

Self Existent

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[0 : 00] Daniel chapter 4. And if you join with me in this journey back to the 6th century BC, the superpower of the age was Babylon. That was the power, and Nebuchadnezzar was the emperor.

He was the man with all power, with all authority. We would describe him as one who was a plenipotentiary. That meant that all power rested in him. There is no parliament. There is no representative democracy.

So what he said went. But Nebuchadnezzar has a message for us that actually he is not the plenipotentiary. That he is not the one with all power and all authority.

Because he has had a powerful and personal life-changing encounter with the one who has all power and all authority. Chapter 4 of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar.

To the peoples, nations, and men of every language, who live in all the world, may you prosper greatly. It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

[1 : 07] 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.

I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.

When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence, and I told him the dream.

He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my God and the spirit of the holy gods is in him. I said, Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that no mystery is too difficult for you.

Here is my dream, interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed. I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

[2 : 16] The tree grew large and strong, and its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all.

Under it, the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches. From it, every creature was fed. In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one coming down from heaven.

He called in a loud voice, Cut down the tree and trim off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

But let the stump and its roots be 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. The decision is announced by messengers.

[3 : 24] The holy ones declare the verdict, so that 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.

This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me, but you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

Then Daniel, called Belteshazzar, was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king says, Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.

Belteshazzar answered, My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies, and its meaning to your adversaries. The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places, and its branches for the birds of the air, you, O king, are that tree.

You have become great and strong. Your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the distant parts of the earth. You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven, and saying, Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump bound with iron and bronze in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground.

[4 : 57] Let him be drenched with the Jew of heaven. Let him live like the wild animals until seven times pass by for him. This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord, the king.

You will be driven away from the people and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the Jew of heaven.

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 command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that heaven rules. Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice.

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.

[6 : 01] All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar 12 months later. As the king was walking in the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, it is not this great Babylon I built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty.

The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven. 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 and you will live like 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.

Immediately, what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. 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.

At the end of the time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High. I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

[7 : 19] His dominion is an eternal dominion and 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? At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom.

My advisors and nobles sought me out and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 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.

We are confronted with the incontrovertible fact that our God is one of a kind. There is not a category or a class of gods to which our God belongs.

You see, we like to categorize things, don't we? So for example, you could categorize animals. You could say there are certain animals that are mammals and there are certain animals that are reptiles or other animals that are marsupials.

[8 : 44] You can categorize and put them in their particular classes or categories. The Bible confronts us with the God who has no category, who has no similarity to other so-called deities.

So that's why giving worship or honor or glory to anything or anyone else is not just mistaken, it is abominable because we are giving the credit, we are giving the glory to something that is not. Because our God has no lack, our God has no limit, our God has no need, he has no necessity, he does not need us, we need him, he is not made complete with us, we are made complete in him.

So the God that we encounter on each of the pages of the Bible is a God that is without comparison. So that's why the lesson to the Old Testament people of God was you shall have no other gods before me.

That does not suggest that there are other gods that could be before him, but to suggest that we have a tendency to make other things God. So with you this evening, I'd like to consider this theme that is brought before our attention.

[9 : 55] That the God that we worship, the God in whose presence we are gathered, is the God who is self-existent. This morning we had the induction of office bearers, elders, and deacons.

And one of the questions that they were asked was about the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's a statement of what we believe. We would say that it's a statement of what the Bible teaches and of what we affirm.

Now the great thing about the confession is that in a short compass, it summarizes some of the great truths of the faith. So let me just read you a few statements concerning the God that we worship.

We're told in that confession in chapter 2 and chapter paragraph 1 that there is but one only living and true God who is infinite in being and perfection.

Infinite means that there is no measure. There is no measure to his being. There is no measure to his perfection. That there is a completeness and a wholeness and a fullness. We then go on to read that God has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself and is alone in and unto he himself all sufficient.

[11 : 14] Not standing in need of any creatures which he has made nor deriving any glory from them but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.

It's a dense paragraph with huge truths but it says that he is set apart. He is different, distinct from us.

We can't say that our God is like because anything that we would liken our God to would be inadequate and would be insufficient. Now in the study of theology, it's not surprising that the human language has limitations, that we can't even speak in a way that adequately describes what it is or who it is that we are trying to describe.

So for example, very early on in the history of the church, there was a word that was needed. How can we describe God who is one, unity, and how can we describe God who exists eternally in three persons?

And you put the try for three and you put the unity together and you have this new word called trinity. It's not a biblical word but it's a biblical truth. Now the biblical, the new word that comes before us tonight is a word again from the Latin language which says that the term is aseity.

[12 : 42] Now it's a technical term, you don't need to remember it but if you know Latin at all, a or a would be from and se, se, means himself, from himself.

Now this is a characteristic that God and God alone has, that there is a self-existence, a self-sufficiency that is in and of himself. Now we have difficulty understanding this because this bears no resemblance to us.

We are completely contingent people. We depend. We depend on other people. We depend on other factors. Now you might think that you are self-sufficient.

Well then ask yourself, how long could you survive without oxygen? How long could you survive without food? How long could you survive without water? We are completely dependent upon other things that are outside of ourself.

Whereas God is sufficient in and of himself. He is self-existent, self-sustaining. He doesn't need our help. He doesn't need our support. He doesn't need our knowledge.

[13 : 46] He doesn't need anything. That's just the way he is. So keeping these truths in mind, we find that there is a qualitative difference and a quantitative difference between who we are and who God is.

We come back to this scene 600 years roughly before the time of Jesus. This kingdom Babylon was encompassing all the other kingdoms, conquering all the lands, including the people of the Holy Land and bringing into Babylon the best and the brightest.

So you see the Babylonian empire was, they had wisdom, they had smarts. So they wanted to incorporate new peoples and new lands. And they thought to themselves, let's get the best and the brightest.

They're foreigners. Well, let's bring them into Babylon. Let's train them. Let's equip them so that we can get the best out of them. So Daniel and some of his friends were brought into Babylon and placed in positions of authority.

But this chapter is quite remarkable because what we have here is an audience with a king, not a king of the people of Israel, not a king of the people of God as we are familiar with, you know, David or Solomon or, you know, the great figures of the past.

[15:06] But here's a foreign king. And this foreign king is testifying to us about the God that he previously had not known, had not worshipped.

And he's now testifying to the God he has encountered and to the God to whom he now owes absolutely everything. So with you, if you look back at the very beginning of Daniel 4, it was a long narrative passage.

But the passage is important because it captures the details, it captures the events that reminds us that this actually happened. These events actually occurred in time, in place, and with people.

So notice first the audience. Nebuchadnezzar has a big audience. Verse one, to the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live in all the world.

You can't have a bigger audience than that. Nebuchadnezzar has a big story to tell a big audience about a big God. He's a big person himself. He's powerful.

[16:11] He has authority. He has power. He has prestige. And he has something to share, not just with his own people, but he has something to share with all people. So we're part of his audience because we are members of this human race and we live in different parts, or we live now currently in Scotland.

We may come from different parts of the world. So we have a big audience, but he also has a big story. In verse two, he says, it is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the most high God has performed for me.

Most high. The God who is, in English we would say that they're, when you have adjectives like good, that's a descriptive word.

Something is good. You have a comparative word, better. I like ice cream better than trifle. You compare two things. But then you come to superlatives where you have best.

And Nebuchadnezzar says that this God is the most high. Now, if Nebuchadnezzar is the top of an empire, and if he is at the top of a power structure, and if he's the top of an imperial kingdom, and he's saying that there is a God who is most high, he is in a position to understand what high looks like.

[17:33] Because he is in a high position, and he's telling us that the God that he wants to tell us about is the most high. He says, he goes on to say, how great are his signs, how mighty are his wonders.

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His dominion endures from generation to generation. When you read the whole of the Daniel story, we get an insight into Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was a man who was overwhelmed by greatness, but primarily he was overwhelmed by his own greatness. But obviously something has changed.

His perspective has altered because now he's using great, not as a self-description, but he's using great as a description of this most high God.

Singular. That there is a God who is the most high, the highest, the most powerful, the one who has, who does wonders, the one whose kingdom has no end, and the one whose dominion endures from generation to generation.

[18:36] So God is in the story and God is above the story that Nebuchadnezzar has a story to tell of which he is a character, but that he is not the main character.

Now, this is difficult sometimes for us to grasp, that we are not the center of this world, we are not the center of this universe, that we are not the center of this story.

We're all part of this story, 7.4 billion people on this planet, each one of us is part of the story, but not any one of us is the center of the story.

I was reading a book recently, it's called Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer, and in that there was an illustration that there was a children's birthday party and a lot of five-year-old kids were invited, and everybody was singing and blowing out candles, presents were being given, a great time was had by all, but one of the five-year-olds was crying, and the host's parents said, what's wrong, why are you so upset?

He said, I don't have a cake, and nobody's giving me presents. Well, the parent tried to explain this to the kids, saying, but it's not your party.

[19 : 53] You know, you're at the party, but it's not your party. Now, Nebuchadnezzar thought it was his party. He thought he was the center of everybody's attention, but he came to realize that he was part of the party, not the center of the party, and he comes to tell us that we are not the center of our lives, but that God is the center of this world, and that we are to revolve around him rather than him revolve around us.

Two other technical words that you might find helpful. What we see here is that God is in the story, he's part of the story, but that God is above the story. Now, theologians will tell you that this means that God is imminent.

Remember that word that we use to describe Jesus from Isaiah, Emmanuel, God with us, that God is in the story, but God is also transcendent, that he exists above and over the story.

He has no beginning, he has no end, he has no start, he has no finish, whereas Nebuchadnezzar had a start, and Nebuchadnezzar had a finish. So if you were there in the 6th century BC, you would have known who Nebuchadnezzar was.

Here in the 21st century, weeks could go by where you never even give a thought to Nebuchadnezzar. He's faded into obscurity. So we want to say that God is in, and God is above.

[21 : 15] And fourth, I want you to notice this, that Nebuchadnezzar now knows the score. He now knows God. He may have known something about God.

He may have known something about Daniel. He may have known something about the various gods and the various deities that existed in his vast empire. He had some previous connection with God.

You'll see that in Daniel 3. But now he knows him. He now knows who this God is. And there's a huge difference between knowing about and knowing. The Bible invites us to have a personal relationship with a personal, powerful, almighty, ever-present, all-knowing God.

So it's not just a series of facts. It's not just a series of figures. It's not just a body of data that you come to know. But we have the opportunity, like Nebuchadnezzar, to have a personal, powerful encounter with this God.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar learned certain lessons the hard way, that he was warned. He had a dream. It troubled him. Daniel, the man of God, came and interpreted that dream and told him, Nebuchadnezzar, I'm frightened.

[22 : 29] I'm frightened because the dream is not about your enemies, but the dream is about you. And unless you mend your ways, unless you turn from your sin, unless you acknowledge God, if you continue on the path, the destruction that you see in your dream will be your destruction.

So Nebuchadnezzar heard, Nebuchadnezzar was warned, and Nebuchadnezzar ultimately decided to ignore the warning. He decided to carry on.

And then one day, he was admiring his great city, all that he had done, and all that he had made, and how high and how great and how mighty he was.

And then God, in his power, God in his promise, brought this big man low, brought this high man to a low position.

And we see what God does. We see the power that God has, and we realize that this man, Nebuchadnezzar, is not self-sufficient.

[23 : 39] He is not self-existent. He has nothing in and of himself, because when his power was removed, when his sanity was removed, he was like one of those animals who was grazing under the tree.

He had no power. He had no strength. He had no authority. He had no prestige. He was humbled and brought low. But our God is a merciful God, a gracious God, so he warns us.

He warns us when we're in danger, but he also is able to restore us. When we've ignored the warnings, when we've gone too far, when we strayed too far, when we ignore the warnings, he can restore us.

He can renew us. So you see, Nebuchadnezzar thought that he had it all, thought that he was the center of the story, that he was the top of the tree. And God says, well, you're no longer at the top of the tree.

You're now under the tree. You're now at the grass level. So what can we learn? How can we apply the lessons of this big passage to our individual circumstances?

[24 : 40] Let me give you four things to think about. First of all, this passage points us, and this truth points us inexorably beyond this story, because it points us to the one called Jesus.

Because if God is self-existent, that means he has no beginning. He has no start. He has no, there was no time where he was not. Listen to the words of John chapter one, verse one.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

There is no one in human history of which that verse can be said. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that was made, has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

That there is a characteristic that belongs to God, that belongs to Jesus, that he is life. He's not just a living God. He's not just the living Savior, but he's life itself. So Jesus can say, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[25 : 45] No one comes to the Father except through me. So we are pointed to the person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, we are pointed to one of the key principles of Jesus' kingdom.

You see, Jesus has a way of bringing high people low and low people high. He told a parable, and he had a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

He said, to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, God, I thank you. I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God for everyone who exalts himself.

[26 : 52] Nebuchadnezzar, you exalted yourself. Nebuchadnezzar, you put yourself on a high place. Whoever, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

So what happens when Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself? He was humbled. What happened when he humbled himself? He was exalted. He was restored. He was put back into his position.

But he recognized that the Most High God is the God. And finally, I'd like you to notice this. We not only are pointed to the person of Jesus and the key principle of his kingdom, but we are also reminded that the kingdom of Jesus needs to be proclaimed.

Now, God does not need us. God does not rely upon us. We don't make him whole, but he, in his mercy, mercy and in his grace, he uses us.

He used Nebuchadnezzar as a spokesman in the 6th century BC to tell the known world about the Most High God, the King of Heaven. And he used you and me in the 21st century to make Jesus known to others.

[28 : 04] At the very beginning of John's Gospel, I read from John 1, verses 1 to 4. Listen to this word of testimony, which we find later in John 1, verse 14.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him.

He cries out, saying, This was he of whom I have said. He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Nebuchadnezzar testifies to the Most High. The apostle John and John the Baptist testified to Jesus. And you and I, we can give our own account.

[29 : 03] We can't give Nebuchadnezzar's account. We can't give the accounts of the disciples or the apostles, but you can give your story. If you have indeed met with this Most High God, if you have indeed been brought low and then exalted, if you indeed have come to know him and want to share that knowledge with others, Nebuchadnezzar's life was transformed by the power of God and by the grace of God.

This God who has no beginning and has no end, this God who is contingent upon nothing and no one, he encountered this God and he wanted to tell others about him.

Have you encountered this God? Have you encountered his son? And have you now been given a testimony to tell? You might not have the whole world as your audience as Nebuchadnezzar had. You might not write one of the gospel accounts as John the apostle has, but you have your own audience, you have your own circle of friends, you have your own family, and you have your own story about the grace of God, the Most High God, who is powerful and personal and who has worked in your life to work through your life.

So may God bless to us this great truth that our God is self-existent. No beginning, no end, no start, no finish. All sufficient, all powerful, all present in time and in eternity.

[30 : 31] And we together tonight, we have had the opportunity of encountering him, encountering him in worship, encountering him in prayer, encountering him in his word.

And he wants us to take that encounter and to take that message to others so that they too can encounter the Most High God who is incomparable, who is one of a kind.