

Daniel 4:28–37 (ESV)

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.

God’s effective discipline of the King

We are back at our study of what **God** is doing in the **kingdom** of Babylon. More specifically, we are looking at God’s actions in the life of a **human**. King Nebuchadnezzar.

Sometimes we read things in scripture and we really don’t know what to make of them. So everyone must give it their best guess and move on. But this morning we do not need to guess. Daniel tells us exactly what God is doing and what his end game is. God is doing these things for this reason:

Daniel 4:25 (ESV) till you, King Nebuchadnezzar, know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

We need to keep in mind the **situation** that our story is **happening in**. God's **chosen people** rebelled **against** the Most High God. They persisted in their sin for generations until God **punished them** as a people. This is the result. These Judeans are in a pagan land without the privileges of worshipping God as they had in the past. They are a minority. They are here because of their sin.

One way of looking at this is that God is teaching **us all** a lesson. This is what God does for **His own Glory** when His people choose not to glorify Him. God brings a pagan king into, what I believe, was a saving relationship with God. God brings a **king to Himself**. We must never think of **God's ministry** being **ultimately dependent** upon **our** efforts. This passage shows us one thing loud and clear. God does not need **us** in order to reach the world.

So how **should** we view evangelism? God **commands** and **invites us** to share in the activity that is central to His heart. God loves bringing people to Himself. We have the elevated privilege of sharing in this activity with God. That is how we should see it. Our urgency should be based upon how much **Christ deserves to be glorified**. That is the reason we evangelize. For the glory of God.

God loves drawing people to Himself so much that this morning we see what happens when His people fail at doing it. God does it anyway.

Daniel 4:28–37 (ESV)

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The king had a whole year to do what Daniel suggested. He should have worshipped this one true God and fixed the way he was exploiting people. We do not know if he made any headway in that regard in this year of opportunity. But we can see that the king's pride **is just as bad** as it ever was.

So the King is surveying his kingdom. And it would have been **VERY** impressive.

It is interesting that it says the king answered and said... Answered **who**?

Answer **what**? We don't know if he was talking to himself or talking to someone else.

But we know what he said. I'll bet the King wished he could **un-say** those words. Now what had God **already** told the king about what part **God played** in the Babylonian kingdom? Several times already God said, I gave you this or I gave you that. Nebuchadnezzar was aware of the truth. It just did not **mean anything** to him. God was going to **make it mean something** very soon.

Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as royal place to live that will glorify my majesty.

This takes bragging to a whole new level.

There is no proper view of god in Nebuchadnezzar's world view. Here is the "I am and there are none besides" like Isaiah quoted. It is all about the **king's self**. God is very long-suffering on a lot of things. But when a human being **starts taking credit** for what **God alone can do**, or when a person starts claiming **to be god**, that is when things often escalate quickly. God appears to have a heightened sensitivity to that particular sin.

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,

Here is an "**Uh oh**" moment of all "**uh oh**" moments. The king may have been thinking, "Oh yeah. Daniel told me about this. This isn't good."

It is interesting that God did not allow the king to finish his sentence. God interrupted him. He didn't even get to finish his self-exaltation before the God of heaven pronounced His judgment on what he was saying.

God told him that the punishment that Daniel had told him about is happening **starting now** and **ending in 7 times**. That is how long it will take for you to get the point.

And the point is simple.

God rules. And you don't. You are not what is special in this arrangement. **God** is the special party. You have just been blessed with all these things you just took credit for. So you are going to live like an animal.

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.

It is interesting that God chose to make the king **like a beast**. Romans 1 describes the process of abandoning God. There is a **beastlike** element to it. When we abandon the worship of God, humanity sinks into its basest animal instincts. In King Nebuchadnezzar's instance, he took the plunge quicker and more visibly. He went instantly insane.

When a **beast** lives like a **beast**, he glorifies God because he is being what he created to be. When a **man** lives like a **beast**, he dishonors God because he was created for so much more.

There is a story about John Gerstner. He was talking one time about the depravity of man and compared men and women to rats. After he finished, someone was very offended and said that it was insulting to compare men and women to rats. **Dr Gerstner said, "I do apologize,". He said "I apologize profusely. The comparison was terribly unfair ... to the rats."**

James Montgomery Boice, Daniel: An Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 52–53.

Now if you saw the king in his beast-like state, what point do you think you would get? There might be several. But I think one point you might not miss is, if **that beast can be a king, anyone** could be a king.

Sometimes we have presidents like that as well.

God truly does **give the kingdoms to who He wills**. The king was left without a single virtue that would be useful in running a kingdom. It is as if God is saying, ok King, you were saying.... Let's see you try to **add on to your kingdom now**, if you are so great. Let's see the glory you should receive for being in the state you are in now. The point is, you, like every creature, are **dependent** upon God. God can **make** you or **break** you. God can allow you to **succeed** or **cause** you to fail. God can **give** anything and **take** anything away.

That is the point that became utterly clear to the king at some point.

Now, this story is a story about extremes. You and I will never be king, nor will we ever probably be this **out of touch** with our minds. Nor are we likely to actually say, "look how great my accomplishments are and how worthy of worship I am." But that doesn't mean we are free from doing sins in that **same family**.

We are in danger of this same kind of sin when our **world** begins to revolve **around ourselves**. When we focus consistently on **what I deserve**, what I **want** that I do not have, how I should be regarded, how significant **my contribution** is compared to others, we could go on. All of those things can have elements of self worship.

Look at the beast the king became. When he came to his mind, do you think he was going to worship himself in **that state**? Probably not. Well there, but for the grace of God, go I. If you were suddenly put in this same state, how many of the things would vanish where we now expect or demand worship? Well we might as well let them go **now**. We do well to adapt the accurate view without God needing to teach us a lesson. All of our ideas about our **innate specialness** apart from God begin to dissolve when we revert to that which **we are** without a God. We are the most useful to God and the least arrogant when we see ourselves in

the proper perspective, when we see ourselves as a **chosen container** of the **grace of God**.

Are there areas of your life where you think you deserve the ultimate credit for what you have become? Are there areas where you demand that people sing your praises or they will taste your wrath? Watch those areas closely. We need to humble ourselves and God will lift us up. We don't want to allow pride to lead us to a fall like the king had.

34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me,

Remember how this trial started. The king was on his palace roof looking down and around. Then he looked inward. Now look how it ends. The king looked **up**. Is it not wonderful how simply **changing our perspective** can often change so much? When we quit focusing **internally** and quit focusing on **our circumstances** and when we fix our focus **on our God**? When we come to God as our father who is in heaven whose name is hallowed?

Could the king have looked up at any time during this process, but he kept choosing not to? We don't know. But seeing how stubborn my soul can be to run to God, I could see that as being possible.

So the king finally fixes his **eyes** and his **heart** where it should have been the whole time. On His maker.

And his reason returned to him.

Now I realize that his was an unusual supernatural event. This was not a normal difficulty with anxiety or mental issues. God had **inflicted the king** and God had to **remove** the affliction. So we cannot apply this exactly like we would in our situation. But none the less, how many times have we been reacting to something in our lives like a crazy person, and the remedy for us, too, was to pray, to lay it in God's hands? We needed to reorient to the truth about God and life. Isn't it a common experience for us to have **reason return to us** after praying or reading God's word? Is that not often the source of our peace and our calm. It is not best proved in our text this morning, but it is a principle in scripture that **reason returns** as we **focus as first importance upon our Savior**. We **think** best after we **meditate** on the truths of God.

Now, how well did the king learn his lesson? How well does he explain the change? How close to the heart is it?

Do you know what I mean? You know how it is with small kids. When coerced, they will eventually say they are sorry. But actually being truly repentant is

another matter. You can often tell by how they approach their apology, whether they have really gotten the point. Well how well did the King get the point? Let's see.

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?"

Now remember what God had already said that all this craziness was to produce: **Daniel 4:25 (ESV) till you, King Nebuchadnezzar, know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.**

It looks like the King could have done a doctoral thesis on **that particular gem** of truth. He really got it. We really don't know how he learned all of this. He was alone in his craziness. He must have taken what **he did know** and just followed the logic. But in the end, he makes universal doctrinally accurate application for what happened to him.

First the king **blessed the Most High**. From what I have read, this term for God tends to be one that focusses on His **Sovereign power**. It is about God's absolute **control of His realm**. So when the king blesses the Most High God, he is referring to that quality of God that the king was probably most resistant to.

Here we see the proper attitude toward God. It is the attitude we should always have. The king is turning into a roll model in submission.

The king **...praised and honored him who lives forever**

The king is adapting to the eternal person and the eternal kingdom of God.

First the king says that God's person lasts forever.

Then he says His dominion lasts forever.

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,

Then he says God's kingdom will last as long as there are people to be part of it. It will always be, no matter how many generations there are.

and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

Now the king will delve into the insurmountable difference between **people** and **God**. That was the part he didn't flesh out very well before he went crazy. He didn't see such a clean line between being God and being a man. He sees it now.

35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing

First, there really is no contender for God's place in the universe. Every individual human falls as far short as any other human in comparison to the power and

wisdom of God. The difference in that regard between God and those made in the image of God that the score is God- infinite Man- zero.

And that distinction puts **every man** alongside **every other**. This truth cuts at the core of any kind of **human superiority**. In the God scale, anything is greater than zero, and zero is our score. So while I may look around and compare myself with someone else in a way that I look better, the difference is unsubstantial. It does not count for anything. So no human is superior in having God qualities.

and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth

Here the King talks about the spheres of God's power. God does according to His will. Where? In the **spiritual realm** and in the **physical realm**. In the world of angels and in the world of people. There is no difference.

You and I know this theology. But do we really believe it? Let me bring it closer to home. Do you run to prayer for your spouse when you have trouble with your spouse? Do you really think God can change this person you live with? Or maybe a boss, or a neighbor, or a church member. Do we really trust that He does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth? Do we trust that truth? Look what he says next.

and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Here is where I think he makes the most dramatic distinction between man and the Most High.

Surely a man must **have something** to bring to God's picnic. How about **reason**? Surely we can **evaluate** what God does. Surely we can provide something useful. Surely our **thinking** should be factored into what God is doing. Surely we can **change His mind** by what we contribute. Surely He is not always correct.

The king really gets it now. He really understands the gap between the One True God and humans.

The core problem with the king was He did not have a **high enough estimation of God**. He did not see **gaping chasm** between the best that a man can do or be and who God is.

I am sure that the king had made mistakes during his years as king. And for sure he reached out for counsel from time to time. It looks like he should have asked for a bit more counsel when he commanded the furnace to be super heated. But, anyway, he needed counsel to avoid making mistakes. Sometimes he learned from his failures. And even as powerful as he was, a person could approach him with reasons that would change his plans sometimes. And sometimes they might carefully tell him that he made a mistake. That is the world of humans.

But somehow the king realized that not only is God's **power** absolute. His **wisdom** is also absolute. God is **self contained**. God is perfect in both His plan and its execution.

God is so far above man that we cannot **correct Him** or **criticize Him**. If we have a different opinion than God, we are wrong. Always. And He is right. Always. The truth is, God's power and wisdom are so great that we really don't even know how to think about Him. He must **reveal Himself to us** for us to even have an idea.

Have you ever told God that He was wrong? How did that work out for you? God is exceedingly patient with us. While it is good for us to tell God our needs, and to share our hearts with Him, it is not wise to tell God what He needs to do about it. **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.

This story is extremely dramatic. I think that God did not want **any person** to be able to come up with **any explanation** for what was going on other than **God did it**.

All of a sudden the king was certifiably crazy and removed from power.

Just as suddenly he is perfectly sane and restored to his prior position.

Where he says "for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me, I think he is explaining **why** God did it. God wanted the tree re-established. The King is saying, "God had plans for the tree. So he restored it to its prior status." I don't think the emphasis is on the MY, like it was before. Now the king might be thinking that people need an explanation for why He was **reinstated**. He was **reinstated** for the **kingdom's sake**.

And God, being like God is, blessed this child of His after the discipline accomplished what God was after. Still more greatness was added to the king.

But I bet he never took credit for it again. Notice he does not say **I became greater**. He says more greatness **was added to me**. That is the lesson he needed to learn.

And here is how he closes his letter to all the people in his kingdom.

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.

The King gets it right. He is now spot on. He is worshipping a god and this time it is the correct God.

He has learned about the character of God. He makes no mistakes. Everything He does is perfect. His works are right. His ways are just. The king knows who God is and it is not him.

And the last few words give the conclusion of the matter.

It seems like a massive understatement for what just happened.

those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

You can almost hear the king saying, you can take it from me. Don't ever walk in pride. Never ever ever do that. Unless you want to be a crazy homeless ultra vegan for a few years.

A good application from our text this morning might be to simply consider the difference between **what we know of God** to what we **think** of God. If it is true that God does what He wills with humans, why do we react like we do in some of our human circumstances? Do we think that **God is in control** in our day to day life situations, **or is He not**? If He **is** in control, what should we do and what should we learn? If He is in control, why do we fret? Do you see what I mean? Our theology says that **God is working out His will in the lives of humans**. What does our life **demonstrate** that we believe? And how can we trust God more fully?