

Daniel #8

February 25, 2024

Series Title: Daniel's Visions Of the Ages

Today's Message: Echoes of the Gospel: Nebuchadnezzar's Testimony; Daniel 4:1-37

Daniel 4 is Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony about how he met God. If you remember in previous chapters of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the God of heaven; but as evidenced by his subsequent actions there was no sign of a heart-change or behavior.

That's not unheard of. That is, Nebuchadnezzar is not the first person and he wasn't the last to acknowledge God, His person and power, yet not have a change of heart, or change of mind. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar knew of God, but didn't know God.

This is a serious issue for people. Do you remember when in preaching the Sermon on the Mount Jesus differentiated between true and false followers. He said to the crowd, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name and in Your Name drive out demons and, in Your Name, perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'"

Jesus goes on in Matthew 7 to describe the distinguishing characteristics of those who are true followers of Christ, believers in God, and those who are not. Those who are, are said to enter the kingdom of heaven as those who have both faith in God the Father and subsequent works. They are the ones Jesus says do the Father's will. On the other hand, there are those who are impressive in word and actions but are yet not known by the Father or the Son. They have the words (they prophesy), they have authority (drive out demons), and they have miracle working powers but are not known by either the Father or Son for they have no true faith.

There may be more, but there are three kinds of *people of faith* in the world. The epistle of James 2 describes them: There are people who have **faith without works**; there are people who have **works without faith** (like the Pharisees); and there are people who have **faith and works working together** in concert with each other. Now, the *faith* we are talking about is a faith in God that is rooted in Christ Jesus—His person and work—and expressed through courageous (faith-driven) acts of obedience to His commands (Matt. 28:20; John 14:15-24).

Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar is an interesting case study. In Daniel 2 after the dream and interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar confessed with his mouth that Daniel's God was the God of gods and the Lord of kings. Then, with no thought or consideration of previous confessions, in Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar regressed by demanding that all the earth bow down before the virtual representation of himself in the form of the idol/image. When *the Three* made it clear that they would not be joining the masses for worship, Nebuchadnezzar, with suppressed fury, offered them another chance to redeem themselves by bowing down to worship his image at the sounding of the musical instruments! And he rounded out his *generous* offer with a menacing threat, "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand." As if he were the God of gods and Lord of kings! So, this begs the question, was Nebuchadnezzar's faith a true God pleasing faith?

Indeed! what god would rescue *the Three*? Only the true God of heaven! In Daniel 3 when Nebuchadnezzar saw the 3 + 1 in the fiery furnace unbound and unharmed, he could not resist acknowledging God of *the Three* as the God who saves! But confessions are no proof of fidelity. Religious shows are of no account. If eloquence of speech gave evidence of true faith then Nebuchadnezzar is in! But he's not, not yet!

In Daniel 4, by way of a letter of disclosure to all the people of the world, Nebuchadnezzar relates his conversion story. It is his story as how he, the most powerful man on earth, surrendered to the God of heaven.

We will look at his story as follows: 1) Nebuchadnezzar's dream disclosed (4:1-18); 2) Nebuchadnezzar's dream interpreted (4:19-27); and 3) Nebuchadnezzar suffers then repents (4:28-37).

I) **(4:1-18) Nebuchadnezzar discloses his terrifying dream.**

- A) (4:1-3) Nebuchadnezzar's wonderful testimony—his statement of faith.
 - 1) The entire chapter is composed by Nebuchadnezzar. There is no other chapter like it in the Bible.
 - (a) Maybe Daniel helped with the wording, etc. But it is Nebuchadnezzar's testimony.
 - 2) He addresses the nations in what is presumably a letter.
 - (a) He even *bles*ses the nations and peoples of the earth! "May you prosper greatly!"
 - 3) "It is my pleasure to tell...
 - (a) "...about the miraculous signs and wonders performed for me by the Most High God."
 - (i) Remember this is written after the events that follow.
 - (a) His attitude sounds like James 1:2: "Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds..."
 - (b) And Jesus' words to Peter in Luke 22:31-32: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back strengthen your brothers."
 - 4) (4:3) Nebuchadnezzar positions himself as a subordinate to the Sovereign God of Heaven!
- B) (4:4) How Nebuchadnezzar's change of mind and heart began.
 - 1) Like a legal affidavit, like a document of sworn testimony.
 - 2) Apparently, a day like any other day.
- C) (4:5-18) Nebuchadnezzar's process of change began with a dream of terrifying images and visions.
 - 1) (4:5-8) Nebuchadnezzar told what he dreamed, unlike the first dream of Daniel 2.
 - (a) Even with the disclosure of the dream the *wise men* could not interpret the dream.
 - (i) I believe God frustrated the "wisdom of the wise". In Daniel 2:4, 7 they claimed that if they knew the dream, they could interpret the dream.
 - (a) Now they know the dream and cannot interpret the dream.
 - 2) (4:9-17) Nebuchadnezzar relates the dream of images and visions in four parts:
 - (a) (4:9-12) Part 1: Neb. Describes a very large, all-encompassing tree (read description)
 - (b) (4:13-14) Part 2: A messenger declares the **divine decree** that the tree be cut down. And, that all the earthly benefits, which the tree provided be stripped and removed from earth.
 - (c) (4:15-16) Part 3: The messenger declares the **divine decree** requiring the stump and roots, be bound with iron and bronze and remain in the ground and in the grass of the field.
 - (i) Then, in a surprising turn, the messenger in the dream personified the stump and roots:
 - (a) As a man drenched with the dew of heaven and living among the animals and plants of the earth.
 - (b) The man would also be changed to behave like an animal until 7 years passed.
 - (d) (4:17) Part 4: The messenger declares a **divine global decree**:
 - (i) That all people of the nations would know that the Most High is...
 - (a) ...sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth, and...
 - (b) ...that this sovereign God gives the kingdoms to anyone he wishes!
 - 3) (4:18) Having explained the dream, Nebuchadnezzar called upon Daniel to interpret the dream.
 - (a) Neb's confidence in Daniel
 - (i) That Daniel was the only one in the kingdom who could interpret the dream.
 - (a) Neb was not accurate in his knowledge of God. (see 4:18c). Not yet anyway.

II) **(4:19-27) Nebuchadnezzar commands Daniel to interpret the dream.**

- A) (4:19) The problem with the fear of men.

- 1) Daniel was greatly terrified by the meaning of the dream.
- 2) Nebuchadnezzar demanded the truth from Daniel, apparently willing to hear the hard truth!
- 3) Daniel's first *revelation* of the dream was that it did not concern Neb's enemies!
- B) (4:20-23a) Daniel replays the "tree vision, interprets it and gives Nebuchadnezzar the first hard truth:
 - 1) (4:20-21) The replay
 - 2) (4:22) Interpretation of the tree: Nebuchadnezzar is that great and glorious tree in the dream.
 - 3) (4:23a) The first hard truth: God has decreed that tree will be cut down and destroyed!
 - (a) An irrevocable decree of God. Nothing can alter it. Except for one act of faith!
 - (i) Nebuchadnezzar must *renounce his sins and obey God's command* (see 4:27).
- C) (4:23b-26) The Second interpretation concerning the stump and roots.
 - 1) (4:23b) The replay of the stump and roots: the binding, drenching with dew, and seven years.
 - (a) Remember that the stump and roots are personified.
 - 2) (4:24-25) The second hard truth:
 - (a) (4:24-25a) God **decreed** that the Neb would be driven away from his kingdom.
 - (b) (4:25b) God will remove every vestige of Neb's humanity for seven years.
 - 3) (4:25c-26) God also **decreed** hope for Neb:
 - (a) After 7 years Neb will acknowledge that *God* is sovereign over all kingdoms.
 - (b) And, after 7 years and repentance, Neb will have his kingdom restored to him.
 - 4) (4:27) Neb related in the letter that Daniel advised him to renounce his sins.
 - (a) I take it that if Neb would have repented then, God may have terminated judgment.
 - (i) Application: Judgment is turned away from everyone who repents and believes the gospel (Mark 1:14-15) by receiving Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord! (Rom.10:9-11)
- III) **(4:28-37) Nebuchadnezzar's dream becomes a reality, leading to repentance.**
 - A) (4:28-30) Nebuchadnezzar tells of his folly and pride. *What a great man I have become!*
 - 1) Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."
 - 2) Proverbs 3:34: "God mocks the mockers (the proud) and gives grace to the humble."
 - B) (4:31-32) Neb heard a voice from heaven announcing the implementation of the decree!
 - C) (4:33) Neb writes in the 3rd person: He lost his mind and his humanity.
 - 1) He took on the appearance and behavior of a wild animal for 7 years!
 - D) (4:34-35) Nebuchadnezzar's restoration!
 - 1) (4:34a) One look! It only took one look toward heaven for God to restore his sanity and humanity!
 - (a) I'm reminded of Isaiah 45:22 where God graciously calls out, "Look unto Me all you ends of the earth and be saved! For I am God, and there is no other!" (See also Psalm 107).
 - (i) God is quick to forgive! Remember the Parable of the Prodigal Son? He runs to us!
 - 2) (4:34b-35) Nebuchadnezzar's insanity turned to praise when he repented and was restored!
 - (a) Again, I'm reminded of God's mercy! Psalm 32:1-2 says, "Blessed is the man whose sins are taken away, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."
 - E) (4:36-37) Application: Neb's restoration by God results in the exaltation of God!
 - 1) God keeps His word. Take 1 John 1:9 to heart, my friends!
 - 2) God did not entrust Nebuchadnezzar to the consequences of his sin to bring him to repentance. Instead, God specifically designed the extreme trial to bring him to repentance!
 - (a) This is how we should view the hard trials of life and listen for the echoes of the gospel!
 - (i) Remember the word in Romans 2:4: "God's kindness leads you toward repentance."