

Faith of an "Evil" King

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[0 : 00] All right, first you could hear me, now you can't hear me, now we're back. Can you hear me okay? My crew says we're good to go. Today I want to look at what I entitled the sermon called, The Faith of an Evil King.

The Faith of an Evil King. To say that these past few weeks have been unlike any other weeks that we as a culture have ever lived, I think would primarily be an understatement.

I'm actually not sure what is of, or what is more horrifying, to be reading the editorials and the news articles that are coming out, or to not read anything at all and to be in the dark.

If you were just to take a look at several of the articles out there, you'll see articles of people saying that the government is overreacting. In other areas they'll say that the government is not reacting enough.

We'll have health advocates say, we flatten the curve, good times are ahead. And then others will say that the curve is not flattened enough, bad times are coming.

[1 : 18] And then of course we have all the conspiracy theory stories. This disease is part of the U.S. undermining China, and this disease is part of China undermining the U.S.

And then of course you have these scare articles, which state that countries have the cure, except they're hiding the cure from the populace, so that they can profit from the development of different drugs.

I think all those kind of articles are expected during uncertain times. But the biggest article that caught my attention was entitled The Spiritual Awakening of COVID-19.

The Spiritual Awakening of COVID-19. And let me define, and there's many different definitions of what an awakening is, but it is a certain way of life that you have always expected it to be.

And now that you have come across some certain truth, it's forcing you to look elsewhere.

[2 : 36] So, and it brings either fear, panic, or anxiety. Experts in the field say that there is five conditions for a spiritual awakening.

One is confronted with a certain truth that it puts us in a place where we can long for more. Or to say that where we are isn't where we want to be.

There's more over there. Or there's greener pastures. I would want to pursue those. One real world example that actually came out this week is in the state of California, there are more cases of COVID-19 that is found between the ages of 18 and 49 than there are of people over 65 years of age.

So for those students and young people that were not heeding the government's call to stay away from one another, to be safe, they are now, there's cases of younger people.

So their view was it was just a disease for those over 65 with respiratory problems. And now we're being confronted with a new reality that it affects healthy younger people as well.

[3 : 56] It's a paradigm shift. Spiritual awakening causes us to regret possibly some of the actions or things we've done because the reality, the ideas that we lived with no longer apply.

I don't know if you remember 9-11. After 9-11, church attendance pretty much broke the records across the United States in Canada for about two weeks.

Churches saw an incredible amount of growth because there was this idea of uncertainty. Sadly, two weeks later, things went back.

The question, the article or the author posited, is how do we manage a spiritual awakening when there's no church to go to?

Most non-Christians or people having this experience will more than likely just find a church online or one in their neighborhood or one that they grew up at and that's where they're going to go to truth.

[5 : 06] Today, as we are told not to meet or gather, what are people to do? How do they flock to truth as they question these things?

As one friend of mine, I stated, they pray absolutely every single day for a new opportunity to connect with someone, somehow, whether it be an old friend over Facebook, a friend through telephone, connecting with them, taking stock of their friends and reaching out.

This spiritual awakening gets to happen through us now. It gets to happen not through the church building, but through the church people who we are, our relationships, that God has already preordained, predestined before this time that we are able to connect and just love and connect with in a deep and meaningful way.

So today, I wanted to complete this type of trilogy of sermons that I've been doing as we look into these Old Testament characters. And this one character that we're going to look at today, which is King Nebuchadnezzar, I want us to see two important things.

The first thing is that God does cause spiritual awakenings. God is the source of creating a spiritual awakening. He uses the events of this world, of this time, of this place to shift the paradigm, as it were, that people are living in one way and that He will use something else to cause them to stop looking that way and consider that there might be something else up there.

[6 : 56] The second lesson I want to take away, which I pray will be profitable in your relationships, is that you will see that there are actually three stages of spiritual awakening.

And we're going to see these modeled in this man, King Nebuchadnezzar. So you can use this as you're speaking to your friends and your family members. You'll know how to pray for them, how to speak to them, and how to guide them in this journey.

Let's pray once again here. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, just as we come to this text, I pray that we will clearly see your hand, that we will see that there is commonality to life throughout all time, and that through these commonalities, oh Father, you use these relationships to teach us about you.

We learn something of us in these stories as well, these narratives. Sometimes we're confronted with our hard-heartedness, sometimes we're confronted with our foolishness, and sometimes we're confronted that we have been acting under your power of your Spirit and are being blessed because of it, oh Father.

So as we come to this text, I pray that we would learn what we need to learn in order to convey this marvelous truth to our friends and families who desperately need it.

[8 : 30] during this time of awakening. We ask these things in your most holy and precious name, amen. Please turn with me to the book of Daniel. Much like last week, I'm just going to shine the light on what the text already tells and teaches us and to pull out the preaching points for us.

One of the things that I liked to do when I was a younger man, I say younger man, I'm going to go back to when I was a kid, a lot of different families read books like Moby Dick, Count of Monte Cristo and some of those type of things.

The books that I was attracted to were comic books. I loved Spider-Man, Superman, Batman and one of the things that I always really loved about superhero comic books is the good guys always beat the bad guys.

because I knew by the end of the story, the bad guy would be wrapped up in Spider-Man's web and the police would be taking him and obviously everyone is saved. When I became a Christian, there was a, I got a hold of something like what we have in the Action Bible.

It was a comic book story of the Bible and I started reading the story and I was attracted to how Moses beat the Egyptian army. I was able to read about Joshua and Caleb going into the land of Canaan as spies and later on marching around Jericho and the walls would fall and no matter where Israel went, God went with them and they always won.

[10 : 03] I read about a man named Gideon raise up an army of 300 people and defeated an enemy army. You'd read these stories of Samson and his supernatural strength.

So as a kid, I'm just starting to understand these stories and I think it's amazing that you read about David and Goliath and then you finally get to Israel with the Ark of the Covenant and you knew if they had this Ark, there would be no losses for them.

And then as I kept reading, I came across a story which was quote unquote my spiritual awakening. It defied all my understanding before then.

And that was the complete destruction of Israel. They were defeated. This man named King Nebuchadnezzar came in, wiped out Israel, destroyed the great city of Jerusalem and went back and utterly destroyed the temple of God.

I kept asking myself how would God ever allow this? In the comic book Bibles, Nebuchadnezzar was the real bad guy.

[11 : 28] He threw Daniel's three friends into the furnace. He wanted all people to bow down and worship him. And I thought how could there ever be a more villainous adversary?

Then, as I grew up and I started reading my Bible and understanding it, I started to wonder if Nebuchadnezzar truly was the bad guy. If you are unfamiliar with King Nebuchadnezzar, let me just explain to you briefly who he is.

Historians consider him to be the greatest king of antiquity. The greatest king under antiquity. Under his rule, Babylon became one of the greatest cities that ever existed.

It is the place where we know of one of the seventh wonders of the world with the Babylonian the Hanging Gardens existed. And what makes Nebuchadnezzar so distinctly different from every other king of the time is he was both a military genius and an incredible builder that he was known for military successes and an incredible building program.

As a prince serving his father, he was responsible for the destruction of Nineveh. As you know, Nineveh under Jonah, they were spared for a time and then God used Nebuchadnezzar to eventually bring judgment against them.

[12 : 56] In 605 BC, when Egypt came under God's judgment, he used Nebuchadnezzar to defeat him. He was responsible for the defeat of Tyre and as I stated, the complete and other responsibility and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

In fact, the prophet Jeremiah calls him the destroyer of nations. But what's amazing with these military successes, he was actually far more known for his building projects.

As I mentioned, he was responsible for the construction of the hanging gardens. And it's modern archaeology has found these buildings and on each brick is stamped his name.

Modern research has demonstrated that Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch that Babylon or perhaps the East had ever produced. In order to have constructed what he did when archaeological experts write, he must have possessed an enormous command of human labor, nine-tenths of Babylon itself and 19-20ths of all the other ruins that in almost countless profusion cover the land are composed with brick stamps with his name on it.

The prophet Jeremiah calls him the servant of the Lord and it's used in a way to present the king of Babylon as the one appointed king by God to have dominion over the nations and the one who would act as the instrument of God's justice.

[14 : 51] Jeremiah himself told the nation of Israel the rebellion that rebellion against king Nebuchadnezzar was rebellion against God himself.

Let me read to you Genesis 27 6-7 The prophet writes for God now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon my servant and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve all the nation shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes.

How many of us when we read the Old Testament have ever considered to think that this foreign king who destroyed Israel destroyed the temple destroyed Jerusalem himself would be considered a servant of God.

This tells us that it wasn't just an accident of history this wasn't because of some snafu and God just allowed it to happen we read in the pages of scripture that it was meant to happen it was meant to happen by a man chosen by God made powerful by God to do what God had told him.

You know who else who he's just like? Saul David Solomon Moses Abraham he's a man that God called out of whatever circumstances they were in and used him to serve God.

[17 : 01] God in God's sovereign grace and majesty he was able to display his own glory through this life of this heathen king.

What's interesting of what I find about King Nebuchadnezzar is he follows a pattern of coming to a true and right understanding of God and I believe there's something great for us to know about him.

Turn with me to Daniel 2 we're going to look at verse 46-47 and I've quoted this and this is the first stage of spiritual awakening is understanding that only God is God only God is God and what I mean by this is that there is a God and it's the recognition of a God.

So just to sum up chapter 2 this king has a dream we learned about it last week he wants he's perplexed by this dream he's asking all the wise men tell me what the dream is and interpret it for me and we know that the people are like hey why don't you tell us the dream and we'll interpret but the king is like listen if you're really of God and you're really anointed of God you're going to know what it is so tell me otherwise I'm putting you all to death because you're not the real wise man that you're supposed to be and what's interesting this is where we see Daniel comes into the picture as Daniel had been removed from Jerusalem many many years later and he asked if he can offer the interpretation Daniel 2 30 reads but as for me this mystery has been revealed to me not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king and that you may know the thoughts of your mind what this dream is this dream is it's a large statue and it's basically

God unfolding what the next 400 years are going to be like it predicts his rule the end of his rule the Assyrian rule that follow this Assyrian rule the Greek rule Roman rule and which we know eventually will lead to the rule of Jesus Christ but he's saying that all these earthly kingdoms will fall Daniel as we read just doesn't interpret the dream but explains to him everything what the dream is so take a look at verses 46 and 47 upon hearing Daniel or Daniel explain the dream it said then king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him the king answered and said to Daniel truly your

[20:12] God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries for you have been able to reveal this mystery what we see in Nebuchadnezzar is a deliberate act a deliberate confession that he believes there's this God but there's these other gods too but he believes his God Daniel's God is superior to these gods so if we were to ask is this salvation of course it isn't we know that salvation only comes by believing in the name of Jesus Christ but this isn't the God he's at first he's saying that there's God but there's these other gods and nowhere in the text does he abandon his standpoint he doesn't recognize God is the only true God but he calls him the God of gods ask yourself this question what do most of your friends think of

Jesus today the son of God who he who has seen me knows the father is Jesus the only God no many of them think that he is one who does miraculous powers he is one who does great things he's a man who's worth emulating but I still have my gods and you can have your gods they believe in Jesus to some extent but not enough to turn away from their other gods now I want us to take a look at the second phase of spiritual awareness that second phase is only the true God saves and we look at Daniel chapter 3 28 29 but first let's begin in verse 16 this is the very well known story of Meshach Shadrach and

Abednego and just to let you know what happens previous to this King Nebuchadnezzar builds this gold statue and he wants everybody because he's feeling pretty good about himself right he's commanded he's a great military commander he's a great building coordinator his city is gorgeous the country is gorgeous he's feeling pretty good about himself you know what I must be a god let's make an idol we're going to have everybody bow down to it but there's these three men who will not bow down to it I just want us to read the text starting in verse 16 so if you're at home just look it up in your Bibles and just read along with me so King Nebuchadnezzar makes this great image of gold and all are supposed to bow down and worship it and if you don't you will be thrown into a fiery furnace so verse 16 Shadrach Meshach and

Abednego answered and said to the king O Nebuchadnezzar we have no need to answer you in this matter if this be so our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand O king but if not be it known to you O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up verse 19 then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury this is a king who does not take no for an answer and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach Meshach and Abednego he ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated and he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace then these men were bound in their cloaks their tunics their hats and their other garments and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated the flame of the fire killed those men remember these are the mighty men these are strong army men not weak guys are stuck in a dungeon running a furnace these are strong mighty men who took up

Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and the fire killed them and these three men in verse 23 Shadrach Meshach and Abednego fell bound into the fiery furnace then king and king Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste he declared to his counselors did we not cast three men bound into the fire they answered and said to the king true king he answered and said but I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace he declared Shadrach Meshach and Abednego servants of the most high God come out and come here then

[26 : 00] Shadrach Meshach and Abednego came out from the fire and the satraps the prefects and those are like the governors and the king's enclave and counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of these men the hair of their heads was not singed their cloaks were not harmed and no smell of fire had come upon them Nebuchadnezzar answered and said blessed be the God of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him and set aside the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any God except their own God therefore I make a decree any people nation or language that speaks anything 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 rescue in this way then the king promoted Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon here now is this king the first time he had a man interpret a dream to him in fact told him what the dream was and he recognized that something like that could only come from God but now he sees God's hand and an angel one that looked like the gods with Meshach Shadrach and Abednego at this point

Nebuchadnezzar understand that God's power is in Babylon now you had to understand in antiquity every nation would have a God and that God only had power in that nation historians tell us that when Nebuchadnezzar would conquer another nation he would run as fast as he could to get to the borders of Babylon with these people he would march them there so those people's foreign gods would have no ability to pray or work against Nebuchadnezzar this is how much they believed in this so now he's seeing the working of a God not only that but God sending his emissary into his land where he's supposed to be the greatest power not only that but he's moved by their devotion to their

God even when obeying that God meant disobeying him and through this we see that God was granting protection for God's people the Jews it's interesting we have a lot of friends that admire our faith a lot of people admire people of conviction who are consistent in their faith they're consistent in going to church Bible study they'll respect us for that but that doesn't mean they're saved they might think that there's only one God and you follow him and they think that's really great some of us we admire our parents for this our grandparents our friends ideology we respect that commitment we respect that conviction we respect people who are willing to take a stand for

God however is that enough for salvation is that enough if they admit that God is only a God and now God is now powerful God that's greater than every other God is that enough for salvation let's take a look at the third stage of spiritual awareness and it's called only the true God gets the glory only the true God gets the glory and we see this from Daniel 4 verses 34 to 37 now what's really interesting about chapter 4 of Daniel is that scholars actually believe that this is Nebuchadnezzar himself writing this section let's take a look at the very beginning this is King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples nations and languages that dwell on the earth peace be multiplied to it has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the most high

[31 : 27] God has done for me how great are his signs however how mighty is his wonders his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion endures from generation to generation now the scene that's going to happen here is he's going to have another dream none of the wise men can interpret and it's this dream of a great and mighty tree that's going to reach up into the heavens and then it's going to come crashing down so of course he calls the wise men they can't do it they bring in Daniel and Daniel is almost reluctant to share this news because he has this love this fondness for this king because this is bad news and we see in the interplay king saying Daniel you can share this with me so let's take a look at verse 24 i believe Daniel would have gone in reluctantly and at the very end we're going to see his love that he has for this king he says this is the interpretation oh king it is the decree of the most high this is by god which has come upon my lord the king that you shall be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field you shall be made to eat grass like an ox and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven and seven periods and time shall pass over you till you know that the most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree your kingdom shall be confined for you from the time that you rules therefore oh king let my counsel be acceptable to you break off your sins by practicing righteousness in your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed and that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity we don't know but there was a time period between what

David interprets here and what happens in verse 28 please continue to read with me all this came about king Nebuchadnezzar at the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon the king answered and said is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty in verse 31 it says while the words were still in the king's mouth there fell a voice from heaven oh king Nebuchadnezzar to you it is spoken the kingdom has departed from you and you shall be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox and seven periods of time shall pass over you until you know that the most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and immediately the word was fulfilled against

Nebuchadnezzar he was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles feathers and his nails were like birds claws at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me and I bless the most high and praise and honor him who lives forever for his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say to him what have you done at the same time my reason returned to me and for the glory of my kingdom my majesty and splendor returned to me my counselors and my

Lord sought me and I was established in my kingdom and still more greatness was added to me now I want you to notice verse 37 now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of heaven for all his works are right and his ways are just those who walk in pride he is able to humble incredible story in fact historians when they tell the story of Nebuchadnezzar they actually talk about a period where his queen ruled the land so in a lot of places it names him and her as rulers what they believe is she is the one who ruled that land for those seven years where

Nebuchadnezzar was under God's judgment what we see here by him is his eyes are lifted toward heaven in an act of submission that is him finally surrendering acknowledging that he has the need for the most high God without him I am nothing these words praise extol honor are participles and they indicate that this is a continual praise to the Lord Daniel tells us that God could and does humble the most powerful men in the world we also read that God restored his kingdom that God honors those who honor him that King Nebuchadnezzar received more power and honor than he did before let me ask you a question is there something going on today this very day that is a work of

[38 : 33] God that confounds both men and women that confounds scientists politicians and geniuses we just need to go back a month from today nobody could have imagined something happening like this could they it was interesting just this week there was a Christian podcast I was listening to and there was a doctor was warning it was down in the states and this doctor is warning people that this is going to have incredible ramifications and callers are calling in they're like telling her you're crazy nothing is going to happen this is all a big conspiracy we're making so and I think it was interesting because on the news report they had four days later that in fact the United States that had doubled to a point where now there's over 100,000 people and they're now talking about shutting off cities and states from all people because the disease is so rapidly growing the first sign of true spiritual awakening

I believe is humility it's to come to a point to say whatever my direction was was wrong it did not produce the fruit that I thought it would I believed it would and it's not a matter of saying maybe there's other paths or maybe not admitting as Nebuchadnezzar that path is greater than those other paths no spiritual true awakening is the one that says your path oh Lord is the only path and this is what we see in Nebuchadnezzar just going through different sermons this week there's plenty of sermons on God's judgment on these nations I actually don't believe that judgment I believe judgment that God has on us is allowing us to continue to live in our sin unchecked

I believe that is God's judgment on us what I believe is going on today is this is the wake up call this is God causing us to change our views and understandings this is the wake up call that is calling us to him the reality is you and I cannot answer for our prime minister our presidents our elected officials we do not have that power but we do have the ability to answer for ourselves the reality is some of you will simply say that my God is better than that God some of you will even say that this path I believe is kind of the only path other than my own path I don't believe in what the other gods say but I have placed myself as a God when I choose to acknowledge that there's another way for me to live when

Jesus Christ is calling me to live this way for some of you I believe the circumstances of your life sin has been the judgment that God is bringing about you and he's trying to get your attention see the reality is our pride is one of our greatest hindrances we do not want to give up what we hold to be important see the tragic reality even with Nebuchadnezzar and it's not so much a tragic reality but the reality is if God wants you he's going to get you and the problem is your resistance can make things a lot harder on you than it needs to be because God is going to keep knocking down those idols in your life till you finally get to the point where

King Nebuchadnezzar was where he is to praise and extol and honors God for some of you pride is keeping you from knowing Christ more pride is keeping you from growing in Christ more what does pride look like very simply it's focused on self the problem is God tells us in Isaiah 48 11 my glory I will not give to another if there is some aspect of your life maybe it's your freedom maybe it's your desire to go out and do what you want to do we read these stories all the time now people are just going to listen to themselves we're going to defy these bans we're going to defy the freedom where I'm supposed to stay at home what it's demonstrating is absolute selfishness you see prideful people believe that they are or should be the sources of what is good deciders of what is right and they are the ones that choose what is worthy of praise the

[44 : 24] Puritan Thomas Watson wrote pride seeks to ungod die let me ask you a question what is this virus what do you think this virus is doing to the world humbling us we think we're in control of our finances we are in control of what we own we are in control of our health we are in control of doing what we want I want you to consider four things from today's time and I have a slide for it one I want to think about this sermon in light of how you think how you feel how you live and how you worship and I want to explain this to you first your thinking how should the truths of Daniel shape the way you view

God how do these truths affect the way you view the world and how they affect the way you view these present circumstances I want you to share with these with these points with your family the friends that you're with at home perhaps even online if you don't have that ability to share at home with anybody the second aspect of your feeling how should these truths of this text inspire greater gratitude humility and joy in Christ how should these truths of this text inspire greater gratitude humility and joy in Christ regarding how you live what attitudes and actions need to change because of the truths you've been confronted with from this passage practically speaking what steps need to be taken for you to live in light of the truth of what it means to extol and praise

God and then the fourth aspect of worship how should you respond to this passage in love for God and prayer does it lead you to greater worship does it lead you to repentance is it calling you to greater obedience these are the things that I want you to consider one of the things that I've been praying about is where do we go from here these last sermons have been kind of designed around the question of why the next sermons and if we're still going to be in this role I don't think it's effective to be preaching Ephesians at this moment so we're going to lay that series aside but what we're going to do and for however long we're supposed to un-meet like this is I want to use this time for us to study God I really believe that if we study

God understand his attributes understand his heart and know God that will help us define everything else around us it's one of my convictions that the reason we face fear we face anxiety we face worry especially in today where it's been magnifying a hundred fold is that we do not know God I believe there's peace to be found in knowing God and I truly want to use this so for the next however weeks we're going to be studying the attributes and characteristics of God and my prayers that you will be blessed wholeheartedly from that let me pray dear Lord heavenly father we thank you for this king Nebuchadnezzar this man that you raised father let's be honest although we are not kings of any great countries you've taken us through these same stories we've acknowledged you at different times of our lives but we did nothing about it we acknowledged you of even being the only

God out there who's stronger than any other gods but we still are going to live our life the way we want to live our lives but then there comes a time when you really grab hold of us perhaps it's an incredible expression of your divine love that reveals our divine brokenness and our lostness you break our habits of sin you break our broken relationships and you tell us that you are going to set things right and through that process we have to die to self so that we might live with you that means burying elements of our past parts of who we once were in order to truly praise and extol you father my prayer for this church is that we would use this type of message to be aware to be aware of our friends and families and where they are

[50 : 15] I pray that we would instead of arguing with them or trying to convince them let's just tell them the gospel just tell them what Jesus Christ has done let's not worry about the other stuff this is a time to call people to repentance and to love and follow you pray that you use this mightily in our lives we ask these things in your most holy precious and everlasting name amen