

01.02.2020 FROM PRIDE TO HUMILITY

“How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” Daniel 4:3

This week we study Daniel chapter 4. It tells us of a king who was full of self-praise and pride and whom God had to take through the path of humiliation before he learnt to praise God and give honour to Him. It is a crucial lesson that everyone who calls himself a Christian has to learn.

King Nebuchadnezzar himself is the author of Daniel 4, verses 1-18 and 34:47. Verses 19-33 are written by Daniel the prophet. There are 3 stages to the story:

1. Nebuchadnezzar’s Pride and Self-Glory
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s Humiliation
3. Nebuchadnezzar’s Repentance and his acknowledging the Power and Glory of God.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Pride and Self-Praise: Daniel 4:4-27

Nebuchadnezzar has a second dream. This time he remembers the dream and Daniel is only required to interpret it (4:4-18). Daniel recognised that the meaning of the dream would not be pleasant hearing for the king and was troubled. But the king urged him to tell the meaning. Diplomatically, Daniel begins by wishing that the outcome of the dream would apply to the king’s enemies rather than the king (4:19).

He then proceeds to give the king the meaning of the dream (4:20-27):

The tree itself represented King Nebuchadnezzar who had become great and powerful. His dominion extended to the ends of the earth. But at the height of his greatness he would be humiliated; he would be driven out to the fields and live like an animal for 7 years “until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” (4:25). This statement implies that King Nebuchadnezzar had become proud and arrogant and would be humbled until he recognised that Jehovah was the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. Once he acknowledged that the God of heaven rules over the affairs of men, his kingdom would be restored to him (4:26).

Daniel has a message for the king – if he repented he would be able to avert this humiliation.

“Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.” (4:27)

This message is similar to the message Jonah gave the king of Nineveh. Though God had pronounced judgement on Nineveh, it was averted because the King and his people repented (Jonah 3:4-10).

Nebuchadnezzar’s Humiliation: Daniel 4:28-33

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?”

While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! (4:28-31)

Nebuchadnezzar would not repent. A year later he was walking about his palace and giving glory to himself... *“Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?”*

Even as he refused to acknowledge that God had given him his kingdom and power, God brought judgement upon him.

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. (4:33)

God loves sinners. He loves proud sinners like King Nebuchadnezzar. He is not willing that any should be lost. But since Man's heart is so self-centred and so full of pride and self-praise, God has to humble us as He humbled Nebuchadnezzar. God's purpose in humbling us is that we may recognise who is worthy of true praise and honour – God our Creator and Redeemer.

'It is the work of God to lay the glory of man in the dust, and do for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.' EG White

Nebuchadnezzar's Repentance and His acknowledging the Power and Glory of God: Daniel 4:1-3, 34-37

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever...At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honour and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

Nebuchadnezzar had a revolutionary change of mind about God – this is called repentance in the Bible. He now accepted that God's will is sovereign and that God rules in the kingdom of men. Now Nebuchadnezzar recognises who is truly worthy of praise and honour and gives glory to God. Both his head and his heart were involved in this recognition of who God is.

Because Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself, God exalted him to his previous position as King (see 1 Peter 5:6).

Nebuchadnezzar had previously recognised Jehovah as "the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets" (Daniel 2:47), and after the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace, declared, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him" (3:28). But in both these instances he had not declared his personal allegiance to Jehovah. Now, after this personal experience of the power of God in his life, Nebuchadnezzar publicly acknowledges God's hand in his life.

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.

How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation. Daniel 4:1-3

The Relevance of Daniel 4 to us:

Ever since Adam sinned, we have all inherited his sinful nature. Adam's first sin was that of pride. He rejected having total child-like dependence on God and instead to choose to depend on self (to have God-like independence in his eyes). And since then, all of Adam's race have inherited his sinful nature of pride and self-glory.

God hates pride...*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.' Proverbs 8:13.*

*"Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling **by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?"***

These words of Nebuchadnezzar are the words of every human heart that has not been humbled under the mighty hand of God. We love to say...'I have achieved this by myself (by my mighty power) and I deserve the glory and praise for it (for my honour and majesty).' And then we look down upon others because they are not as successful as we are. Or we say like Nebuchadnezzar, "This has all been done **by me and for my glory**".

If we are not successful people and we tend to be quiet and not boast, we can still be guilty. Our problem is our ego. We want to be successful and we want to enjoy our success and to be praised by men. We desire to be where the proud man is.

Yet God loves sinners; sinners who are full of self-praise and pride. He wants them to know that life abundant is found in having a child-like, humble dependence on God. So He sent His Son, Christ Jesus, to die and pay the penalty for our pride and to give us victory over the power of sinful pride. Jesus also patterned for us the way of humility...*'You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges, He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)*

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:4

Because God loves us and knows that total dependence on Him is best for our lives, He often has to humble us, because the human heart finds it nearly impossible to humble itself.

Today, Babylon is not primarily a geographical place or organisation. The spirit of Babylon is a state of mind. The hallmark of God's end-time people is that they will have 'come out of Babylon'. It is not enough to leave any institution or church that sets itself up in the place of God, if we still have the spirit of Babylon in our hearts. Satan is very deceptive and his main aim is to make us have the spirit of Babylon - the spirit that delights and takes pride in our achievements and seeks the honour and praise of men.

In a beautiful passage in Jeremiah 50:1-5, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the spirit of the people who come out of Babylon when it falls.

"In those days and in that time," says the LORD, "The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; with continual weeping they shall come, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces toward it, saying, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that will not be forgotten.'" Jeremiah 50:4-5

This passage tells us that those of spiritual Israel who truly reject the spirit of Babylon return to God with repentance and a humble heart. They bind themselves to God in a perpetual covenant – the everlasting new covenant. In this covenant, they no longer make promises to be righteous, for they know their righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Instead, they believe the promises God makes to them in the New Covenant...*'because I have forgiven your iniquity and will remember no more your sins, I will put My law in your minds, and write it on your hearts; and I will be your God, and you shall be My people.'* Jeremiah 31:31-34 (see also Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Hebrews 8:8-12).

Such Christians will never say of their life and work, "All I have done has been achieved by me and for my glory." Instead, their testimony will be that everything they have achieved has been of God (they have sought His will) and through God (by His power) and therefore, He alone gets the honour and glory.

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." Romans 11:36

Conclusion:

'None but God can subdue the pride of man's heart. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot regenerate ourselves. In the heavenly courts there will be no song sung, "To me that loved myself, and washed myself, redeemed myself, unto me be glory and honour, blessing and praise." But this is the keynote of the song that is sung by many here in this world. They do not know what it means to be meek and lowly in heart; and they do not mean to know this, if they can avoid it. The whole gospel is comprised in learning of Christ, His meekness and lowliness.' *EG White. Testimonies to Ministers: p. 456*

"Fear God and give glory to Him..." Revelation 14:6

"Let anyone who glories (boasts), glory (boast) in the Lord." 1 Corinthian 1:31

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches; but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 9:23, 24

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. 1 Peter 5:6

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14

Additional Notes/Quotes:

The Great Sin

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility...The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. It was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.

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 shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?" The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride... Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

Of course, Power is what pride really enjoys.

It is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison— you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshipping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how He approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people: that is, they pay a pennyworth of imaginary humility to Him and get out of it a pound's worth of Pride towards their fellow-men.

I suppose it was of those people Christ was thinking when He said that some would preach about Him and cast out devils in His name, only to be told at the end of the world that He had never known them. And any of us may at any moment be in this death-trap. Luckily, we have a test. Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good—above all, that we are better than someone else—I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God,

but by the devil. The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether.

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.' *CS Lewis: Mere Christianity*
