

Daniel 4

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[0 : 00] Let me add my word of welcome to each and every one of you. made your way here to the house of the Lord this morning. It's good to see you and to have you here.

As we continue in our series, Daniel, at home in Babylon. Once upon a time, in a faraway land, the young prince lived in a shining castle.

Although he had everything his heart desired, wealth, beauty, and power, the prince was spoiled, selfish, and unkind.

But then one winter's night, an old beggar woman came to the castle and offered him a single rose in return for shelter from the bitter cold.

Repulsed by her haggard appearance, the prince sneered the gift and turned the old woman away. She warned him not to be deceived by appearances, but he dismissed her again.

[1 : 13] And in an instant, his world was turned upside down. As punishment for his arrogance, a curse turned him into the very thing he had become on the inside.

A hideous beast. And in that condition, he would remain unless and until he learned humility and love.

Many of you, especially some of our young people, may be familiar with this story, as this is a part of the actual opening monologue of the Disney classic fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast.

We have something similar here this morning in Daniel chapter 4. In the book of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar is the greatest king on earth, living his own version of beauty and the beast.

Arrogant, self-centered, intoxicated by his own success and his power seemingly untouchable. As you heard in our scripture reading this morning, he stands on the rooftop of his palace and says, Is not this the great Babylon that I have built by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?

[2 : 36] Unfortunately, this is no fairy tale. And this king will soon learn that every kingdom, even his, belongs to God.

In our text this morning, God sends a dream, a warning, and eventually an humbling that will turn a king into a creature, a palace into a pasture, and render a timeless lesson for all of us that sometimes down is the way up.

That's my thought this morning. Beyond what happens in the fairy tale, Daniel 4 will give us a real-life reminder through this king's story that pride deforms us.

Humility transforms us. Grace restores us. And down is the way up. Grace restores us.

This chapter is like a movie that shows the shocking ending, then backs up and shows how the story arrived at this surprising conclusion.

[3 : 59] In this initial first-person account, the king here is really giving in writing his personal testimony to the entire nation.

I grew up in a church that had testimony service on Sunday nights where the saints would get up and tell of the goodness of God in their lives.

Brother Milton, they would all start with first giving honor to God, who's the head of my life. Pastors, saints, and friends.

Here, starting in verses 2 and 3, King Nebuchadnezzar begins his testimony by saying, Let me tell you what the Most High God has done for me.

How great are his signs. How mighty his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And his dominion endures from generation to generation.

[5 : 02] Let me quickly mark here that this part of Nebuchadnezzar's testimony is really the main idea of the entire book of Daniel.

God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And his rule will endure forever. I can see the king continuing with his testimony by saying, Now all of that I just said, I didn't always fully believe.

In fact, it took me a while to get there. Don't judge me. It took some of you a while as well. You don't know my story.

In order for you to understand, I need to take you back a few years and describe my journey. It all started, verse 4, When I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.

This leads me to just three points I'd like to lift this morning from our text. First is pride's problem. Then pride's punishment.

[6 : 23] And lastly, pride's prescription. Pride's problem, punishment, and prescription. We begin with pride's problem, which really encompasses the bulk of our text.

Here's the first problem with pride. Despite the warnings and signs and evidence, despite what you see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears, pride makes you think that the rules don't apply to you.

King, starting in verse 5, has an incredible dream. Now, if you've been following along in our series, it's important to remind you that this is not Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, nor is it his first encounter with God.

In fact, his previous encounters have actually caused him to develop some pretty good theology. The problem is that his good theology does not go to his heart.

You've probably heard that the longest 18 inches in all the world is from here to here. After the first dream that Daniel interprets for him, he knows that the Most High God reveals secrets.

[7 : 45] Daniel chapter 2, verse 47. The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly, your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, a revealer of mysteries.

He recognizes all that about Daniel's God, and then at the end of chapter 3, you heard about it last week, after the three Hebrew boys come out of the burning, fiery furnace, smelling like a rose.

The king declares in verse 28, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel, delivered his servants, who trusted in him.

I make a decree, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against their God shall be torn limb from limb, their houses laid in ruin, for there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way.

That sounds pretty good. Do you see what Nebuchadnezzar has learned? Your God is mighty. Your God is able to rescue.

[8 : 49] Your God is a king over lords and a lord over kings. He has some decent theology. But while he recognizes that God rules, he has not yet realized that God rules over him.

And down is the way up. It might be so for some of us. Lots of true statements of faith.

Lots of orthodox confession. And yet, if we're honest about the throne of our own hearts, it's still us sitting there.

Maybe we'll get up and vacate the throne for a few hours on Sunday morning, but it's still where we reign and rule.

This king's good theology has not gone from his head down to his heart. It has not become his personal profession, faith.

[9 : 52] So now this king has this amazing dream, and this dream scares the living daylights out of him. In verses 5 through 27, the king describes this vision that basically has two distinct parts.

First, the king saw a vast tree with leaves and branches stretching as far as the eye could see. Birds nested in the branches, and animals found shade and food under its leaves.

Second, the tree was cut down, stripped of its leaves and fruit, and the stump of the tree is bound with iron and bronze.

Then somehow, this stump becomes a person who loses his mind and lives among the animals for what most believe seven years.

The king intuitively realized that this dream contained an important message he needed to know. But no one in his kingdom could explain it to him. His wise men utterly failed.

[11 : 01] They had no clue as to what it meant. Then king calls for good old, faithful, consistent Daniel. Daniel who possessed, according to him, the spirit of the holy gods.

Daniel, can you interpret this dream for me? I love this. Daniel is so bold and forthright. The king had asked for an interpretation, not counsel, but Daniel gives him both.

His loyalty to the king and his royal role as God's messenger compelled him to use this opportunity to speak the truth.

Think about the courage of Daniel. This slave who speaks truth to the most powerful man in the world.

A man with a notorious temper. You do recall he threw his three friends into the burning, fiery furnace. Yet Daniel stood firm.

[12 : 08] What an example for us. Don't let fear of man silence you when you should speak. Standing on the truth of God's word can strengthen you to courageously be the voice of wisdom.

Is there a situation in your life you've been afraid to speak into? Is God calling you to speak up and say what needs to be said? Then follow Daniel's example.

When Daniel heard the king's dream, he knew exactly what it meant. He stood silently for a moment. Not wanting to have to tell the king the awful truth, but he knew he had to.

He finally says at the bottom of verse 19, my Lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and the interpretation for your enemies. In other words, I know what this means and I wish it was for somebody else, anybody else.

After summarizing the first part of the dream, Daniel comes to the bottom line in verse 22. You, O king, are that tree.

[13 : 19] He goes on to say that God had ordained that the king will become like a beast of the field. You shall be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beast of the field.

You shall be made to eat grass like an ox. You shall be wet with the dew of heaven and seven periods of time shall pass over you till you know that the most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Notice how Daniel cares for Nebuchadnezzar and tries to counsel him and warn him. Starting in verse 27, he says, O king, would you please listen to me?

I'm trying to tell you that it's you, Nebuchadnezzar. You are the great one that's about to be cut down. You're going to become a beast in the field. But perhaps God will have mercy on you if you repent and turn while you still have time.

God was waiting, but soon the wait would be over. Is it possible? God has been waiting on you.

[14 : 35] Days, weeks, months, years. He's warned you. You've seen it in the scriptures. You've heard it proclaimed from the pulpit. People have given you the counsel to turn from your ways.

Or perhaps your own conscience has been gnawing at you. Will you hear the warnings? Today is a great day to give your life, Christ.

Maybe it's people you love who have been given these warnings from the Lord again and again. But you know the road is coming to an end.

And they just don't believe it. Again, one of the problems with pride is that the proud man never imagines that he is the problem.

He never thinks the rules apply to him. He can't see that down is the way up.

[15 : 36] This was Nebuchadnezzar. He does not consider the warnings. That was an interesting message. Daniel, scary dream.

Thanks for that interpretation. I'll consider it and I'll try to tighten up. But church, please notice in verse 29 this marker at the end of 12 months.

God waited for 12 months. Maybe during that time, the king did tighten up for a while. Maybe he did try to walk the straight and narrow for a while. But somewhere, he went back to believing that it was all just a bad dream.

Maybe this was a fairy tale. Nothing's going to happen. My kingdom is secure. Until it wasn't.

That leads us to the next devastating problem with pride. And it happens quickly in just one sentence in verse 30. The king answered as he's walking on the roof of his royal palace.

[16 : 42] Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty? Here's the problem. Nebuchadnezzar mistook God's handiwork for his own.

Has anybody ever had someone take credit for your work? Or for something you did?

Several years ago, I was asked to judge this national choir showcase. Now, at that time, as an artist, Brother Hackley, I, along with the choir, had a pretty popular, well-known song at that time called Stir Up the Gift.

So, we're watching choirs and judging all these choirs. And one group comes out and their director has something to say before they sing. And he says, this afternoon, we'd like to sing a song for you that God woke me up and gave me at 3 o'clock one morning.

God wouldn't let me go back to sleep until I had completely finished this song. God.

[18 : 08] And I pray that it encourages you as much as it encouraged me when I wrote it. And as much as it encourages all of us when we sing it.

The name of this song is Stir Up the Gift. I said, uh, huh. Well, I guess there are songs that have the same title.

So, no big deal. They started singing. And right from the introduction, I knew they were singing my song.

And claiming it was theirs right in my face. I let them finish.

I did. Then I asked the director, uh, when did you say you wrote that song? He said, uh, just a couple of months ago.

[19 : 20] I said, uh, so what if I told you that I wrote the exact same song over a year ago?

And it's been on the radio for months. What would you say to that? The director said, I would say that God is truly amazing.

The fact that he would give both of us the exact same song.

And I said, you better stop telling people that.

Or soon you will meet my truly amazing attorney. It wasn't that they were singing the song.

[20 : 23] That was great. It was the fact that they were boldly taking credit for something that wasn't theirs. Here with the king, no doubt what he saw when he made the statement was indeed impressive.

Historians tell us that the palace had large courts and reception rooms and a throne room with numerous residences and large structures with water supplies for trees and plants.

You may know that the hanging gardens of Babylon were considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. By one estimate, there were more than 15 million bricks surrounding the edifices in Babylon.

And every brick had the king's name on it. But the Bible warns us about thinking that what we have or where we are is because of something we did.

Because of how smart we are, connected we are, or cute we are, or hardworking we are. We must not forget where it all comes from and who it all belongs to.

[21 : 39] We must recognize, even with our little successes in life, that behind those successes is the grace and the wise and sweet providence of God.

We had to be at the right place at the right time, and God had to give favor to the right people for the right doors to be opened for us.

You have a good job, give glory to God. You have a happy family, thank God for his blessings. If you've achieved something significant, acknowledge it was due to the abilities, gifts, and talents God gave you.

Nebuchadnezzar made the mistake, looking out at Babylon and thinking, I did that. Look back at verse 30 again.

Look at the nouns and the pronouns. Is this not great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power for the glory of my majesty?

[22 : 48] I, me, my. Don't let that summarize your view of life. The psalmist says, unless the Lord builds the house, they who build it labor in vain.

He mistook God's handiwork for his own. Now comes pride's punishment. God had finally had enough.

Verse 31 says, while those arrogant words were still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven and reminded him of Daniel's interpretation of the dream, and immediately the word was fulfilled.

There were no more warnings. When Nebuchadnezzar refused to change his ways, God took the king's hubris and showed him a dose of humility.

Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal. He was driven from men. They put him out of the palace, and he ends up just living outdoors, exposed to all the elements and covered in dew.

- [24 : 04] He doesn't bathe. He doesn't keep himself groomed. His hair just grows like the feathers of an eagle, and his fingernails no more royal manicures.
- They just become like claws. He takes on this persona of a beast, literally eating grass like oxen.
- What happened here? I'll tell you what happened. He loses his mind. He goes truly insane. Doctors speculate that Nebuchadnezzar was afflicted, a psychological condition called boanthropy, which is a disease in which the sufferer believes he is a cow or an ox.
- My wife did tell me once that I was going to turn into a chicken because I ate so much of it.
- Whatever the scientific explanations are, God's hand was clearly behind this affliction to accomplish his purposes and demonstrate his sovereign power.
- [25 : 19] This is all that's said about these seven years of insanity. One moment, he's surveying his royal kingdom, and the next, he's ripping off his clothing, making strange noises, and galloping on all fours down Main Street Babylon.
- He's going to turn into a man. Totally naked and start raving mad, losing all connection with reality. My, how the king has fallen.
- Now, be careful, because while we may point and lament Nebuchadnezzar's predicament and declare how tragic his situation is, the truth is, we've all suffered from some form of Nebuchadnezzar syndrome at some point in our lives.
- We've all had to grapple with pride that caused us to act and look out of character, not like ourselves, giving ourselves more credit than we were due, becoming selfish and self-absorbed.
- We've all had low moments in our lives where God has had to humble us. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn what every one of us must learn, that God will not share his glory.
- [26 : 51] He can bless us. He can raise us. He can use us. But when pride begins to whisper, when we start believing that the strength of our hand has done it, God in his mercy will remind us who is in control.
- Matthew 23, verse 12, Jesus says, For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. How do you view your life in the world?
- My glory or God's glory? My rules or God's rules? My deserving or God's blessing? James 4, verse 6, God resists the proud like this punishment.
- But God And now he has been exalted to the right hand of the Father.
- And in our union with him by faith, we are exalted with him. As for Nebuchadnezzar, in verse 34, the scripture says, At the end of the days, meaning at the end of God's appointed time of judgment, the king's life took another dramatic turn.
- [28 : 22] It took another dramatic turn. The king, somewhere out in the pasture, somewhere while he was hanging out with the animals, this king somehow found grace in the grass.
- Yeah, grace in the grass. I'm, I'm, I'm about to close. I promise I am. The king found grace in the grass.
- He discovered pride's prescription. Dr. Meeks, this prescription manifested itself in just three ways.
- I'm, I'm shutting down. It manifested itself in three ways. While he found grace in the grass, he looked up. He woke up.
- And then he spoke up. Uh-huh. He, he looked up. He, Lord help me. He looked up. He lifted his eyes towards heaven.

[29 : 41] It is only then that you can truly see who God is and who you really are. Nebuchadnezzar could only see the truth about himself when he first saw the truth about God.

He looked up. Once he saw who he really was, realized that he once was blind, but now he sees, he woke up. It's all in verse 34.

His reason returned to him. He came to his senses. I must have been out of my mind to think that I in any way could compare to the great, glorious God of the universe.

After he came to himself and he woke up, he spoke up. It's in the, it's in the, I blessed the most high and praised and honored him who lives forever.

Now my converted to praise, my wilderness wandering has been turned to worship. I've learned the truth the hard way, and I've got a testimony to tell you.

[30 : 46] You want to hear the testimony? Here it is. Here it goes. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. He is the king of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just.

And let me tell you, from personal experience, those who walk in pride, he is able to humble. That's the singular lesson Nebuchadnezzar needed to learn.

Not just that the most high was a great God, but he is the only God. God over Babylon, God over your house, God over your life, God over your children, God over your money, God over your job, God over your education.

He's God over everything. Now watch this just for good measure. You have to catch verse 36. Not only was the king humbled, lifted, and restored, but verse 36 says, And still more greatness was added to me.

You all just missed your opportunity to shout right there. Shout, shout, shout. And still more greatness was added to me.

[32 : 10] He was brought low, then brought back better than he was before. What a mighty God we serve.

Church, this is no Disney movie. Maybe God has allowed you to be brought low.

Maybe your plans have fallen apart. Your pride has been wounded. Your strength has run out. Don't despise that season because now you know that down really is the way up.

The lower you bow, the higher he lifts. The more you surrender, the stronger you become. When you come to the end of you, you will find yourself again in him.

When you look up from your lowest place, grace is already there, waiting, ready to restore. Don't hang your head.

[33 : 17] Lift your eyes to the hills from what cometh your help. Your help comes from the Lord. And remember in God's everlasting kingdom, down is really the way up.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your grace that keeps us and sustains us and covers us. Thank you for continuing to teach us that all we have belongs to you and comes from you.

Thank you for using us for your glory. And may we always remember that you give grace to the humble.

May we walk in humility, realizing that down is the way up. And at the appointed time, you will lift us to where you want us to be.

Father, keep us low so that you can always be lifted high. We give you praise, glory, and honor.

[34 : 36] In your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Before us this morning is...