

Daniel 4 is a multi-angled study on pride and humility. Ultimately the way of humility paves the way for us to have both care and courage in exile. Thus far in this series, we have been looking at the life of Daniel as our guide and exemplar for how we navigate life in Babylon. Now I want us to look at both Nebuchadnezzar and at Daniel because I believe that both of these characters actually have something to offer us.

For Nebuchadnezzar, we will watch the proud be humbled. We will watch the powerful be made weak. For Daniel, we will watch the boldness and courage of one ready to confront injustice and the courage to pastorally lead Nebuchadnezzar to repentance.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

[Read Daniel 4:1-3](#)

What a radical shift in what we have known of Nebuchadnezzar up until this point. Here is Nebuchadnezzar, who has been, for all intents and purposes, pretty full of his own ego and strength. But at this moment, he has changed. Something has happened inside him.

Notice that Nebuchadnezzar is declaring to his entire kingdom something about "The Most High God..." Remember, Babylon was deeply polytheistic, so for Nebuchadnezzar to declare this about the "the most high God," we right away recognize that something is different with him.

A change has taken place within Nebuchadnezzar, and he is able to recognize that even though his kingdom is great, it doesn't match up to God's kingdom. "His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation" (v. 3b). Here, the leader of the strongest kingdom in the known world is declaring that Yahweh's kingdom is the only one that will last

Verse 3 is Nebuchadnezzar's main thesis for his testimony that will follow. He will go on to repeat this at the end in verse 34 and also three different times in the middle (vv. 17, 25, 32). Keep that in mind as we continue. After a short preamble, he now flashes back and begins to tell his story.

[Read Daniel 4:4-8](#)

Notice the way this story opens; Nebuchadnezzar says that he was home, he was at peace in his palace, "contented and prosperous." Now, remember this is a testimony. It is a story that Nebuchadnezzar is telling in the first person.

So in his reflection, he starts by saying something to the effect of, "It seems like life was fine, everything was good. I was living the good life, contented and prosperous." This is the challenge that faces those of means; the prosperity of our own ability can lull us into thinking we

have arrived at the good life. And for Nebuchadnezzar, this was the danger of the position he was in. He had all the success, all the money, and all the power. The status quo has a way of numbing us to the sin in our lives and can shield us from seeing our shadow side.

Whatever was in the dream disturbed him enough to seek out an interpretation calling on the regulars; astrologers, magicians, enchanters, and diviners. They all fail in their ability to interpret the dream, so Nebuchadnezzar calls in Daniel to give him a chance. Notice again that Daniel is called up for the work that he was given to do. I continue to be utterly amazed at how Daniel is able to hold together his faithfulness to serve the king (even though he was king of a foreign land and a people against God) while not giving in to the temptation to withdraw, assimilate, or try to conquer. Once again, Daniel quietly serves the place that God has placed him in and does so with faithfulness to the way of Yahweh

What an example and inspiration for those of you working in the secular world. As someone who has, for their entire adult life, worked primarily in the church world, I am amazed when I hear the stories of people balancing the tension of faith in public life. Because of the dedication that Daniel put into his work, he was able to get to a place where he could serve the king, and God could use him in that particular role. Where has God placed you? Where has he equipped you?

I have a deep respect for those Christians who for years remain faithful to the way of Jesus while working in secular jobs—you are a gift to the world. And I believe when Jesus talks about being salt and light, you are the embodiment of that, navigating complex situations with grace and faithfulness. This is Daniel; this is you, living out your vocational calling in the midst of the world around you with the very Christlikeness that transforms your workplaces. We can too often give the impression that what we do here in the church is ministry, but you all are doing the work of ministry; our task is to equip you to then go out—to be a transformed people, transforming the peninsula.

### **Daniel: The Challenge**

[Read Daniel 4:9-12](#)

So here, the vision is of an enormously abundant and prosperous tree that is the source of life for all who are near it and live within its influence. Both people and the beasts of the field were sustained by it—a magnificent tree with significant reach and influence.

[Read Daniel 4:13-15](#)

So the beautiful image we see at the beginning of the dream of the tree that is flourishing and is giving life to all around it is interrupted by being chopped down. And not only that, but they drive a bronze/

iron steak right through the center of it that would have prevented the stump from growing back.

So the tree is not just being destroyed; it is being actively held back from returning to its former glory. But yet, it is not utterly abolished; it is held in a state that awaits its return. The stump remaining, although held back from returning leaves room for the possibility of future restoration. Certainly, this is an illusion of what may come to pass with time and the restoration of the tree.

#### [Read Daniel 4:16-18](#)

The punishment is a severe humbling. *"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" (v. 16)*. He is being brought down for a season to the level of an animal. A mighty king and powerful ruler of a strong empire is reduced to an animal

And then you see this familiar line that is repeated three times in this text, *"...the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people" (v. 17b)*. Here we see a beautiful declaration that for millennia the church has held to, that God is the sovereign ruler over all of creation and cannot be obstructed by anyone. Even the powerful Nebuchadnezzar could not deter God from ruling over creation. Regardless of the sinful humanity that may be placed in positions of leadership, there is nothing that can knock God from the throne. God plan for creation will find its fulfillment.

We also see a vision of the love of God emerge here. God is choosing to love a sinner in his sin. He is choosing not to withdraw but to engage, even with one like Nebuchadnezzar, who is living entirely counter to the way of God. But in God's sovereign love, he works to restore Nebuchadnezzar.

#### [Read Daniel 4:19](#)

The testimony of Nebuchadnezzar now shifts to focus on Daniel. Now, imagine the fear that Daniel is facing. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar had just recently thrown Daniel's friends into the furnace for not worshipping him. Daniel, who remains faithful to Yahweh with full conviction, is confronted by Nebuchadnezzar with a horrifying dream and asked to interpret it. And Daniel's initial response is one of concern, "if only the dream applied to your enemies!" Essentially saying, "Nebuchadnezzar, I wish not your destruction but your enemy's, but unfortunately, that is not the case!" But Daniel demonstrates resolve and gives Nebuchadnezzar his interpretation.

#### [Daniel 4:20-27](#)

What a beautiful and confident response by Daniel. He recognizes the weight of what his job will require, but he doesn't retreat and instead, with all the humility and confidence, confronts Nebuchadnezzar in his pride. "Your majesty, you are that tree!" What a bold thing to say to the king in light of the fate of the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But Daniel continues to demonstrate faithful service to the king and the place that God has put him.

Let's not forget that the only reason Daniel is in Babylon is because of force! He has not voluntarily gone there; they are in exile. Daniel was torn from his homeland; the Babylonians destroyed their home, neighborhoods, and everything they knew. Nebuchadnezzar was responsible for the devastation and deportation of Daniel's people. He was the enemy to Daniel. And yet Daniel finds the resolve to humbly, lovingly, and graciously serve the king with no hint of pretense or vengeance. He didn't speak an ill word toward the king or his captors. And notice that because of that, the opportunity arrives for him to stand before the king and confront him on his pride, arrogance, and injustice.

I personally cannot think of a better example in the Old Testament of Jesus' New Testament teaching on "love your enemies." How? How is Daniel able to maintain this posture of pastoral care for his enemies? There was a deep commitment in Daniel to carry out the instructions that had been sent to him in Jeremiah 29. I want to return briefly to that letter again. Remember, this was the instructions sent by God through the prophet Jeremiah. *"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (v. 7)* Daniel was deeply committed to this mission, and his humility enabled him to carry this out. I want to point out two things that Daniel was able to do that demonstrated care and courage while in exile.

#### **Pastoral Care for Nebuchadnezzar**

In this particular story, we are not given any clues, but I believe it comes back to the letter that Jeremiah had written to the Exiles in Jeremiah 29. When we look at the whole of Daniel's experience in Babylon, we see that he continually embodied this message.

Notice the two-fold manner in which Jeremiah instructs the exiles to live in exile. First, "seek the peace and prosperity of the city..." We've seen Daniel continually give himself humbly to that work. He is faithful to his calling; he is faithful to his work, and he seeks excellence in his work.

It should not be understated that the work done in your offices, jobs, callings, homes, neighborhoods, etc., all create a cumulative witness of care for the world around us. For Daniel, this was paramount in his living in exile, and God found a way to use him in those spaces.

Second, "pray to the Lord for it..." We will see this in Daniel 6. Daniel had a deep commitment to prayer. I think of Jesus' command to "pray for those who persecute you." Daniel was committed to a fixed hour of prayer, praying three times a day. I can't help but wonder if Nebuchadnezzar was on that list of prayers. Prayer has a way of forging maturity in us. He had grown beyond revenge or hatred. It is really hard to hate someone that you continually pray for—prayer guards against your heart from growing cold and jaded.

Consider the situation again; Daniel is standing before the king and is invited to interpret the dream where he watches Nebuchadnezzar fall. But he doesn't give in to inward cheering and rejoicing at the fall of his enemy; instead, "Daniel was greatly perplexed..." Daniel reluctantly interpreted the dream. He took no pleasure in the destruction of his

enemy. This is a level of maturity that looks and feels a lot like Jesus. But it wasn't just Daniel's pastoral care for Nebuchadnezzar that we need to note; it is also his courage to confront Nebuchadnezzar.

### **Courage to Confront Nebuchadnezzar**

To look the most powerful man in the world in the eyes and say, "You are that tree," took tremendous courage. To stand in the midst of a vast empire and see all that Nebuchadnezzar had built and the spectacle of his power and tell him that he must acknowledge a king higher than himself takes guts.

Notice the sharp confrontation of Nebuchadnezzar's sin because Daniel had to bring this before the king, as he didn't see his sin. Pride has a way of blinding us from what is wrong. Pride has a way of hindering us from seeing clearly the folly of our own ways. So Daniel confronts him. *"Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice..." (v. 27a).*

Did you notice that Nebuchadnezzar never asked for his advice? He merely asked for an interpretation of the dream. I would suggest that this took the courage of a prophet to call out the sin in Nebuchadnezzar's life and the injustice on which his kingdom had been built. Notice what Daniel calls out. *"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" (27b).*

Daniel calls out two things—sins and wickedness. Sins: From what we can tell, this is in reference to his pride, arrogance, and delusions of power. Wickedness: The outflow of his sins resulted in wickedness and the oppression of others for his own sake. Practical injustice and oppression in the social realm resulted from his sin

And Daniel's call for repentance was also two-fold. It wasn't enough to simply renounce his sins; the wickedness of his oppression must be turned to kindness. There needed to be confession and action. The radical change of heart that needed to take place in Nebuchadnezzar would be manifest by a change in actuality. Exploitation was to be replaced with justice and kindness

We can't miss the drama and courage of the moment. For Daniel to stand before the supreme world power and call out his sin and exploitative practices would have run the risk of losing his life. Certainly, history would show that others have lost their lives for far less when it comes to confronting those in power.

If I were to sum it up in one statement, it would be this: Humility paves the way to care and courage in exile. Daniel was able to maintain his position as well as his faithfulness to Yahweh because he humbly understood his calling and vocation.

### **God: The Humbler**

[Read Daniel 4:28-30](#)

So God gives Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to act in response to this dream. God moves slowly to take the dramatic movement toward repentance. He had 12 months to do something in response, to change, to humble himself, but rather than humility, we see Nebuchadnezzar unchanged in his pride. *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal*

*residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty" (v. 30).* The reality is that in one sense, Nebuchadnezzar had built Babylon, but the sin of wicked oppression that Daniel had accused him of would indicate he probably hadn't lifted a brick in his life. Rather his kingdom was built on the backs of slaves, and his success blinded him from seeing this.

[Read Daniel 4:31-33](#)

The move of God to humble the proud is drastic. Nebuchadnezzar is described in animalistic terms and is forced out into the wilderness to live with the animals. It is the utter opposite of what we had come to know about Nebuchadnezzar. But notice the 12-month delay. It indicates the reluctance and patience of God. It would seem that God took no pleasure in reducing Nebuchadnezzar to the level of a brute beast.

God's desire for us all is not humiliation but humility, but God is known for humbling the proud. This is all over the scriptures. So God takes away his royal authority, and he is driven into the wilderness, where he is reduced to life in the wilderness. The descriptions of Nebuchadnezzar are that he has a sort of break and is more beast-like than human.

But the humiliation only lasted as long as was needed. The phrase "seven times" is intentionally vague and doesn't necessarily mean seven years. The humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar only requires the time needed for him to learn what needed to be learned. And what needed to be learned was the very thing that Nebuchadnezzar had declared throughout the text..." that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth..." here in verse 32 and also verses 3, 17, 25, 32, and 34. Remember, what we are reading in this chapter is a testimony of Nebuchadnezzar as he reflects back on this experience. It would seem the lesson was very much learned. He was humbled and recognized the futility of his own power.

To close, I just want to note three particular things that pride does to us from the example of Nebuchadnezzar.

### **The Fallout of Pride**

#### **Pride Dehumanizes Us**

The effect of the pride in Nebuchadnezzar was that he was dehumanized in two ways. First, his pride puffed him up, making him believe that he was something of a god. We saw this last week as he became consumed with his own power. It is a failure to live into the limitations that exist for all humans; in doing that, he actually erodes his soul by dehumanizing himself.

But the fallout is that he was reduced to what is described as an animal-like figure. Pride turns us into something we are not. Rather than thriving within the design that God has created for us, pride distorts our own vision of who we are. The effects of this are deep and pervasive. This is the sin that Daniel points out in his confrontation, "Renounce your sin and do what is right."

#### **Pride Dehumanizes Others**

Second, pride dehumanizes others. Notice that the second sin Daniel points out is that Nebuchadnezzar oppresses others. The source of pride believes that you are more than you are. It is the posture that you are all that matters. It believes that you are more important than others.

As a result, everything and everyone becomes something for your own consumption. For Nebuchadnezzar, what you see is his flippant oppression of others, his disregard for life; everything was centered on him. The fallout is others lose their dignity and humanity and become mere things for consumption. Daniel calls this out for the sin that it is.

### **Pride blinds us to God**

Lastly, Nebuchadnezzar's pride blinds him to God. We will look at this more next week. But throughout the entire book of Daniel, there has been tension between the sovereignty of God and the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar. Over and over, Nebuchadnezzar refuses to see that Yahweh is the one true God. His pride blinded his vision and clouded any view of reality.

Even with all of this swirling beneath the surface, God doesn't give up on Nebuchadnezzar. The beauty in a narrative like this is that Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the known world, ruling over the most powerful empire the world had ever known, is brought to his knees by the one true God—Yahweh. But Nebuchadnezzar speaks of this humbling, not as God pouring out his wrath, but as an act of severe mercy, speaking of it out of a posture of gratitude.

How did God bring about this humbling in the life of Nebuchadnezzar? Because if we all must be humbled by the kingdoms that we have, then understanding how God operates in that will be instructive for us as well.

### **Drenched in the Dew of Heaven**

I think we see this phrase that Nebuchadnezzar was "drenched in the dew of heaven," used multiple times throughout the chapter. This is mentioned in verse 15 in the dream, verse 25 in the Interpretation, and verse 33 in the outcome. It means two things.

### **To Be Exposed**

It is to be, as was the case here for Nebuchadnezzar, driven into the wilderness and pushed out into the elements. Nebuchadnezzar was stripped of his palace and his power. Everything was taken away from him, and he was forced out away from all that was comfortable.

In some respects, he had lost everything. And in that, it was a severe punishment. But it wasn't just a severe punishment. The exposure was a severe mercy. Because without being him being exposed, I don't know if Nebuchadnezzar would have seen the folly of his ways. This leads to the second aspect of being "drenched in the dew of heaven."

### **Mercy and an Extension to New Life**

In the ancient world, the dew was an incredible gift from God. It would nourish and support crops through the harsh climate changes of the middle east. The scorching heat would mix with the cool air of the

morning, and the result would be a heavy dew that sustained plants through drought conditions

For Nebuchadnezzar, when he loses the roof over his head and is exposed to the elements, the dew dissolves his arrogance. He was drenched with the dew of heaven. God was covering him in kindness by pouring on him the kindness of a wake-up call. It is the "kind severity" of God that called him back to repentance. For Nebuchadnezzar, to be drenched in the dew of heaven was to be humbled and stripped of all he had built, ego, power, success, arrogance, all of it.

While Nebuchadnezzar was in power and in his palace, he was shielded from the dew of heaven. It wasn't until this was taken away and he was thrust into the wilderness that he was able to be drenched in the dew of heaven, drenched in the goodness, mercy, and call to repentance that God has to offer

This offer is before all of us. We have all been given the opportunity of severe mercy. In some ways, we all have a little Nebuchadnezzar in us. We have a propensity to believe we are god-like; we all can be filled with an unhealthy pride. And that will cause us to erode our own humanity and that of others.

It is in Jesus that we meet both our own wretchedness and God right in the mess. This is the gift of grace and the gift of forgiveness. And maybe for the first time, you are seeing in yourself Nebuchadnezzar and want to step out of that. Maybe it is the first time you've had to consider your own insufficiency and the grace of God. We would love to connect with you. Please email us at [communications@cpc.org](mailto:communications@cpc.org) if you would like to talk with someone.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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