

Daniel 4:28-37 “Humbled by the Most High—The Rest of the Story”<sup>\*\*1</sup>

Main Idea: In Daniel 4, we see the testimony of a man who was humbled by the Most High. God got Nebuchadnezzar’s attention by using five activities (we looked at the first three last week, and will ponder the final two today).

- I. The testimony of a person God brought to himself (1-3).
- II. The transformation of a person God brought to himself (4-37)
  - 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).
  - 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).

Take Inventory: Some lessons to consider...

1. God hates pride, and so must we.
2. God wants us to live for His honor, not our own.
3. It is a dangerous thing when we seek to ungod God.

“Humbled by the Most High—The Rest of the Story.” That’s this morning’s message. We’ll be looking at what happened to a man that God humbled in Daniel 4. But to prepare for today’s text, I’d like to read this prophetic account from Revelation 11.

*Scripture Reading: Revelation 11:15-19*

On his desk was a simple wooden plaque that read, "Faithfulness, not success." That motto sat between two heavy, silver "in" and "out" boxes, mementos of a time when success alone was his goal.<sup>2</sup>

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 captured the essence of the change that had occurred in his life. He no longer lived 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 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, "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

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<sup>\*\*</sup>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.

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

<sup>2</sup> Taken from *More Than Conquerors*, p. 265

political-gossip pages; Nixon, who knew a man who could get the job done, egged him on."<sup>3</sup>

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 and see a person who was *humbled by the Most High*.

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 see God use His Word to get our attention so we will leave here giving Him the place He desires and deserves in our lives.

Pride. That was Nebuchadnezzar's root problem. And we share it, more than we may realize. To help us see the connection, let's take inventory by considering the following from Stuart Scott's booklet *From Pride to Humility*.

I am proud when I...

1. *Fail to be grateful (2 Chron. 32:25)*
2. *Look down on others and show little tolerance for differences (Luke 7:36-50)*
3. *See myself as being indispensable (1 Cor. 4:7).*
4. *Focus on my abilities OR on my lack of them (1 Cor. 12:14-25)*
5. *Have to be perfect (Matt. 23:24-28)*
6. *Talk too much (Prov. 10:19)*
7. *Am consumed with what others think (Gal. 1:10)*
8. *Resist or become angry when criticized (Prov. 13:1)*
9. *Fail to be teachable (Prov. 19:20)*
10. *Fail to show compassion (Matt. 5:7; 18:23-35)*

Do you see yourself in any of those? Know this. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)."

God opposes, He stands against, purposes to bring down, the proud. So that, having been humbled, He might lavish upon them His undeserved favor, His *grace*.

This is precisely what we see in today's text. In Daniel 4, we see the testimony of a person God brought to Himself (that's verses 1-3) and then the transformation process God used (in verses 4-37).

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

Notice verses 1-3, "King Nebuchadnezzar, to the peoples...who live in all the world...It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me...His kingdom is an eternal kingdom."

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<sup>3</sup> *More Than Conquerors*, p. 266

So Daniel 4 is the spiritual autobiography of King Nebuchadnezzar. 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 God brought to himself (4-37)

How did God get Nebuchadnezzar's attention? He used a series of five activities. We looked at the first three last week and will ponder the final two today.

**A. God blessed him with prosperity (4).** In verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar says he was “at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.” 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 verse 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 urge Nebuchadnezzar to repent in response to the message God sent him. Did he listen? It's time to find out.

Notice verse 28, “All this happened to 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. Verse 29 says, “Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon...”

Notice the time-frame. A year has passed. Has Nebuchadnezzar taken God's message to heart? Has he made any attempts to turn from his sins and be kind to the oppressed, as evidence of his desire to please the LORD?

We don't know since the Scriptures do not say. The pattern of his life indicates that this was a man who, like many of us, seemed interested in the Lord during crisis times but then forgot him when things got back to normal. Eventually, however, the truth of his heart condition began to show, for it always does.

It happened, says verse 29, on a day when the king was walking in the palace, specifically, “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 fifty 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 in making 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 fifty 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. So in verse 30, "He said [don't miss the pronouns], 'Is not this the great Babylon **I** have built as the royal residence, by **my** mighty power and for the glory of **my** majesty?'"

Pride. It's always easier to see it in someone else. And to justify it in ourselves. "What's wrong with a little pride?"

Well, let's start here, in Isaiah 66:1-2. "This is what the LORD says: This is the one I esteem, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

If I want to be esteemed by God, then I must humble myself and tremble at His Word.

Did I tremble before His Word this week? Did I open it, and read it, and respond, "Have Thine own way, Lord. Thou art the Potter, I am the clay."

Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matt 23:12)."

Proverbs 6 says, "There are six things the Lord hates, yea, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look" is the first (Prov 6:16-17).

Nebuchadnezzar made two grievous mistakes. First, he magnified himself and let his accomplishments go to his head. Second, he marginalized God and failed to give God the glory He deserved.

Yes, Babylon *was* a great city, and in truth Nebuchadnezzar *had* done what few others have ever done. But his problem was he failed to remember who enabled him to do it.

"What do you have that you did not receive?" asks 1 Corinthians 4:7. "And if you have received it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?"

So Nebuchadnezzar boasted, and God took action. Just as Daniel had predicted, God humbled the proud king with a tragedy. The Lord stripped Nebuchadnezzar of three things.

1. *He stripped him of his position (31).* Notice verse 31, "Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, 'This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.'"

God's judgment was immediate. As soon as the king finished his boast, a voice announced the sentence of God. "The kingdom is departed from thee," as the AV puts it.

Someone might say, "That doesn't seem fair. Wasn't God being harsh and unkind to do this to a man just because of a little pride?"

But we think that only because we don't grasp what it means to say that God is just and holy, that 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 slight Him and take credit for what He has done.

2. *He stripped him of his power (32)*. God continues with the drastic details in verse 32, "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? God says, verse 32, until two things happen. One, until "seven times" pass (apparently, a reference to seven years). And two, until this once proud king acknowledges 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.

Please consider this with me. In a moment, Nebuchadnezzar lost his position and his power. Do you realize how fleeting and fragile so many things are with which we consume ourselves?

For instance, your home, the castle you've invested your life into, 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 the God who created you and His glory, you're in danger even if those things don't happen. Centuries ago, the Westminster Confession posed the question, "What is the chief end of man?" What's the correct answer? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

But for so many today the chief end of man is to know myself and enjoy me forever. That's what Nebuchadnezzar thought, until God stripped him of his position and power.

And...

3. *He stripped him of his pride (33)*. Verse 33 states, "Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."

Can you imagine that? One moment the man is 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. And his transition from sanity to insanity was instantaneous.

If you google that term, which I did, you'll see a Wikipedia post that says at the outset, "The most famous sufferer of this disorder was Nebuchadnezzar." And then this observation by the Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist, referring to Nebuchadnezzar "[as] a complete regressive degeneration of a man who has overreached himself."<sup>4</sup>

Overreached himself. That's one way to look at it.

Gleason Archer comments, "Physically he became like the brute beast he imagined himself to be, as his skin toughened into hide through the constant exposure to outdoor

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<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boanthropy>

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.)"<sup>5</sup>

Oh, how quickly God can bring a man down to size. When I think of the folly of pride, one image that comes to mind is a television scene years ago when a boxer by the name of Mohammed Ali was asked to predict the outcome of his upcoming fight. His response became the trademark of his life.

"I am the greatest!" So he said, and so he thought. And then came another who proclaimed his unsurpassed greatness, followed by another, then another.

The graveyards are full of indispensable men. Charles De Gaulle is credited with saying that, and it's true.

Self-proclaimed great people do not last, for God's Word says it is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). And there are no exceptions.

So 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.<sup>6</sup> 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, God intervened, and Nebuchadnezzar was restored in three ways.

1. *He was restored to his sanity (34-35).* Here's what happened, verses 34-35, "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. 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. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"<sup>7</sup>

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

2. *He was restored to his kingdom (36).* Verse 36 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."

Talk about a turnabout. What do you do with a king who's lost his mind for seven years? The Babylonians supported him. Because of the purpose of God and the influence of Daniel, he was restored to his kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> Gleason Archer, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Walvoord, 108

<sup>7</sup> In the *Living Bible*, "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?'"

3. *He was restored to his God (37)*. Here's the climax in 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 (AV 'and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.')." "

There is speculation as to whether Nebuchadnezzar was truly converted. Calvin, Keil, and others say the evidence is insufficient. But Nebuchadnezzar's testimony here about God is a strong indicator that he was indeed restored to His Maker.

When God truly saves a sinner, His intent is for that person to know Him (that's the definition of eternal life in John 17), to honor Him, and to live in light of His Lordship. And by his own words, Nebuchadnezzar says that is his desire.

Last week I listened to the audio book by Frank Pastore, *Shattered: Struck Down, But Not Destroyed*. You Reds fans will remember Pastore as an opening day pitcher back in the early 80s. What you may not know is that Pastore was an atheist until God got his attention through a line drive that shattered his elbow in 1984. He lost his dominance on the mound, but gained something far better, the understanding that God did exist, loved him, and sent His own Son into the world to rescue him from his sinful arrogance by dying in his place on the cross and then conquering death.

After an early retirement from baseball, Pastore served with Athletes in Action and eventually went to Talbot Seminary. Later he became host of one of the largest Christian talk shows in the United States, focusing on Christian worldview.

It was Chuck Colson who wrote the introduction to Pastore's biography.

#### Take Inventory: Some lessons to consider...

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

1. *God hates pride, and so must we*. Listen again to Prov 6:16ff, "These six things does the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him." And here's the top of the list, "A proud look."

God hates pride, and so must we. What must we do to see that happen?

First, I must not take credit for what God has done. 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.

But they're also resisted by God, according to 1 Peter 5:5. So we must, by God's grace, resolve to walk humbly with God in this world.

Second, 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 His punishment.

Let me illustrate with a scenario I've used before. Suppose we lined the world's population on the shores of the Ohio River and said, "God's on the other side. Let's 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 5 or 10'. But what is even 30' feet compared to a quarter of a mile? It might impress the audience, but it still falls short of the mark.

So it is with human accomplishments. Our good works might impress other people, but they fall short of God's standard. We are depraved, and need a Savior.

That's why God sent His Son. His perfect Son. Who lived a perfect life, and provided a perfect atonement for sinners like us.

When we reach heaven, my Christian friend, we will have no reason to boast, for we will be there, not because we "jumped further," but because God came after us and enabled us to admit the futility of thinking we could jump to Him, and beyond that, gave us the faith we needed to accept the One who came to rescue us.

So lesson one, God hates pride, and so must we.

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!"<sup>8</sup>

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.

One of the tangible ways we do that is by setting aside time every day to worship Him through meditating on His Word. When we do that it says, only You are great, and I want You to be great in my life.

And when we don't do that, God graciously does something to get our attention. *He takes away our peace.*

The Puritan Thomas Watson (born 1620) put it this way, "When Christians abate their fervency in private devotions, God abates their peace. If you slacken the strings of the violin, the music is spoiled; so, if a Christian is slack in duty, they spoil the sweet music of peace in their souls. As the fire decays, the cold increases; so, as fervency in duty abates, our peace cools."<sup>9</sup>

Is the peace gone, my friend? Then look right here. Have you been humbling yourself before the Living God every day with His Book open before you? If you slacken the strings of the violin, you'll spoil the music. Tighten up your time in the Word.

3. *It is a dangerous thing when we seek to ungod God.*

That's what we do when we're proud, again, to borrow from Thomas Watson, we *ungod* God. We behave like we are God.

I don't know who first said it, but it's true. "There are two types of people in the world – those who are humble and those who are about to be."<sup>10</sup>

Let's learn from Nebuchadnezzar and humble ourselves before the Sovereign One today.

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<sup>8</sup> in Wallace, 85

<sup>9</sup> *A Body of Divinity*, pp 264. <http://thomaswatsonquotes.com/when-christians-abate-their-fervency-in-private-devotions/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.activegarage.com/character-and-personality-6-humility>