

“Knockout” // Daniel 4 // *Shining in Babylon* #4

(DANIEL BUMPER)

We are so grateful for the rapid decline of Covid cases in NC! Both the CDC and Gov. Cooper have removed social distancing, capacity restrictions, & mask requirements for vaccinated adults, &, as such, like we announced on Friday, we are removing the request for everyone to wear them at our weekend services, except, for the time being, Summit Kids staff & volunteers will continue wearing them as a safety precaution. Of course, you are free to wear one if it makes you feel more comfortable.

(Unfortunately, at campuses where we rent the space, we don't set the rules, the venue owner sets the guidelines, so if you're at one of our mobile campuses, your campus pastor will instruct you in what to expect.)

And, of course, we will continue to offer Summit Online for those who feel at risk. Our goal is to make worship accessible to everybody, and that no one has to worship alone. So, that's your PSA for this weekend. Good to see a lot of your faces, as we with unveiled faces behold the glory of the Lord together.

Daniel 4, if you have your Bible. This is Mike Tyson. If you're under 30, you may not know this guy, (don't get confused, I know some of you thought that was a picture of me with my shirt off for a minute)



but's hard to describe what an icon he was when I was in middle and high school. He was, along with Michael Jordan, one of the 80's great sports phenoms. A boxer unlike any who had ever come before him. He had this whole string of heavyweight challengers between 1985–1990 that he knocked out in 1 minute or less--like 10

Works consulted:

“Farewell Lessons From Nebuchadnezzar,” Beth Moore

“Gone Too Soon,” Bryan Loritts

Preaching Christ in Daniel, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Great Tree,” Sidney Greidanus

“Pride: The Case of Nebuchadnezzar,” Tim Keller

“Kingdom Down #4: Jesus Is King,” Mark Driscoll

“Thriving in Babylon,” Larry Osborne

of them and I'm not exaggerating. He even had a video game named after him, **Mike Tyson Punch Out**, that was my favorite arcade game. My parents could drop me off at the mall with \$2.00 and I could play that game for 3 hours. He got so rich from his wins that there was this story about him running his Ferrari out of gas and just leaving it on the side of the road, never returning to pick it up!

At the peak of his career, however, 1990, Iron Mike squared off with a no-name fighter, Buster Douglas. Now, when I say nobody, I mean nobody. It wasn't even supposed to be a challenge. Tyson had knocked out his previous opponent in 93 seconds, so the bets weren't about *whether* he'd win, just on how long it would take. But Mike was so heady from his previous successes that he didn't even prepare for this fight. He stayed out late partying the night before.

You can guess what happened:



Buster Douglas won by knockout in the 10th round. And I remember, when it happened, being bewildered because this was literally the plot of *Rocky III*, which had come out just a few years before this fight--Rocky takes himself for granted, gets fat and out of shape, then loses to Mr. T, Mik dies. It was terrible. It was the low point of the 80's for me. So Mike should have known, I thought.

But Mike thought he was special. And Buster showed him that he wasn't. This fight proved a watershed, btw--after this fight Tyson's career went rapidly downhill.

Mike Tyson's life illustrates a tragic truth: ***Defeat is difficult, but success can be fatal.***¹ In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar is suffering from a bad case of "success" and the Almighty is about to knock him out with a right hook. But unlike the punch by Buster Douglas or Mr. T, the hit God lands is a healing one.

¹ Thanks to Dr. Bryan Loritts for this great illustration and great line!

It is **truly a crazy story**, but you should see it as the final round in God's battle vs. Nebuchadnezzar.

- **Round 1**, if you recall, was when God prospered Daniel and his friends after they defied the King's order to eat defiled foods forbidden by Jewish law. At the end of the time of examination, D, S, M, and A were found to be smarter, healthier, and brighter than all other wise men. So Round 1 goes to God.
- **Round 2** was when God gave Daniel the ability to do what none of Neb's wise men could do: to reveal and then interpret a mysterious dream, a dream about a gigantic statue warning Nebuchadnezzar about setting up a kingdom independent of God. In that encounter, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that there was something special about Daniel's God—he could do what no other god could. He said, **"...surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings." (2:47)** (I.e. better and higher than my gods)
- Nebuchadnezzar was a little dazed, but not knocked out yet, so **Round 3** was the 'skirmish by the furnace,' as I like to call it, where Neb set up a 90 foot gold statue of himself and commanded everyone to bow down to it. S, M, and A, D's friends, refused to do it, and that set up another confrontation between God and Nebuchadnezzar, where Neb threw the 3 teenagers into a fiery furnace. But instead of dying instantly, Neb saw them up and walking around in the fire, with a mysterious 4th man Neb called "the Son of God." S, M, and A emerged from the fiery furnace without even a hair on their head singed or the slightest whiff of smoke on their clothes. At the end of this round, Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed,, **"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and defied the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God...there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." (3:28–29)** IOW, this God is one of a kind.
- It seems like we're getting somewhere, like Neb might be ready to throw in the towel. But as **Round 4** opens, we see that Nebuchadnezzar is still fighting. So, Daniel 4 is God's knock-out blow.

Strangely enough, I'll tell you, there is no story in the Bible that I identify with more than this one. No, I didn't have a season where I went insane, ate grass and didn't cut my fingernails for 7 years, like we're about to see happen with Nebuchadnezzar (Although, my mom might say that pretty accurately describes my hygiene as a middle-schooler,). But when I was a teenager I felt like God did some dramatic things to humble me, and I remember reading this chapter at the end of that season, and when I got to the part where Nebuchadnezzar summarizes how God humbled him, and what God had taught him through it, and Nebuchadnezzar, one of the wickedest most pagan kings in history, lifts his humbled eyes in worship to God, I felt like I was reading something out of my own biography. Let's take a look.

4:1 To those of every people, nation, and language, who live on the whole earth: May your prosperity increase. 2 I am pleased to tell you about the miracles and wonders the Most High God has done for me. 3 **How great are his miracles, and how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.** 4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. 5 (BTW, this is a chapter of your Bible written by a pagan king!) **I had a dream** (he said), **and it frightened me.** So, as was his custom, he called in all the wise men of Babylon to give him an interpretation, but none of them could do it. They were probably all a little scared since Neb had threatened to have them all killed for making up dream interpretations. But **8 Finally Daniel, named Belteshazzar after the name of my god—(but) the spirit of the holy gods is in him—came before me.** I told him the dream: (And here it goes)

There was a tree in the middle of the earth, and it was very tall. 11 ...its top reached to the sky, and it was visible to the ends of the earth. 12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit was abundant, and on it was food for all. Wild animals found shelter under it, the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and every creature was fed from it.

But then, Neb said, while I was admiring this tree, a messenger dropped down from heaven and proclaimed: *14 Cut down the tree and chop off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it, and the birds from its branches. 15 But leave the stump with its roots... Let him be drenched with dew from the sky and share the plants of the earth with the animals. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let him be given the mind of an animal for seven periods of time. 17... This is so that the living will know that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms. He gives them to anyone he wants and sets the lowliest of people over them.*

Now, vs. 19 says that when Neb told Daniel this dream, Daniel was deeply troubled and asked Neb not to make him give the interpretation: He said, *19 "My lord, may the dream apply to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your enemies!* (And, BTW, might I observe: it appears that Daniel by this point had learned to genuinely love King Nebuchadnezzar. Not to admire him or approve of all his practices--far from it--but to love him as a PERSON. Daniel had obeyed God's command that we looked at in Jeremiah 29 to make his home in Babylon; to seek the blessing of its inhabitants. And he genuinely loved Nebuchadnezzar. I'd ask you: Is that how you feel about the antagonistic Babylonians around you--whether the ones in politics and your neighbors--even when they threaten to throw you in the fiery furnace? Are your Babylonian neighbors around you, with their offensive signs in their yards and Facebook posts, primarily political opponents for you to overcome, or people you genuinely love, weep for, and pray the best for?)

So, Daniel said, "Please, Neb, don't make me interpret this dream." And Neb, who had also learned genuinely to trust Daniel, responded, vs. 19, *"Belteshazzar, don't let the dream or its interpretation alarm you."* Just tell me.

And so, Daniel said, vs. 22, *"King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the tree. And like the tree, 22 ...you have become great and strong: your greatness has grown and even reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the ends of the earth.* But God has issued a decree from heaven, that because of your pride, you, like this tree, are going to be cut down. And vs. *25 You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals. You will feed on grass like cattle and be drenched with dew from the sky for seven periods of time, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants.*

26 As for the command to leave the tree's stump with its roots, your kingdom will be restored to you as soon as you acknowledge that Heaven rules.

Daniel PLEADED with the king to repent, to turn his life over to God. *27 Therefore (he said), may the king heed my advice: Separate yourself from your sins by doing what is right, and from your injustices by showing mercy to the needy. Perhaps there will be an extension of your prosperity."*

But sadly, Nebuchadnezzar didn't, and so, vs. 29: At the end of twelve months, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon (admiring its power and beauty, his heart filling with a swelling sense of pride over what he'd accomplished) 30 the king exclaimed, "Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by *my* vast power and for *my* majestic glory?"

31 While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared that the kingdom has departed from you. 32 You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals, and you will feed on grass like cattle for seven periods of time, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants." 33 And at that very moment the message against Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to repent. And really, more than that. This was after 4 chapters of warnings and signs. But the day came when Neb crossed the line and God said, "That's it. Enough." God knows when that day is for you. It's never where you think it is. God says, "You have walked in disobedience long enough." And that very hour, he sends something to destroy your foundations, to rock you to your core.

And so it happened to Nebuchadnezzar. "For seven periods of time... he ate grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with dew from the sky, until his hair grew like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. BTW, we're not exactly sure what "**7 periods of time**" means. Most say it means 7 years and I think that's right. Probably more important is that 7 is the OT number of "fullness," so it's the Bible's way of saying that Neb suffered for the "full amount of time." IOW, as long as it took. Or let me make it really simple for you: *As much time as it took for Neb to realize that God was God and Neb was Neb and for Neb to abdicate the throne he had usurped from God.*

During these 7 seasons, the mightiest king in Babylon was reduced to a groveling mad-man. He lived outside, ate grass like a cow, and his hair grew out like eagle's feathers and his nails like the talons of an eagle. (BTW, that is another reason I think it was 7 actual years. We're not talking about a "No-Shave November" or a bad case of split ends because you didn't use conditioner or wearing the same pair of underwear for a week. We're talking so many years that his hair became so long and matted that it looked like feathers instead of human hair, and during this time he ate grass like a cow. It was utterly humiliating. A moo-ving experience. Believe it or not, psychologists actually have a classified name for this, it's called Boanthropy, a mental disorder, that, while rare, the victim believes he or she is a cow.²

God was using Nebuchadnezzar to give us a picture of what happens to humanity when we rebel against God. You see, like Nebuchadnezzar, we were created to rule on earth. But when we reject God, and give ourselves to sin, we become like beasts. Insane.

And this is not just true of individuals, either. It's true of whole societies that turn their backs on God. The Apostle Paul said of the human race, "Professing themselves to be wise they became fools." IOW, in all our

² This is not to imply that all mental illness, or even that most illness, is some kind of direct punishment from God, but this one was. It was designed to humble Neb and get his attention in a very public way.

sophistication and advancement, we go insane. We say things like the human race is nothing more than the product of chance plus time, that nothing x nobody equals everything; that we're just slightly evolved beasts, no different than monkeys except for some reasoning ability and opposable thumbs. Insanity! We say things like "If you are an advanced parent, and you think your 10 year old boy is really a girl trapped in a boy's body, give him hormone therapy and irreversible invasive surgery to make him a girl, and if anybody opposes that it's a hate crime." Insanity.

So this is not just about Nebuchadnezzar, this is about the whole human race. It's about you and me. **So let's stop here and reflect on human pride**, because that's what is most at work here in this chapter. It's the source of all Nebuchadnezzar's other sins. **So, we're going to look at pride's roots, pride's fruits, and pride's cure.**

I. Pride's Roots

In this chapter, we see that pride has two roots: **1. A failure to see that every good thing comes from God.** In vs. 30, Nebuchadnezzar exclaims, **30 "Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?"** There is no acknowledgement that it call comes from God. So, God says, vs. 32,

- **"You think you did all this, Nebuchadnezzar.** God's ultimately in charge of it all. Every talent you have, every breath you take, every ounce of strength you exert is a gift from him. He sets up and tears down whomever he wants."
- **Americans in particular believe the myth of the self-made man.** Many of us look out at what we have and say, "I worked for everything I have... Look at what I created by my vast power and for my majestic glory." I don't want to take away from human ingenuity or your hard work; I'm a big believer in a free economy, but even the slightest moment of self-reflection will show you that the whole "self-made-man" bit is not entirely true. Right? **Think about it:** The biggest factors contributing to your success you had no control over—like where or when you were born; the education you received; the society you were born into; the influences that inspired you to succeed; even the genes that gave rise to your talents were gifts from your parents.
- The most fundamentally determinative factors in your life, you had no control of. You may have worked hard, but you were using health and energy supplied to you by God. None of us are truly self-made men. We took gifts that God gave us and utilized them. And to not acknowledge that is plagiarism. (Plagiarism borrows something from someone else and then claims to be the sole author of it.) Your whole life should have **one big footnote:** "This came from God. Not my doing."

Pride's 1st root is a failure to see that everything we have is a gift of God. It's always accompanied by a second root: 2. The foolish assumption that 'the good life' will last forever.

- Nebuchadnezzar assumed he was safe, and relatively speaking, he was. **Nebuchadnezzar was, in his time, the most powerful man in the world;** furthermore, historians say that no more than 5 people in all of human history have had the kind of power and status he enjoyed.
- **Babylon, his capital city, located in modern day Iraq,** was the headquarters of the known world. It was an architectural wonder: It was built like a great terraced, hanging garden on two different sides of the Euphrates River, connected by a tunnel under the river. His palace had a 400 foot high waterfall. The city

was bedecked with jewels and gold. Remember I told you about Herodotus, a contemporary historian, who visited Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and wrote that never in his life had he seen such an abundance of gold. Everywhere.³ ⁴ Nebuchadnezzar's capital was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

- **Furthermore, he had made Babylon virtually impregnable.** He built a wall around Babylon, I told you, that stretched for 56 miles, and in many places was over 80 ft wide and 300 ft high.⁵ They raced chariots on top of the wall in places.

The point is: If anyone should have felt secure about the future, it was Nebuchadnezzar.

- He couldn't be attacked. Literally no army in the world compared to Babylon's. *He can't be fired.* He's an unchallenged monarch. *He can't go bankrupt. He's the world bank.*

But you and I both know, God has a way. You might be sitting on top of the world; enough savings for any contingency. Or maybe you are young with so much talent that everybody tells you the world is your oyster.

- **But then everything changes with a simple 3-word diagnosis: "You've got cancer."** A little over a year ago an invisible virus that none of us had heard about shut our society down.
- **The builders of the Titanic famously boasted,** "Not even God could sink this ship." But then there's that iceberg.
- I remember reading how **one mighty Civil War general boasted that he'd never lost a battle,** and then it was true. But then he became violently ill and died from a tick bite.
- **Maybe it's happened to you this year through your spouse telling you that she's done.** (Me as youth pastor in Florida.)
- Or maybe it's happened through something happening with one of your kids. Ain't no pain like kid pain.
- **Maybe, like Nebuchadnezzar, it's happening through mental illness.** The human body is so delicate, so fragile, so easily thrown off.
- And then you watch one of those **nature documentaries on Netflix** and realize how fragile our whole ecosystem is. I was watching one the other day and the scientist was explaining that the right solar flare, aimed the right way, could destroy life on earth. It could happen at any time, and we'd have about 8 minutes before life on earth as we know it is over. Or an asteroid. Or an earthquake.
- **The financial markets can get disrupted.** The right set of factors creates a Wall Street crash and then billionaires are jumping out the window. Someone says the word "gas shortage" and North Carolinians

³ Cf. Isa 14:4

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging_Gardens_of_Babylon - The Hanging Gardens are shrouded in some mystery—both in terms of location and origin—but many ancient historians (among them, Josephus) connected these Gardens with Nebuchadnezzar.

⁵ Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 BCE) built three walls around Babylon at heights of forty feet and so broad at the top that chariots could race around them. The Ishtar Gate in the wall of Nebuchadnezzar II's Babylon was claimed by some to be greater than any of the listed Wonders of the Ancient World. **The Greek historian Herodotus claimed that "Babylon surpasses in wonder any city in the known world" and specifically praised the walls which he said were 56 miles (90 kilometres) long, 80 feet (24 metres) thick, and 320 feet (97 metres) high.** Although it is generally believed that Herodotus exaggerated the majesty of Babylon, other ancient writers have also noted the magnificence of the walls. <https://www.worldhistory.org/wall/>

begin filling up plastic bags with gas... You know who you are. Y'all crazy. The point is: *we're not as impregnable as we think we are, folks.*

- **Part of Satan's lie in the Garden of Eden** was: "You will not surely die." It's a lie that he whispers in our ears today. It's not that he convinces us to deny death's existence; it's just that he makes us forget about it as a reality. (Years ago there was one of these "faces of death" documentary, and it had video footage of this guy who filmed people parachuting out of airplanes. People on their honeymoon would do skydiving and he'd jump out after them and film them. And so you see his camera jump out of the plane with this couple, and after about 1 minute the camera begins to go crazy...). You and I are like that. Death is certain, we just have no idea how far we have to fall.
- **So, right now, you might walk out on your roof and look over your Empire, your portfolio, your future prospects, and say,** "Look what I built by my power, for my glory and enjoyment," and with one small flick of the Almighty's finger, everything changes.

When I was a teenager one of the things that God used to shake me was a kid I'd grown up with who died in a car wreck. It was gruesome. He'd been one of the coolest kids in school. And I remember standing there before his casket thinking, "*Jamie is in eternity. I wonder if he's in heaven or hell?*" At that moment, everything we competed in--sports, school, girls--*none of it mattered.*

Pride's roots are the failure to recognize everything--everything, every breath you take--is a gift of God; and, second, the foolish assumption that it will last forever.

These roots gave birth in Nebuchadnezzar's life to several *fruits*:

II. Pride's fruits:

1. Competitiveness

- Nebuchadnezzar's language is filled with boasting. "I, I, my, my. Nobody compares to me." That's the surest sign you are eaten up with pride. You are always comparing yourself to people. I don't mean a healthy desire to do your best, but a drive to show you are the best.
- C. S. Lewis says that **the quickest indicator lights** that indicate you have pride is that some other person's pride bothers you. I've always loved this paragraph in *Mere Christianity*. "If you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me... or patronise me, or show off?' The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree. Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature." So, there you have it. How much does someone else's pride bother you? How much are you like, "I just hate how they are bragging, or how if they are always trying to show they are the best, or how they think they are something." That's the surest sign you have a bad case of pride. You see, their pride is competing with yours. You're mad that they got the attention, because you wanted the attention. It ticks you off that they think they're something because deep down you want to be thought of as something, and their something-ness is getting in the way of your something-ness and you don't like that.

- The irony about all this is that **you may not even recognize it, but it's obvious to everyone else around you**. C.S. Lewis said that pride is a funny disease, because those who suffer most from it never know it, but they make everyone around you sick.
- **John Calvin said that Neb's insanity gives us a picture of the blindness of human pride**: When someone is insane, they don't know they are insane, but everybody else does!

2. Ingratitude:

- The Apostle Paul in Romans 1 said that the reason for the Fall was that we **"...did not glorify God as God, nor were we thankful."** (Romans 1:21) Gratitude is the sign of humility. You recognize that everything you have is a gift, and as a sinner you deserve none of it, so you're constantly giving God glory for it and thanking him for it.

And that leads to #3, ingratitude's ugly twin brother:

3. Entitlement:

- **Pride says, "I deserve good things. Look at what I've done!** I worked hard. I did something good. I did something difficult. Something special. I sacrificed myself. I. I. I... Therefore I deserve... glory, praise, appreciation, more money, a better marriage, a break, whatever."
- And when your life is going well, pride says: *"This is as it should be. I deserve this blessing in life. I'm owed this kind of marriage; I'm owed these kinds of kids; I deserve these friends, this job, etc. Thank me."* And when things go poorly, pride says: This isn't fair, this isn't right. And you live with resentment, blaming others for how they have let you down--your husband, your friends, your kids. You blame God.
- **By contrast, when things go well for humility**, humility says: "Wow, this is a gift, this is mercy. Thank you, God." And when things go poorly, humility says, "Well, God's growing me which is good because I sure need it. Thank you, God."⁶
- **Pride leads to entitlement**; humility leads to gratitude.

4. Overconfidence:

- **Neb believes his kingdom will last forever**. In the NT, James tells us a sign of pride is that you take the future for granted. He says, "Don't be arrogant and declare that tomorrow I'll go do this or that,' because you don't know what tomorrow hold. Your life is fragile, like a vapor, that can be whisked away with the slightest whiff of God's hand." Rather, James says, you should say, 'If the Lord wills,' we will do this or that."
- Overconfidence is seen in the bold self-assurance that, "The future's going to be bright; I always find a way to end up on top; I get knocked down, but I get up again; what doesn't kill me makes me stronger" (and yep, i'm just quoting a bunch of song lyrics). Listen, a little can-do attitude is great. I love it. But realize that you can only do that as God supplies the strength. How does Paul say it? *I can do all things -- THROUGH CHRIST -- who strengthens me.*

⁶ Adapted from Timothy Keller, "Pride; The Case of Nebuchadnezzar," February 5, 1995.

Overconfidence leads to #5. Self-will:

- Neb isn't afraid to go into the future without God because he believes he has all he needs to make life work. But God is about to show him how foolish that is.
- Another wealthy King, King Solomon, said, **"The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."** The fear of God means, in part, a recognition of how much you need him. I fear God like I fear oxygen. It's not that I am terrified of oxygen; I just know how essential it is for life, so I fear getting separated from it and would never put myself in a situation where I'd be without it.
- Those who go through life without seeking God's will are those who are foolish enough to think that they can make it in life without him. What's it going to take to wake you up from that insanity?
- Friend, I am TERRIFIED to think about being in a place where I don't have God guarding my present (giving life and blessing in my relationships), and securing my future.

6. Stinginess and Exploitation

- In vs. 27, Daniel pleads with Neb: **Separate yourself from your sins by doing what is right, and from your injustices by showing mercy to the needy."**
- **It's significant that Daniel puts repentance in terms of a new attitude toward the poor.** And that's because a sure sign of pride is a callousness toward the needs of others. If you feel like you are responsible for everything in your life, and you have no one to thank but yourself, then you have no natural compassion for those who are poor. But if you realize how much you owe to God, your heart naturally goes out to others in need.⁷
- I love that little phrase "showing mercy." This chapter is written in Aramaic, and in Aramaic that phrase literally translates "complain on behalf of." Complain on behalf of the poor. Advocate for them.
- Entitlement is the sign of pride; advocating for the needs of others is the sign of humility.⁸

So, in Neb you see the roots of pride and the fruits of pride. Now, pride's cure. (BTW, can I tell you how frustrating it is...)

MUSIC III. Pride's cure

This one's pretty short. Suffering. Failure. And maybe that's happening to you right now. But realize that failure by itself is not enough. Failure often leads to more bitterness and resentment. God's Spirit has to awaken you in your failure. John Calvin said, *"Neb's insanity alone didn't wake him up. God's Spirit had to give him eyes to see."*⁹ You hear, in your soul, a voice calling you to look upward toward heaven: **34 But at the end of those days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven (that's the look of repentance), and my sanity returned to me.**

⁷ That phrase "showing mercy" here, literally means, in Aramaic: "To show favor to, to make lovely, to complain for." I like this one: "To complain for": That means we get out in public with our privilege and complain on their behalf. Daniel wants Neb. to "complain" on behalf of the poor--to advocate for them, especially when they are in a position to not speak up for themselves. The sign of humility is that your sense of entitlement has been replaced by a desire to help others, to lift them up. No longer do other people exist for your benefit, but you exist to help lift them up.

⁸Beth Moore, "Daniel | Session 4: Farewell Lessons From Nebuchadnezzar," 2006.

⁹ From John Calvin's commentary on Daniel. My paraphrase.

Hey, is that happening to you right now? Do you hear his voice calling you to look up? How much more are you going to have to suffer?

Neb's final statement here is one of the most stunning declarations of humility anywhere in the Bible.

- ***The most high God lives forever (vs. 34)*** Neb's flatterers had always greeted him with, "O king! live forever." But Neb now says, "That epithet belongs only to God." We're all temporary. Our lives are like vapors in the wind; our kingdoms like sandcastles on a beach. Don't flatter yourself that we're all going to remember you when you are gone. To quote the **great Mark Twain**: "The world laments you for an hour, and it forgets you forever." Like I've told you, *at your funeral, your family is gonna gather up all your prize possessions that you've spent a lifetime accumulating, and they are gonna say, "What in the world are we going to do with all this junk?"* And then they are gonna hold up your clothes and make fun of them and then that's it. You're gone.
- Vs. 34, like God, only God's Kingdom is ***"an everlasting dominion, (a) and his kingdom is from generation to generation."*** That means trying to erect a life independent of him is like a gnat trying to build a nest on the surface of the sun or a kid trying to build a sandcastle on the beach right before a hurricane. Only one kingdom lasts forever: Jesus': *Only one life to live, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last.* And only things done through his power will last. You can't make that marriage work. You can't make those kids turn out right. Summit, we can't build this church. Unless the Lord builds those houses, those who build it labor in vain. Apart from me, Jesus, you can do nothing.
- ***All the inhabitants are before him are as nothing (vs. 35)***. God's not impressed with Babylon, or America. He's certainly not wowed by the Summit Church, my talents or your money. He has no need of any of us, and our greatest achievements are of no consequence to him.
- ***He does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. (vs. 35)*** He's fully in charge of history. Armies of angels move at his command, as do our smallest molecules. Not a sparrow falls from the sky apart from his permission; not a hair falls from our heads without his knowledge. We're just INHABITANTS of the earth; God is in control of it.¹⁰
- ***There is no one who can block his hand. (vs. 35)*** His power is irresistible. No one, ultimately, will ever frustrate his purposes. Not you, not Nebuchadnezzar, not Hitler, not Hollywood, not Washington, not the UN, not Satan, not Trump, not Biden. Nobody. He does *whatever he pleases*; ***no one stay his hand or say to him, "What are you doing?"***
- ***All his works are true and his ways are just (vs. 37)*** In the end, we'll see that God was just and true in all that he did and it is our complaints that were foolish. We feel so justified now--God, what were you thinking, but when our eyes are opened to see what God was really up to, we'll feel so foolish; we'll seem like 3 year old children questioning the wise and loving ways of their parents. The prophet Isaiah says that on that final day, ***"The wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish. The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day..."***¹¹

¹⁰ From John Calvin's Commentary on Daniel 4

¹¹ Isaiah 2:17; 29:14

- **AND, *He is able to humble those who walk in pride.* (vs. 37)** The mightiest men and women ever to walk the face of the earth on that final day will find themselves crumbled in a heap before the King of the Universe, unable even to lift their heads; for at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.¹²

That's it. That is the conversion testimony of the richest, most powerful, most wicked king in ancient history. He is able to humble all those who walk in pride. And that included, by the grace of God, **J.D. Greear**.

This blows my mind--I'll get to be in heaven with Nebuchadnezzar. I'll get to call him "Brother Nebuchadnezzar."

What about you? Has he humbled you? Are you ready to listen? Listen, the worst thing is for you to enter eternity un-humbled. For God to wake you up through some tragedy is nothing compared to facing the terror of his wrath on the day of judgment.

And that leads us to probably the best part of this story. **Jesus was the true King**, and even though he walked his whole life in submission and humility, at the end of his life God drove him into the wilderness of suffering and he died like a beast on the cross. And because of that he can forgive us for our sins and restore us from our insanity.

Do you remember that little phrase in vs.26, "... but leave the stump with its roots." A stump with roots can grow again. Yesterday, Veronica had me out in the yard digging up a stump in one of our flower beds. Evidently the previous owner had cut down a tree but left the roots and this hickory tree was growing again. When Jesus died on the cross, his life was pulled up by the roots so that he could forgive and restore you, grow you again to everything you are supposed to be, if you'll let him.

And so now, he calls to you now, in your insanity, to come to him. To separate yourself from your sins. To humble yourself in surrender to him.

Are you ready? Friend, this pain in your life that you are going through--he is not trying to punish you for your sin or indicate that he hates you, friend. He's trying to wake you up! As we say, 'He's not trying to pay you back but bring you back!' He wants to restore you. Will you listen?

¹² Much help on this from Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Da 4:34. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991

Bullpen:

Then I praised the Most High and honored and glorified him who lives forever (said Nebuchadnezzar): For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can block his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

36 ...And (at that moment) my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, and even more greatness came to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. And he is able to humble those who walk in pride.

Summit, I know a lot of you saw the CDC announcement today that vaccinated people no longer have to wear a mask indoors in most places, and you are wondering what that means for our worship services.

Our plan had been that we would announce the first of June that we were going to 'mask optional', because that would give everyone who wanted a vaccine time to get it. But in light of this announcement, we are removing the mask requirement at our permanent facilities, though, as the CDC recommends, we are asking that those adults not yet vaccinated continue to wear a mask for the time being.

Our desire is not to take options away, but to engage more people in worship, including those who have been waiting for this clearance, so the speak, from the CDC, to return to public worship.

That's it. Nebuchadnezzar's testimony. He is able to humble all those who walk in pride. And that included, by the grace of God, J.D. Greear.

Listen to how Isaiah said it: "If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." Isaiah 58:10-11.

- ~~Something else entitlement does is it makes you blind to some genuine blessings staring you right in the face! **Someone shared with me an actual ad in The New Yorker.** It's in the want ads where you can look for ad date. The girl lists herself as Strikingly Beautiful — "Ivy League graduate. Playful, passionate, perceptive, elegant, bright, articulate, original in mind, unique in spirit. I possess a rare balance of beauty and depth, sophistication and earthiness, seriousness and a love of fun. Professionally successful, perfectly capable of being self-sufficient and independent, but I won't be truly content until we find each other. Please reply with a substantial letter describing your background and who you are. Photo essential." (First of all, can you imagine being this girl's friend?) But the point is her sense of entitlement probably keeps her from entertaining a lot of guys that would make great marriage partners for us. It probably keeps you from some genuine friendships, some real blessings and opportunities, because you're so full of who you are and what you deserve you miss the good blessings right in front of you.~~
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- Helping the poor is your healing!
 - Neb was a very cruel man. 2 Kings 25 tells us that when he captured Jerusalem he took the Jewish king, Zedekiah, and killed both his sons before his eyes, then put out his eyes, so that the last thing Zedekiah saw was the death of his sons. Then he dragged him off to captivity. Cruel.
 - So i
 - sees this as all for his enjoyment and his glory. If you're the source of it all, you don't feel any compulsion to live for God.
 - But if God is the source of it all, not only do you feel like you owe it to him to live for him, you're actually scared to be separated from him.
- Overconfidence almost always leads to an overestimation about what you're capable of, and what is beneath you, that is annoying as heck to everyone else:
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This is a picture of our conversion. John Calvin noted that his deformity was so dreadful that his restoration might be called a kind of new creation, and that Nebuchadnezzar did not raise his eyes to heaven until God drew him to himself." It wasn't God's punishments that woke up Nebuchadnezzar, but God's Spirit.¹³ The same is true of us. We can't be woken up from the insanity of sin until the Spirit of God quickens us and gives us eyes to see.

And then you are gone and forgotten. At your funeral, they gather up all your prize possessions that you've spent a lifetime accumulating and cultivating, and they say, "What are we going to do with all this junk?" and they hold up your clothes and make fun of them.

Mark Twain: "The world laments you for an hour, and it forgets you forever." And even if they do say some nice things about you, you can't hear them. Because you're dead.

Every futile, silly, limited-perspective opinion on the unfairness of God will vanish. We will see that, like David declared, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." (Ps 89:14) And there we will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations... All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed (understood!)." (Rev 15:3-4) We will say with the Apostle Paul, *"Who are you, o man, to reply against God?"* It's like J. Oswald Sanders said, What will amaze us as we look backward from eternity is not the unfairness of his judgment--for we will see that there is no unfairness--but the greatness of his mercy.

Strikingly Beautiful – from New Yorker magazine... "Ivy League graduate. Playful, passionate, perceptive, elegant, bright, articulate, original in mind, unique in spirit. I possess a rare balance of beauty and depth, sophistication and earthiness, seriousness and a love of fun. Professionally successful, perfectly capable of being self-sufficient and independent, but I won't be truly content until we find each other..... Please reply with a substantial letter describing your background and who you are. Photo essential." (Can you imagine being this girl's friend?)

Pride sets us all up for a fall. Pride makes us an enemy of God, and all of us have it. Pride, CS Lewis said, is a strange disease. Everybody around you knows you have it before you do. You feel great, but it makes everyone around you sick.

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on Daniel*, 301, 295.

When you walk out on your roof and look over your kingdom; your prospects for the future; and you feel that satisfaction of a job well done, right behind that is pride. And pride is characterized by ingratitude and over-confidence.

“Defeat is difficult, but success can be fatal.” (BL)

- - Even if you feel impregnable, two things should humble even the richest person: death and God’s judgment.
 - And our work is so fragile. It could be wiped out at any minute by an earthquake or solar flare.
 - Do you ever watch when you knock over an anthill how the ants immediately go about scurrying to rebuild. They don’t even stop to complain. “Awww.... Come on, man!” They just go right back to work, not knowing, of course, that I can come back and do it all again tomorrow. That’s what we’re like... all this activity, and one solar flare and we’re toast.
 - Jerry Seinfeld who became famous for making a show about the absurdity, the *hevel*, of life, says, “Your last birthday and your first one are very similar... You just kinda sit there...you're the least excited person at the party. You don't even really realize that there is a party. At both, people help you blow out the candles, you can't do it...you don't even know why you're doing it.”
 - You are like, “What is this ritual? What is going on?”
 - At your first birthday party and your last one other people have to gather your friends together for you. Sometimes they're not even your friends. They decide. They bring 'em in, they sit 'em down, and they tell you: 'these are your friends! Tell them, “Thank you for coming to my birthday party!”
 - You go out just like you came in.
 - Solomon asks, What does the one gain who struggles for the wind? 17 What is more, he eats in darkness all his days, with much frustration, sickness, and anger. (5:15–17)
 - “Eat in darkness” means you work late, eat alone.
 - But then you die, and you can't take any of it with you so you leave it to a trust fund kid who doesn't appreciate it and they just waste it.
 - You say, “But they will always remember how awesome I was.”
 - Not really. Like I told you, after your funeral, they gather up all your prize possessions and say, “What are we going to do with all this junk?” and they hold up your clothes and make fun of them.

In and of itself, success is not a problem. But quite often success it is accompanied by: