

A Babylonian Rollercoaster

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[0 : 00] Well, I hope you like long Bible readings. They're good, aren't they? Welcome to Holy Trinity Doncaster Temptation Quiz Show.

I mean, in thinking about this as sort of a Monday night temptation, I'd kind of feel more in the groove, if you like, if Lavinia Nixon was up here with me. But no. We're in the last round. It's about 7.20 on a Monday night. And we're up to that little segment, Who Am I? So what I want you to do is when you recognise the person who has made the following statements, the following quotes, can you stick your hand up and leave your hand up?

When you're as great as I am, it's hard to be humble. It's not bragging if you can back it up. I'm so fast that last night I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and was in bed before the room was dark.

Okay, we've got one tentative hand. Someone else wiping their chin. Joe Fraser is so ugly that he should donate his face to the US Bureau of Wildlife.

[1 : 14] Still time for more. I'll be floating like a butterfly and still the hands are rising, stinging like a bee. I am the greatest.

I said that even before I knew I was. I'm not the greatest. I'm the double greatest. Not only do I knock them out, I pick the round.

Okay, Jenny. Muhammad Ali. Muhammad Ali, heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

Muhammad Ali, previously known as Cassius Clay, loudmouthed, prized, heavyweight fighter, who made headlines during his heyday for his outrageous behaviour both inside and outside the boxing ring.

He also recited poetry and he yammered on incessantly about how pretty he was and how great he was. In fact, he was such big news that Columbia Records, for some of the younger ones, you've probably won't have heard of Columbia Records, it's been taken over four, five, ten times, it's probably Sonny now, but Columbia Records actually issued this record, that's the record cover of Cassius Clay's poetry.

Now Jenny was the first hand, anyone remember the second hand up? I know Paul was about three or four. Phil, was it? Well, listen, the first prize, Jenny.

[2 : 36] This is an exciting weekend in an overseas country, an overseas country which in fact was the centre of the Babylonian kingdom in the 6th century BC.

You'll be staying in fact in the capital of modern day Iraq, at the Baghdad Hilton. Limousine service all the way, well, personnel carrier, action-packed, guaranteed.

Phil, second prize. Four weeks at the Baghdad. Much of Ali's sounding off was part of his showmanship, but his line about being the greatest was repeated so many times that pride seemed to literally ooze out of every one of his words and actions in his heyday.

So let me ask you as we start, how would you define pride? How would you define it? I mean, is it just as simple as being arrogant? Let me give you a simple, perhaps working definition of pride. It's simply seeing every one of our achievements, our status, our possessions, as simply because of us, because of me.

[3 : 55] It's seeing every one of our achievements, our status, our possessions, as the sole result, as the sole fruit of things like our cleverness, our own hard work, our great body, our great mind, perhaps the pedigree of our family bloodline.

See, pride simply fails to see that everything we have is God's gracious gift to us. Pride, if you like, it puts ourselves up on the throne.

In doing that, it seeks to actually take everyone else off the throne. And especially God. Let me ask you this as well.

Guess the percentage of senior business executives who have a high net worth. This would be something like more than US \$1 million, excluding their family home. So what would be the percentage of such executives who credit their current financial status to their own intelligence and their own good sense?

94, I hear. Any other number? 99? Somewhere between the two. 97% in a business magazine polled, they credit their success to their own intelligence and good sense.

[5 : 23] But you might say to that, well, yeah, but of course, what else would you expect from senior executives? Friends, pride is a universal disease.

It affects the whole human race. You see, if we have not turned back to God, if we haven't repented of our sense of self-sufficiency, if we haven't repented of our rebellion to God the King, then we simply, we put our ultimate confidence in ourselves and not in the living God.

And when we do that, we can simply regard that as pride. Pride's seen in old people, it's seen in young people, it's seen in rich people, and it's seen in poor people.

Of course, the specific exhibitions, if you like, of pride vary from person to person. I'm just trying to think with the junior youth, have you heard of Courtney Love?

Heard of Courtney Love? I know the senior youth have heard of Courtney Love, the so-called rock star. Well, Courtney isn't used to waiting in line. She's used to the fame that came from her marriage to the megastar Kurt Cobain of the rock band Nirvana, who tragically committed suicide in 1994.

[6 : 47] Courtney's used to the front cover of Rolling Stone magazine and the wealth that has come with her multi-platinum selling albums. Courtney's used to the black-stretched limousines.

In fact, one dropped her off in front of the Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City, where she placed charges of disorderly conduct for hitting one of her friends, one of her fans with a microphone stand.

Lovely girl, Courtney. But Courtney isn't used to what the security guard said to her when he didn't let her bypass the long line leading into the courthouse to go through the metal detector.

She said to the reporter on the scene, the guy wants me to stand in the line with everyone else. I'm not everyone else. At the end of 12 months, King Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.

And the king said, is this not magnificent Babylon which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?

[8 : 00] Does that sound like pride to you? Pride. Pride, big time. This is the ruler of the greatest willpower in the 6th century BC.

Big Neb. The ones who've been here, they know him by that name. Big Neb. Verses 4 to 6. If you turn with me to page 720. Verses 4 to 8, in fact.

Put your feet up. Oops. Nebuchadnezzar was living at ease in my home and prospering in my... Nebuchadnezzar was living at ease in my home and prospering in my palace. Ah, yes. The good life. You can just about feel it, can't you? I mean, perhaps Big Neb was in a jacuzzi and he said, oh, just move that nozzle a little bit.

Oh, that's good. Boy, I really am successful. I mean, I have made it. I have made it. But he seems to have had a memory lapse. There's no mention of God.

[9 : 03] It's a bit surprising, isn't it, for those who've been following through the early chapters of the book. I mean, remember twice before his conscience has been pricked back in chapter 2, verse 47, the king said to Daniel after he knew the content of the dream and interpreted, this is what he said, truly your God is God of gods and the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries for you've been able to reveal this mystery.

And what about last week? After the three boys were miraculously protected and saved in the furnace. Chapter 3, verse 29. Nebuchadnezzar says, Therefore I make a decree, any people, nation or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins for there is no other God who is able to deliver in this way.

I mean, now in chapter 4, Big Neb seems to have taken those sort of wrap-around sunglasses with a big sticker on the sign, you know, I'm the greatest. And like so many people, he's simply got that at you, I'm secure.

I mean, just simply look at what I've got, of course I'm secure. it's a deadly mistake.

Nebuchadnezzar is on what I've called a Babylonian rollercoaster.

You see, it's a bit like, hmm, that's pretty interesting. God must be real. But at another time, who cares about God?

[10:37] I mean, I'm just simply busy doing my own thing. The ups and downs of a rollercoaster. Friends, we're in great danger if our hearts have been stirred by the Holy Spirit when we've been convicted that we're not right with God and then we don't submit to the living God, to our Creator.

You see, stirred, but no submission. It's a very, very dangerous predicament. At a purely human level, certainly King Nebuchadnezzar was very secure.

He had a massive army at his disposal and the capital city, Babylon, was most fortified. But God penetrates the security of the Babylonian capital like no enemy could.

He pierces the walls of big Neb's palace and he breaks into the king's sleep. I saw a dream that frightened me.

My fantasies in bed and the visions of my head terrified me. He's got good reason to be frightened because this is a vision of destruction.

[12:05] So, did big Neb turn to Daniel, the only one in the kingdom who was able to know the content and the interpretation of the dream back in chapter 2?

No way. What does he do, the king? Bring in the astrologers, bring in the magicians. But, did they prove to be any better than their abysmal failure earlier?

No better. Look at the end of verse 7. The king himself says, but they couldn't tell me its interpretation. Does the pure nonsense of astrology stop people from reading it?

I mean, in just about every popular magazine and every newspaper, there's an astrology section, isn't there? Well, if you're here tonight and you're born between the 21st of April and the 21st of May, then the Age Good Weekend this weekend has some penetrating insights for you in the week ahead.

Are you ready for them? Prepare to farewell a friend, a pet or another cherished aspect of your life. You see, today's Venus and Saturn copula signals a sad but inevitable odour to someone or something you love.

[13:34] Chin up. Chin up. Give me a waste paper thing. Big Neb was a practical atheist.

You see, he had actually seen firsthand the power and the revelation of God. But he just continued to live his life as if the living God did not exist.

Finally, we read in verse 8, At last Daniel came in before me, he who was named Belteshazzar, after the name of my God, who was endowed with the spirit of the holy gods.

And I told him the dream. See, Big Neb, he was a polytheist. Okay, June, you can grab that word, just means he had lots of gods. And so, what did he do?

He just sort of tried to jam Daniel's God in there amongst the rest of them. Big Neb turns to Daniel's God as a last resort.

[14:40] Daniel's name actually means God is my judge. And as Daniel comes in, judgment comes with him. The general thrust of this dream should have been pretty clear to even astrologists and certainly to Big Neb.

Pretty clear that there was doom and destruction waiting. Verses 19 to 27.

But I thought that I was a big deal. there are two accounts of the dream. 8 to 18, the king recounts it and then 19 to 27, Daniel interprets the dream.

Verse 19, then Daniel who was called Belshazzar was severely distressed for a while. His thoughts terrified him. I mean, this is one of the classic confrontations in scripture.

Imagine the scene. Here's Daniel. He's standing before his captor. this man is the world ruler. He's a despot who's taken Daniel to a foreign land.

[15:48] He's given him a new name. This is the king who would execute his counselors if their dreaming know-how wasn't the best.

This is the king who threw those who upset him into an incredibly hot furnace. man so if you were Daniel, how would you be feeling standing before him ready to tell him the dream?

Big Neb could have easily thrown another wobbly, couldn't he? But Daniel knows from God's revelation to him that the dream speaks of impending destruction.

It's interesting, though. I mean, it's fascinating that Daniel cared enough about this man, this ruling world king, cared enough about him to have compassion on him, to actually fear for his future.

And I think that's just the most tremendous model of us being in the world, but not of the world. God. See, Daniel was completely faithful to his God and at the same time, completely faithful to his king.

[17:09] It's a great model. Verse 20, The tree that you saw, which grew great and strong so that its top reached to heaven and was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant and which provided food for all, under which animals of the field lived and in whose branches the birds of their head nest, it is you, O king.

You have grown great and strong, your greatness has increased, it reaches to heaven and your sovereignty to the ends of the earth. You see, friends, the central element of the dream, the cosmic tree, was a reflection of Big Neb's self-image.

In chapter three, remember, we saw Big Neb kidding himself, deluding himself, that he was the centre of the universe. Verse 23, and whereas the king saw a holy watcher coming down from heaven and saying, cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the ground with a band of iron and bronze in the grass of the field and let him be bait with the Jew of heaven, let his lot be with the animals of the field until seven times pass over him.

Big Neb is a proud, proud man. God's judgment on him is that he'll live like an animal.

The king wanted the whole world to bow down before him. Friends, that's insanity. reality is all sin is insanity.

[18:58] It's like raising our puny little fists to our creator, our creator, our wise, holy and gracious God. The essence of sin is simply that each one of us think that we are the centre of the universe.

And when you think about it, nothing is actually more bizarre than sin. I mean, declaring autonomy against our creator, disregarding his totally wise counsel as to how we should live our lives.

I mean, of course he's the one who knows what's best for us. He actually made us. Verse 26, as it was commanded to leave the stump and the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be re-established for you from the time that you learn that heaven is sovereign.

Big Neb, Bob, Ted, Alice, Mary, everyone, all of us must acknowledge that heaven rules and bow our knee before the sovereign king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 27, God of interesting, Daniel offers the king something that he hadn't been asked for. He gives him advice, repent, seek righteousness, show mercy to the oppressed.

[20:33] You see, Big Neb needed to turn from his idolatry to serve God and his eternal kingdom. remember that kingdom back in chapter 2?

The rock not made with human hands, it would grow and fill the earth. Well, did Big Neb listen? God graciously gives this man a whole year to heed his warning?

Did Big Neb take any notice of God's warning? Did he take any notice of it? Do we heed God's warnings in our own lives?

To repent of our sin, to live lives that honour the Lord Jesus? The king's head was swollen with self-worship. At the end of 12 months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon and the king said, is this not magnificent Babylon which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?

[21:57] See, Babylon contained two of the ancient world's seven wonders, the hanging gardens and just these extraordinary city walls which I think historians say you could actually drive, I don't know whether it was one or multiple chariots, around these walls.

Big Neb would have fitted pretty easily, wouldn't he, into the 21st century? In love with himself, in love with his achievements, and his self-love, his pride, had blinded him to the reality that all of his achievements were only because God had given him the power and had given him the authority. And tragically, there are many of our school and college friends, our work colleagues, extended family friends, who, just like Big Ned, presume on God's patience.

And it is a terrible, terrible error of judgment for any of us to make. Verse 31, While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared, the kingdom has departed from you, you shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field, you shall be made to eat grass like oxen, and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives it to whom he will.

Friends, that's exactly what happened. He was reduced to insanity, eating, and behaving like an animal.

[23 : 54] God's judgment struck him that suddenly. I think it's probably one of the most graphic incidents that's recorded in all of scripture.

And the insanity of King Nebuchadnezzar highlights the madness, the sheer madness, sin and pride. He was reduced to an animal existence.

See, the reality was that actually, before God, that's exactly how King Nebuchadnezzar had been living his life, like a beast, disregarding, ignoring the living God, failing to take a holy and a righteous God seriously, failing to realize that God's spirit will not always strive with us.

So what did the Lord do? He gave him over to his beast-like inner instincts. God judged him by letting him go.

That's the stark warning in the first chapter of Romans in the New Testament. for anyone who worships anything other than the living God. And Jesus' words ring out to us, all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

[25 : 30] Or verses 34 to 37. Yep. Big nebs seen the light. at the end of the allotted time, back in verse 25 it speaks of this seven times.

And that likely refers to the complete period that was fixed by God's decree. Verse 34, I, Nebuchadnezzar, I lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me.

We actually are not told what brought about the moment when Big Neb lifted his eyes to heaven. but I want you to notice carefully the steps.

He lifts his eyes to heaven and acknowledges the sovereign rule of God. Instead of, if you like, looking down the Babylonian kingdom with sinful pride.

That's the first step. Secondly, his reason returned to him. Of course, living as a sinner outside of relationship with Jesus Christ, each of us, actually have twisted reasoning.

[26 : 38] We see the world wrongly. We don't see it through God's eyes. It is God who is the author of rational thinking and living.

That's the second step. His reason returned to him. Thirdly, verse 34, he praised God. Great verse. You see, now it was Big Neb, who was the one who was bowing, before the real king of heaven and earth.

I think this is just the most fantastic turnaround, and what a great privilege to share this chapter with you tonight. And that turnaround is just as fantastic for all, indeed, for anyone who repents of their sin and submits to Jesus Christ as their saviour and lord.

God showed great mercy to King Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 36, At that time, my reason returned to me, my majesty and splendour were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom.

My counsellors and my lord sought me out. I was re-established over my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. The king of Babylon had learnt the most important lesson of all, and that's what he wanted to share.

[28 : 10] So now, let's look at how the chapter began. Verse 1, King Nebuchadnezzar, to all peoples, nations, and languages that live throughout the earth, may you have abundant prosperity.

The signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me, I'm pleased to recount. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders, his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his sovereignty is from generation to generation.

What a great confession. What a tremendous testimony, a tremendous testimony of a reformed man. And this is a worldwide announcement.

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders, his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his sovereignty is from generation to generation.

Friends, that's my testimony. And I pray that it's a testimony for each one who's here tonight. From the youngest one here tonight, to the oldest.

[29 : 24] Now I never, there's a praise and extol and honour the king of heaven, for all his works are truth, all his ways are justice, and he is able to bring low those who walk in pride.

If you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then don't be surprised if you find yourself at the banquet table in glory, sharing the marriage supper of the lamb with big Neb.

And I'm sure we'll have many amazing conversations in the new heaven and the new earth. But most amazing of all, when we think of that reality, that future reality, is that we'll be in the presence of the living God, in the presence of the lamb of God who died on the cross, shed his most precious blood, gave his life as a perfect sacrifice so that we might be saved.

You see, the Lord Jesus died for people like you and for a person like me. People with deep-seated pride.

people living in active rebellion to their creator. People like you and me, that's who the Lord Jesus died for.

[30 : 59] And the God of heaven, the God of earth, is still able to bring low all who walk in pride. And so his urgent call, his gracious call, is to each one of us, to humble ourselves before him, to bow down before the Lord Jesus.

So if you're here tonight and the Lord Jesus is not your saviour and Lord, then the living God's message is just extraordinarily straightforward.

Repent, turn around from your prideful rebellion, and ask Jesus to forgive you. That is the living God's message to anyone living outside of relationship with Jesus Christ.

But what about the many who are here tonight who are followers of Jesus? People like me. Pride is a scourge in our lives.

And what I need to do, and what you need to do, is ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of pride, to confess it, and then move on with your eyes fixed firmly on the Lord Jesus.

[32 : 29] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, for all his works of truth, and all his ways of justice, and he is able to bring low those who walk in pride.

Amen. Amen.