

King of Kings: Our King Converts the Lost

King of Kings: Study on Daniel

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Can he ever be converted? Can she ever be converted? I'm sure you've asked that question. I certainly have. Maybe somebody we know, somebody in our community, somebody in our family maybe who has a hard and haughty heart, a proud enmity against God, who fights against God and his people, and we've prayed and we've given up praying. We've witnessed and we've given up witnessing. We say in our hearts, if not out loud, "He will never be saved. She will never be saved. They will never be saved." Or maybe, you've maybe asked that of yourself. Maybe you're asking that tonight. Maybe you're saying, "Can I ever be saved?" You look at your past, you might look at your present, the sins that have you in their grip, the hardness of your heart that you look back and you think, "I've prayed and I've called upon the Lord and I've tried to believe and nothing's happened. Can I ever be saved?" And you're giving up hope for yourself.

Well, Daniel 4, especially the end, tells us this: believe anyone can be converted. Believe anyone can be converted. Children, this is one of the hardest pictures I've found to illustrate. How do you illustrate conversion? How do you get a picture for that? I don't know if you recognize that. It was the best I could come up with. It's a little connector that converts one input to another on a computer. It'll have to do for the moment. Maybe you can draw something better. But just know this, anyone, anyone can be converted, and that's proven to us here in Nebuchadnezzar's conversion. Last week we saw him brought down by God's judgment. This week we're going to see him lifted up by God's grace. And so we're going to ask, what are the steps of true conversion? We're going to ask that so that we know what to pray for, what to look for, and maybe what to look for in ourselves to figure out, "Am I being converted? Have I been converted?" And Nebuchadnezzar's story gives us a wonderful step-by-step guide through what happens when God comes into a life in saving power.

The first thing we notice here is conversion is from heaven. Conversion is from heaven and we get that from verse 34, "At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven." This is where it began. This is where his turning, his conversion began. He lifted his eyes to heaven. Now, this was somebody who was not used to doing this. If you remember from last week, the chapter really begins with him on the rooftop and he's looking down on everyone else and finding himself just so much better than anyone and everyone else. He was somebody used to looking down on people, exalting himself and

putting other people down, comparing himself favorably with others; downwards and sideways was how he looked, and he never looked up. He never needed to, or at least he thought he didn't. He enjoyed looking down. He enjoyed comparing himself with other people and puffing out his chest with pride. Of course, God brought him down, judged him for seven seasons, we're told, probably seven years. He was cursed. He was judged with what looks like either a mental condition or just a miraculous judgment whereby he believed and acted like an animal. Seven years he was naked in the field. Seven years he was eating grass. Seven years he grew all his hair and his nails so that he looked like a hairy, clawed animal. He lived like an animal. He smelled like an animal. He sounded like an animal.

Seven years this went on for and then one day, this happened, he looked up. Looks like it was the first time he'd ever done that in his life before. All his life looking down, even when he was under judgment, looking down at the ground. Now here we're told, at the end of these days, when this was coming to an end, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven." He's now looking away from himself to God, from earth to heaven. He's looking away from what he had done. Remember, he spoke a lot about that, all the things he had done. He looks around Babylon, he sees the glorious architecture and hanging gardens and all his accomplishments and he sees his glory reflected in them and he says, "Look what I have done." But not now. Now he's looking up and he's seeing what God has done and what God is doing. We see that in the summary of this chapter. If you remember last week, we noticed how verses 1 through 3 are really a summary heading of a lengthy chapter and here, Nebuchadnezzar sums it all up, "It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me." Do you see that? It's no longer what I've done, it's what he has done. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the center of the universe. Now, as he looks up, he sees he's just a little speck in the universe.

Conversion is from heaven. So this makes us ask, where are we looking? What is the general direction of our eyes? Are we Nebuchadnezzar-like, pre-verse 34, looking down on people and looking at others, comparing ourselves with them favorably? Are we those who see all that we have done and all that we are? Or have we begun to look away, begun to look up, begun to recognize that we are not master and Lord, but God is, and we are but servants. This is what Nebuchadnezzar is doing here.

Now, as we look up, remember we looked at these verses in Psalm 34, we look up, we look eyes with God. We see eyes we've never seen before, not physically, but by faith. And what do you see when you see these eyes? Do you see anger? Do you see contempt? No, you see pity. You see love. You see welcome. That's what the Bible tells us God's eyes are like. We look up and we're stunned by the eyes. We see this is not what we expected. We're like, you can imagine Nebuchadnezzar just beginning to look up. This God that judged him so painfully for seven years, who had humiliated him for seven years, this God, he's got no one else to turn to. It took seven years of humbling, of humiliation, of day after day, night after night, animal-like, seven years and then the eyeballs begin to turn. He's got no other hope. There's nowhere else he can look. There's no one else in his life that can help. He's at the end of himself, and he looks up and instead of the fist of God coming down on him, God's arms stretch out to welcome him.

Conversion is from heaven. It's something God does. It's a sovereign mercy. It's sovereign grace. "I lifted my eyes to heaven." Looking down lets us down, but looking up lifts us up. So let's look up.

So when we look up, what does God do? How does God respond to that? Well, Nebuchadnezzar here tells us, conversion restores our reason. Conversion restores our reason. Look what happens here. Verse 34, "I lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me." And this seems to have been a big thing for Nebuchadnezzar because later on in verse 36, again he says, "At the same time, my reason returned to me." What's he saying to us here? He's saying, "Prior to this time, I was irrational, I was illogical, I was unreasonable." And of course, that was true of him when he was an animal, right? He didn't have human reason functioning in that seven years. He was operating purely by animal instinct. But I don't believe he's only speaking of that period. I believe he's also looking back on his whole and he's not just saying that, "Seven years I was unreasonable, but my whole life I've been unreasonable. I've been irrational. I've been illogical," because of the way that he excluded the God of reason from his life. But when he looks up, when his eyes lock on God, something happens. Reason begins to enter into his mind. He's saying, "My sin made me unreasonable, irrational, illogical because my sin separated me from the God of all reason, the God of all logic, the God who designed rationality." And so here he's no longer thinking without God or thinking against God, but now he's thinking God's thoughts after him. That's what true reason is.

There's that beautiful couple of verses in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 55:8 and 9, "my thoughts," says God, "are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." God's teaching us here that if we want to be reasonable and rational and logical, we have to connect with his mind. We have to get his kind of thinking into ours. And, you know, so much today we make a God of human reason and do it in such a way that it actually excludes God from our thinking and so people often mock Christians as illogical, irrational, and unreasonable, and yet here, Nebuchadnezzar tells us, "No, no, no, no. This is the first time in my life I ever was reasonable. This is the first time I ever began to think God's thoughts after me, because I realized that no matter how high my thoughts were, God's thoughts were much higher, higher than the heaven is above the earth. And therefore, what is more reasonable than me bringing my thoughts into alignment with God's? Rather than saying, well, we don't agree and I'm right. How insane is that? My reason returned to me."

Faith is reasonable. Our faith is a reasonable faith. When we look at the truth here, it's not opposed to reason. It's supportive of reason. And in fact, the best believers are the best reasoners. The best believers are the best reasoners. And it's not just our faith is reasonable, God is reasonable. And when he presents the gospel to us, he comes with reasons and arguments. He doesn't come and coerce us physically. He doesn't come and manipulate us emotionally. He doesn't try psychological tricks. He doesn't intimidate. He comes and he pleads and he argues and he reasons and he presents truth and he beseeches us and pleads with us to act on them and believe them and receive them. You remember

what he says through Isaiah, "Come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."

This is a reasonable faith. This is a reasonable God. When God brings the gospel, he appeals to our reason and through the gospel, he enlightens our reason and he elevates our reason, he frees it from the sin that twisted it and perverted it and darkened it and therefore we can truly say, we use reason to believe better, and we believe to reason better. You see, they both interact with one another. We use reason to believe better, and we believe in order to reason better. Christian faith is faith, as Augustine said, seeking understanding. There's always that combination going on and here, what happens when Nebuchadnezzar looks up in faith, reason begins to flow into his mind, begins to rewire what's happening up here.

Conversion restores our reason. But, okay, it affects our eyes, it affects our minds. What else does true conversion do? In Nebuchadnezzar answers, he says, it changes our worship. It changes our worship. "I lifted my eyes to heaven, my reason returned to me," verse 34, "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." Now, if you've been following along, you'll say, "Eh, did he not say that before?" He did. Similar, not quite the same, but twice before Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed worship to God but what's really clear is that previously it was the worship of his lips and not the worship of his heart. His heart was still a cold, closed heart to Almighty God. But here, this is different. Having lifted his eyes, having his reason restored, the next thing that inevitably happens is worship. A true heart worship.

Notice what he praises. He praises God's supremacy. He's the Most High. No longer me, it's God. I'm high, but he's the most high. He praises God's foreverness. He praised and honored him who lives forever. He praises God's sovereignty. His dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures. Notice he praises God's covenant faithfulness with this unique covenant phrase, "from generation to generation." We wonder where he got that language. Maybe from Daniel. Maybe from the three friends of Daniel. We don't know, but he seems to have picked up some theological vocabulary along the way and now it's coming, not just like rote, parrot fashion, but coming from his heart worshipfully.

And what's interesting here is he has no complaints about how God treated him. He'd been livestock for seven years, therefore a laughingstock for seven years. Try to imagine that. I mean, think of Joe Biden or Donald Trump, one of our presidents, going from the highest office and you're driving out the back of Byron Center and you pass a farm and you see a bunch of pigs and goats and cows and there's the president. He's covered in filth. He's making mooing noises or oinking noises or animal noises. He's grunting and he's scraping about in the soil. And you want to go and help him, but the stench is so bad. It's just like, "This is so bad. This is so unfair." Well, that's not what Nebuchadnezzar thought. There's not one word of complaint about his seven-year humiliation. Not one word. In fact, you go further into this chapter, verse 37, "I praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just." Imagine that. That's like

President Biden or ex-President Trump coming back from the farm, going into Washington, and everybody's waiting for him to complain about God seven years on, and all the hardness and the harshness and the injustice and the unfairness, "All his ways are just. All his ways are true. No complaints. He has not dealt with me as I have sinned." It reminds you, doesn't it, of the thief on the cross, doesn't it? There he is being crucified, one thief on the other side is throwing insults at Christ, just aggressively protesting against his sense of injustice, and the other one, although that's how he started, eventually, what's he saying? He's saying, "Do you know what you're saying, friend? We are receiving the just reward for our deeds, but this man, he's done nothing wrong." It truly is a remarkable expression of worship.

Conversion changes who we worship, when we worship, where we worship, why we worship, how we worship. If any of you have a conversion story that has a remarkable change in it, and not every story is like that, but some are. You'll remember, I do. I remember growing up in church, and I hated worship, I have to be honest. I say that with no pride, but just as a confession. It bored me to tears. I just couldn't wait till it was over. It was so dead and so boring, and just, what is the point in this? Sometimes it made you angry. You looked around and you saw some people really happy and you thought, they're crazy. And then God works, God humbles. God gives you reason. God puts a worshiping heart and you begin to realize this is the most amazing experience in the world, isn't it? That's why you look forward to church so much. Yes, I get a chance to worship now. Smiles. Joy. And it's the mixture of emotions in worship, isn't it? There's a confession, then there's the assurance of pardon, and then there's the renewal of commitment, there's the embrace of grace. There's one Sunday we're worshiping the Father, another the Son, and another the Holy Spirit, and sometimes we're in the Old, sometimes we're in the New Testament, but every time it's just, the worship is just so renewing and refreshing. That's what true conversion does, isn't it? And if you didn't have like a noticeable change in your life, that doesn't matter if you have this worshipful heart. That's all that matters. It's not when it happened, how long it happened or whether you can point to a moment in time. That just, it's irrelevant. What's totally relevant is, am I a worshiper today? That will tell you if God has brought about true biblical conversion. Worship changes our praise and our tune, puts melody in our hearts as we sing to the Lord.

So conversion changes our worship. Fourth and finally, conversion humbles our hearts. Notice he goes from lifting God up to putting himself down. Verse 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?'" Look at that last line in the chapter where he sums it all up, "those who walk in pride he is able to humble." If we want to improve our worship, we've got to work on two directions. We've spoke of the first direction, which is lifting God up higher and higher with our lips, with our volume, but also with our hearts. The higher we can lift God like that, the better, the higher, the more honoring to God is our worship. But we also work in another direction, which is a humbling of ourselves, getting lower before God. As we lift up our hearts to God, our minds and hearts see ourselves as just so unworthy of this God, and it's so much smaller than this God. We're accounted as

nothing. We used to think we were something, and now we're a nothing, and we love to be nothings. We're never happier than when we see that we are nothing and he is everything. And none can stay his hand or say to him, "What are you doing?" We love it when we can just zip it and stop arguing with God and just say, "God, you're just and you're holy and you're true, and who am I to think otherwise?" And so we come to church and we want to lift God up and we want to lie down deeper, further, flatter before God in our hearts, not in a in a kind of self-loathing way. It's not in a way that is demeaning or dehumanizing. It's, in fact, it's the way to be re-humanized because we're told God brings down the proud and he lifts up the humble and this is the mechanics, the circuit of worship, isn't it? It's a mysterious transaction that's going on. Even as we sit here and we listen to God's word, we're wanting to lift God higher, higher, higher, and we're thinking of ourselves, lower, lower, lower, because we know that the more we can increase that gap, the more pleasing our worship is to God, the more we honor him, the more we do good to ourselves.

This is what Nebuchadnezzar realized. It's like a balance, and on the one side is our self-love, let's just call it that, self-love. On the other side, God-love. Self-worship and God-worship. Maybe that's better. And when we're converted, well, before we're converted, the self-worship side is really heavy. In fact, there's nothing in the God-worship side but when conversion happens, a lot of this worship, not all of it, but a majority of it moves over to the other side, and the scales begin to tip, and there's more God worship in our lives than self-worship. That's conversion. It doesn't need to go like that, but it may go like that, right? In conversion, you would say, the scales tip. If self-worship was weighty and God-worship was light, in conversion self-worship lightens and God-worship gets heavier. And the rest of life is more and more worship grains transferred over, isn't it? That's one of the reasons we come to church. We're basically saying, "Lord, less self-worship, please. Even one grain transferred today would be great. Just one less here and one more there." Maybe ten, maybe twenty, maybe a hundred. And yes, sometimes these grains slip back into the other side. We backslide, become self-centered again. God heals, God turns us, and so the process goes on. And one of the great longings of heaven, isn't it, is to eventually get to the place where there are zero grains on the self-worship side, and all the grains of worship are on the God side. But we won't have that here. What we can have here is a change in the balance, a significant change in the balance and this is what Nebuchadnezzar experienced. He went from being an animal to being a worshiper, from a monster to being a child of God. God restored his reason and his royalty. He exalted him in more ways than one.

So what does this tell us? It tells us no one is lost. No one is too lost. No one is too lost. He is not too lost. She is not too lost. Your daughter, your son. If God can do this for Nebuchadnezzar, what can't he do for your loved one? If God can do this for Nebuchadnezzar, what can't he do for you? Can you honestly come and say, "Well, you know, I'm worse than Nebuchadnezzar." No. He's here because it's like Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament, they're examples of like how God can take the worst and save them, the most lost and make them the most saved. We'd love to know more about this story, wouldn't we? How did he get to know Christ? Maybe Daniel helped him look forward in faith somehow or other. This faith was centered in Jesus and God humbled his highest,

haughtiest, hardest of hearts and gave Nebuchadnezzar a story to tell. This is his autobiography. He's not ashamed of it. Like I said, Daniel, I really like a chapter in the Bible. I want to tell my story. He's unashamed of the gospel because he knows it's the power of God to salvation for all who believe therefore if he can tell his story, we can tell our stories without shame and all glory to God. Amen.

Let's pray.