intent in sending the dream.

C. God shocked him with a message (19-27). In short, the message was this. "Nebuchadnezzar, the tree represents you. The Most High God is going to get your attention in a drastic way. He's going to break your self-centered pride by taking away your sanity. You are going to leave the palace, and spend seven years in the pasture, eating grass like oxen do, until you acknowledge this truth (25): The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes. Then, when you let God be God, He will restore you."

We left off last time listening to Daniel plead with Nebuchadnezzar to repent and respond to the Word of God (27). Did he listen? We'll find out next.

This Week: Part Two Notice v 28, "All this came upon the king, Nebuchadnezzar." All what? All the catastrophic details of the dream that God sent and Daniel interpreted. It all happened, just as God said.

Which brings us to the fourth activity which God used to transform Nebuchadnezzar's life. After He blessed him with prosperity, terrified him with a dream, and shocked him with a message...

D. God humbled him with a tragedy (28-33). Here's how it happened. V 29 states, "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon." Notice the time-frame. It's twelve months later. Had Nebuchadnezzar tried to change? Had he made attempts to reform his life, to appease the LORD? We don't know since the Scriptures do not say. What we do know is that the pattern of his life indicates that Nebuchadnezzar was a man who had just enough religion to be dangerous. Eventually he showed his true colors.

It happened (v 29) on a day when the king was walking in the palace (specifically, as the NIV indicates, "as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace").

From the flat roof of his royal mansion, Nebuchadnezzar had quite a spectacular view. Archaeologists inform us that the Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar built was breathtaking. Inscriptions for about 50 building projects have been found. Among his most recognized accomplishments were the famous "hanging gardens," regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar built those gardens on terraces in an effort to cure his wife of homesickness, for the queen missed the mountains of her homeland in Media!

Nebuchadnezzar spared no expense to make Babylon the most beautiful city of the world. That day as he scanned the capital, he could gaze at the expanses of the New City with its blue and yellow brick buildings gleaming in the sun. He could watch the rolling Euphrates flowing through the city separating the new from the old, and marvel at the large shipping docks. He could see 50 temples to the gods as well as the shrine of Marduk. He could allow his eyes to follow the Processional Way toward the palace, and remember the many victorious processions that had marched in triumph under his leadership.

And as he looked over Babylon that day, Nebuchadnezzar's heart filled with pride, until he could not contain himself. In v 30, "The king spoke and said [don't miss the pronouns], Is not this great Babylon, that **I** have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of **my** power, and for the honor of **my** majesty?"

Nebuchadnezzar had a bad case of "I-trouble." He made two grievous mistakes. First, he overestimated himself, and let his accomplishments go to his head. Second, he underestimated God, and failed to give God the glory He deserved.

You say, "Wait a minute. Wasn't Babylon a great city? And if it was, didn't Nebuchadnezzar have a right to be proud of his accomplishment?" There's a big difference between appreciation and pride. It's one thing to appreciate what God has allowed us to do; it's another to well up in pride. The difference is, "Who gets the credit?"

Babylon was a great city, and in truth Nebuchadnezzar had done what few others have ever done. His problem was he failed to remember who enabled him to do it (1 Cor 4:7).

Then God took action. Just as Daniel had predicted, God humbled the proud king with a tragedy. God stripped Nebuchadnezzar of three things.

1. *He stripped him of his position (31)*. Notice v 31, "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee."

God's judgment was immediate. Before the king finished his boast, a voice announced the sentence of God. Nebuchadnezzar was stripped of his position.

Someone might think, "That doesn't seem fair. Wasn't God being harsh and unkind to do this to a man merely because of a 'little' pride?" The answer is an emphatic "No!"

God is just and holy. Sin is an offense to Him. Every sin. What's amazing is not that He took immediate action to judge Nebuchadnezzar. What's amazing is that He doesn't do the same to us every time we speak proudly, brashly, and ungratefully!

2. *He stripped him of his power (32)*. God continues with the drastic details in v 32 (NIV), "You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

The consequences were specific. "Nebuchadnezzar, you will be driven from people. You will live with animals, and you will live like an animal."

For how long? According to God's message, until two things happen (32). One, until "seven times" pass (seven years). And two, until this once proud king acknowledged that God alone is sovereign.

Don't miss this. God had a purpose in this tragedy, to change Nebuchadnezzar--to change the way he viewed himself, and most of all, the way he viewed God. God can use tragedy to accomplish the same purpose in our lives, too.

I want you to consider something with me. In a moment, Nebuchadnezzar lost his position and his power. Do you realize how fleeting and fragile many of the things are with which we consume ourselves?

For instance, your home, the castle you've always dreamed of, is only one tornado away from a pile of sticks. Your position at work--the one for which you've scratched and scrapped for twenty years--it could be gone with one pink slip. The person that you've poured your life into--maybe it's a spouse, or a child, or a friend--if a car veered just inches across the yellow line, that person could be gone.

The question is this. What are you living for? If your answer isn't God and His glory, look out. Years ago, in the Westminster Confession posed the question, "What is the chief end of man?" What's the correct answer? The right answer is, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Unfortunately, in our day, many would answer, the chief end of man is to know ourselves and enjoy life forever. That's what Nebuchadnezzar thought, too, until God stripped him of his position and power. And...

3. *He stripped him of his pride (33)*. V 33 states, "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men, and did eat grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws."

Can you imagine this? One moment, the man was the most influential dignitary on the planet, and the next, he's tearing off his royal robe, and filling his mouth with grass!

Clinically, the disease is called Boanthropy, that is, he thought himself to be an ox. His transition from sanity to insanity was instantaneous.

Gleason Archer comments (66), "Physically he became like the brute beast he imagined himself to be, as his skin toughened into hide through the constant exposure to outdoor weather at all seasons. (The temperature in modern Iraq ranges from a high of 110 or 120 degrees Fahrenheit in summer--usually with high humidity--to a low of well below freezing in winter.)"

Oh, how quickly God can bring a man down to size. When I think of the folly of pride, the image that comes to mind is a scene on television years ago when a boxer by the name of Mohammed Ali was asked to predict the outcome of his upcoming fight. His words became the trademark of his life, "I am the greatest!" So he said, and so he thought. What a different scene we saw a few weeks ago when Ali again appeared on television, no longer a world champion boxer dancing in the ring, but a man stricken with Parkinson's disease shuffling across the floor.

God hates pride. God took action to deal with pride in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. Until Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar thought he called the shots in his life. Then God humbled him with a tragedy, and stripped him of his position, power, and pride. But there's more. God used a fifth activity to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention.

E. God changed him with divine intervention (34-37). Apparently, during the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar was kept in the palace gardens away from abuse by common people (Walvoord, 108). His officials remained loyal to him, probably due to the influence of Daniel who no doubt told them the message of God.

At the end of the judgment period, by the intervention of God, Nebuchadnezzar was restored in three ways.

1. *He was restored to his sanity (34-35).* We read what happened in verses 34-35 (LB), "At the end of seven years I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven, and my sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High God and honored Him who lives forever, whose rule is everlasting, His kingdom evermore. All the people on earth are nothing when compared to Him, He does whatever He thinks best among the hosts of heaven, as well as here among the inhabitants of earth. No one can stop Him or challenge Him, saying, 'What do You mean by doing these things?'"

Nebuchadnezzar's sanity was restored. What brought about the change? It happened the moment he lifted his eyes to heaven (34), and let God be God.

2. *He was restored to his kingdom (36).* V 36 (NIV) reveals, "At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before."

What an amazing miracle! What do you do with a king who's off his rocker for seven years? The Babylonians supported him. Why? Because of the purpose of God and the influence of Daniel, he was restored to his kingdom.

3. *He was restored to his God (37).* Here's the climax in v 37, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways justice; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

There is speculation as to whether Nebuchadnezzar was truly converted or not. Calvin, Keil, and others say the evidence is insufficient. But Nebuchadnezzar's testimony about God here is a strong indication that he was indeed restored to His Maker.

In salvation, God's goal isn't merely to get us to pray a prayer. It's for us to know Him (that's the definition of eternal life in John 17). It's for us to honor Him. It's for us to live in light of His Lordship.

Practical Lessons: There are three lessons we must not miss from Daniel 4.

1. *God hates pride, and so must we.* Prov 6:16ff says, "These six things does the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: A proud look, a lying tongue..." God hates pride, and so must we. What must we do to see that happen?

•I must not take credit for what God has done. Are you a proud person? Pride is an "acceptable" sin in our society. We tend to justify pride, after all, proud people get things done. They're aggressive go-getters. They're confident and self-assured. They're also resisted by God, according to 1 Peter 5:5. Resolve to walk humbly with God.

•I must give God glory for what He has done. Did you speak a proud word this past week? Did you boast? The only reason we are here today and not eating grass in the pasture is the grace of God. The truth is, in the sight of a perfect God, every one of us has missed the mark and deserves punishment.

Let me illustrate. Suppose we lined the world's population on the shores of the Ohio River and said, "God's on the other side. Jump to Him." What would happen? Would some jump further than others? Yes, the world record holder would make it nearly 30', others 20', and you and I perhaps 10-15'. But what is 30' feet compared to a quarter of a mile? It might impress people, but it still falls short of the mark.

So it is with human accomplishments. Our good works might impress people, but they can't reach God. We are depraved, and need a Savior. That's why God sent His Son.

When we reach heaven, my friend, we will have no reason to boast. We will be there, not because we "jumped further," but because God enabled us to admit the futility of "jumping" and gave us the faith to accept the One Who came to rescue us.

2. *God wants us to live for His honor, not our own.* God's kingdom matters, not ours. We must never forget the exhortation of Jeremiah 9:23-24, "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understands and knows Me..."

Centuries ago, when the great Louis XIV died, his funeral service was conducted in Notre-Dame. Massillon was called upon to preach the funeral sermon. He began his message in a most staggering way. There, in full view of the open coffin of the dead king, the man of God began with the twice repeated cry, "Only God is great! Only God is great!" (in Wallace, 85)

It took Nebuchadnezzar a long time to learn that truth. Have you learned it? Is God great in your life? My friends, only God is great! The pomp and pageantry of this world are as rags before Him. He alone is great. And He invites us, in fact, He commands us to live for His honor, not our own.

3. *It is a dangerous matter to trifle with God.* Don't miss an important, final truth as we leave Daniel 4. The same God who hates and judges sin is ready and willing to

receive and save sinners. It took seven humiliating years for Nebuchadnezzar to learn that lesson, but at last, apparently, he learned it well. Have you? (see Prov 29:1)