

THRIVING in BABYLON

A STUDY OF DANIEL

SERMON TITLE: Heaven Rules
SCRIPTURE: Daniel 4

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Sometimes life feels like it's all about survival. Sometimes it feels like all we can do is keep our head above water. This is true for everyone, but especially for followers of Jesus. As Christians, we are exiles, and that means that survival is doubly difficult. But God has not called us to survive; he has called us to thrive. And the place that God called us to thrive is in Babylon - the place of our exile. With this in view, the book of Daniel is a perfect picture for us of what it looks like to be faithful in a foreign land that isn't our home. Daniel doesn't merely survive in Babylon. Rather, with God's help, he thrives there. What would it look like for us to do the same here in Greenville?

SERMON NOTES

Have you had a weird dream lately? ...a dream that even after you woke up you couldn't quit thinking about it? Today, in Daniel 4, we're going to look at another weird dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had that terrified him, but it was a dream that actually came true.

By way of reminder, the book of Daniel is a story that helps us explore what it means to be God's people when you are in a minority in a society that doesn't hold to your beliefs and values—when you are in a culture that views your faith with indifference or even hostility. The book is about the struggle to maintain faithfulness and hope in exile. So, what does it mean to be a people who maintain the hope that Jesus is the King of the world when most of what you see going on around you seems to deny that reality? Daniel 4 helps answer that question because in this chapter we see that God is God and he can do anything he wants with whoever he wants. This story—really the whole book—is an affirmation of God's sovereignty—it's a story about two kings, two kingdoms, and two sovereignties. It is a story that tells us that God is in control of who is in control. The amazing thing about this story is that it's the only place in the Holy Scripture that's written by a pagan king. Nebuchadnezzar's personal account of his encounter with God is recorded for all eternity in God's book.

This morning Charlie is working through the entire passage and making commentary as he goes along. So feel free to take notes in the big space below.

Now for sure, there is a moral lesson here about pride—“those who walk in pride God is able to humble (v37)” —in fact, as we’ll see next week—chapters 4 and 5 are about pride—about God humbling the proud—and that was certainly the personal application for Nebuchadnezzar, but I think there’s a bigger lesson here in chapter 4 than pride for us—THINK—*Why does God include the personal testimony of a wicked, ruthless, pagan king among the inspired canon of Holy Scripture? Is it simply to teach us a lesson about being humble and not being proud? I’ve heard many sermons through the years that camp on pride as the application for this story—but I think there’s more going on here.*

If you were an Israelite living as an exile in Babylon and you hear what happened to this king who conquered your people—who maybe even killed your parents, family, or friends—when you hear this story—*What do you think God wants you to take away from how he humbled Nebuchadnezzar?*

And for us—living now as a minority in a culture that has rejected our beliefs and values and labeled them as irrelevant and even dangerous...

What does God want us to take away from this story? What is God trying to teach us as a church? ...as his church in this moment as we are trying to thrive in modern-day Babylon? ...as we’re trying to live out our faith in a culture that’s trying to coerce us into thinking what God says is right is actually wrong? ...as we try to maintain hope in the face of our fears of what the future will be like for our kids and grandkids? What does God want us to take away from this story?

Would it not be the simple truth that HEAVEN RULES?—that—“God does as he pleases among the host of heaven and among all the peoples of the earth; and no one can hold back his hand or say to him, “What have you done (4:35)?”

Here’s what I’m driving at—Knowing that HEAVEN RULES gives us hope!

Compare Ephesians 1:20-23—read from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase “The Message”—to what we learn from Daniel 4.

Discussion Starters

Take time to read all the way through Daniel 4. (Note: You may want to ask different people to read 6 or 7 verses at a time.)

1. What have been some of the weird dreams you’ve had?
2. How are the two stories of the two dreams that Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2 and Daniel 4 alike? How are they different?
3. What does Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the colossal tree reveal about how he thinks about himself and his kingdom?
4. What did the image/symbol of a tree represent? (See Ezekiel 31 for another story about a tree that is very much like the one here in this dream.)
5. When Daniel interprets the dream for Nebuchadnezzar what is surprising in how he relates to his King (4:19) How do you think Daniel was able to not take pleasure in the horrible fate that awaits his enemy, King Nebuchadnezzar? What does that imply for us when we see someone “getting what they deserve?”
6. What does this story teach us about pride?
7. But, as Charlie said, there’s more to this story than a moral lesson on pride. What is the big takeaway from this story?
8. How does Ephesians 1:20-23—read from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase “The Message”—give us even more confidence about how God is in control of who’s in control.