

DANIEL 4:28-37, Part 7 11-13-16

The King Meets the KING

Once upon a time, long ago and far away, a powerful king had a dream. It was a dream from God warning him that if he didn't straighten up he would be humiliated by becoming a crazy animal-like madman. But the king, being very proud, did not heed the warning and a year later lost his throne and his dignity, and his sanity, in order that he might be prepared to meet someone. The King's name was Nebuchadnezzar. The kingdom is Babylon in the 6th century before Christ. The one he was getting ready to meet is Jehovah, the Most High God. Let's look once more at the fourth chapter of Daniel and the story of how the king meets the KING. **28-37** *All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' 31 While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, 32 and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' 33 Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' 36 At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."*

Most everything I have to say today is a reflection on that last verse in which the king praises God for his ability to humble the proud.

Now that the election is over, how about a Donald Trump quote – or a few.

(1) *All the women on The Apprentice flirted with me. Consciously or unconsciously. That is to be expected.*

(2) *I've had a beautiful, I've had a flawless campaign. You'll be writing books about this campaign.*

(3) *America is broken. I alone can fix it.*

(4) *I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters.*

(5) *My IQ is one of the highest — and you all know it!*

(6) *I think apologizing's a great thing, but you have to be wrong. I will absolutely apologize, sometime in the hopefully distant future, if I'm ever wrong.*

In an interview with Lesley Stahl we find this exchange:

LESLEY STAHL: *You're not known to be a humble man.*

DONALD TRUMP: *I think I am, actually humble. I think I'm much more humble than you would understand.*

Now, Mr. Trump comes by his humility quite naturally. Most of us mistakenly think we are different. The Bible says *all of us*, are born with a terrible pride, a sickness that can only be cured with an operation by the Great Physician who alone, who alone, has the ability to humble those who walk in pride. As we study God's word today we will consider three realities: the right of God to touch hearts, the grace of God to humble hearts, and our hope in God to change hearts.

First, consider the right of God to touch hearts. There are many who will admit that God is sovereign over the weather. Some see Him as sovereign over many circumstances but will deny the Lord any right to interfere with the matter of human thought and will. *Certainly*, they say, *God does not and cannot control what we choose to do*. But Scripture says otherwise. The Bible says God does whatever He pleases in heaven and earth and in the hearts of men and women. Just think of the Moses story. What did God do to the heart of Pharaoh? It says God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the children of Israel go. It says God softened the heart of his daughter so that she would accept Moses as her own child. Listen to Proverbs 21:1 *The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes*. He what? You mean to tell me that God imposes his will in the heart of free moral agents, even kings? That's what it says. And

rather than get upset over that, shouldn't we be glad in that reality as was Nebuchadnezzar? He praises God for doing this in his life. And he certainly recognizes the rights of God to do so. Paul writes of this in Romans 9 where he argues that the sovereign Lord who made us may do with us as He pleases. He can deal with us in justice. Or He can deal with us in mercy. He can darken our hearts or illumine them, harden them or soften them. Having just mentioned what God did with Pharaoh the apostle Paul then says this. Romans 9:**18-19** *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"* In other words, you will complain that God isn't being fair to judge people for having hard hearts when God has the ability to soften them. **20-21** *On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?* The point is what? God has a right to do anything He pleases. This is His planet. We are His creations. He is free to do what He wills with all that is His.

Now, I don't see Nebuchadnezzar struggling with the issues of Romans 9. He is just praising God for sovereign grace. Nebuchadnezzar had undergone a dramatic and wonderful change of character and he gives credit to whom? To God. It wasn't the king who changed the king. It was the KING who changed the king. God is the One who humbled him. This is why you can never be proud of being humble. It isn't something you can work up. It is a gift of the Lord alone who is able to humble those who walk in pride. And God does this not by forcing hearts, but by changing them. God never forces anyone to do anything. What He does is touch the heart in such a way as to make it willing and even inclined to do what He has appointed to be done. Psalm 110:**3a** *Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power.* That is, when God extends His mighty arm, one result is the free choice of His people to follow Him. We speak theologically of God's effectual or irresistible calling upon a person. What we mean is that the Lord is able to so work in a soul that the person will necessarily and inevitably embrace Christ, choose Christ. In John 6:**37a** *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.* And the Lord knows they will come not because God will force them, but because He will change them and give them the *want-to*. They will come freely in the day of God's power. Praise the Lord for that. Listen, if God did not have the ability and the right to change hearts there would be no point in me preaching. There would be no point in evangelism, no point in prayer, no point in Christian counseling. Proud hearts stay proud until transformed by the King who alone has the power and the right to touch the human heart.

Secondly, this morning, let's look at the grace of God to humble hearts. In the story of Nebuchadnezzar it seems that God was awfully tough with him, but, in truth, there is nothing kinder, nothing more loving, nothing more important God can do for you than humble you. God is the pride-slayer and all of us have plenty of the ugly stuff. You either kill it or it will kill you. There is nothing more destructive than pride. It has a blinding effect upon the soul. We become unable to see our faults, unable to see our needs, and, consequently, unable to see the Savior who stands ready to bless and exalt what kind of people? The humble. Peters and Waterman, the management gurus write about the blinding effects of pride, how it distorts our view of reality. They report that *A random sample of male adults were asked to rank themselves on the ability to get along with others; all subjects, 100%, put themselves in the top half of the population. 60% rated themselves in the top 10% & a full 25% thought they were in the top 1%. In a parallel finding 70% rated themselves in the top quartile in leadership; only 2% felt they were below average as leaders. Finally, in an area in which self-deception should be hard for most males, at least, 60% said they were in the top quartile in athletic ability, only 6% said they were below average.* This is where Nebuchadnezzar was wasn't he? He looked out over Babylon and said 30 *Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?* He overrated himself in a huge way. Every time I read this story I think of another one in Scripture. In Acts 12 we read of Herod the Roman-appointed Jewish king Acts 12:21-23 *On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.* What's the old saying? Pride comes when? Before a fall. Over and again the Scriptures warn that God brings down the proud, opposes the proud. And don't think that the only pride God opposes is the crass, blatant kind exhibited by these two kings. Pride shows itself in many ways. I think John Piper was very insightful when he wrote: *Boasting is the response of pride to success. Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, "I deserve admiration because I have achieved so much." Self-pity says, "I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much." Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. Boasting sounds self-sufficient. Self-pity sounds self-sacrificing. The reason self-pity does not look like pride is that it appears to be needy. But the need arises from a wounded ego and the desire of the self-pitying is not really for others to see them as helpless, but heroes. The need self-pity feels does not come from a sense of unworthiness,*

but from a sense of unrecognized worthiness. It is the response of unapplauded pride. Herod had applauded pride. Most of us struggle with unapplauded pride, which is just as ugly, just as blinding, just as damning. It is the sovereign grace of God to remove it from us and fill us with a humility that lays hold of the greatest promises of God's word. The Bible says God exalts the humble, fills the humble, graces the humble. Question then: How does one become humble? We've said it already. God alone can make us humble. He graciously promises great things on the condition of humility and then graciously meets the condition in the souls of those he loves.

How does God do this? How does God make proud men humble? Nebuchadnezzar's story is a good example. God humbles us by the work of His providence in our circumstances and the work of His Spirit in our hearts. Normally, God brings to pass something in our lives that reminds us of our frailty, our weakness, our sinfulness and our need. It could be an injury, an illness, a great failure. Reality comes and gets right in our faces and makes it hard to ignore how needy we are, how dependent. We shouldn't have to think long to realize that, apart from God, we are nothing, we have nothing, we can do nothing. But amazingly, many there are whose circumstances scream to them of their neediness without ever humbling them. Many there are who get humiliated without getting humbled. To get humbled requires the additional work of God's Spirit in our souls to soften us, to break us, to grant us tears of cleansing and incline our voices to cry unto God. The Spirit of Christ is needed if we are to be really humble. You look at the story of the prodigal son. There we read of a proud, young man who despises the goodness of his father's house. He demands his money and hits the road convinced that he knows where real livin' is to be found. And what happens? The bottom falls out. His money is gone. His friends are gone. He is humiliated. Is he humble yet? No. Lots of people have been humiliated. Lots of people wallow in failure and weakness without ever getting the point. But the prodigal did catch on because the Spirit of Christ humbled him, and lifted him out of the humiliation and back to the father's house. I heard a testimony recently by the former baseball great, Darryl Strawberry. If you are a baseball fan you know all about Darryl. He was on the cover of Sports Illustrated seven times more than even me. He was an eight-time All-Star who became famous, not only for his sweet, powerful swing but for the out-of-control lifestyle he tried to maintain. He set records for promiscuity, became an addict to multiple substances, was in prison, in debt, you name it. But ten years ago he found Christ as His Lord and is now completely changed. He says the old Strawberry is gone, dead. Now he lives in a modest home with his wife, runs a ministry in central Florida and says, and I quote, *I've never been happier in my life; it's so much fun being a pastor.* How about that!

Thirdly, this morning, let's talk about our hope in God to change hearts. Our hope in God to change hearts. We speak often around here of world missions as we have done again today. But, ponder what we are doing in taking the gospel throughout the earth. In a way, what we are doing is nonsensical. Here we are, given by Jesus, a message about repentance to declare to a world of people who are what? Proud. Insufferably proud. What possible hope could there be in declaring a kingdom of servanthood and love and humility to a world of people like that? Where is the attraction for anyone to buy into the Jesus agenda? In the natural, there is none. This is the proverbial *selling air-conditioners to Eskimos*. If all we have to hope in is common human persuasiveness our cause is lost. But we don't hope in that. We hope in God who is able, through our message, to humble the proud, to break through the hardened soul and plant his seed. If God couldn't do that, if God didn't do that, if God was too polite or reserved to do such a thing, what would be the point of going across the globe or even across the street to share the gospel? But, a sovereign Pride-Slayer is the hope of Christian missions. We go out preaching Jesus, confident that God has chosen some for life whose hearts will be changed as the word is opened.

In some respects, you know, all non-Christians are the same. In other respects they may be quite different. I can think of some who seem like excellent candidates for the gospel. Why, they almost act like Christians now. But, there are others who strike me as utterly hopeless. You know what I mean? There are some unbelievers who are just so proud and disinterested, or evil and deceived there seems no point at all in praying for their salvation or witnessing to them. What does our story say to us about that? Is there someone out there too proud for the gospel, too far gone for the humbling grace of God? Here we have a king with unlimited powers of government. We have a man boasting of his own might and his own glory. We have in Nebuchadnezzar the epitome of vanity and God humbled even him. To the early church there must have been no one who seemed further from the kingdom of Christ than Saul of Tarsus, that self-righteous zealot who was dedicated to their extinction. When he was converted they could hardly believe it. But the lesson of his story and Nebuchadnezzar's story is that God's grace is stronger than anyone's pride. When I was in college, I was seeing a young lady whose parents were not Christians. They were both veterinarians, had money, were heavy into psychology and on the brink of divorce, with no interest in Jesus. Every time their daughter and I were together we prayed for their salvation, but I just could not see it. They were hardly the kind to give one hope. But our hope is not in people is it? It is in God and so we prayed. Virtually every time we were together we prayed for her parents. Within three years my friend's parents and their son had all become Christians, their marriage had

been healed, and the dad had become an elder in the church. Whenever I am tempted to think someone is beyond hope I remember Bill and Manu Lyall, and I remember that God is able to humble those who walk in pride.

What is the great barrier to missionary success? It is not cultural. It is not linguistic. It is not financial. It is not political. The greatest barrier on any mission field is proud, cold, hard hearts. And the greatest need is the power of God that is able to change those hearts. Is it possible for the gospel to ever really penetrate into the nation of Japan with its tradition and materialism? Is it possible for the gospel to ever really make a difference in Muslim countries where Christians are seen as the enemy? Is it possible for the gospel to impact the progressive nations of the earth where people think God is an ancient fable of no modern use? The answer is YES. YES. YES. For God is able to humble the proud religionist, the proud atheist, the proud materialist, and open their hearts to the good news of Jesus, making the worshippers who find their joy in the glory of Christ. Knowing this sends us to our knees. Knowing this opens our mouths to speak of Jesus. Knowing this we hope in God for the success of the word. Praise the Lord that He can humble men and women under the gospel. I praise God that He is able to humble me. I need this work of grace in my own soul to make me a humble husband. God can use your marriage to humble you. I know he did it with me. I was so arrogant as to think that marrying me would make my wife happy, only to learn that if I didn't find some more humility I was going to make her miserable. Then what about parenting? Oh my, did I need the grace of God to make me a humble daddy. If marriage doesn't help with humility try parenting. I need the grace of God to make me a humble witness for Christ, to make me so unconcerned of what others think that I can freely and lovingly declare to them the message of Christ. For those called as Christians, called to be missionaries for the king, there is nothing we need to understand more than this. Jesus told us in the Great Commission: *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go and make disciples. He says do your disciple-making in the knowledge that I have all power.* And this is our hope, that with his power He is able to humble those who walk in pride – the proudest and the vilest, the richest and the brightest, and even little 'ole very proud me. Bless His holy name and let's pray.