

***Daniel 4:19-37. Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! <sup>20</sup> The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, <sup>21</sup> with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air— <sup>22</sup> you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. <sup>23</sup> "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.' <sup>24</sup> "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: <sup>25</sup> You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. <sup>26</sup> The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. <sup>27</sup> Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." <sup>28</sup> All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>29</sup> Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, <sup>30</sup> he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" <sup>31</sup> The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. <sup>32</sup> You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." <sup>33</sup> Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. <sup>34</sup> At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.***

Maybe it's all the pomp and circumstance that surrounds them. Maybe it's the riches and the power, the attention and the authority. Whatever the reason, kings and rulers in general aren't usually a very humble group. Those who are humble stand out as the exception. As we prepare to meet our King Jesus we see how he stood out as the Prince of Peace. While the kings of this earth are so often prideful and arrogant, the King of kings was born in humility. He came to save. He came to save both

prince and pauper, both the average person and those born with royal blood. He came to save us all from our sins. He came to save you and me, for we too, along with our many other sins, we too, can be full of pride. We too can be arrogant. We don't even have to be surrounded by pomp and circumstance. We don't have to be lavished with riches and power; pride can swell up in all of us. But our King comes in humility to save us. He comes to confront us with our sin, but most of all he comes to comfort us and save us.

So let's look at this example of God teaching a prideful king an important lesson in humility. And as we do we will learn of God's power to humble even the most prideful and we will rightfully praise him for his mercy that restores the sinner.

Nebuchadnezzar had built an impressive empire. His kingdom and his influence stretched out throughout the known world and he had just added the kingdom of Judah as a notch in his belt. He had overtaken Assyria as the major superpower of the ancient world and he had done what King Sennacherib of Assyria could not do, he had defeated the kingdom of Judah and sacked the holy city of Jerusalem. Babylon was *the* major global force of the entire ancient world and Nebuchadnezzar was its king. The king swelled with the pride that had come from amassing such a large empire. But this powerful king would soon witness the power of the king of Heaven. He would be humbled and set in his place and in the end he would praise the one true God.

Our lesson for today was not the only time that Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed the power of the true God. Daniel had already, by the power of God, interpreted a dream for him. And Nebuchadnezzar who had conquered many lands and many nations, learned of the power of the true God when he tried to unite the different peoples from so many different lands and cultures under a false god.

Nebuchadnezzar had commissioned the construction of an idol of gold and a decree went forth that all those under his rule were to bow down to this golden image. However, some of his new captives refused. And three men were thrown into a furnace that burned so hot that even the guards who escorted them were killed by the intensity of the inferno. But the Lord God kept these men safe. Nebuchadnezzar was intrigued and impressed. Had had seen the power of the true God more than once. But he still had a lot to learn.

And so in Daniel chapter 4 we are told that God sent another dream to distress and to trouble this king. Nebuchadnezzar told his dream to all of his magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners but none of them could tell him what it meant. And so finally he called out to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had recognized that Daniel was a spiritual man. Nebuchadnezzar actually gave Daniel the Babylonian name of Belteshazzar, because he believed that the spirits of the gods were in him. Nebuchadnezzar recognized the power of God in Daniel's life, but the proud king had failed to truly humble himself before the true God that Daniel worshiped and served. But this would soon change.

By the power of the Most High God Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The focal point of the dream was a proud and massive tree that gave shelter to many living things. This tree was Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel explained this to the proud king saying these that Nebuchadnezzar was pleased to hear, ***"You have become great and strong, his greatness had grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth."*** But Daniel went on to speak words that Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to hear as Daniel explained that the Almighty God of heaven and earth would cut down this proud tree. Daniel stood in front of the most powerful man in the world Daniel told him that God would humble the king in an incredible and bizarre fashion.

This mighty king Nebuchadnezzar who had so much power, who was a man of intelligence and pride and wealth, this king would become like an animal, a simple brute beast. Nebuchadnezzar would be driven from the people and he would live with the wild animals, and instead of feasting in the proud halls of the king he would live in the wilderness and eat grass like cattle. For seven times (or seven years) Nebuchadnezzar would live like this until his hair grew so thick it was like the feathers of an eagle and his finger nails grew so long that they were like the claws of a bird. God would bring this

about at his direction and according to his purpose. The true God of heaven would show all of Babylon his power and at the same time the LORD would encourage the people of Judah as they were held in captivity. They would see the power of the almighty God of heaven who could humble the most powerful man on earth.

And so 12 months after Daniel had warned him about this dream, just about a year after Daniel had advised the king to repent, and to humble himself before the Lord, the Lord God instead had to humble the king. The God of Israel and Judah, the God of heaven and earth, made the once mighty king of Babylon into nothing more than a lowly animal. In his pride Nebuchadnezzar bragged about his kingdom and exalted himself as the man who built this empire and yet when these words of hubris were still on his lips there came a voice from heaven. ***“This is what is decreed for you.”*** And it was as if God flipped a switch and the king suddenly lost his sanity and all his power. Nebuchadnezzar was driven from his royal palace and from his fortified city and he went into the wild and lived like an animal.

God had the power to humble even the mightiest king. He did this so that his people and the line of the promised Savior would be preserved and Jesus would be born from the tribe of Judah from the line of David just like God had promised. Certainly anyone who was on Nebuchadnezzar’s royal staff would think twice about acting with cruelty toward the people of the Most High God. Certainly no one would dare try to extinguish this people when their God was so powerful. Instead when Nebuchadnezzar returned he would have only respect and honor for the true God and his people. Our lesson for today is the last we hear of Nebuchadnezzar and his reign. And the last words from his lips are not words of arrogance and self-praise but instead the last words we hear from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar are words of humility and worship as he praises the mighty God and King of heaven. Nebuchadnezzar recognized God’s power to humble all those who walk in pride and restore those who are humbled before him. These are the words of Nebuchadnezzar, ***“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37).***

What power our God has! What powerful change he brings! As Mary once sang after she was called blessed by the mother of John the Baptist. ***“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thought. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:51, 52).*** God is rich in power! He is rich in mercy! The same God who had the power to come down to this earth as a child born of a humble virgin has the power to humble those who in pride reject his power. He is near to humble those who oppose him. But he is also so very near to lift up, restore, and encourage his people.

This is a message of which we need to be reminded. If God can change the heart of the most powerful man on earth he can go with us and help change the hearts of those lost in the pride of unbelief, and in the blind arrogance of sin. His word has power. His word has the power to change hearts. And he sends us out with this powerful word so that it may make its lasting effects.

But often we are afraid to sound the call of repentance. We fear that it won’t do any good! We look at the surge of other pagan religions in this world and we wonder if we aren’t fighting a losing battle as Christians. We may doubt God’s power to bring about change and so we hesitate to speak. Why tell my sister to repent, why bother pointing out that sin to my son or daughter, why bother telling my neighbor that he is sinful and has a need for a Savior; what good is it going to do anyway! The only thing that it can do is put a strain on our relationship and cause me trouble.

All too often we are overly concerned about our own stature or reputation; we are overly concerned about our own standing among our friends and family and neighbors that we are hesitant or unwilling to sound the call to repentance. Is that not the sin of pride, as well? Is this not a case of putting ourselves before the work of God! Instead, should we not put our confidence in God’s Word and his power?! Instead, should we not ask God for courage and the words to speak God’s word

of truth?! We certainly should. Let us ask our Lord to give us the strength to faithfully stand up like Daniel did and swallow our pride and tell people the truth that they need to hear?! Think about the courage that God gave to Daniel. He stood before the most powerful man in the world and he told him to repent. He told him to change his ways. He delivered a message that the king didn't want to hear, but it was a message that he needed to hear. Let us ask God for the same courage. We should. We can. We will. For the Lord is near. He will hear our prayer and he will give us his powerful word to go with us.

God has placed his word into our hearts so that we might not only treasure this word for ourselves, but we may share it with others. In 2 Corinthians Paul relates the Christian to a jar of clay. We are vessels that carry the treasure of God's Word, but we are certainly imperfect vessels. And the very message that we treasure, the very message that we are proud to carry, has made us aware of how imperfect we are. God's Word has made our sins known to us. His law points out our sins, it cuts down our pride, it puts us in our place, and makes us aware of our need for a Savior.

This may not be pleasant, but this is necessary. Without recognizing just how sinful we are there would be no pressing need for a Savior. If the reality of our sinfulness is denied or avoided, then the reality of our deep need for a Savior is made pointless. Without preparing our hearts with the law Jesus becomes something of an unnecessary gift. As one writer put it, without having our hearts prepared by the law to help us see that we need a Savior, Jesus becomes a gift that is about as unnecessary as a winter coat given to a person on a summer day in Florida. But when the layers of sinful pride that we hide under are cut away and our sin is laid bare it becomes so very clear how much we need Jesus, how much we need a Savior.

This is the harsh but necessary work of the law. It exposes our sin. It exposes us to the chill of death and the cold wintry blast of judgment we deserve. But God be praised for the healing work of the gospel. For in his grace God wraps us in the saving warmth of his love. His gospel tells us what our God has done to save us. And then our God uses this saving message to hold us in the warm embrace of his grace so that he may send us out well equipped and well dressed to share this message in this cold world of sin and darkness. And so having headed the call to repent, we too sound the alarm!

We gladly take this message to others, including the law, which can be difficult to share, because our mighty God goes with us. God's Word has the power to tear down the walls of pride and unbelief. His word has the power to bring about true sorrow over sin. And most importantly the gospel has the power to bring about faith that trusts in God. The good news of God has the power to create saving faith which receives the forgiveness of Christ. His word has the power to change a person inside and out and lead a person who once saw God as unimportant and powerless, praise the triune God and serve our Lord with a life of humble service and praise.

What an extraordinary lesson of God's power we have before us today! The most powerful man in the world was humbled but as soon as he was restored this once heathen king gave praise and honor to the true God of heaven. What extraordinary power our God demonstrated! But dear friends, let us not forget the ordinary way that the Lord works in us a daily change in our hearts and minds. May we thank him each day for leading us away from sin and leading us to praise him! Praise God for the power of his Word! May we take up that Word and appreciate, on a daily basis, what our Lord has done for us, so that we may have the courage and the strength to tell people what they need to hear: that God restores and forgives the sinner. May the Lord be near to encourage us as this life changing message changes our hearts and may he be near to encourage us when we share this life giving message with others. Amen.