

## God humbles the proud so he may give true splendor.

Text: Daniel 4:19-37 for 12/8/2019 by Pastor Bolwerk

King Nebuchadnezzar was truly a great man. To recognize that you just have to look at the nations he conquered, and the splendor of the kingdom which he built. The city of Babylon itself speaks of his greatness: the massive walls that protect the city, its well laid out streets, and the canals carrying water from the Tigris and Euphrates. Even the expansive palace with its hanging gardens all speak to the glory of king Nebuchadnezzar. And his glory was my glory. As the head general of the Babylonian army I was honored to serve my lord and king. As head of his armed forces not only was it my duty to protect the king, but I was also one of Nebuchadnezzar's most trusted advisors.

This is why I was the first to be there the day the king had that terrible dream. I woke early that morning and had gone to check on the soldiers who guard the king's chambers. As I approached his room, I heard Nebuchadnezzar cry out. I reached for my sword and told the soldiers to get some torches. I entered the king's room fearing the worst and found him sitting up in bed. His face looked pale and he was breathing hard. I asked him what was wrong, and he told me he had a terrible dream. Immediately **"he commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before [him] to interpret the dream"** (Daniel 4:6).

So I sent men to bring before the king all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners of the kingdom so they could interpret the king's dream. Surprisingly none of these men were able to do so. Finally, the last man entered. He was a Hebrew named Daniel. The king had given him the name Belteshazzar after one of our gods. Daniel had interpreted a dream for the king once before, and I wondered if he could do it again.

Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel that in his dream he saw an enormous tree that reached up to heaven and to the ends of the earth. Then he saw a messenger from heaven come and give the command to cut the tree down and strip off its branches. The messenger also commanded that the stump was to remain in the ground, bound with iron and bronze. The 'stump' would be drenched with dew, live among the animals and be given the mind of an animal until seven times passed.

At first Daniel was troubled by the dream. **The king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream and its meaning trouble you."** Belteshazzar answered, **"My Lord, if only the dream were about your enemies and its meaning about your foes!"** The tree which you saw grew and became strong. Its height reached to heaven, and it was visible to the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit was abundant. On it there was food for all. The wild animals lived under it, and the birds of the air lived in its branches. **You are the tree, Your Majesty. For you have grown, and you have become great. Your greatness has increased and reached to heaven. Your dominion reaches to the ends of the earth"** (vs. 19-22).

**"This is the interpretation, Your Majesty: It is a decree of the Most High that has come upon my lord, the king. You will be driven away from humans, and your dwelling will be with the wild animals. You will have to eat plants as bulls do, and you will be wet with the dew from the sky. Seven times will pass over you until you know that the Most High rules the kingdoms of men, and he gives them to whomever he wishes. Because they said to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will**

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**remain yours when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, let my advice be pleasing to you. Break away from your sins with righteousness and from your guilty deeds by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps your prosperity will be extended” (vs. 24-27).**

Daniel sounded sincere enough, but when I heard his words, I kept thinking, “How foolish! Why should the great king Nebuchadnezzar humble himself before some foreign God? We Babylonians clearly defeated Daniel’s people. If Daniel’s God couldn’t save the Jews from our power, how could he think his God could affect the greatest king in the world?” Besides, how could Daniel say Nebuchadnezzar was sinful and wicked? Look at all the good he had done for Babylonia. Look at all of the good he had done for Daniel!

My lord, the king, must have been thinking something similar because he never did respond to Daniel request. He seemed satisfied just to know what the dream ‘supposedly’ meant, and he went on ruling his kingdom as before. Weeks and months went by and nothing happened. Soon everyone had forgotten about the king’s dream.

But twelve months later, something dreadful happened. I was with the king up on the roof of the royal palace. The king was relaxing after a busy day and as he looked out over the city he said, **“Isn’t this the great Babylon that I built for a royal residence by my mighty power and my majestic glory?” While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice came down from heaven. It said, “It is announced to you, King Nebuchadnezzar: The kingdom has been taken away from you. You will be driven away from humans, and your dwelling will be with the wild animals. Grass will be fed to you as grass is fed to bulls, and seven times will pass over you until you know that the Most High rules the kingdoms of men, and he gives them to whomever he wishes” (vs. 30-32).**

I was terrified both by the voice, and by what I saw happen to the king! His eyes were large with a crazed look in them. He trembled and shook with fear. When he turned toward me, he looked at me as if I were a stranger! He stared at me for a few seconds, and then suddenly he turned and ran away yelling and making strange noises. I could not believe my eyes. What Daniel’s God had spoken against Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled (v. 33)!

Now I was afraid. If the God of Daniel could reduce the greatest king in the world to an animal, what could he do to me? If this God calls the acts of a great king ‘wicked’ and ‘sinful,’ what does he think of the things I do? Was I next? Even though I had command of the entire army of the kingdom of Babylon I felt powerless. This God was making it clear who was in control. It wasn’t the king, and it certainly wasn’t me! I felt so helpless, so I did the only thing I could think of: I went to talk to Daniel. Being a great wise man I thought he could help since his God was clearly with him.

I met with Daniel, told him what happened, and asked him what this was all about. I was surprised at what he had to say. Daniel spoke of how king Nebuchadnezzar was a picture of the people of Israel. I told him I didn’t understand. He said the one, true God had raised up Israel as a nation for a special purpose. Through Israel God was going to bring a Savior into the world. Not someone to save people from worldly enemies, but a

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Savior from sin. The people of the world had rebelled against God and brought eternal destruction on themselves, but God wanted to save the people from their rebellion.

As Daniel spoke, he did something rather odd: He brought out several scrolls. He opened one he told me how God had people record his words so that those words could be shared with the people of the world. Then he started reading from the scroll. **“The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one”** (Psalm 14:2-3). The words Daniel read were unsettling. If ‘no one’ is good, then how can anyone be good enough for God? Daniel pointed out that we cannot save ourselves from our sinfulness; only God can solve our problem of sin. And that is what God wants to do. Then he read, **“[God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust”** (Psalm 103:10-14).

I had certainly come to ‘fear’ this powerful God who controls all, but it was comforting to know that he is a loving and compassionate God. Daniel told me that God promised to save the people of this world from their sins by sending one called the “Messiah.” And God would send this Savior through the people of Israel. So God blessed the Israelites, and they became a great nation. But the people became proud and rebelled. They thought they didn’t have to listen to God; that they were in control of their lives. So God allowed trouble to come upon his people: The northern ten tribes of Israel were carried into exile by Assyria. When Judah rebelled, God brought Israel low by the power of Babylonia. Israel was a great nation, but like Nebuchadnezzar, God cut them off and left only a stump in the ground. Yet even now, out of the stump of Israel, God still promises to raise up a Savior. Through his prophet God told Israel **“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth”** (Isaiah 11:1-4).

Again, Daniel said how Nebuchadnezzar is a picture of Israel. God humbled Nebuchadnezzar to bring him true splendor: forgiveness of sins and faith in the true God. There is no greater honor that God can give to a person than to give them faith, for those who trust in God for forgiveness receive the gift of eternal life. God had humbled the Israelites, not to bring them glory and splendor, but so that he may give the world true splendor: a Savior from sin and eternal death.

Daniel reminded me of the king’s dream, and he pointed out that when the king humbles himself before God, acknowledges his sin, and trusts the Almighty, then God will

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forgive him and restore to him his kingdom.

And that's what happened. The king's nobles and I went to find Nebuchadnezzar. After a considerable amount of time and searching we found him and brought him back to the royal palace. There the king told us, **"At the end of the set time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me. So I blessed the Most High, and I praised and glorified the one who lives forever, because his dominion is an eternal dominion, and his kingdom lasts forever and ever. All of the inhabitants of the earth are considered to be nothing, and he does as he wishes with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. So there is no one who can hold back the hand of the Most High and say to him, "What have you done?" (vs. 34-35). The Almighty Ruler of Heaven restored to my lord, the king, both his throne and his splendor. So Nebuchadnezzar made the following proclamation: "Now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of Heaven, because all his works are true, and his ways are just. All those who walk in arrogance he is able to humble" (v. 37).**

I, too, have come to understand that truth. God does humble the proud, but he does it so he can give a person true splendor. How often do we become puffed up with pride? We act proud of our skills, our knowledge, our work, our position, or status in life. Sometimes we even walk in pride before God as if he should acknowledge us and our greatness. Yet, like my lord the king, I have learned how foolish that is.

Like Nebuchadnezzar we need to praise the Most High! We need to give honor and glory to him who lives forever because even though he humbles us he does so to give us eternal splendor. The only true God has sent the Branch from the stump of Jesse who has removed from us our sins and paid for our foolish pride. The Messiah, the Savior, has removed our sin as far as the east is from the west. He has saved us from eternal death. So let us walk humbly before him and give honor and glory to him who gives us the splendor of the eternal glories of heaven. Amen.