

## Daniel 4 A Painful Lesson

What will it take to bring us to our knees?

How much failure and frustration will we tolerate before admitting we need help?

How much pain and humiliation must we endure before we repent of our pride, ask forgiveness and actually change some of our ways?

It doesn't have to be a painful lesson.

Not if we can accept from the start that all we are and have and achieve are gifts from God for us to exercise and enjoy with thanks and praise to our generous Maker.

Genesis teaches that God made human beings, male and female, in his image and blessed them with all kinds of abilities and responsibilities to fill and govern the earth creatively, thus reflecting the Lord Himself. All of our human achievements in learning, technology, engineering, architecture, art, these really declare something of the wisdom, goodness and grace of God. When we celebrate giving thanks and glory to Him it's all good.

But when we give ourselves sole credit, we make an idol of ourselves, we proudly set ourselves up as little creators, we try to squeeze God out of His creation as unimportant or even non-existent. Bad idea! Time and again this kind of idolatrous human pride has led to self indulgence and abusive behaviour.

When we act like this we insult the real Creator, we disobey His guidelines and instructions and we invite His displeasure.

Consider Nebuchadnezzar.

600 years before Christ, this absolute monarch had built a vast and most impressive empire. The administration he had set up was comprehensive and efficient, his capitol city Babylon with its art and architecture was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Its ziggurat reached into the clouds, its 'hanging gardens' were magnificent. And it's important to note that God does not judge Nebuchadnezzar for any of these great achievements per se. It is not a sin to work and be creative and achieve things with the gifts God gives us.

Where Nebuchadnezzar does receive criticism is in three areas, pride, immorality and oppression.

Pride was the original sin of Lucifer, it led to his expulsion from heaven, hence the saying, 'Pride goes before a fall'. It's not a good idea. But archaeologists tell us the very bricks of ancient Babylon were stamped with the king's name. This was a man who thought highly of himself. He did not acknowledge God. He gladly gave himself the glory for Babylon's success. So, like Lucifer, Nebuchadnezzar fell and fell hard.

Daniel also challenged him in the area of personal morality, urging him to turn from wrongdoing and do right. It's an interesting question for all of us, what would we be like if we were absolute monarchs and could be and do and have whatever we wanted? If we knew we could basically do anything we wanted and get away with it what might we do? Let's never forget our motives and actions are witnessed and weighed by Heaven.

The third area he's challenged on is his lack of compassion for the poor and oppressed in his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar had no qualms about ruthlessly using people and cruelly executing them on a whim. But the Almighty is generous and merciful to all, He would have human rulers and governments do likewise.

We could find an interesting parallel to Daniel 4 in the 1<sup>st</sup> century letter from the Apostle Paul to the Romans ch 1. Another powerful empire with no shortage of wonderful art and architecture. Another culture that refused to acknowledge the Creator but worshipped images of their own making and choice. Again we see idolatrous human pride linked to all kinds of immorality and leading quickly to a list of cruel, abusive practices. These things seem to go together and provoke God's holy wrath.

From Daniel 4 let's take careful note of three things:

God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar  
Daniel's compassion for the king  
The absolute necessity of repentance.

God disciplined Nebuchadnezzar. The most powerful man on earth was humbled by One infinitely more powerful. For seven years the King was afflicted with a profound mental disorder, something like boanthropy or lycanthropy, imagining himself an animal and behaving accordingly. The lesson is very simple. If we don't humble ourselves, we will in time be humbled by God!

And yet this was not judgement without mercy. The Lord's ultimate plan for Nebuchadnezzar was forgiveness, restoration and greater blessing than before. His ultimate purpose for Daniel and the people of Israel in this foreign exile was not destruction but that they would be cured of their idolatry. He would keep

His promises to their ancestors Abraham and Jacob. In time He would bring them home again. May He help us see in the most humbling circumstances traces of His loving mercy that we might learn and grow and trust.

Let's not miss another thing here, Daniel's compassion for the king. Nebuchadnezzar could be ruthless and cruel and yet when his humbling is forecast Daniel is grieved at the thought. He has no malice towards his foreign captor, only goodwill.

We might think of Jesus, the sinless Holy One Who looked on the crowds in Galilee who were undoubtedly guilty of multiple sins against God, yet He *had compassion on them*. He famously welcomed, healed and fed all in need. He never condoned wrongdoing, nor did he fail to show kindness, and He is the Christian's example.

We must *pray* God's mercy for those around us, especially those who seem to have little knowledge of the Lord. We must *speak* God's Word of truth and make known His commands, even if they're not widely accepted. And we must seek to *demonstrate* by our actions His love and grace very humbly even to those who disagree and threaten us!

Never forgetting this thirdly, the absolute necessity for us all of repentance. Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was near so people should 'repent and believe the good news.' Nebuchadnezzar was healed and restored when he repented, finally acknowledged an authority higher than his own and sought God's mercy.

We may not have to suffer illness or public humiliation like him. It may not come to that. But we do need to repent and turn from doing anything God says is wrong. Then we can really begin to appreciate and enjoy His love and generous blessing in Christ.

'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,' writes the Apostle Peter in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5, '*Humble yourselves* therefore under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.' (1 Peter 5 v 5-7)

Amen