

## **The Restoration of the Penitent**

### **Daniel 4:28-37**

*<sup>28</sup> All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>29</sup> At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. <sup>30</sup> The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”*

*<sup>31</sup> While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! <sup>32</sup> And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”*

*<sup>33</sup> That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.*

*<sup>34</sup> And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 is from generation to generation.*

*<sup>35</sup> All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;*

*He does according to His will in the army of heaven*

*And among the inhabitants of the earth.*

*No one can restrain His hand*

*Or say to Him, “What have You done?”*

*<sup>36</sup> At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol*

*and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.*

This week our text has a little bit of cross over with last week's text. We are beginning at the fall of Nebuchadnezzar into madness. His descent into madness and insanity occurred one year after Daniel gave him the interpretation of his dream.

One of the things that I mentioned last week that we would speak about today is what was meant in verses 13 through 17 where we read:

*<sup>13</sup> "I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. <sup>14</sup> He cried aloud and said thus:*

*'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,*

*Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.*

*Let the beasts get out from under it,*

*And the birds from its branches.*

*<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth,*

*Bound with a band of iron and bronze,*

*In the tender grass of the field.*

*Let it be wet with the dew of heaven,*

*And let him graze with the beasts*

*On the grass of the earth.*

*<sup>16</sup> Let his heart be changed from that of a man,*

*Let him be given the heart of a beast,*

*And let seven times pass over him.*

*<sup>17</sup> 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers,*

*And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,*

*In order that the living may know*

*That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,*

*Gives it to whomever He will,*

*And sets over it the lowest of men.'*

There are a couple of things that we need to understand about this passage to rightly interpret it. First off, we have to remember it is a dream. It is a dream sent by God, but none the less it is a dream. This text had been dealt with in many different ways, but I want to give just a brief summary of what is meant by the watcher and the holy one.

Notice that the watcher is not different and distinct from the holy one. The expression “a holy one” is descriptive of the watcher. The reason for the clarification that the watcher was holy was to distinguish the role of the watcher. To put it in a more common way of speaking he was a good messenger, not an evil messenger. The Bible often speaks of watchers without using that word. We are used to the word angels, and angels are the messengers of God for example in Psalm 103:20 we read: *Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word.*

The watchers, according to Jerome are those who are ever on the watch to execute God’s will. According to Revelation 4:8 we see the four living creatures and they are described as having eyes that do not rest day or night.

Psalm 34:7 describes The angel of the LORD encamping around all who fear the Lord and delivering him all around those who fear Him, and Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who would receive salvation.

In Jeremiah 4:16-17 the term “watchers” is used and applied to *human* instruments of God’s vengeance.

<sup>16</sup> *“Make mention to the nations,*

*Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem,*

*That watchers come from a far country*

*And raise their voice against the cities of Judah.*

<sup>17</sup> *Like keepers of a field they are against her all around,*

*Because she has been rebellious against Me,” says the LORD.*

The term watcher here is speaking of the judgments of God against prideful Nebuchadnezzar and I think it is important to notice that we have this one watcher proclaiming this judgment against Nebuchadnezzar, but it is interesting that in verse 17 that this judgment is the word of the

watchers. We have one watcher proclaiming the sentence, but he speaks for all of the watchers in his judgment. He speaks for all of the watchers because the decree is from God.

The Angels, the watchers are not acting independently, they are ministering spirits from God and they are doing his bidding. Now, I think something needs to be pointed out here that speaks against a very common error in the church today.

There is a teaching by many that anything bad that happens comes from the devil and God only sends us good things. Let me paraphrase, "Sickness and poverty are obviously bad things and so the only place they can originate is from Satan." You may hear it this way, "God wants you to be happy, wealthy, and healthy." But I want to be clear, God is looking at the full picture, and his saints have gone through many difficult circumstances and they are walking exactly where God wants them to be. Yes we sometimes do foolish things and bring terrible consequence on ourselves, but just because your circumstance is not where you would like it that does not mean you are outside of the will of God.

How would a modern evangelist in one of these positive thinking churches deal with the situation of Nebuchadnezzar? I have heard very similar statements to this. "Nebuchadnezzar, you must never say that this madness that has overtaken you has come from God. This is a bad thing it can only have come from the devil." Well, as we read this account the one thing we see is that this entire madness, this being driven into the wilds to live as a beast was directed by God for a purpose. The purpose was to soften the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. The purpose was to destroy his pride. And the purpose was entirely directed by God and carried out by His servants and as verse 17 says:

*In order that the living may know*

*That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,*

*Gives it to whomever He will,*

*And sets over it the lowest of men.'*

In this text we see a statement of God's absolute sovereignty over His creation. I want to ask a question. What does it mean that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men? We often worry and lose sleep over the doings of those who are in positions of authority. Be they Presidents, Kings, or Judges, or Mayors...etc. etc. Calvin rightly said that when God wants to punish a nation, he gives them wicked rulers. What is happening is we are bothered by the short game, we are bothered by the increasing wickedness of our leaders and what is happening is God is calling His people to repent of their own wickedness. He rules in the kingdom of men and we are getting what we need for the changing of our own wicked hearts.

As I read and reread this passage several times over the last weeks I asked myself what is God doing for his people? He is calling us to repent, he is calling us to trust in him. Last week we looked at Nebuchadnezzar's words:

*"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"*

The text then says: <sup>31</sup> *While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! <sup>32</sup> And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."*

We, like Nebuchadnezzar possess many things that we call our own. The temptation is to pride. The temptation is to think that we possess what we have by some nobility or goodness on our part, but we are reminded in this passage that all that we have is given to us by God. He is calling us to trust in Him and not in ourselves.

We are not told earlier that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his kingdom, we are told he would descend into the state of a beast, but what is interesting when it actually happens, the details what happens to him in his madness are only covered in one verse. That verse is the 33<sup>rd</sup> verse. The details are only given here, but we told in the dream that this period of time where he is being humbled by God lasted for seven years:

*<sup>33</sup> That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.*

This is a short verse, but the commentaries have so much to say about it. There are some commentaries that describe this passage as speaking of a period of insanity. There are some who describe it as being a time of exile, or forced banishment by enemies. More than one commentary describes what happened to Nebuchadnezzar as a case of Lycanthropy.

Lycanthropy comes from the Greek words *Lukos*, meaning wolf, and *Anthropos* meaning man, so they are saying he was like a werewolf. But I think what we need to see in this text, is that everything that Nebuchadnezzar had pride in, everything that cause him to exult in his own self worth had been taken from him. And the reason was, according to the text that he would learn who rules in the affairs of man.

We marvel at the extremes God went to teach Nebuchadnezzar this lesson, but I often wonder if some of us were to be put to the same standard here how would we fare? We live in a day and age where pride is celebrated. We are proud of our country, we are proud of our heritage, and we are even proud of our sins, both personal and national. We are often even proud of the ways in which we worship. I have caught myself falling into the trap of the Pharisees who claimed boldly, "Thank you God that I am not like that sinner..." But rather than thanking God we focus on the "I" part of the statement.

This passage is so relevant to what happened with Nebuchadnezzar but in Romans 1 when God speaks of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all manner of ungodliness the cause for the judgment of God is that they refused to acknowledge God or give him thanks for His many gifts. And notice the response by God for this pride.

*<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.*

*<sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

Remember man is created in God's image, but God gives them over to a depraved or a debased mind. Sinful man, because of his pride will attempt to become God. He will attempt to become the sovereign, and God gives him full access to this bestial nature. What is interesting is that Nebuchadnezzar's madness lasted for 7 years and one verse, but the problem is much larger than that for so many. We all think we would have done so much better than Nebuchadnezzar but do have we truly come to learn the lesson of Daniel 4?

The lesson is found beginning in the 34<sup>th</sup> verse:

*<sup>34</sup> And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 is from generation to generation.*

*<sup>35</sup> All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;*

*He does according to His will in the army of heaven*

*And among the inhabitants of the earth.*

*No one can restrain His hand*

*Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

Notice the solution to the madness of Nebuchadnezzar was to turn to the God who was greater than him. As soon as he lifted his eyes to heaven the text say, his understanding returned to him, and he then began to bless the most High. He began seeing that the Kingdom of God is an everlasting dominion.

Listen again to verse 35:

*<sup>35</sup> All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;  
He does according to His will in the army of heaven  
And among the inhabitants of the earth.  
No one can restrain His hand  
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

I love the last line in verse 35. I read it and I cannot help but think of Romans 9. Romans 9 is of course a very well known passage of Scripture? Notice I did not say it was popular. It is popular in some circles, but in others there is a deep and abiding hatred for this passage. Many people will jump through incredible hoops to make it say something other than what it says. In Romans 9 Paul is laying out the Biblical teaching of Election. He also understands sinful man quite well and he understands the objections that such a teaching will bring up and he respond to those objections with these words:

*<sup>14</sup> What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! <sup>15</sup> For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." <sup>16</sup> So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.*

*<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" <sup>20</sup> But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup> Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?*

Compare these words to Nebuchadnezzar's last line in verse 35

*No one can restrain His hand  
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*



And yet there are many who still believe, if it is to be it is up to me. We do have responsibilities and requirements, but we must recognize that it is God who is in control.

I mentioned last week that this chapter of the Book of Daniel was written by Nebuchadnezzar. There are some who believe that Daniel was writing on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar and that is fine, but the point is that these words are the words of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. This is the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter and after this chapter Nebuchadnezzar will only be spoken of in the past tense. Chapter 5 begins suddenly with a change of time and a different King. The King at the beginning of Chapter 5 is Belshazzar, who is a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar. Sometime between Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 Nebuchadnezzar dies. But the last thing we hear from Nebuchadnezzar are the last words of this chapter.

*<sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.*

There are many people who struggle with the idea of God and His absolute sovereignty. But notice this words. “I praise and extol and honor the King of heaven.” Nebuchadnezzar was a king, but he had come to understand that his rule was a rule under God. Even the King had to answer to someone higher and mightier than Himself.

He learned something else we see in this final verse. All of His works are truth and all of his ways are justice.

I am frequently amazed at how easily we attempt to find unfairness and injustice with God. I am not saying that I am immune to this temptation. We often desire to challenge God and His Word with our own conception of what is true. Of course we see this more easily in those we dislike or our enemies, but what Nebuchadnezzar is pointing out to us is that when we challenge the truth of the Word of God, or the justice of God, we are walking in pride.

He closes by telling us that those who walk in pride he is able to put down. We know this, at least we should know this, but very often we forget God and trust in our own methods.

I want to remind us as I close of the words from Proverbs 3:5-7

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;

<sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.

<sup>7</sup>Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

Trusting in the Lord is often not easy. We have to stop trusting in ourselves. But we will find that as we do this that the paths that the Lord leads us on, though not easy, are right.