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Sermon Notes

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The Humiliation and Exaltation Of King Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 4

I. Human Pride: The Root of All Evils

- A. Augustine on Pride
- B. Our Boastful Age
- C. God's Hatred of Pride
- D. Pride: The True Enemy of Salvation
- E. The Central Lessons of Daniel 4

- 1) God rules over the kingdoms of men
- 2) Those who walk in pride, He is able to humble

II. Nebuchadnezzar Narrates the Vision (vs. 1-18)

- A. An Official Proclamation (vs. 1-3)
 - 1. Timing

Probably made immediately after His restoration, to explain his seven-year absence

- 2. Audience: The people of the Babylonian empire
- 3. Author: The King Himself (with Daniel's help)
 - a. amazing document... the only chapter in the Bible written by a pagan King
 - b. undoubtedly had help from Daniel, explaining the Biblical language in it

Psalm 145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

This is Nebuchadnezzar's official testimony, testifying to the transforming power of the God of Heaven

4. The Culmination of a Spiritual Journey?

a. Nebuchadnezzar's interactions with the God of Heaven

i) Ch. 1: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah: "Ten times better"

ii) Ch. 2: Daniel's amazing achievement under God: interpreting the dream

iii) Ch. 3: God's miraculous answer to Nebuchadnezzar's prideful question:

Daniel 3:15 "...Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

b. culminating act in the drama... God acts directly in Nebuchadnezzar's life

c. no one comes to saving faith without God's powerful action on their heart

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..."

God frequently draws sinners by causing hardships to enter their lives, causing them to ask deep questions and seek eternal answers... then bringing the saving message at just the right moment

That may be just what is going on here with Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4

B. Greeting and Worship (vs. 1-3)

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! ² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

1. The King wants the world to know!!

2. Evangelism a pleasure

a. each of you Christians have a testimony

b. tell it WITH PLEASURE!!!

3. "Miraculous signs and wonders..."

a. proof of the supernatural power of God

- b. laws of nature broken
- c. astonishing timing, inexplicable knowledge

4. The Awesome Kingdom of God

- a. supernatural power (again, signs & wonders)
- b. eternal in its reign (“eternal,” “from generation to generation”)

NOTE: This was the lesson of the image of Daniel 2, but the King needed reminding... God’s Kingdom will never end, but all human kingdoms are mortal and finite

Nebuchadnezzar draws in his audience with a gripping introduction... they are ready to hear his story

C. Nebuchadnezzar’s Circumstances (vs. 4-5)

vs. 4-5 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

1. Comfortably in sin (vs. 4)
 - a. at home, in my palace
 - b. contented: throne secure, no genuine threats near or far
 - c. prosperous

lit.= green and flourishing... like the tree he would soon see

Nebuchadnezzar had reached the pinnacle of power and wealth: Babylon was a fantastic creation of his military conquests and his administrative and technological skill; his palace was comfortable and luxurious; he was still a young man with, so it seemed, years ahead of him

But his pride was a stench in God’s nostrils, and his oppression of the poor cried out to heaven for vengeance... he was in deep trouble with God though he knew nothing about it

Before anyone can be saved, they must know that they are lost in sin, under the wrath and judgment of God, in grave danger unless they repent

The grace of God begins when He makes a contented sinner afraid for his future

John Newton: “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved...”

Country preacher: "First, I gets 'em lost, then I gets 'em saved!!"

2. A Terrifying Dream (vs. 5)

- a. for the second time, God uses a nightmare
- b. Aramaic very strong... this dream left the mighty potentate terrified, perhaps sweating profusely and gasping for breath

D. Wisdom of Man Inept AGAIN!! (vs. 6-7)

vs. 6-7 *So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.*

- 1. Human counselors summoned (as before, Nebuchadnezzar calls for his "wise men)
- 2. Human counselors fail: (as before, they completely fail in their task)
 - a. **human wisdom** limited
 - b. OR PERHAPS... **human courage** was what was limited
 - i) Babylonians had extensive system of dream interpretation
 - ii) it was pretty obvious who the tree was
 - iii) perhaps they're afraid to tell Nebuchadnezzar the truth

E. Daniel: God's Spokesman AGAIN!! (vs. 8-9, 18)

vs. 8-9 *Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) ⁹ I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.*

- 1. as usual, Daniel stay clear of the false teachers
- 2. makes his entrance separate
- 3. NOTE: Nebuchadnezzar's respect for Daniel & for God

The holiness of God is mentioned for the first time... perhaps Daniel has been witnessing to him all these years

God's holiness means His SEPARATION from all creation and all other false gods... He is high, lifted up, above all things... He is the HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, God and there is none like Him

Yet, notice that some of Nebuchadnezzar's paganism remains: "after the name of my god" "spirit of the holy gods is in him"

4. he clearly remembers Daniel's earlier interpretation

vs. 9 "... *no mystery is too difficult for you*"

5. After relating his dream, he begs Daniel for help again

vs. 18 *"This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."*

F. Nebuchadnezzar relates his vision (vs. 10-18)

1. The tree described (vs. 10-12)

vs. 10-12 *These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.*

- a. an immense tree
 - i) central & isolated (in the "middle of the land")
 - ii) enormous height
- b. a growing tree
 - i) reaching to the heavens
 - ii) spreading to the ends of the earth
- c. a beautiful and fruitful tree
 - i) beautiful foliage
 - ii) abundant fruit for all

- d. a protective, providing tree
 - i) protection on its branches
 - ii) perches for birds, shelter for beasts
 - iii) food for all (again)

2. The judgment decreed (vs. 13-16)

vs. 13-16 *"In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim 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 let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. ' 'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.*

- a. Nebuchadnezzar's personal vision: "While I was lying in bed"
- b. a messenger; lit. = "a watchman"... a "holy one"... sent from heaven
- c. LOUD VOICE: the judgment decreed
- d. "let it", "let him"
 - i) the tree cut down to a stump... stripped of all its branches
 - ii) stump banded about with iron
 - iii) LET HIM be drenched with the dew of heaven
- e. mind changed to that of an animal
- f. seven times pass by

3. The lesson declared (vs. 17)

vs. 17 *" 'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'*

- a. what's the point? "That the world may know..."

b. GOD'S SOVEREIGN RULE OVER EARTH

c. God's sovereign choice of rulers: "the lowliest of men..."

III. Daniel Interprets the Vision (vs. 19-27)

A. Daniel's Compassionate Reaction (vs. 19)

vs. 19 *Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you."*

1. Daniel loved Nebuchadnezzar
2. Daniel feared for Nebuchadnezzar's soul
3. Daniel's genuine compassion
 - a. deeply troubled in spirit (not just afraid to tell the truth)
 - b. emotional answer

vs. 19 *"My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies, and its meaning to your adversaries."*

B. Daniel's Clear Revelation (vs. 20-26)

1. You are the tree

vs. 20-22 *The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air-- ²² you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.*

- a. details of the tree's splendor recounted
 - b. Nebuchadnezzar's kingly reach described
2. Angelic messenger with the dread decree

vs. 23 *"You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in*

the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

3. INTERPRETATION: Clear statement of the dread decree

vs. 24-26 *"This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.*

Horrible shame is threatened... for a pompous tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar, this may have seemed like a fate worse than death; some would rather die than have earthly capabilities stripped

Yet... even in the midst of judgment, God remembers mercy; God's ways are perfect, and his mercy is immeasurable; Nebuchadnezzar will get his kingdom back!!

C. Daniel's Courageous Rebuke (vs. 27)

vs. 27 *Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."*

1. Mark of true prophet: tell the truth even if it hurts

Illus. The boy Samuel & Jeremiah... prophets with unpopular messages

2. Daniel courageously presses home the personal application

a. courage of love for God above all else

b. courage of love for Nebuchadnezzar

IV. God Fulfills the Vision (vs. 28-33)

A. One Year Later

vs. 28-30 *All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, "Is not this the*

great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

1. God's incredible patience: twelve months of waiting
2. Yet... judgment hung like a sword of Damocles over his head every moment
3. At last it fell

B. "Was it something I said??!!?"

1. Nebuchadnezzar's stroll
2. Majestic Babylon in all its splendor

Illus. Hanging Gardens of Babylon

3. Military conquest made it all possible... but IMMORALLY!

Habakkuk 2:12-14 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! ¹³ Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Nebuchadnezzar pursued his own glory... gave no credit whatsoever to the God who created him and gave him the strength and ability to do all that he had done

4. One simple statement brings judgment down

Matthew 12:34 "...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

The thread of the Sword of Damocles has been cut... one sin too many!

C. Sudden, Severe Justice

vs. 31-32 "The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven... "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

1. Stripped of authority

2. Stripped of society
3. Stripped of sanity
4. Stripped of humanity

vs. 33 *Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.*

V. Nebuchadnezzar Learns and Proclaims the Lesson (vs. 34-37)

Habakkuk 3:2 “...*in wrath remember mercy.*”

A. God grants Nebuchadnezzar repentance

vs. 34 *At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.*

1. Nebuchadnezzar’s mind could have been gone forever
2. Judgment carefully measured out
3. Seven years... not a day more

B. God restores to Nebuchadnezzar all He had taken

vs. 36 *At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.*

1. Humanity restored
2. Sanity restored
3. Society restored
 - a. advisers and nobles sought him out
 - b. people wanted him around again

4. Royal authority restored

- a. full authority granted again...BY THE SAME GOD WHO GAVE IT THE FIRST TIME!!!
- b. Remarkable!! Usually he would have been assassinated
- c. God kept his throne available for him

5. Some additional gifts

- a. "I became even greater than before..."
- b. ADDED WISDOM AND HUMILITY
- c. added kindness to the poor??

B. Nebuchadnezzar praises God

vs. 34-35 *His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"*

1. Worship for God's power

- a. total authority
- b. absolute sovereign power
- c. no one can even question him!

2. Worship for God's eternity

- a. a kingdom that will endure forever
- b. "from generation to generation"

3. Worship for God's righteousness

vs. 37 *"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just."*

- a. delight in God's judgments... even though they fell on him
- b. maybe the greatest proof of Nebuchadnezzar's salvation

c. NO GRUDGING ACQUIESCENCE... joyful submission

C. Nebuchadnezzar Proclaims the Lesson

vs. 37 *“Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”*

VI. Applications

A. Repentance That Saves

1. Recognize God’s Sovereign Power

- It is absolute
- It cannot be questioned
- It will never end
- It rules even over the most powerful potentates that have ever lived

2. Ask yourself: Do I delight in God’s sovereignty... or do I resent it?

3. Fear God’s judgments

4. Hate your own pride

5. Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand

6. Turn from sin

B. The Hidden Time Frame: When is your year up?

Luke 13:6-9 *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' ⁸ " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "*

C. From A Warning to a Promise

vs. 37 *“Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”*

Pride hinders everything God wants to do in your life...

Pride stands on the roof and looks out over things God has given you and says "Look at all I've accomplished!! Aren't I amazing!" You boast about your career, about your possessions, your physical prowess, your children, your intellect... all these are gifts from God

Pride hinders God's work in you:

James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5 "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

God wants spiritual beggars... people who humbly accept grace from Him

Pride resists God's wisdom, pride resists God's correction, pride resists God's leadership and authority

Question for 2001: What would your life look like if you were totally humble?

- In marriage
- In prayer
- In Bible study
- In friendships
- In evangelism
- In personal spiritual growth