

Daniel 4:1–18 (ESV)

1 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.”

(The mercy of God in the madness of the king.)

So first King Nebuchadnezzar was given a vision about the future that only Daniel could answer. He was the **head of gold**. But his was not going to be anywhere near the **eternal kingdom**. There would be several **“after this”** kingdoms, until the rock not cut by humans falls upon the world kingdoms, until there is nothing left of them.

The King’s initial response was **good** but upon reflection it looks like he reverts to his default position. **Pride**. He makes a statue that **is all gold**. It was as if to say King Nebuchadnezzar’s **kingdom** is eternal. And naturally he demands worship. And naturally those who love God cannot bow the knee.

I hadn’t thought of this earlier, but this might mean that the only followers of the one true God in Babylon’s administration were these **four people**. Only **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** were singled out for the furnace, because only **they** would not worship the statue. Being a God follower there would have been very lonely.

So the King is impressed by God’s miraculous rescue of the three from the furnace, and he declares that people better not say anything bad about the Hebrew God.

Again we see a wonderful **profession**. Has the King surrendered yet to King Christ? Has he placed his faith in the Hebrew God for his eternal salvation? Nope.

The King was willing to say very positive things about God. He publicly displayed his admiration. He even made decrees to protect God followers. Surely he was one of them?

Nope. Not yet.

God was not yet done **drawing the King** to Himself. This horse had not yet been broken.

We all have different stories. But the same question applies. What point did God need to bring **you to** before you were prepared to listen to Him? For some of us there was a **single dramatic point**. It may have been the lowest of our lows. It showed the **us** that we never wanted to **believe** or **admit** that it existed. For some of us it has been a **series of failures** on our part that humbles us, that make us ready time after time to listen to God.

I think of the prodigal son in the pig pen. What a horribly humiliating experience for a proud Jewish young man who thought he had this life by the tail. I think of

Peter after he had denied Christ three times. That day was the death of Peter having illusions that he was some kind of **super Peter**. No, he was **failure Peter**. When we think back on our lives, or when we look at the prodigal son feeding pigs, or of Peter's failure, we think of shame. We think of remorse. We think of humiliation and defeat. But what we sometimes miss is the **grace of God**. What would have happened if we had **not** reached those lows? What would we have become if we were allowed to believe that we actually **are** morally superior to others? Would we ever have come to Christ at all. Would we have come, "Just as I am without one plea"? Would we ever have had the right attitude?

We may regard those things as the lowest points, when in reality they were **strategic points** in our **spiritual growth**. We needed to see ourselves as we really are. We needed to see the beast in us.

Did you ever consider that between you and God, you were the only one **surprised** by your failure. God was not surprised. He was not tempted to abandon you because he had higher hopes for you but you disappointed Him. No, He arranged your failure because He knew **you needed it**. Oh the **grace** of God to display to us the **animal-ness** in our souls. Oh the **love** of God to teach us those things that cause us to cling to His grace and His grace alone.

What we see in chapter 4 is the hound of heaven in pursuit of an animal. We will see how little of a distance it is from **living at the top of the world** to being the **vilest creature in the realm**.

The point is made with absolute clarity. It is only the **goodness of God** that sustains our spiritual walk. If he were to remove his hand and allow the worst of us come out, we would not be able to live with ourselves.

Yet if He will **intrude into our lives to draw us to Himself**, there is no one that He cannot win.

What we are going to read about is one of the most severe mercies in world history. The madness of a king.

Now it starts with a royal decree. Daniel probably copied the actual wording from the decree scrolls or tablets that went out. It is written in the common language of the kingdom.

From what I read the first line matches the language of most of the decrees of that time.

1 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!

Isn't it interesting that **the last time** the people of all peoples, nations and languages would have heard from the King was an invitation for his administration to come worship the gods of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Now they are about to hear about a **different** God.

I would mention being careful with the use of the word "all", but you are probably tired of hearing it from me.

2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

What the King is about to tell his people, he has had time to think about. He could have kept it a secret. Really. Who wants to make **public** their **greatest humiliation**? But the King thought it over. He weighed it out. And he determined that this truth needs revealed. Why? Because the work of God needed to be revealed. If that meant telling something that was personally humiliating, so be it.

That in itself leads me to believe that the king is saved at this point. Pride was his greatest issue previously. He wanted to be worshipped. He wanted to be regarded as great. And now he is willing to tell people that he became an insane beast. Only God does that to a person, unless they have some kind of profit motive.

Look how he refers to God here.

The Most High God.

I doubt he still has all of his theology worked out. He might still think there are other gods. Everything does not change **in a DAY** when a person is won to Christ, when a person becomes a follower of God. But Nebuchadnezzar displays his loyalty and his worship to this greatest of Gods.

And look at his attitude. He does not say what God has done **TO** me. He says what God has done **FOR** me. He **knows** that it is God who **made him crazy**. So he could have had a completely different attitude. But he ends up focusing on the **grace of God that restored him to more than he was** prior to his insanity. He sees God as doing a necessary thing in the King's life to draw him to God. He did all this **FOR me**.

How do we see it when God puts **us** in a trial? Are we quick to use this word **FOR**? If we see through the eyes of faith, we will.

3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Ok, the King is speaking from some experience here. Daniel knew a dream that was only in **the King's head**. He had seen three Hebrews be impossibly delivered

from a fire clearly capable of killing anyone close to it. And now he has experienced God's hand on his life. He has gotten the idea. **God** is the powerful one. The king certainly cannot claim that title **for himself**. That illusion has fallen away.

It is **God** that is great and mighty. It is God that does things for HIS Glory. And you can almost see him pointing to the statue in the plain when he says what is next. You know that statue of the **man of gold**? That is **fiction**. Pure **fiction**. It is **God's kingdom** that will reign, not the **head of gold**. I learned my lesson. I won't build any more statues like that. The rock is the everlasting kingdom. It is what comes after everything else, everything else we work so hard to build. It is also interesting that he says God's kingdom **ENDURES** from generation to generation. Maybe he is realizing that while the Rock of Christ will come in the future, that same God has His own people now. He certainly is **in control** right now. So it isn't like God will start moving during the Roman government. He is **already at work** doing what He wants when He wants to whoever He wants. So the King is done in his decree telling **why** He is giving it. Now he breaks into the story.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.

Basically Nebuchadnezzar was saying, I was in the peak of my career. I had a lot of conquests. I was in the good times. That sometimes happens to us. Things seem to be coming our way. We are being treated well by those in our household and things are going good at our jobs. Both family and finances are working out well.

God is often good to us that way. And we should thank God for those blessings when they come. That is not a bad thing. But because of the King's spiritual condition, it was about to turn out to be a bad thing **for him**. God started with a warning.

5 I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.

The King did not know what the dream meant but he knew it was not good. It scared him. I don't know much about these kinds of dreams. I do not think God ever revealed to me a supernatural truth in a dream. Most of what I get from a dream is that I really should study for any upcoming test, I should know where my high school locker is, I should never lose my sermon on a Sunday morning, and I should really wear clothes in public. My dreams are stupid mostly.

Somehow the king knew the dream actually **meant something**. He knew it was supernaturally inspired.

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.

Now, this king is not stupid. And I am sure he has at least some memory. Do you have the same question as me? Why not **just** call for Daniel? I think **I know why** just like **you probably think the same**.

Who do you **like being around most**? Those people who just love us for who we are, but are rarely confrontive and rarely tell us the truth we need to hear that hurts us? Or those people who get right down to the nitty gritty of our lives? Those who give us the messages from God that shake us to our core?

I think that is the issue here. If anyone can give him the answer to the dream, he would prefer it **not** to be the guy that hears from the Jewish God. I cannot prove that. But I think all the evidence points to it.

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.

This is where you want to say “Duh”. “Never did, never will”, is a statement that comes to mind. And the King is not exactly an idealist. He is too smart to expect that those who have never delivered will deliver now. But the devil, and our own vices, makes us stupid.

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,

Why at last? Sure looks intentional to me. The king would rather have his **home team** finally deliver for him. Maybe he can maintain a sense of dignity. Surely the gods of Babylon can do **something**? But no. I think he knows that Daniel is going to deliver bad news, and whatever He delivers, Daniel’s God is going to end up being the God to worship. So you can understand the King’s delay.

But desperation strikes and Daniel gets his chance.

Now this next phrase is the most discouraging.

he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods

The king clarifies where Daniel’s name came from. It is as if clinging to any hope that there is power other than from the one true God. But the king lets everyone know that this guy is in touch with the gods. This guy, more than anyone else, has a supernatural connection.

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.**

That is like telling the tenth girl you proposed to, after the other 9 said no, that it is because you love this girl so much that you want to marry her. It might sound a little more like flattery than reality. I am guessing the king still has a ways to go in truth telling.

And I bet every time Daniel heard the title “chief of the magicians”, he cringed. That would be like someone referring to one of us as the wizard at Ferndale. But the end of the story is the King asked Daniel for the interpretation. Here is the dream.

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.

There is something interesting in this. Governments are very useful. Good governments provide a platform for people to get what they need to survive and thrive. Look at the services this government provided. Food and shelter. Those under this government had the opportunity to procure what they needed to live. As much as we may say bad about **our government**, up to this point our government has also done **a good job at this**. We should learn to be thankful for that which God has used our government to provide for us.

Clearly this dream is showing Nebuchadnezzar the usefulness of his kingdom **so far**.

But there are limits to what God is willing to take.

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.

This idea of watcher was a Chaldean word and idea. We would call it an angel. But remember, this king did not know much theology yet. So he put it in his mental framework.

And what the angel said was, **cut down the tree**. In this case it was the head of gold. It was the **center** of the Babylonian government.

Now it looks like Evil-Merodach was installed as the vassal king to the Babylonian government during this time. He was the King's son, but for some reason did not have the qualifications to run the country.

But Nebuchadnezzar, as the central figure, was to be removed from power. This would have an effect on **all** of his administration. We do not know what happened. All we know is that the kingdom **did not fall apart** during the king's absence. Did it weaken financially so that people suffered? Maybe. We know for sure that the King did not keep a tight reign on his kingdom during this period. Probably the administrators were doing all they could to keep their positions when the tree fell. Imagine this kind of immediate power vacuum.

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.

It is clear that the king is the stump. The tree is gone but the king is not. He is alive but stripped of government, the tree.

Then we start getting the picture of the fate of the stump. He is going to go primitive. He is going to live like an animal. Living outdoors. Living without shelter.

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.

This is clear. This man is going to go insane. He is going to be reduced to the mental functioning of an animal. This is interesting. Here is a person that is clearly inflicted with insanity. This king did not think his way into this mess and cannot think his way out of it. The king is clearly a victim of something outside of himself happening to him. There was not some mental trigger that he experienced that sent him into it. And the only remedy was for God to heal him. Insanity was inflicted upon King Nebuchadnezzar for an eternal purpose. I think this kind of insanity might be unusual in our world. But it is never out of the question.

God made the king insane and would keep him that way for 7 times, maybe years. That is a really long time in the life of a person. 7 years.

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.'

We see here that the King understands that it is God who put this into place. It was by decree. It was by decision. This was no accident.

But we really need to focus on this. WHY? Why was God doing this?
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.'

God was orchestrating this whole thing so that the living, maybe every human being in the rule of Babylon, will know this one thing.

God rules.

God rules.

And He gives the kingdom to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men. That is really interesting.

Nebuchadnezzar would have **never** seen himself **previously** as the **lowliest** of men. But I am sure he got the point here. That is **exactly** what God caused him to be. The lowliest of men. When the king was reestablished on the throne it was from a place of absolute humiliation.

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."

Well we just saw what the interpretation is. But it is being put to Daniel to tell the tale. And that is what is to come.

Again, Daniel might have cringed when the King said that Daniel had the spirit of **the holy gods**.

Have you ever spent much time with a new Christian? They will say lots of things that make you cringe. You know that they do not fully understand everything yet. But you are not going to correct them at every point. You stick to the important things and work your way to the less important in time.

Daniel is probably biding time.

We will continue from here next week.

For application, I think it would be good to ask ourselves the question, "**How confident am I in God?**" Do I really believe **His control is absolute** over the activities in this world? Do I really think He arranged everything and uses everything **for good** in our lives?

This chapter shows us just how easy it is for God to make the changes He wants to make. And the object of these changes just happens to be the most powerful human on the planet at the time.

If we trust that God deeply loves us, and if we trust that He controls everything, there is little reason to fear.