

The Humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Daniel

I. Introduction

- a. Continuing our series: Lessons from Daniel. I'm excited and eager to teach this lesson.
- b. Chuck and my desire: the church here is characterized by love and humility. Today's focus is on humility.
- c. **Questions:** Why is humility so important? Why are pride and arrogance so damaging/terrible?
 - i. Humility is an essential aspect of love:
 1. "Love ...does not parade itself, is not puffed up...." (**1 Corinthians 13:4**, NKJ)
 - ii. Jesus and the NT writers address the need for humility repeatedly and urgently. They knew this was a problem for most of us and important for us to learn.
 1. Read **James 4:4-10** (speaking to Christians)
 2. They were becoming "friends" with the world and "enemies of God".
 3. But God desired to give them grace. Offers them two promises that God will always keep:
 - a. "God resists the proud... ["opposes the proud", ESV]
 - b. But gives grace to the humble."
 - i. (quoting **Proverbs 3:34**)
 - ii. This is in our hands: to be proud or to be humble.
 - iii. We receive a promise either way!
 4. Seeking humility is an important part of resisting Satan.
 5. Humble yourselves. He will lift you up.

- iii. Humility is to rule in the hearts of every Christian!
 - 1. Read **1 Peter 5:1-11** (also speaking to Christians)
 - 2. Elders not being lords over those entrusted to you
 - 3. All of you be submissive to one another
 - 4. All to be clothed with humility
 - 5. “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble....”
 - 6. “Humble yourselves....”
 - 7. Spiritual warfare with casualties: the devil walks around like a roaring lion, seeking who he might devour.
 - a. Humility is a great spiritual weapon.
- d. Today, we continue our lessons through the Book of Daniel. This lesson is the story of King Nebuchadnezzar, an extremely arrogant king. The story has a wonderful ending and shows how God brought the king to a place of great humility.
 - i. After reading the story, we will look at some practical applications for ourselves.

II. Daniel 4

- a. **Question:** Who is this king? (Answer: A murderous king who has moments/periods of humility.)
 - i. The king takes the Jews into captivity. (Imagine being overrun by Canadians, taking our homes, and displacing us to northern Alberta!)
 - ii. When Daniel and his three friends want to eat vegetables rather than the king’s food, the chief over them is afraid the king will take off his head! (**Daniel 1**)
 - iii. When the king had a terrible dream and forgot it, he told all the enchanters, magicians and wise men that he would kill them if they did not tell him his dream and its interpretation. (**Daniel 2**)
 - iv. When Daniel reveals the dream and its interpretation (about the statute that symbolized the four kingdoms that would be pulverized to dust by a stone cut out of a mountain not by human hands), the king falls down and worships. (**Daniel 2**)
 - v. But, eighteen years later, the king erects an actual giant statue and demands everyone to bow down to it or be killed. Furious when

Daniel's three friends refuse to bow down, the king throws them into a fiery furnace.

- vi. When they survive through the protection of The Angel of the Lord, the king falls down and worships the Lord. (**Daniel 3**)
 - vii. Now we come to the king recounting what happened to him years after the fiery furnace event.
- b. Read **Daniel 4:1-37**
 - c. The king's arrogance
 - i. **Question:** What was the king's sin? (anger, murder?)
 - ii. "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened with arrogance, he was deposed from his kingdom throne, and his honor was taken from him." (**Daniel 5:20**)
 - d. God's mercy
 - i. God tries so many times to warn the king.
 - 1. Dream #1 (statute being pulverized by the rock)
 - 2. The miracle of Daniel's three friends saved in the fire
 - 3. Dream #2 (the tree being chopped down)
 - ii. What else can God do?! (Free will)
 - iii. God then punishes the king (an act of mercy!)
 - iv. Finally, the king comes to his senses and humbles himself.
 - e. Understand how wicked pride is.
 - i. "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished." (**Proverbs 16:5**)
 - ii. Central to Satan and his fall: pride (**Ezekiel 28**)
 - iii. Do not minimize: "I'm just really prideful."
 - 1. Would you say, "I'm just an adulterer" or "I'm just a thief"?

III. Seven ways we can humble ourselves before God (and receive His mercy!)

- a. Expose your pride; don't hide it.
 - i. Pride is extremely deceptive.

1. The king is completely clueless about his pride (as he walks around admiring how great he is) and the punishment he is about to receive.
 - ii. Confess your specific sins to God and to others. This brings humility and grace!
 1. Be honest. Me, after college, so much anger, shaking my fist at the sky in Somerville, "I hate You!"
 2. Example this week of brother confessing.
 - iii. Pray that God will expose your pride and help you overcome it.
- b. Take the lowest seat!
- i. Read **Luke 14:7-11**
 - ii. "Go low" – wherever you can find opportunity!
 1. Chuck: speaking last, "I really don't know...."
 - iii. "humble yourself"
- c. Don't look down on others
- i. Read **Luke 18:9-14**
 - ii. Religious pride/so deceived!
 - iii. What a terrible blemish on Christ. When we see this in a brother and sister, we need to call it out!
 - iv. May we each deal with our own rotten heart/sin!
 - v. Humble yourself
- d. Fast and Pray
- i. We have seen many examples of Daniel praying to God.
 - ii. Prayer and fasting are equated with humbling ourselves.
 1. Daniel prays and fasts from meat, wine and delicacies for three weeks.
 2. Angel appears.
 3. "... from the first day you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words." (**Daniel 10**)

- iii. But not like the Pharisees who fasted twice a week, yet Jesus called hypocrites! See **Matthew 23.**)
- e. Give to the poor
 - i. After Daniel explains that the tree cut down in the dream was the king himself, Daniel offers the king hope and a potential way out of this terrible fate:
 - 1. “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be pleasing to you, to atone for your sins with alms and your wrongdoings with compassion to the poor. Perhaps God will be longsuffering regarding your trespasses.” (**Daniel 4:27**)
 - ii. Being merciful (humble!) opens the door to mercy! Not showing mercy closes the door to being shown mercy! A wise bishop’s/elder’s words:
 - 1. God tells us in Scripture in many places that “with the deserts of mercy sins are cleansed.”
 - 2. “And in Solomon we read, ... “Whoever closes his heart to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.” [**Proverbs 21:13**]
 - 3. For he shall not be able to deserve the mercy of the Lord, who himself shall not have been merciful [**Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy”**]....
 - 4. And this also the Holy Spirit declares in the Psalms, and proves, saying, “Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him....” [**Psalm 41:1**]
 - 5. **...Daniel, when king Nebuchodonosor was in anxiety, being frightened by an adverse dream, gave him, for the turning away of evils, a remedy to obtain the divine help, saying, “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee; and redeem thy sins by almsgivings, and thine unrighteousness by mercies to the poor, and God will be patient to thy sins.” And as the king did not obey him, he underwent the misfortunes and mischiefs which he had seen, and which he might have escaped and avoided had he redeemed his sins by almsgiving.**
 - a. Cyprian of Carthage, “On Works and Alms,”c. 258 AD, ANF 5.477.

- iii. Tabitha “full of good works and charitable deeds” (**Acts 9**)!
 - 1. “When Tabitha, being greatly given to good works and to bestowing alms, fell sick and died, Peter was summoned to her lifeless body; and when he, with apostolic humanity, had come in haste, there stood around him widows weeping and entreating, showing the cloaks, and coats, and all the garments which they had previously received, and praying for the deceased not by their words, but by her own deeds....
 - 2. [Peter raises her from the dead.]
 - 3. Nor did [the Lord] fail to bring aid to Peter... **Therefore death is suspended, and the spirit is restored, and, to the marvel and astonishment of all, the revived body is quickened into this worldly light once more; so effectual were the merits of mercy, so much did righteous works avail! She who had conferred upon suffering widows the help needful to live, deserved to be recalled to life by the widows’ petition.**
 - a. Cyprian of Carthage, “On Works and Alms,” ANF 5.477.
- f. Don’t resist the humbling process
 - i. The king was humbled for 7 years (lived like an animal).
 - ii. The process of confession, humbling, forgiveness
 - 1. “If you shrink back from [this process of confession/humbling/forgiveness], consider in your heart the hell, which [it] will extinguish for you; and imagine first the magnitude of the penalty, that you may not hesitate about the adoption of the remedy. What do we esteem that treasure-house of eternal fire to be... [goes on to describe the fires of hell]....
 - 2. Why are you tardy to approach what you know heals you? Even dumb irrational animals recognise in their time of need the medicines which have been divinely assigned them. The stag, transfixed by the arrow, knows that, to force out the steel, and its inextricable lingerings, he must heal himself with [a plant called dittany]. The swallow, if she blinds her young, knows how to give them eyes again by means of her own [plant called swallow-wort].
 - 3. **Shall the sinner, knowing that [this process of confession/humbling/forgiveness] has been instituted by**

the Lord for his restoration, pass that by which restored the Babylonian king to his realms? Long time had he offered to the Lord his repentance, working out his [confession/humbling/forgiveness process] by a seven years' squalor, with his nails wildly growing after the eagle's fashion, and his unkempt hair wearing the shagginess of a lion. Him whom men were shuddering at, God was receiving back.

4. **But, on the other hand, the Egyptian emperor—who, after pursuing the once afflicted people of God, long denied to their Lord, rushed into the battle—did, after so many warning plagues, perish in the parted sea, (which was permitted to be passable to “the People” alone,) by the backward roll of the waves: for repentance and her handmaid [the process of confession/humbling/forgiveness] he had cast away.**
 - a. Tertullian, “On Repentance,” ANF 3:665–666.
- iii. Sometimes God authors the punishment (opposes the proud); sometimes the punishment is authored by Satan and God allows, to accomplish His purposes, including humbling, which leads to mercy and grace. (For example, the story of Job.)
- iv. Me:
 1. My sickness, anger, I want this over, learning, slowly, to be content in my suffering: I desire to get well, but if I never do, I will be content and serve You. It took 9 years!
 2. Long-term suffering is a tremendous test. Do not underestimate it! The daily battle to put your hope and trust in God.
- v. Read **Hebrews 12:3-13** over and over again!
 1. “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”
 2. He does this “for our profit,” both now and eternal!
- g. Enter the contest and train to win! (whether finding victory over greed and love of money, the focus of this quote, or the victory over pride!)

- i. "II. Perhaps the reason of salvation appearing more difficult to the rich than to poor men, is not single but manifold. **For some, merely hearing, and that in an off-hand way, the utterance of the Saviour, "that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," despair of themselves** as not destined to live, surrender all to the world, cling to the present life as if it alone was left to them, and so diverge more from the way to the life to come, no longer inquiring either whom the Lord and Master calls rich, or how that which is impossible to man becomes possible to God.
- ii. **But others rightly and adequately comprehend this, but attaching slight importance to the works which tend to salvation, do not make the requisite preparation for attaining to the objects of their hope.** And I affirm both of these things of the rich who have learned both the Saviour's power and His glorious salvation. With those who are ignorant of the truth I have little concern.
- iii. [we must teach these Christians] ... that the Lord gladly receives them, provided they are willing; and then, in addition, exhibit and teach how and by what deeds and dispositions they shall win the objects of hope, inasmuch as it is neither out of their reach, nor, on the other hand, attained without effort; but, as is the case with athletes—to compare things small and perishing with things great and immortal—let the man who is endowed with worldly wealth reckon that this depends on himself.
- iv. For among those, **one man, because he despaired of being able to conquer and gain crowns, did not give in his name for the contest; while another, whose mind was inspired with this hope, and yet did not submit to the appropriate labours, and diet, and exercises, remained uncrowned...."**
- v. [Don't exclude yourself from the contest before it begins and] "don't expect to grasp the crowns of immortality without struggle and effort, continuing untrained, and without contest."
- vi. "But let him go and put himself under the Word as his trainer, and Christ the President of the contest; and for his prescribed food and drink let him have the New Testament of the Lord; and for exercises, the commandments; and for elegance and ornament, the fair dispositions, love, faith, hope, knowledge of the truth, **gentleness, meekness**, pity, gravity: so that, when by the last trumpet the signal shall be given for the race and departure hence, as from the stadium of life, he may with a good conscience present himself victorious before the Judge who confers the rewards, confessedly worthy of the

Fatherland on high, to which he returns with crowns and the acclamations of angels.”

1. Clement of Alexandria, “Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?,” c. 180 AD, ANF 2.591-592.