

Faith and Repentance

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[0 : 00] The city of my birth was Atlantic City, known as the Playground on the Atlantic. Six miles long boardwalk. It was the first ever boardwalk constructed on one side is the Atlantic Ocean and now in Atlantic City which is famous for casinos.

As you walk along the boardwalk you have the Atlantic on your right. If you're going north then you would have the casinos on your left. And I remember walking by and hearing piped from one of the casinos.

You often heard the sound of slot machines, people winning prizes, etc. to entice you in. But there was a kind of a loudspeaker. I remember it was quite striking. And the loudspeaker had somebody's voice and they were saying, act in haste, repent at leisure. I thought, what a timely message. But I guess the idea was time is short, have fun, have fun now and you can worry about the consequences later.

You'll be happy to know that I kept walking. I didn't go into that particular or any casino that day. But it struck me because that is in many ways in a nutshell the lesson that we see in the life of big King Nebuchadnezzar.

Act in haste, repent at leisure. And we have here what we describe in the Bible as an illustration or an example. Jonathan Edwards, when he was writing the most famous biography or compiling the life and diary of David Brainerd.

[1 : 43] In his introduction, he said there are two ways of representing and recommending true religion to the world. The one by doctrine and precept and the other by instance and example.

Both are abundantly used in the Holy Scriptures. So you have doctrine and precept. You can go to the letters of Paul. You can go to the prophetic writings. Or you can look at examples.

Where God gives you an example of someone who learned a lesson. Our theme tonight is the response that God requires to his message.

You see, he not only sets the terms and conditions of the gospel. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. But he sets the terms and conditions that we are to respond with. But whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. Now in the Bible there are often two truths that are coupled together so closely that you cannot separate them.

[2 : 50] You cannot separate faith and repentance. This is our theme tonight. These are the two things which God requires which really are the two sides of the same coin.

You cannot repent without believing. Nor can you believe without repenting. So sometimes in the Bible you see one of these truths articulated.

Remember when Jonah preached in Nineveh. What did the people do? They repented. They turned from their evil ways. And they turned to God in sackcloth and ashes.

And God relented from his threatened judgment of that city and of its people. They turned from sin. But they just didn't kind of turn abstractly.

The turning motion was turning from and turning to. They turned in faith to the God who had previously threatened judgment. And now the cause for such a judgment had disappeared.

[3 : 50] Because they had turned from their sin, from their evil ways. And they had turned to God. The instance and example that we see here is quite remarkable.

King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the greatest empire of the age. The Babylonian Empire. And his kingdom was the great kingdom.

And when he surveyed the city of Babylon and the surrounding empire. He recognized his power, his authority, his honor, his glory.

But you'll notice in this chapter three things were placed before the king. First of all, he was warned. Remember, he had a dream.

And we're told, again, this is quite remarkable. Because generally speaking, when you are reading the Bible, the Bible is written by the particular authors. The prophet or the spokesman.

[4 : 50] But here, it's almost as if there's an interlude where King Nebuchadnezzar inserts a testimony. His story. Quite a remarkable story.

He says in chapter four and verse one. King Nebuchadnezzar to the nations and peoples of every language who live in all the earth. He's not only addressing his empire. He's addressing all peoples. He's saying, folks, I've got something to tell you. It doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter what your culture is. It doesn't matter what your nationality is. I want you to hear what God has done in my life.

It's my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders, verse two, 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. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. All was well.

[5 : 52] I had a dream. And that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

We see God giving the proud king a warning. Rousing him from his contentment. Rousing him from his satisfaction.

And troubling his mind. And many of God's people can testify that one of the first steps in their religious awakening was a troubling reminder.

Whether something they heard or something they read or something that somebody shared with them. In this case, the warning came by means of a dream. But the dream was even more terrifying because the dream did not have an interpretation.

What does the dream mean? So not only does God warn Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. God provides a prophet who can interpret the dream.

[6 : 57] So you have a warning. And the warning is then accompanied by information. He's warned and he's informed. So the dream is laid out before us.

Then Daniel is brought in. We've met Daniel before. Daniel was a young man at the very beginning of the book of Daniel. We've seen his interactions with the emperor before.

And when he hears the dream, he himself is terrified. And the king said, Belshazzar, don't let the dream or its meaning alarm you.

And Belshazzar said, I wish this dream related to somebody else. King, I wish I could tell you that this was the enemies who were the tree in your dream.

He said, King, unfortunately the tree is you. This is your empire. This is your story. This warning is meant for you and you alone.

[7 : 59] So you have the warning. And then you have the information to explain what the warning means. And the prophet Daniel then closes with a word of advice.

A word of counsel. He tells the king what will happen. Verse 26, the command to leave the stump of the tree with its root means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that heaven rules.

So he gives a detailed interpretation of a detailed dream. But he closes with this. Therefore, your majesty, be pleased to accept my advice.

I can't command you. I don't have the authority to tell you, O king, what to do. But I'm going to give you some advice. And my advice is this.

Renounce your sins by doing what is right. Your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.

[9 : 07] The warning of the dream. The information of Daniel. And now this word of timely advice. King, you've been warned. This is your life.

This is your kingdom. You are that tree. Now I'm going to give you some advice. You asked me for an interpretation. I'm going to give you some advice. And this kind of, as a little bit of a sidebar, I think it was Francis Schaeffer who said that we are to give honest answers to honest questions. So if people have questions, try your best to answer them. Many questions, however, are very complicated because easy questions have easy answers. The questions that people have, where we've come from, where we're going, why certain things have happened, why other things haven't happened.

But what I think is interesting here is Daniel answered the question that he was asked, but he did more than that. He did more than that.

He wasn't asked for advice, but he gave advice. Sometimes people don't ask for advice, but they need advice. Some people don't ask for direction, but they need direction because they're wandering aimlessly.

[10:19] He says, I'm going to give you some advice, king. It's time to repent. It's time to turn from your sin. It's time to keep, to stop making yourself the center of the story.

This is my advice, oh king. I'm just a prophet. I'm just a stranger in a strange land. I'm one of your exiles. You brought me here from my home.

But I'm going to give you some advice. So the king had a warning. The king was then given the information to understand the dream. And the prophet said, you really need to listen to what I have to say, oh king.

And for a time, it seems that all was well. Twelve months had passed. Maybe the king had actually heeded the warning. Maybe the king had actually accepted the advice.

Maybe the king decided, as strange as it seems, this unusual man from an unusual place with an unusual God who is telling me, the king, that he advises me to renounce my sins.

[11:24] You see, all the king wanted to do was to know what the dream meant. Whereas Daniel says, actually, king, there's a problem here. And you're the problem.

You're sin. You're evil. You're wickedness. That instead of being kind, you are an instrument of oppression. Twelve months pass.

Verse 29. And the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace. He said, is not this great Babylon, the great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power for the glory of my majesty?

He decided not to take Daniel's advice. He decided not to heed the dream. He decided to ignore all that he had been told. He's the king. He can do whatever he wants.

And as he surveys his city, his palace, his glory, he wants to say it because what he sees demonstrates. Look how great I am.

[12:31] Look how great my palace is. Look how great my city is. And look how great my empire is. Well, God had something to show him. God wanted to tell him. But then if he didn't listen to what God said, God was going to show him.

And sometimes if we're honest, we know what's right and we know what's true and we know what's good. We know it. But sometimes God needs to show us.

Sometimes he needs to show us the folly of thinking that we are in charge. Sometimes he needs to show us that we are not in control. That we do not know everything about everything.

The king did not heed the advice of Daniel. And all that was promised came true. You see, God's word is true.

God's word is always true. When he invites, it's a genuine invitation. When he threatens, it's a genuine threat. When he teaches, it's genuine instruction.

[13:36] When he encourages, it's genuine encouragement. When he promises, it's a genuine promise. Whatever his word says is true in the terms in which it is given.

So the king is warned. The king ignores the warning and God fulfills all that he had promised to do. All the glory departed immediately.

All the honor, all the prestige, all the trappings of power disappeared. And the king is now grazing like an ox. The king is now drenched with dew.

The king looks like, acts like, and appears to be an animal in the field. How the mighty hath fallen. That's what pride does, does it not?

Pride, I'm told in the book of Proverbs, comes before a fall. A haughty spirit. And this is a sin that you don't need to be an emperor to have.

[14:36] Pride is where you place yourself at the center of the scene. Pride is where you tend to use I, me, and my. Rather than you, or they, or our, or his, or hers.

So pride is an ever-present danger that we need to repent of. Now, we're told that the drenching with dew.

We're told that the living, eating grass of the field like an ox. This is not the final word. Because remember we talked that there was a stump.

There was going to be a stump. And even though the stump was overlaid, it was still there. The stump was there, the roots were there, and the promise of restoration was there. But what was required? What was required was that the king had to come back to his right mind. The king had to come back to his senses.

[15 : 39] So we're told in verse 31, as the king, the lip words were still on his lips. As he was speaking, there was a voice that came from heaven.

Notice, Nebuchadnezzar speaks. But as it were, his speech was overspoken. You know how sometimes it's not polite to interrupt someone when they're speaking. It's not polite to interrupt the king when the king is speaking. However, a greater king can interrupt a lesser king. And the lesser king was interrupted in the middle of his speech. And the king of kings has something to say.

This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar. Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from the people. You will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth.

[16 : 36] And gives them to anyone he wishes. Repentance literally means a change of mind. Remember the parable of the two sons.

Jesus said there were a father with two sons. The younger son comes to the father. He wants his share of the inheritance. And he then takes that share and he spends it in wild living. And when he's in the far country, he has nothing to eat. And even the pigs that he's now tending, he longs to eat the food that he is feeding them with. He came to himself. He came back to his right mind. He remembered what his father was like. He remembered what his father's house was like. And he said, even in my father's house, the servants are well fed. And here I am. I am starving. Wishing I could eat the food of pigs. He comes to his right mind and he returns. What happens to Nebuchadnezzar?

[17 : 38] He comes to his right mind. And he turns to the one alone who can save him. When we told this, that all that was immediately done, it was fulfilled.

Driven away. Ate grass. Body drenched. His nails grew so long like the claws of a bird. But notice that that's not the end of the story.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar. You see, you have a framework here in this chapter. Nebuchadnezzar begins with personal testimony and he ends with personal testimony.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven and my sanity was restored. His mind was restored to him. Quite literally, a change of mind.

A mind of an animal, the mind of a man. The mind of one who had no regard for God was now a mind of one who had regard for God.

[18 : 36] His sanity was restored. And how do we know that his mind was changed? Then I praise the Most High. I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

Wait, wait, wait. The last thing this man said is not this the great Babylon I have built. As the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty.

Maybe what Nebuchadnezzar just experienced was the advice that Daniel had given him. Turn from your sin. Turn from your wickedness.

Turn from your pride. Turn from your self-centeredness. And acknowledge the king. The king of kings. So his mind was restored. And the evidence of a restored mind was a right relationship with the king.

He's no longer telling us of how great he is. He's now telling us how great God is. A change of mind and a transformation of heart.

[19 : 42] Because he goes on to say, let me tell you about his dominion. It's eternal. It has no beginning, no end. Now, I can't give you the exact year.

But the Babylonian Empire came to an end. You can read about it in Daniel chapter 5. His grandson, Belshazzar, threw a banquet. And that was the end of the story. Belshazzar gone. The Medes and the Persians replaced the Babylonians. The Greeks replaced the Medo-Persians. The Romans replaced the Greeks. And so on. And so on. And so on. Human empires rise. And human empires fall. But Nebuchadnezzar's restored mind says the king, the most high, has an eternal dominion. And his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

And all the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases. Now, you see, Nebuchadnezzar thought he was that king. He thought, I can do what I please.

[20 : 43] I can live as I want. I can say what I want to say. Until he was walking along the balcony of his palace.

Then he realized, actually, I can't do what I want to do. I can't say what I want to say. Because there is an authority that is higher than me. He now acknowledges that authority.

Now, you might say, well, okay. You know, he's restored to his sanity. He's restored, we're told, to his kingdom. He actually had a greater end than a beginning.

Even though his beginning of his kingdom was a glorious beginning. We're told that his throne was restored. That his advisors came to him. And that he was, his kingdom was even greater.

So you might wonder, well, is there any evidence here of faith? Is there any evidence here of a relationship with God? Well, let me just show you just by comparison.

[21 : 44] At the end of Daniel chapter 2. Remember, that was another dream sequence. Where the, where Daniel interpreted the dream. But if you remember Daniel chapter 2.

The king says, I've had a dream and it's bothered me. And he said to his enchanters, his diviners, his astrologers. Tell me the meaning of the dream. And they say, king, just tell us the dream. We'll tell you the meaning.

No, no, no. You need to tell me the meaning. I'm not even going to tell you the dream. And the astrologer said, nobody can do that, king. And then Daniel comes on the scene. And Daniel tells the king the dream that he had.

And the meaning of the dream. In verse 47 of chapter 2. The king said to Daniel, surely your God. Is the God of gods and the Lord of kings. And a revealer of mysteries.

For you were able to reveal this mystery. So he praises the God of Daniel. At the end of chapter 3. You remember the story of the three young men thrown into the fire.

[22 : 38] In verse 28 of chapter 3. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So he acknowledges Daniel's God.

He acknowledges Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God. But he does so in a very distant way. He acknowledges Daniel.