

Dominion

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- [0 : 00] Well, Muhammad Ali, the professional boxer, said, I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. He also said, it's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am.
- Lady Gaga, the singer-songwriter, said, some people are just born stars. Either you have it or you haven't. And I was definitely born one.
- Jose Mourinho, the current Tottenham football manager, said this during his initial press conference on joining Chelsea a few years ago. He said, please don't call me arrogant, but I'm European champion and I think I'm a special one.
- And John Lennon of the Beatles said, Christianity will go. It will vanish. I needn't argue about that. I'm right and I will be proved right. We are more popular than Jesus now. And there are plenty other examples we could give of human pride, whether in what is said or in what is done.
- And so as we come to Daniel chapter 4 this morning, Daniel 4 tells us about the pride of King Nebuchadnezzar. He was a proud king, but God humbled him.
- [1 : 15] And so what he does here is he shares his story in his words, because Daniel 4 is spoken essentially by Nebuchadnezzar himself. And so he gives his story of how God has worked in his life.
- The chapter begins in verse 1 to 3 with his personal testimony and then ends in verses 34 to 37 with his personal testimony of what God has done for him.
- And in between these bookends, we get his dream. Daniel gives the interpretation of that dream and then we get the fulfillment of the dream. And so what it is, is a graphic record of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, his humiliation, and then his restoration.
- And the central thread through all of what is said here is this. God rules. God's dominion is emphasized as he humbles this proud king.
- And it's made clear in the language of the chapter through the repeated words like the most high, kingdom, dominion, and sovereign. And the message that is hammered home is this.
- [2 : 22] It's there in verse 17, verse 25, and verse 32. The message is the most high is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.
- And it's a message that continues into Daniel chapter 5 because chapter 4 and chapter 5 really are deliberately placed together because they speak of God's judgment on proud rulers.
- And they're at the center of the Aramaic section in Daniel chapters 2 to 7. And so chapter 4 is about how God humbles the proud Nebuchadnezzar.
- And then chapter 5 is about how God punishes the proud Belshazzar. One is humbled and transformed. The other is hardened and destroyed.
- And so we are being told that God rules. He rules over human kings and he rules over earthly kingdoms. So whatever we stand today in relation to God, the message applies to us because we are to recognize that God rules.

[3 : 28] And then we are to respond by humbling ourselves before him rather than proudly standing against him. And so this morning what I'd like to do is look at this passage under three headings.

First of all, a grim revelation, verse 1 to 27. Second, a grueling realization, verse 28 to 33. And then thirdly, a gracious restoration, verse 34 to 37.

So first of all, let's look at a grim revelation, verse 1 to 27. God gives Nebuchadnezzar a grim revelation through a dream.

But it transformed his life. And so Nebuchadnezzar wanted the world to know. And that's what we see in verse 1 to verse 3. He gives an official royal pronouncement.

And it's for all peoples. So King Nebuchadnezzar, to the nations and peoples of every language who live in all the earth, may you prosper greatly. It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

[4 : 36] How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His dominion endures from generation to generation. I guess the equivalent today of what King Nebuchadnezzar does here would be a speech that's broadcast simultaneously across major news outlets.

Because world leaders don't normally do God, but Nebuchadnezzar definitely does. Here is the most powerful man in the world, and he wants everyone to listen to what he's got to say.

And so what he does is he gives us the headline at the beginning before he gives us the details. Because he had come to learn through the fulfillment of a dream that God gave him, that God rules.

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

Now this wasn't the first time that God had spoken to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. Remember the statue in chapter 2 of Daniel? Well, Nebuchadnezzar didn't pay much attention to that.

[5 : 53] And he didn't pay much attention to this one either. And he is what we might call a megalomaniac with a narcissistic personality. And if you mix this with power and success, then you get a lethal cocktail.

And so by his own admission, Nebuchadnezzar says that he was contented and he was prosperous. And so with that, you would think that he had no fears.

Yet, he admits he had no peace because his dream terrified him. Nobody could interpret his dream for him. And so that's when he called Daniel in to help.

And Daniel does help. Verse 10 to 12. And what Daniel says there is good so far. These are visions. The visions I saw while lying in bed.

I looked and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth.

[6 : 52] Its leaves were beautiful. Its fruit abundant. And on it was food for all. Under it, the wild animals found shelter. And the birds lived in its branches. From it, every creature was fed.

So Nebuchadnezzar is telling Daniel his dream. And it is good. But then, verse 13. In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven.

He called in a loud voice, Cut down the tree and trim off its branches. Strip off its leaves. Scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground and the grass of the field. So this dream was a shocking wake-up call for Nebuchadnezzar.

And the point of the dream is really made at the end, in verse 17. The decision is announced by messengers. The Holy One declares the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.

[8 : 03] So while the dream was given for Nebuchadnezzar's benefit, it was also so that the living may know. In other words, if you're living right now, just poke the person next to you on the sofa to see if they're still alive.

If you're living and breathing and you're watching this broadcast, then the message that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar is also for us. It's for you and for me to know.

We are supposed to know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and he gives them to anyone he wishes and sets them over the lowliest of people.

Do you know that? That's the point of the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, but also for us. And that's why it was a grim revelation for Nebuchadnezzar, because he's a man who lived his life as if God didn't rule.

He was a self-made man and he took great pride in his position, as if he had achieved his greatness all by himself. He didn't realize that whatever he had, his power, his prosperity, his possessions, they had all been given to him by God, because God gives to anyone he wishes.

[9 : 22] And God also takes away, as Nebuchadnezzar was about to learn. And so Daniel had to communicate this grim revelation to the king.

And so see Daniel's reaction in verse 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. So the dream was actually a nightmare for the king. Daniel was about to tell the most powerful man in the world that God was going to cut him down.

And so Daniel had to explain how the king was this enormous tree. Verse 22. Your majesty, you are that tree. You have become great and strong.

Your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the distant parts of the earth. Again, so far, so good. But, verse 23.

[10 : 23] Your majesty saw a holy one, a messenger 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 with the wild animals until seven times pass by for him. This is the interpretation, your majesty, and this is the decree that the Most High has issued against my lord the king.

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox 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 on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.

So the king, Daniel says, is going to be cut down at the height of his powers, and he would go mad, behaving like an animal.

Why? To force him to acknowledge that God rules. And so it was grim, but there was hope. Verse 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.

[11 : 40] So God's purpose here in the judgment was restoration rather than destruction. And that's why Daniel counsels him in verse 27. Therefore, your majesty, please 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.

So Daniel urges the king to turn away from his sins and do what is right and turn away from his wickedness and show mercy to the oppressed because the king could not continue in his pride.

So what has all this got to do with us? Well, before we go any further, the first thing we must see is that power and prosperity are not the answers to life.

When Nebuchadnezzar was at home in his palace, he said he was contented and prosperous, but he was terrified by his dream.

[12 : 44] Now, of course, we are not King Nebuchadnezzar. We haven't made it to the top like he did, but he proves that no matter how much we achieve, no matter how powerful, how rich, how successful we become, we can still be crippled by fear.

We can still be afraid. We can still be terrified. We can lack sleep. We can lack peace. And that was Nebuchadnezzar's story.

But it's also the story of countless celebrities who are successful and rich. The actor Jim Carrey said, I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so that they can see that it's not the answer.

So many of those who make it in this life can still be deeply troubled people. Those who in the eyes of this world have everything can still struggle to find peace on the inside.

And it's because the human heart will never be satisfied with power or prosperity or possessions. So like Nebuchadnezzar, you could rule the greatest empire in the world, but still be afraid and deeply insecure.

[14 : 06] And so however great our achievements in life, they're not the answer to the deepest longings and desires of the human heart. And thankfully, God reveals this to us as he did to Nebuchadnezzar.

So let's see this. First of all, there's the grim revelation. Secondly, there's a grueling realization. Verse 28 to 33. So despite God's revelation, Nebuchadnezzar still didn't listen.

Perhaps the longer that time went on without the dream being fulfilled, he just became far less disturbed, thinking it was never going to happen. And so he ignored God's revelation and he just carried on in his proud ways.

Verse 28 says, All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?

So twelve months down the line, Nebuchadnezzar hadn't learned his lesson. God had been patient with him, but he was still so full of himself.

[15 : 20] So it was time for God to wake him up and humble him. He needed this wake-up call. He needed this reality check to see that God rules.

So he might have been called a king, but he wasn't the real king. He may have ruled over a temporary human kingdom, but there is a kingdom that lasts forever. He might have thought that he was in charge of his life, but the Most High God is in charge of everything.

So again and again, in many different ways and through many different people, God had shown mercy to Nebuchadnezzar. God had been patient with him, and yet Nebuchadnezzar had failed to recognize God's dominion over this world, God's rule over his life, and so it was time for his dream to become a reality.

So verse 31, even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven. This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar. Your royal authority has been taken from you.

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.

[16 : 42] Notice that the king hadn't even finished his sentence when the voice came from heaven, and the grim revelation became a grueling realization.

And the length of time that this was to happen is mentioned as seven times, and it might refer to months, years, seasons, or simply the period that God had set for this king to lose his power, his dignity, his sanity, even his humanity.

Because Nebuchadnezzar didn't just behave like an animal, he even looked like one. We might wonder, what is this condition that afflicted him? Well, some commentators suggest something called boanthropy, which is a mental condition where a person imagines themselves to be an ox or a cow.

Others suggest lycanthropy, a similar mental condition where a person imagines himself to be a wolf. But whatever this severe illness was, the point is, it was God who afflicted him.

It was God's judgment on his pride. So God made him suffer in mental anguish, not because God took pleasure in it, but in order to humble him.

[18 : 01] So in his pride, Nebuchadnezzar thought he was superhuman. And so God made him subhuman, like a beast. As a human, he aspired to attain a godlike status.

And so God made him less of a human and more like an animal. Nebuchadnezzar refused to give God glory. And so he lost his own glory.

He showed no kindness to the oppressed. So he became the most oppressed of all. It was a severe judgment on his pride. But it's what he needed so that he could acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.

And that's also what we need to acknowledge too, lest we become too proud. Because pride is not limited to rulers like Nebuchadnezzar or kings or queens or presidents or prime ministers.

And it's not limited to celebrity pop stars or sports stars. Pride lurks within every single human heart. So what do we need to learn from this?

[19 : 16] Well, surely we need to realize that a failure to acknowledge God's rule is a fatal mistake. Because if the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes, then God rules over our world and God rules over your life and mine.

Therefore, it is God who makes us what we are. We are not self-made men or women. We are recipients of God's unmerited favor.

So people like Nebuchadnezzar who are at the very top of their game are only there because God has placed them there. Now, it might seem like our success comes through our own strength or our own intellect.

But the point is, it is God who gives it. We are not the ones who make it. That's why there can be no room for pride in human achievement or human influence.

But you might say, well, just hang on, wait, hang on a minute. I've got to where I am today because I have worked hard. I have studied hard. I have achieved.

[20 : 31] Yes, but with what? With the brain, the abilities, the skills, and the opportunities that God has given to you.

Those most basic things have been given by God. And so any fame, power, achievement, strength, success, ability, rule, wealth, influence, anything and everything has been given to you by God because of his grace.

Just think of it. You didn't choose your family. You didn't choose your family. You didn't choose your gender at birth. You didn't choose your race. And you didn't choose the time or place to be born.

For example, I discovered that there are 21 places called Glasgow in the world. Who knew? 14 are in America. 3 are in Jamaica, as well as a few others scattered throughout the world.

And so what if you were born in another Glasgow in the world instead of this Glasgow, like Glasgow St. James in Jamaica, for example?

[21 : 39] Your life, your opportunities, your income, your career would probably be very different from your current situation. So we are not the self-made, self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-sustaining people that we think we are.

And we don't need to be a mighty king with a magnificent empire to feel pride. We can take pride in our mini-empire, whether it be our academic achievement or our job title, our musical talent, our sporting ability, our artistic flair, our business acumen, our family success, or whatever else it might be.

It is easy to be deluded into thinking that I am the one who's done it all and take great pride in our own personal kingdom. And so we've got to realize that ultimately, we are not who we are or where we are or what we are with what we have because we have done it.

The Most High God is sovereign. We are mere human beings. We are weak and we are fragile. So whatever we have in life can be taken away in an instant, even life itself.

And so what Daniel chapter 4 does is that it exposes the weakness of human power and human pride and human pretentiousness, whether as individuals or also as kingdoms in this world.

[23 : 16] And that's why there can be no room for pride when it comes to God. Just see how far God was prepared to go with Nebuchadnezzar in order to humble him.

So just think, question, how far would God need to go in order to humble you or me? That's our second point, a grueling realization.

First, a grim revelation. Second, a grueling realization. And thirdly, a gracious restoration. Nebuchadnezzar records his restoration in his own words.

So he writes, verse 34, At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored.

Then I praised the Most High. I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

[24 : 15] So his restoration began when he lifted his eyes towards heaven to acknowledge that God rules.

And that is the right response to God, whoever we are, whether we call ourselves a Christian or not. It is to realize that God is above us. We are not above him.

And therefore, we must submit to him. Because this God, although he is the Most High God, what we see is that he is gracious.

So when God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar's life had run its course, God wasted no time in restoring him. His sanity was restored as quickly as it was taken away.

And so if you don't know this God, please don't underestimate how gracious he is. Please don't think that if you're somehow to become a Christian, then you need to sort your whole life out first or be perfect before he will even look at you.

[25 : 21] Now, he's not expecting us to have it all together before we approach him. We simply need to raise our eyes towards him, recognizing that we need him.

So Nebuchadnezzar no longer looked down from the roof of his royal palace, thinking that he was mighty and powerful. Instead, he looked up to the almighty God, the one who has power over him.

C.S. Lewis describes this well in his book, Mere Christianity, in a chapter called The Great Sin, which is pride. He says, And so, And so, Nebuchadnezzar says, Verse 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?

so Nebuchadnezzar now knows that God does as he pleases you can't stop God doing what he's going to do and you can't question God's ways and so God will not tolerate human pride and arrogance so long before Frank Sinatra sang I did it my way this was the theme tune of Nebuchadnezzar's life and it may have worked for a while but he realized it couldn't work forever he was forced to acknowledge that God rules and so that's what we must learn from Nebuchadnezzar his example illustrates the destructive pride that is within every human heart because his story really is a microcosm of the story of all humanity of the sinful pride that says no to God I will not let you rule over my life and it was there at the beginning in the Garden of Eden with our first parents Adam and Eve they rejected God's loving rule over them and so rather than acknowledge that the most high is sovereign they believed the lie that they could be like God and rule for themselves and so they were banished from God's presence and then again the sinful pride of the human heart was there at the

[28 : 09] Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11 that's when humanity tried to reach to the heavens to make a name for themselves and so what did God do he scattered the people all over the earth and so the Tower of Babel is a vivid picture of our desire to proudly exalt ourselves in opposition to God in fact Babel is Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon that's why Babylon is symbolic of human opposition to God all the way through the Bible and so humanity's sinful pride shows up on every page of the Bible and it shows up at every stage of human history and it shows up every day in our lives and it wreaks havoc in our world and Nebuchadnezzar's life is a graphic example of this because the irony is that when we proudly reject God's rule over us we don't become a better human being we actually become a worse human being in trying to be more like God by living for ourselves and for our own power and glory we actually become less human and we might not always display Nebuchadnezzar's beastly behavior but our pride will prevent us from doing what is right and from being kind to others and so if we're honest we know that we are not what we should be we know that we do not give God the rightful place as ruler over all of our lives because we prefer to rule instead and yet it's a massive problem because God won't stand for such pride and such arrogance from the creatures he has made forever and so if we continue in sinful pride refusing to acknowledge and submit to God's rule we will be cut down at the judgment and cut off forever from God in hell and yet the good news is that there is a solution to human pride and again it's illustrated in Nebuchadnezzar in fact in his own words verse 36 and 37 at the same time that my sanity was restored my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom my advisors and nobles sought me out and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before now I

Nebuchadnezzar praise and exult and glorify the king of heaven because everything he does is right and all his ways are just and those who walk in pride he is able to humble he is expressing God's gracious restoration of his life his reason had been restored his kingdom had been restored and he had become greater than before and Nebuchadnezzar didn't deserve any of this but his look towards heaven indicated the repentance that led to his restoration repentance essentially means a change of mind and so what happens in Nebuchadnezzar's life is that the death to pride becomes a resurrection for him and it's a powerful illustration of the grace of God and it's one we see supremely in Jesus because Jesus is the solution to sinful pride the sinful pride of our hearts which deserves God's judgment how so well like Nebuchadnezzar every human being behaves as if we rule when we don't whereas Jesus behaved as if he didn't rule when he did well King Nebuchadnezzar wanted glory the true king Jesus Christ willingly gave up his glory why to save us Jesus not only became what we are but he stooped even lower in order to die for us he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross so Jesus died for our sinful pride that refuses to let God rule over our lives and there is no other way that we can be restored to God it will never happen by ourselves or by our effort we are only restored by

God's grace and so we must swallow our pride and humbly accept that we need Jesus Christ in order to save us and because Jesus humbled himself God exalted him to the highest place so one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord so who are we to stand proud when the Lord who has everlasting dominion humbled himself to death for us only when we turn to Jesus as our Savior and trust in him as our Lord do we have nothing to fear when we are secure in his love and when we belong to his kingdom we don't need to prove ourselves to anyone but we're able instead to serve everyone the way up is the way down it was for Jesus and it must be for us too let's pray thank you our gracious and loving God for sending your son Jesus Christ into this world the one who humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross he came down in order to die for our sinful pride so that we might be raised up and resurrected humbled from our pride and given a place in your kingdom that lasts forever please forgive us for when we like to rule and we think we can rule teach us that you alone are the ruler and we must submit to you for we pray in Jesus name amen you