



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Daniel 4:1-37

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English Standard Version

“Pride and Proclamation”

This is the 5th sermon in the series on the book of Daniel entitled,
“A Broken World and a Sovereign God.”

Daniel 4:1-37

“King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

³ How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and His dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶ So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸ At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹ “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. ¹⁰ The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed

from it.

¹³ “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.’ ¹⁸ This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, ²¹ whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— ²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. ²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,’ ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. ²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹ While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

³⁴ *At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to 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, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*

³⁶ *At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.* ³⁷ *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."*

Heavenly Father, once again we have come to Your Word and we're excited to read this story and we know that this is Your inspired truth. We ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit, You enable us to learn from the Prophet Daniel and from the confession of King Nebuchadnezzar. By it show us your great sovereignty and your great mercy. And may you teach us our deep need for repentance. Do this in and for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The Perfect Christmas Letter*¹

Don't you just hate those glowing family newsletters that we get every year during the holidays? You know ... the one's that sound like this ...

"It's been a great year for the Lamplighters! Greg had been hoping for a promotion, but what a surprise when the CEO came to his desk and begged him to take over the company. The whole office chipped in and gave the family a week in Paris to celebrate. Wasn't that nice? Of course Jeanne has been busy as well. You probably saw that news item about how she rescued a school bus full of children from a kidnapper, armed only with a plastic comb. Nice to think, too, that the poem she wrote for last year's holiday letter will be chiseled into the wall of the Library of Congress. The twins did so well at the state tap-dance championship that Spielberg is crafting a movie around them, while Greg Jr.'s science fair project was the topic of much excitement in the New England Journal of Medicine."

When I get Christmas letters like that, I want to take the Lamplighter's perfect little family picture, set it on fire, and then **stomp** on the ashes.

Why is that? Pride. The problem's not just the Lamplighter's pride in their achievements: the Lord will deal with them (or not) as He sees fit. No, what my response to the letter reveals is the pride **within my own heart**.

Pride inherently compares our own achievements and rewards to those of others around us: it **boasts** if we've achieved greater recognition than others, and it **sulks** if we've done less or

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the article "Pride: The Anti-Self-Esteem," by Frederica Mathewes-Green, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2002/08/Pride-The-Anti-Self-Esteem.aspx?p=1>. It can also be found at her website, <http://www.frederica.com/writings/seven-deadly-sins-pride.html>. Parts are adapted from the chapter "The Great Sin" in *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, pages 108-114.

been passed over. In its very nature, pride has to be **cleverer** than someone else, more **attractive** than someone else, be **wealthier** than someone else, or be a **better** cook, a **faster** runner, a more **skillful** gardener, or whatever. Pride is never satisfied in what's been accomplished because its essence lies in **defeating** others, not in the achievement itself. The Lamplighter's letter makes me feel like a hopeless underachiever and so it **challenges my pride**.

Pride is one of the few sins that's almost universally recognized as being wrong. Most people still think that pride goes before a fall. Even people who don't call themselves religious find pride offensive. Yet at the same time ... there are very few people who are able to recognize the sin of pride within themselves; it deceptively slides into our hearts undetected.

However, in God's grace and mercy, He sometimes uses life's difficult experiences to remove the **blinders** from our eyes and show us what our hearts really contain. He exposes and confounds our pride in order to transform us from the inside out. Daniel 4 is about one such journey from pride to humility.

And so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of the Book of Daniel, we're in chapter 4, and here we find ourselves ...

v. 1-3: BEGINNING AT THE END ²

"King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures from generation to generation."

The narrative actually begins at the end of the story, with a letter of praise to God that Nebuchadnezzar wrote **after** his recovery. The letter is addressed to **"peoples, nations, and languages,"** the same group summoned to bow down to the golden image back in chapter 3. The **"signs and wonders"** the Lord has performed certainly include the fiery furnace, yet the key difference is that now Nebuchadnezzar speaks of **"signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me."** From being a persecutor of the faithful, Nebuchadnezzar has himself become a witness to the faith.

This is a striking shift in the life of the most powerful man in the world. It's **as dramatic** as the transformation in the New Testament of Saul the persecuting Pharisee into Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. In both cases, the change was not brought about by **merely seeing** the power of God. Saul saw the Lord's grace sustain Stephen through his violent death in Acts 8 and Nebuchadnezzar saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego emerge unharmed from the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. Yet neither man was converted by that experience.

Miraculous demonstrations of God's power can get people **to stop and think**, but true conversion is normally accomplished through **a personal experience of God's grace**. And that personal experience in Nebuchadnezzar's life is what we see in Daniel 4.

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, the transformation required the stripping away of everything in which he gloried. Nebuchadnezzar was literally the lord of all he surveyed. I mean, can you imagine reading **Nebuchadnezzar's** annual holiday letter? It would have made the Lamplighter's letter seem trivial by comparison.

And yet it was precisely that situation of **great prosperity** that was an obstacle to the

² The Exposition of the text is adapted from *Daniel: Reformed Expository Commentary* by Dr. Ian Duguid, pages 61-76. A few comments are taken from the study notes on Daniel by Dr. Duguid and Dr. Paul Wegner found in the *ESV Study Bible*. Some parts are taken from *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* by Tremper Longman, page 118.

work of God in his life and which had to be addressed if his heart was going to be changed.

And that's an important point for us to recognize in our own lives. **Discontent, disaster, and discomfort** ... are often the **precursors to real spiritual growth**. As long as we're pretty comfortable, we're not usually willing to examine our hearts. On the other hand, when God disturbs the calm waters of our life, then we're more than ready to seek out change. For most people, it's when our career hopes are **dashed**, when a serious relationship gets **shredded**, when the doctor announces he has **bad news** ... it's **then** that we get serious **about spiritual things**.

And if that's true, then, it suggests that we should approach the troubling times of our lives with a **far more positive outlook** than we normally do. The difficult experiences of life should give us an **expectation** that God is doing something in our lives.

So let's see how that happens in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Once again, he has a dream, and once again, he finds it terrifying. So what was it? Let's see ...

v. 4-18: THE DREAM EXPLAINED

"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶ So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸ At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹ "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. ¹⁰ The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³ "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' ¹⁸ This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

The first challenge from the Lord is directed at the contentedness that Nebuchadnezzar feels, verse 4, **"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace."** And so God sends a dream of a toppled tree. And since he wasn't all that excited about **the last dream** God gave him, he's even **less** excited about **this one**. The text says, verse 5, that he was afraid and alarmed. Add to that his frustration that once again, verse 7, *"the magicians, the*

enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers” were unable to interpret the dream for him.

And so, once again, he turns to Daniel, verse 9, *“I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.”* And Nebuchadnezzar trusts that Daniel can do this, jumping down to verse 18, *“And you, O Belshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”*

We’re not going to spend a lot of time on the dream itself, but move right into ...

v. 19-26: THE DREAM INTERPRETED

“Then Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, ‘Belshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.’ Belshazzar answered and said, ‘My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!’²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth,²¹ whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived—²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,’²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.”

In his interpretation Daniel provided the key to understanding the dream. The enormous tree represented Nebuchadnezzar himself. So far, so good. Nebuchadnezzar would have been quite pleased to see himself in the role of the cosmic tree, the center of the universe. As with his earlier dream in Daniel 2, where Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, this dream acknowledges Nebuchadnezzar’s power and might, verse 22, *“it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.”*

Yet this image of the tree has a dark side as well. The description of the tree reaching to the heavens reminds us once again (there’s lots of repetition in Daniel, either because those Daniel was speaking to were slow learners or the people reading him 2,600 years later are ... one of those) ... anyway, we’re reminded once again of the builders of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 trying to construct something whose top would reach into the heavens. Usually such acts of pride result in disaster. This dream of a tree is no exception.

In this case, the image of the tree itself suggests the appropriate metaphor for its downfall: the divine lumberjack will bring the mighty tree crashing to the ground, removing it from its place of influence and glory.

Nebuchadnezzar would not only lose his power and glory but also his rationality (which

distinguishes him as human), so that he would behave like the wild animals, verse 25, “*you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox.*” The one who thought of himself in godlike terms would become beastlike so he could learn that he is merely human after all.

However, when the tree is cut down, the stump and the roots were allowed to remain. Therefore, there was the hope of new growth emerging from the stump. So too, God’s act of judgment on Nebuchadnezzar would not be final, verse 26, “*as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.*”

Nebuchadnezzar would experience a full period of judgment in this animal-like state, until the time was complete, whatever that time was, the text says “**seven times.**” And yet, when the time was complete, and Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that “**Heaven rules**” — that God is in charge of the universe and he is not — then his kingdom would be restored to him.

But there’s one interesting verse right in the middle of this passage that shows that Nebuchadnezzar’s fate was **not** inevitable. And in that verse, verse 27, we have ...

v. 27: THE CALL FOR REPENTANCE

“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

The purpose of the dream was to provide Nebuchadnezzar with a warning so that he might **repent of his pride**. He can then demonstrate his repentance by doing what is right and showing concern for the oppressed. If Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself, then God wouldn't need to humble him. If he didn't repent, however, then he'll find out who's really in control of the universe.

In the same way, God sometimes presses in on our hearts **the likely outcome of our present course**. And often, it's not very pretty. As a Pastor, there's nothing more sobering than to see men **shipwreck their lives** due to their own ego and pride. This can lead to moral failure, spiritual failure, and the more common idolatries related to wealth and materialism. **That** brings me up short and challenges my pride, for I know that I'm no better than they are, and it's only God's grace that keeps me from going down the same road.

Sometimes God gives you a glimpse of the **depravity of your own heart**. Perhaps you catch yourself thinking something really mean. Perhaps someone cuts you off in traffic and something profane just jumps out of your mouth. And right then, you see **the seeds of sin** in your own life. It's a warning shot across your bow, a challenge to repent and humble yourself before the Lord while there's still time, asking for help and strength to keep you faithful.

Sadly, the warning of the dream, the call to repentance here in verse 27, went **unheeded** by Nebuchadnezzar. A whole year went by, during which he had plenty of opportunities to live differently. Instead, he misunderstood God's merciful delay of judgment as a sign that the warning could be ignored.

And therefore, the judgment of God came upon him, and we see ...

v. 28-33: THE DREAM FULFILLED

“All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O

King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.”

The boastful words of verse 30 ... “*Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?*” ... those words were barely out of his mouth before the sentence of judgment was announced from Heaven. Nebuchadnezzar lost his power and position, was driven out of Babylon, and his humanity taken away. He’s eating grass and living out in the wild like the beasts of the field. Lots of people have tried to figure out what mental illness Nebuchadnezzar suffered from, but that’s not the point of the text.

The story here is far more interested in the unique **inhumanity** of Nebuchadnezzar’s condition. This condition is, after all, **a direct judgment of God**, and not a naturally occurring disease. Finally, at the end of God’s appointed time, Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes to heaven and the story ends with ...

V. 34-37: THE HUMILITY OF RESTORATION

“At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to 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, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Notice when God’s judgment came upon Nebuchadnezzar he was looking **down** at everyone else and when the judgment was lifted he had lifted his eyes **up** towards Heaven. And this happened because his pride was stripped away along with all of his achievements and possessions until he came to recognize that **whatever he had and whatever he did** before was the gift of God, who can exalt the lowliest of men to kingship or can bring down the mightiest of men.

At the end of God’s appointed time of judgment, Nebuchadnezzar raised **his eyes to heaven and his reason was restored**. Once brought low by God, he was brought back and restored to control of his kingdom, demonstrating that the Lord is able **both to humble** the proud and to **exalt** the humble.

And so he praises God, verse 34, “*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.*”

And the chapter ends with, verse 37, “*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are right and His ways are just; and those who walk in pride He is able to humble.*”

This became Nebuchadnezzar’s own confession of faith in the God of Heaven, and it’s

the last word we hear from him in the Bible. The great and mighty **persecutor** of Israel, the **destroyer** of Jerusalem, was **humbled** by God's grace and brought to **confess** God's mercy. God used Daniel's **faithfulness** to bring light to this Gentile. His personal experience showcases God's power; if someone like Nebuchadnezzar can be humbled and restored, then **surely no one** is beyond the reach of God's grace.

Once again, there's a final note that we **can't** afford to miss in all of this. And that's the reminder that God uses ...

CONCLUSION: *Suffering and Redemption*

First of all, this is an important message for Israel to hear, for the imagery of the tree reduced to a stump spoke to their situation just as much as it did to Nebuchadnezzar's. When the prophet Isaiah was called to preach judgment to the people of Israel, he asked the Lord how long he had to preach judgment?

And God answered him, **Isaiah 6:11-13**, *"Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said: 'Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste,¹² and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.'"* **The holy seed is its stump.**

This judgment was exactly what had come upon the people of Israel in Daniel's day. Israel itself was the tree that had been cut down until only the stump remained. Yet that also meant that Nebuchadnezzar's experience could be **a source of hope** for them. If Nebuchadnezzar could be forgiven and restored when he humbled himself and looked to Heaven, then Israel too could be forgiven and restored. If, in the midst of the devastation of the exile, they took this lesson to heart and humbled themselves before God, then they could **expect** to experience His grace and mercy once more.

The same reality is true for us as well. **The gospel is a humbling message.** The only way for us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is with empty hands, lifting our eyes to Heaven, and confessing our **awful** sins and our **desperate** need for a Savior. By nature, that's hard for us to admit ... because we want to say with Nebuchadnezzar, to paraphrase verse 30, *"Is this not a great house, which I have built by my power as my residence and for the glory of myself?"*

We're all inclined to believe that the world revolves around us. Some of us trust in our achievements, and we really have achieved some things. Some of us trust in our own righteousness, because, compared to others, we look virtuous and noble. But we can only receive the Gospel when we stop comparing ourselves with others and recognize that before a perfectly holy God **even our greatest achievements merely increase our condemnation.**

When we stand in front of God, our problem is not just **our weaknesses and our failures**, **but it's our successes and our strengths**, because these lead us to take pride in ourselves. **Our goodness itself** can be an obstacle to receiving the message of the Gospel, because in **our pride** we don't see **our need for God**. To cure us of our deadly pride, God may **graciously** bring us to **disaster**.

We may find that it's only when we commit a sin that we thought we **wouldn't commit** ... that God is showing us the depravity that really lurks within our hearts. And as painful as that may be, if it leads us to **repentance**, then it's a work of God's grace!

The worst thing that could happen is for God to leave us comfortable in our pride. Without the pigsty, the prodigal wouldn't have ever made it home.

And so humiliation, weakness, failure, **sin** ... which leads to **repentance** ... can be the

means by which God brings about transformation in your life and give you a fresh understanding of the Gospel. Nebuchadnezzar simply looked to God's grace to restore him, not based on anything that was in him — not even his newfound humility — but his hope was **simply in God's mercy**.

But why does God exalt the humble? Oh, we understand when He humbles the proud. The Nebuchadnezzar's deserve what they get. The Lamplighters need to be taken down a peg or two ... or ten. But why does God exalt **the humble**? Why do **they** receive God's grace?

And to answer that question we need to consider another king who was brought from the heights to the depths. He didn't create one of the Seven Wonders of the World; He created the world itself ... out of nothing. Even though He was in very nature God, He humbled Himself and made Himself man. He left the glories of Heaven and came to dwell among us, a step downward as least as large as Nebuchadnezzar's. This king took on the form of a servant; He touched lepers, healed the sick, preached to the poor, and washed the feet of others. He carried this servant's form all the way to the cross, where, even though He didn't do anything wrong, He died a criminal's death. **What more humbling experience can there be than for the living God to die**? Yet this king's humbling was not forced on Him because of His pride, but it was a voluntary choice on His part to **save us from our pride**.

This humble king is named Jesus. And His time of humiliation is over and now He's **exalted** in glory. Now He's accomplished our salvation and is at the Father's side. Now He's the One to whom our worship is directed. And that's why the humble are exalted, not because their humility deserves it, but because instead of looking at themselves, their eyes are fixed on Jesus, who was once humbled, but is now glorified.

And looking to Jesus, the King of Heaven, is the answer for our pride.

How can we exalt ourselves and sing our own praises when our eyes are **fixed on Jesus**? What's more, the scars that remain visible in His hands and feet as the Lamb that was slain constantly remind us of their cause ... which is our depravity. And so in view of the incredible mercy that we've received, how can we boast in anything **other** than the Cross of Christ?

And as we contemplate Christ, we're reminded over and over again that the only thing we contribute to our salvation **is our sin**. And yet at the same time, we're reminded that **as foul as we are**, we're more **loved** and **accepted** and **forgiven** than we could ever dare hope for.

So take your eyes off yourself and your own **self-righteousness**.

And take your eyes off yourself and your own self-condemnation.

Instead, lift your eyes to Heaven and look to Christ, the author and perfecter of your faith, the humbled and exalted King. His death and resurrection are the means by which you're restored to your senses and made fit to stand in His presence — now and forever.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we continue to study Daniel over the next few months, we pray that You would enable us to know and believe in Your gracious sovereignty. Thank You for pursuing us until we bow to Your love and mercy. Help us to fix our eyes on our exalted Savior, Jesus Christ, for we ask it in His name, and for His glory. Amen.

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Philippians 2:8-11

“And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”