

Daniel 4

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[0 : 0 0] Let us now turn to the chapter we read in the book of Daniel, chapter 4, and will take us a connecting link tonight, verse 34. And at the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth forever.

As you read the opening words of this chapter, you ought to resemble it, or resemble the words to something that you see very often in the New Testament.

The chapter reads very much like one of the New Testament epistles, many of which begin with the same beginning as Nebuchadnezzar speaks here, peace be multiplied unto you.

And it is because of that that many of the commentators are of the opinion that what Nebuchadnezzar is really doing here is telling people and telling anyone who cares to listen to him, the story of his conversion to the Lord.

Telling how he came to faith and to penitence, as a result of a most serious and trying experience in his life, he came to recognize and to acknowledge God as his Lord.

[2 : 2 0] And it is in that way that I would like to deal very briefly with the history recorded for us in the chapter here, as though it were the story of this man's conversion to the Lord.

Someone has said that, Though the faith of Nebuchadnezzar may indeed have been weak and his knowledge meager, yet his faith was saving and his knowledge true.

Well, as we look at it, as we look at this testimony, you get in it, you see in it what you discover and what you hear in every single testimony.

He tells us what kind of man he was, he tells us what happened to him, and he tells us the result of that in his life.

He lifted up his eyes unto heaven, and his understanding returned to him. First of all, then, what kind of man was this Nebuchadnezzar?

[3 : 3 0] Well, from our study of him so far, I think we've discovered that he was a very proud and self-centered man. But in many respects, he was also a forgetful man.

He could quite easily overcome and forget thoughts that troubled him, thoughts that passed through his mind, particularly during the night.

He could resume his attitude of pride, and he could quite easily drift back again into the practice of idolatry.

And here he tells us that after a very, very troublesome period as a result of yet another dream, he was able, after a year, to have distanced himself so much from that crisis in his life that he was again priding himself in his intellectual greatness, in his military success, and in his architectural triumphs.

He was, as he tells us, 12 months after this very troublesome experience, buoyed up with the thought that, seeing everything was going well with him, that, obviously, that period of danger had passed.

[5 : 01] Seeing his providence was proving to be so favorable, he could enjoy things yet again. And so he drifted back into his old failings, when everything revolved around himself and terminated on himself.

Now, I'm not in any way suggesting that when the book of Netzer was giving his testimony, or anybody else gives his testimony, that they should in any way at all denigrate what God has given them, the gifts with which he has bestowed them, with which he has enriched them, the gifts he has bestowed on them, with which he has enriched them.

There are many people who are thankful to, thankful that they have a roof over their head, thankful that they have a good home, thankful for the kind of family that's growing up around them, thankful for the many gifts and the many possessions that they have, thankful for all that they have achieved in life, and all that those who belong to them have achieved.

But the problem with people and the problem with Nebuchadnezzar was this, as he strutted, as he tells us here himself, as he strutted in his own palace 12 months after this very troublesome dream, the trouble with him and with many of us is this, that we have all these things, but we have them without God.

And so it is that people today speak about their very highly developed education, a very highly developed reason, their great technological achievements, all the mod cons at their disposal.

[6 : 59] They look at all these things and they forget that in the very midst of them all, God is the giver of every good and every perfect gift.

The other thing to note about this man is that though he was able to forget the troublesome experience that he had, it was in a sense quite amazing that he had been able to distance himself from that which had troubled him so much.

Not only that, but this was a man who had had many religious and spiritual blessings and experiences and privileges in his life.

This wasn't the first time that God had spoken to him in a dream. We saw in chapter 2 that God had spoken to him on another occasion by way of another dream. And God had shown to him the futility of turning to the magical portents and the astrological advances that the Chaldeans had made under his own rule as well.

His own, the achievements of his own so-called wise men had failed at this particular time in distress, great distress.

[8 : 29] He was led to Daniel who interpreted for him the dream and told him that God was speaking to him. He acknowledged that and he prayed at least to all intents and purposes. He seemed to have acknowledged God as well, but we saw that that was just lip service.

He soon forgot what God had done for him. That's true of all. I think it's true we all have that principle in us. In a crisis, in a situation faced with danger, at a particular stressful time in our lives, we all acknowledge God.

We all vow that we will be this and we will be that. We turn there and we make all kinds of promises. But you see, when the crisis has passed, the more you distance yourself from that time, the more likely you are to forget God.

It's just like a person in a serious illness. And the doctor comes to him and he warns him and he gives him counselling and tells him to alter his lifestyle. And if he's been brought back from the very gates of death, he is only too ready to alter his lifestyle.

But the longer the distance between the crisis that brought him the gates of death, the longer he distances himself from these and the better he gets, the more he is likely to forget the advice that is given to him.

[9 : 55] It's the same in the spiritual realm. There are many people who are touched by the hand of God in a sermon, in a providence, in a dream, in the experience of someone else, the death of a friend, or something like that.

God speaks to them and he speaks to them powerfully. And the stock, dead in the tracks, they acknowledge him. But then, after a while, they're back to their old ways.

Well, that's the kind of man Nebuchadnezzar was. Together with that, he had had the privilege of having come face to face at a very early stage of the life of Daniel and his three godly young fellows down at about 17 years of age at the time.

He had come face to face with young men of great principle, young men who were dignified and godly and righteous and God-fearing, young men who weren't afraid to say no on the basis of principle.

He was profoundly influenced by the attitude and by the witness of these young men. But that witness wore off.

[11 : 11] And you know what it's like. You see, you may meet someone and that person, be he young or old, may have a very profound effect upon you. You're really sort of, you're made to sit up and think, that person really's got something, a semi-real about that person's testimony, that person's witness.

Perhaps you begin to want the kind of thing that he has yourself. But then, you see, the influence can wear off. Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot about Daniel and Shadrach and Mesheh and Abednego.

Till the Lord spoke to him in a dream and then he was brought face to face with Daniel again. And then, as we saw two weeks ago, he saw the omnipotence of God at work.

The wonderful delivering power of God miraculously delivering these three men from a fiery furnace. He had seen the presence of someone else with him in the furnace whom he wrongly identified as a son of one of the gods.

It was God. in a form in which he was identified as a supreme, as God, as a deity himself.

[12 : 34] And he had come face to face with his power. He had forgotten that as well. And here he is, now God, speak to him yet again in this very powerful dream.

and he's very, very troubled. And even when the dream is interpreted for him by Daniel and he's told that God is speaking to him, look, that's you.

Unless you amend your ways, unless you turn to God in righteousness and faith, you're going to have a very serious illness. It's going to last, probably, this is a reference to it, maybe seven years.

Let's take that, that's the meaning here. Seven years, you're going to be afflicted with a kind of very severe mental disorder. You're going to be like, you're going to act like, and you're going to think that you are one of the very piece of the field, unless you amend your ways.

But he forgot it. Twelve months afterwards, here he is, strutting on the roof of his palace, looking around, filled with pride, filled with a sense of his own importance, his own achievements.

[13 : 46] Look at what I've got. Look at where all this has taken me. He doesn't feel uneasy. He doesn't feel distressed or oppressed.

He's not anxious. He's full of life, full of the good things of life. And so it is with many people. There are many who are, as Hebrews 6 tells us, touched with the finger of heaven itself.

They test of heavenly things. They test of things to come of our realm beyond the present, of the kingdom that is spiritual and heavenly.

They test of these things. God's hand falls upon them. They're made to stop dead in their tracks. But now, like the of the kingdom, they're as far away from God as I've ever been.

They're as rebellious as heaven. Ah, my friend, how often has God spoken to you like this? How often has God touched you? How often have you tossed and turned in your bed at night?

[14 : 55] How often has the providence of God spoken to you? How often has God spoken to you maybe in your dreams, in the thoughts that you've had, when no lights went out and no one was seeing you, no one was hearing you?

You were glad that there was no one there? You'd have been very embarrassed if they had heard what was passing through your mind concerning your relationship to God and the world to come?

It felt very uneasy. Many people feel like that. Dissolutioned, disappointed, all their hopes have proved to be false.

All the pictures that they were painting for themselves, really, life hasn't come up with the goods at all. They've had an answer to the problems that are confronting them.

There are many people in the world tonight like Nebuchadnezzar was. And the other thing is this. This is what he tells us himself.

[16 : 05] He's giving us testimony. This is what kind of man I was. This is the kind of experience I had. That's what I thought and this is what I did to them all. And you know, he said, after this most troublesome experience, 12 months afterwards, I forgot all about it.

Why 12 months? Why this period? Well, perhaps the Lord was giving him time to turn to himself, time to repent, time to come in faith, time to make use of the privileges that he'd had.

But he didn't make use of them at all. Now he finds himself filled with the things that used the things about which God spoke to him and the things that troubled him.

I think that one of the applications I want to make of that is this. How often has it been the case?

I wonder if this applies to some people here tonight. how often has it been the case that in a very powerful way God has spoken to you about something that is wrong in your life? He has given you time to put it right and you failed to make use of the time.

[17 : 29] When you discovered the wrongness of what you were and the wrongness of what you were doing and where you were going and so on, you determined to put it right. But you see, tonight, there's quite a long time since then and time that says a wonderful healer and now you're doing these things and you don't bat an eyelid.

It doesn't bother you, it doesn't trouble you at least. Nine times out of ten it doesn't trouble you till you hear someone like me speaking about it again.

I don't know what it may be but tonight I think that it may very well be the case with you that you're very much at ease.

Things are going not too badly at all. Providence has not been too unkind. And yet, my friend, as you look back over the period, God has spoken to you in various ways as he spoke to Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar's testimony is this. I was that type of man. God was speaking to me but I didn't listen to God and then, secondly, the judgment of God came upon me.

[18 : 56] Now, what he tells is this and listen to his own testimony. I was strutting on the roof of my palace one night, twelve months after this very troublesome experience with a dream and I was filled with a sense of achievement with a sense of pride as I looked out over the city over which I was king myself as I looked out over the things that I had built as I thought upon the monarchy as I thought upon the kingdom that I possessed and all the glory that belonged to me as I thought.

Then, at that very moment, he says, while the word was in my mouth that fell a voice from heaven, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom has departed from the same hour.

At that very time, my whole personality was changed. I was gripped by a mental disorder about which I had been warned but which I had chosen to forget.

The very thing that Daniel had said would happen if I didn't amend my ways happened to me. I was deprived of my reason with dreadful suddenness.

But I must say this, he says, it wasn't that I wasn't warned about this. Isn't it significant that the Bible speaks to us in these ways?

[20 : 38] It speaks to us, for example, that in the old days, in the old world, the world was created by the hand of God before it was destroyed in Noah's day. Noah was preaching to people that God had told him, look, this world is going to be destroyed.

For over a hundred years, he had preached that message. God had told him it was going to happen. People didn't believe him. They laughed at him. And Jesus tells himself, Jesus believed in the old world, he believed in the flood, he believed in Noah, because Jesus said this, do you realize this?

He said, in Noah's day, people carried on as if the world was going to go on day after day. They didn't believe a word that was said to them about Noah. And then suddenly, the flood came.

The same thing happened with Herod, who was king in Jerusalem. During the time, the days of the first century, the first Christian century, priding himself on all his achievements, defying God.

And in that very instance, he was cut down. Cut down. It happens to so many. The rich fool, Jesus said, has told a story.

[21 : 59] There was a man once, he was so filled with a sense of his own importance, his own achievements, he wondered how he could expand a perfectly reasonable suggestion.

He must expand. He must use his capital. He must invest more. He must build bigger bonds. He was getting on so well. But he was reckoning without God.

The old world reckoned without God. The rich fool was reckoning without God. Herod was reckoning without God. And that night, his soul was required of him.

God will be next week with this man, Belshazzar, the man who saw the writing on the wall. Suddenly, the judgment of God fell upon him when he least expected it.

So it was. That Nebuchadnezzar tells us what happened to me. I didn't expect it, but I must say I was warned about. And I think that there's a great biblical principle that God's judgments never fall without warnings going before them.

[23 : 16] You know there's a text in the Bible I think that ought to strike terror into the very bone of every one of us. Be sure your sins will find you out.

God, my friend, isn't asleep. All you and I may think, you know Peter's speaking to his own day, speaking about the second coming, the same principle again, Jesus is going to come again.

People in Peter's day, so you can see the whole generation standing laughing at him. What? Jesus is going to come again? Don't be daft.

This world has existed for thousands of years. There's no sign of his coming. Where is the evidence of his coming? But the Lord will come.

And the Lord will come, let us be sure of this, the Lord, and I want to speak this with all seriousness, with all gentleness to you, let it be that you are distancing yourself from the Lord, if you are turning a deaf ear to him and a blind eye.

[24 : 21] You be sure of this, my friend, it will cost you, but the Lord will bring you back. But not without great passion or cost to yourself.

And that's exactly the point that Debra is making here. You know, he said, the very day that I spoke like that in pride, I was struck. And this is the way that I would look at it, understand it.

I know a lot of people put scorn on this. Think of it, a man turned into a beast. A man going around eating grass like an ox. A man growing long fingers like a wild animal.

A man who's acting like a beast. He's not thinking like a man at all. Oh, my friend, before you start pouring scorn on such things in the Bible, you be careful.

there are many poor souls in the world tonight, men and women, who don't believe that they're human beings, who believe that they're other people, who believe that they're other things, who believe that they're machines.

[25 : 31] Oh, yes. There are people in the grip tonight of mental illness, who believe that they are animals. and who are acting like animals.

Don't you post scorn what you're reading Daniel chapter 4. Some of you may have been caught up in sins. Some of you may have been born along by crowds of hundreds who have acted like animals.

I remember when I was in Dingwall at a conference there on education I remember the man who was dean in the Episcopal church in Dingwall, Dean Gow.

Some of you present here may have come across this, a very interesting man. I remember he challenged some of the people there representing the education authorities and this is what he said to them.

He was speaking about the way in which evolution was taught in the schools and he said this to them, if you teach people that they came from the animals don't be a bit surprised when they start behaving like animals.

[26 : 47] And you yourselves know that you see from time to time animal behaviour amongst human beings and people read Daniel chapter 4 and they laugh. I could take you to some places I wouldn't want to take you there but there are others who could take you as well to some places where this is true where there are people who act as though they were animals who have lost all the rational powers some of them never had and these are signs that fill your heart with pity and with dismay.

Oh my friend I wonder if you and I tonight are as thankful as we ought to be that we are in possession of a rational power.

Well that Nebuchadnezzar said you know he said I lost them and I was afflicted with dreadful illness perhaps deluded thinking that he was an animal living like an animal his whole personality tragically deformed filled with shame and with misery and as someone put it then all the joy and pleasure and glory of the pride with which he spoke with one breath was removed with the next all the fearful thought of how near the judgment of God is upon every one of us and especially upon those who care to forget him.

now this is his testimony and this is what he brings this is what he tells us in the third and final point it was very severe he said very distressing and lastly and this is what I made when I take the period of seven that it was perhaps a reference to the fact to this that he was like this for seven years but you know he said in the wonder of the grace of God this at the very beginning of this chapter I thought it good he says to show the signs and the wonders of the most high God hath wrought toward me oh how great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders how God works as William Cowper put it he moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform his ways in the sea we don't understand why God does a thing at a particular time but God doesn't need to tell us why he does a thing God knows himself why he's doing a thing and that and particularly in the interest of those who are going to come to faith and going to love him they're going to bless him for all that he has done in their experience and nothing can bring a man to bless

God for an affliction such as this but the grace of God working in his heart well reformation followed as a result of this and he tells us how it happened after seven years I he says looked I lifted up mine eyes unto heaven and my understanding returned unto me well this is a testimony of every single convert this is whatever he believed in his church night will tell you I was this type of person I was brought through this experience but the Lord in his mercy enabled me to look to himself I lifted up my eyes to heaven and you know the testimony of the psalmist in words that you all love and that you all know I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come my aid my safety cometh from the

[31 : 02] Lord who heaven and earth hath made there's the same testimony a man looking to the heavens we're going to finish this service with psalm 34 they looked to him and lightened where the words of the Lord look unto me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved a man will never be saved neither will a woman a boy or a girl till they lift up their eyes to heaven till they realize that the source of all their help must come from heaven above till they realize that there is a God in heaven with whom they have to reckon till they follow their knees and lift up their hearts to the one who lives above and beyond this world and who can meet with him in the world in the very depth of their need I said seven years before this

I was walking my palace I was filled with thought of myself and my own greatness and my own achievements and my own pride nothing mattered to me but nebuchadnezzar nebuchadnezzar nebuchadnezzar but now he says I lifted up my eyes to heaven nebuchadnezzar didn't matter anymore it was God that mattered it was heaven it wasn't what he had achieved but what the Lord was and what the Lord could do that was the great moment in his life now that was his hope his comfort his strength and his joy his eyes were now focused on God himself he looked away from himself as John Calvin put it he fixed both his eyes on the Lord in heaven above fixed them on his mercy on his grace on his love and on his power and filled with a sense of his own emptiness and his own need he comes with nothing knowing that he deserves nothing and yet he receives everything you know that Jesus told us too and

I want to refer to it very briefly probably one of the best known stories in the New Testament in which he elicited the exact same point as the story of the prodigal son the story of a man who you can almost picture the scene who went to his father one day and said look he says I'm a bit fed up of the restraints of the home life I want to get away I want to enjoy myself I want to be free I want to do my own thing so the father reluctantly gives him the portion of goods that fell to his hands what he was entitled to as a son and off he went he was free ah yes but was he free how free was the prodigal in the far off land he was as free as this that he had to do what the powers in the far off land determined that he should do so it is that people want to be free get away from home get away from the church get away from the eye of the neighbour get away from the minister of the bible get away from people who are constantly tugging at them and asking how about yourself and your spiritual conditions get away from it all come on be free let's join my mates let's go where we want to go let's drink and let's eat let's be married let's enjoy companionship let's see the world that's freedom let's do what the world does that's freedom is it it is slavery because all the time they've got to do what they're doing they've got to be what they are and their happiness is determined by being within that particular framework it's like being a prison you're free within these walls within these boundaries parameters but then the prodigal son discovered the truth of the situation and it's almost with us you can almost see him with a sense of disgust saying oh how could

I have been so daft how can I have been so foolish how could I have been so ungrateful how could I have fallen into trapped I've got to get out of here and filled with disgust he makes his way home to his father that's the story of Nebuchadnezzar that's the story of every convert I confess to face he says to the reality of my situation I realized my misery the depth which I have sunk and I lifted up my eyes to heaven and I pleaded for his mercy and for his grace no one here tonight has any other testimony but that testimony because my friend let me say this to you unless God saves you no one will unless God has mercy and you no one will unless his power is hold on you no other power known to man can deliver you from self and from sin and from the slavery of sin oh no

I lifted up my eyes to heaven and I blessed he says I my understanding returned unto me and I blessed the most high the same remember what Jesus said about the prodigal when he came to himself he said here's the same thing in this man his reason returned and he began to see things in a new light he began to see God in his providence he began to recognize that God was speaking to him and he blessed God that he was speaking to him is God speaking to you tonight is he how how how often has spoken to you in a sermon in a book in someone's life someone's witness how often has spoken to you in providence in a dream in someone else's providence in a birth in a death in an illness I know he has spoken to you he has spoken to every single one of you and maybe you're closing your ears just now in case he's speaking to you through me but he is thank

[38 : 02] God that he's speaking to you you know that there are people in hell tonight to whom God is speaking in judgment and in wrath but not in mercy you're here tonight and God is speaking to you in mercy yet again yet again my friend the opportunity is given to you to turn in penitence and in faith to God to come from the far off country to come away from the place in which you have distanced yourself from God you have been quite successful so far things have been going pretty well and maybe you don't feel perhaps tonight you feel a bit hot under the collar a bit bothered a bit uneasy because the word has nailed you yet again thank the Lord that the word has nailed you thank the Lord that he's speaking to you and as he speaks to you lift up your heart to him and bless bless bless him bless him for the providence that brought you here bless him for the providence that brought you face to face and ear to ear and eye to eye with the word of

God yet again acknowledge his goodness to you and speaking to you acknowledging his acknowledge his goodness and sending to you his word and be like Daniel oh be like what grace this was he acknowledged God's goodness to him listen to this I said I blessed him that he rules amongst men and I blessed him he said that he came into my life in that most distressing way I blessed him for it you know it takes grace to do that I told you the story before of the father who stood at the gravesite of his young daughter down at Agonish there and said God gave God hath taken away blessed be the name of the Lord that's grace and that's what grace can do it can bless the most trying and the most distressing of circumstances to men and women to boys and girls people people can say to

God I thank thee we sang there in psalm 119 what the psalmist said before I was afflicted I went astray but because of thine affliction I have been brought back to thee and I bless thee well that's what Daniel that's what Debrauch is saying here and he says I bless God he says because he's sovereign God does what he likes I am the clay says God is the potter and I cannot say I cannot stop his hand at any time nor can I say to him what are you doing because he says he does everything right everything he does is right what's happened to this man God begins to dominate his thinking God becomes everything God becomes bigger than He becomes bigger than Babylon He begins to live now for something far bigger and far better than he ever had and that's conversion that's testimony the life that you have tonight you who are unconverted

I'm not saying that your estimate of it is wrong your estimate is that it's pretty good things are going pretty well success has come satisfaction yes I know but there's something better something bigger something more worthwhile and in every single case of penitence and conversion it replaces what you have we come to be truly in our right minds at someone when we begin to view and to value everything else in the light of heavenly realities what's Nebuchadnezzar saying to you he says to the whole world to anyone who care to listen to me I say this there is no one better than God there is nothing greater than God and there is no life worth living like the life that is committed to the

God who rules in heaven and who rules in the hearts of men God becomes dominant perhaps some of you have heard that at the funeral of Louis the 14th of France that great orator a who preached his funeral sermon standing before the open coffin and amongst the assembled masses repeated twice before he preached God only is great only God is great and that's the testimony of every single believer though they tell what they were and though they tell what happened above all else is this all the grace that saved me

[43 : 49] John Newton's hymn Good Shame is on the lips of so many people amazing grace that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar speaks about here oh how amazing is the grace of God his hand smoked me his hand crushed me but his hand raised me up delivered me and brought me face to face with my need and face to face with his grace and his love and this is his testimony to the world to which he was writing and to which he was speaking rather at the time what is your testimony tonight to the unbelieving world in which you live and into which you're going to go after the service you're walking down Kenner street along Cromwell street you're in your car you stop you meet someone you meet your mates are you able to say to them do you know what

God did for me do you know that God brought me face to face with myself and do you know that I have something bigger in my life now than myself than what I had than what I am than what I wanted God is great ah my friend would that word would burst from your lips tonight as you testimony to the grace of God let us pray bless to us thy word and grant that thy power would take possession of our hearts and of our thoughts and of our lives to the glory of thy name and for our good for

Christ's sake Amen ■ Mari vom