

We come now to meditate on Chapter 4 of Daniel so let's pray. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your Sight, our God & Redeemer, Amen.

You might like to have your Bibles open at Daniel Chapter 4. It is quite a long reading.

Recap/review from last week.

It seems to me that as we read the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is a bit of a loser. We have the three young Israelites from Judah being told by N or his courtiers to do something which they say is against the word of God and won't do it and he, N, is proved to be wrong. So he has to accept S, M & A's God is right.

Consider the story from Chapter 3 last week. N has a huge idol of gold built. When the people hear the music playing, they all have to bow down & worship it or risk being thrown into a blazing furnace. S M & A won't bow down. N has a huge rage, a hissy fit in today's terminology. He orders the three to be bound up with the furnace cranked up to seven times its usual heat. It was so hot that the guards who did this died of heat exhaustion or the like. N sees the three Judaeen men walking around in the furnace with a fourth person who we presume to be Jesus walking around. N orders the three to come out. There is no evidence of them being burnt so N says "Praise be to the God of S, M & A who sent an angel & rescued his servants.

This Chapter 4 focusses on the subject of Human pride, so let's just briefly decide on what pride means – perhaps satisfaction or pleasure taken in one's own achievements. Pride also is regarded as one of the seven deadly sins - along with wrath, greed, lust, envy, gluttony and sloth.

We will look at the reading in four parts

1. The Lord Exposes Human Pride
2. The Lord Warns Against Human Pride
3. The Lord humbles Human Pride
4. The Lord Restores Those Who Repent of Human Pride

1. The Lord Exposes Human Pride

Immediately when our passage opens, right off the bat we see something strikingly different than something we have seen thus far. Remember when chapter two opened, Nebuchadnezzar was anxious, erratic and furious. Then when chapter three opened we heard Nebuchadnezzar issue a decree, after he set up this golden image, that everyone should come and worship this image that he set up on the Plain of Durma. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego politely refused, he once again became erratic and furious.

When chapter four opens and Nebuchadnezzar addresses all peoples, nations and languages, he doesn't do that with a command to worship some idol. No, he does that to tell the people what the Lord has done for him. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar

has become an evangelist of sorts. This is a stunning reversal of what we have seen in Nebuchadnezzar's life thus far.

We can't be 100% sure that this is a sign that Nebuchadnezzar came to saving faith through the events he proceeds to narrate. I kind of think that he did. But whatever we make of that question, something has fundamentally shifted in his life and way of thinking.

Understand how this apparent change materialized. Nebuchadnezzar takes us back to an event where God took him from self-absorbed pride to a place of utter humility.. We will begin to see how this change in Nebuchadnezzar's life transpired.

We don't know when during Nebuchadnezzar's reign these events took place. We do know that during Nebuchadnezzar's reign he enjoyed some spectacular architectural and military achievements. He was responsible for The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Apparently, he also had the option of presiding in any one of three grand palaces. So, you can imagine with all of those accomplishments and luxuries to fall back upon, how pride could easily grip someone's heart.

Then one night Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream that is recorded in Daniel. Just like the first one, it terrifies and alarms him. In this dream, as he communicates it to Daniel, there is this great tree that reaches to the heaven. It's just like that image we read about in chapter three. We are hearing echoes once again of the Tower of Babel event from Genesis chapter eleven.

This tree provided food and shelter for the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Then in an instant a watcher, an angelic emissary of the most high God comes down from heaven and demands that the tree be cut down and only a stump remains. Also that the mind of the man that this tree represents be changed from a man's mind to the mind of a beast and that he remain in this condition for seven periods of time until, "the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of man and sets over it the lowliest of men."

While Daniel hasn't entered in at this point in our text to offer an interpretation, we can kind of anticipate what is coming here. This is a dream that relates directly to Nebuchadnezzar. Through it the Lord is exposing two related problems in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

First, he doesn't really know that the Lord reigns. He may have assented to some true facts about the Lord's reign in the previous chapters in Daniel, but in the words of verse seventeen, he needs to really and truly know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. He needs to know the supremacy of God's kingdom and the relative insignificance of his own. He needs to know who is really calling the shots.

We will see this same phrase from verse seventeen three more times in this chapter, reinforcing the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar has to come to realize. The only way the he will come to really and truly learn that lesson is second, he sees his pride for what it is, that is the second problem that the Lord exposes in his dream.

Nebuchadnezzar, even after all that he has experienced in Daniel thus far, is still diluted with illusion of his own grandeur. He is still living out of a heart that is

consumed by pride. Unless his eyes and heart are opened to see this self-absorbed pride as sin before a holy God, he's never going to appraise God's kingdom the way that he needs to appraise God's kingdom.

Unchecked pride, both in his life and in our lives, will always be a barrier to grasping salvific realities. We are going to continue to see, as we work through other sections of our text, this unreserved brazenness of Nebuchadnezzar's pride. Stay tuned for that.

But lest we think that the only people susceptible to such pride are people in positions of affluence and power, such as Nebuchadnezzar, I bet that if each of us were to search out our own hearts I'm certain we would find the struggle of pride is real in our own lives as well.

Pride is what C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* calls "the great sin". Here's how pride works. Whenever we measure ourselves against other people, even people in this community, on any number of factors with the goal of feeling superior to someone else, that is pride. In our pride we may focus on how our vocational or educational accomplishments are superior to others.

We may relish in the observation that our lives are morally cleaner or more socially honourable than that of our brothers and sisters. Then disapprovingly shake our heads at those who don't measure up or don't have their lives together as much as we do.

Pride also sneaks in from the other direction. On the other hand, sometimes we sulk in the observation that some people seem more intelligent or more prosperous or more put together than us. Lest we fool ourselves, that too is pride.

The very danger of pride is that when we are consumed by it, we are consumed with ourselves instead of God. C.S. Lewis writes this, "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 is exactly Nebuchadnezzar's problem in our text. He is so intoxicated with himself and his kingdom that he hasn't grasped at a heart level that it's the Most High who rules the kingdom of men.

Pride is one of those things that we often fail to see in ourselves. We see it in other quite well and we hate it when we see it in others. We are often blindly ignorant when it rages in our own hearts. That's why this revelatory dream is given to Nebuchadnezzar. This is why this revelatory dream is actually an incredible mercy. Apart from divine revelation exposing Nebuchadnezzar's pride, and apart from divine revelation, the Word of God, exposing our pride, both Nebuchadnezzar and we would remain hopelessly blind to the reality of our sin.

Pride tends to lose all perspective on reality. Just as Nebuchadnezzar needed his pride exposed through divine revelation, so too do we. Now that this problem of pride is exposed, at least to Daniel and to us, Nebuchadnezzar at this point is still blind to it, Daniel then gives an explicit warning to Nebuchadnezzar in view of his pride. This leads to the second point.

2.The Lord Warns Against Human pride

Just as in Daniel chapter two, so too here Daniel steps in and he interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The interpretation is more or less what we suspected. Nebuchadnezzar is identified as this mighty tree teaming with life that reaches to the heavens, under whose branches the beasts of the field and bird of the air find sustenance. The dream portends seven periods of time when Nebuchadnezzar is cut down from his lofty position and transformed in mind and manner into this beastly kind of state.

At this point nothing yet has happened and from Nebuchadnezzar's standpoint nothing yet has to happen if he repents. Right now, it's a warning given by Daniel to signal that if he thinks his many successes and achievement in his reign are evidence that things are going well for him before God, he's fooling himself. Unfortunately, that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar thinks.

Notice that in verse nineteen, after Nebuchadnezzar describes his dream and Daniel was dismayed and alarmed by what the king reveals to him, Nebuchadnezzar actually tries to comfort Daniel. He says to Daniel, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you."

Remember when we opened up our passage, we heard that Nebuchadnezzar was initially alarmed by the dream, but as one commentator suggests, maybe at this point he is already convinced himself that this was just a bad dream and nothing more than that. Things really aren't as bad as they first seemed.

He tells Daniel, don't worry about this. But here's the thing, Daniel has every right to be alarmed. The problem is that Nebuchadnezzar has become deaf and dumb to divine revelation and desensitized towards the gravity of his pride and spiritual condition. He isn't nearly as alarmed as he should be.

What do we do when we encounter situations like that in our personal ministries? Do we shut our mouths with fear of offending, or do we immediately call out our family and friends on what they fail to see? Let's us see how Daniel handles this situation.

Notice that Daniel's first response, once he gets past this initial shock of what Nebuchadnezzar describes, is compassion. He says in verse nineteen, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!". Even as someone who was carried away into exile by the Babylonian king, someone who heard reports that his hometown, the holy city of Jerusalem was set ablaze and destroyed by this king, Daniel still has compassion for the king. He doesn't delight himself in the potential demise of this king like Jonah did at Nineveh. Instead, like Jesus he has compassion on this sheep, who despite all pretences is really and truly helpless and without a shepherd.

Compassion doesn't lead Daniel in any way to soften the warning that he knows Nebuchadnezzar needs to hear. Instead after offering his interpretation, he concludes in verse twenty-seven with a declaration and a warning. He says, Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by

practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” [Daniel 4:27, ESV](#)
Again, unlike the other counselors that Nebuchadnezzar so often calls to himself, Daniel doesn’t tickle his ears with what he thinks the king wants to hear. He tells him that his sin and unrepentant pride is a serious issue and in turn Nebuchadnezzar needs to head this warning with the solemnity and gravity that it deserves. He needs to see his sin and pride as an offense before the holy God.

Friends, the same goes for us too. Very often our pride is a sin that we re-label and explain away. We may deflect the accusation of pride by framing it as self-esteem or self-respect or self-love. The problem in all of those conceptions is that the self is still at the heart of the matter. Of course, it’s not wrong to acknowledge our dignity as people made in the image of God, nor to remember that in Christ we are dearly beloved children of God. But pride does something else, it puts us at the center of things and entices us into forming a God like conception of ourselves.

After all, our confession reminds us that pride and self-love are just two of the ways that we violate the first commandment. The antidote it would seem is to stop thinking so much about ourselves. To hear the word of God and to be humbled under the mighty hand of God. This leads to the third point.

3. The Lord humbles Human Pride

We see in the third point that Nebuchadnezzar, even after having his sin exposed, even after being warned in his pride, still doesn’t get it. So now, by an act of God he is humbled in his pride.

We don’t know what happened in the intervening twelve months since Daniel provided an interpretation for Nebuchadnezzar. It’s possible that after Daniel provided this interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar was jolted in some sense and amended his ways for a time.

It’s also possible, and I think maybe even more likely, that he never did. He persisted in his pride and God had been patient with him up until now. Either way, the warning that was mediated through Nebuchadnezzar’s dream never produced the heart change that needed to take place. Now the desires of Nebuchadnezzar’s heart are made manifest in the brazen words of pride that he speaks at the end of twelve months.

Nebuchadnezzar is going for a stroll one day, looks out at all his accomplishments and says in verse thirty, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

Do you hear that there are all the personal pronouns that come to his lips; “I have built,” “My mighty power”, “My majesty”. Nebuchadnezzar here is vocalizing the musings of his heart without any restraints and just like that, the Lord acts in the most gracious way that he could. He humbles Nebuchadnezzar.

In an instant Nebuchadnezzar is driven from the highest of highs, a king with all of the luxuries one could imagine, to the lowest of lows. Into a beast like, subhuman state until he knows and comes to learn the lesson that the Most High rules the kingdom of men.

For Nebuchadnezzar to learn this lesson and for Nebuchadnezzar to be a true worshipper of God, he needs to be convicted of his guilt, corruptions and the dishonour of his sin. Friends, the same is true for us too. For us to receive the gospel, for us to receive and rest upon Christ alone as he is freely offered in the gospel, we need our prideful hearts to be humbled by the Holy Spirit. We need to see that Nebuchadnezzar's animal like state is really just a parable of sorts to the nature of our sin and what sin does to us.

How does God humble us? Clearly, we shouldn't expect to be humbled in the same way the Nebuchadnezzar is humbled in this text. Anytime we encounter, by the Spirit, the law of God through the ministry of the word, God is so faithful to expose our pride and to lead us to a conviction of our sin.

When we sit under the word of God, his Spirit so often humbles us in our delusions of grandeur and by God's grace and mercy exposes the pride that we are hopeless to see on our own. So that we can begin to see with clarity the glory and grace of God. The law of God in the ministry of the word is that mirror that offers us the humbling that we need.

Notice that this humbling that Nebuchadnezzar experiences isn't the end of the story. Remember that in the dream that Nebuchadnezzar saw that Daniel interpreted, even as this tree was chopped down, there was a stump of its roots that was left in the earth. This signals that hope remains even in his humility.

Now we learn when by the grace and power of God, Nebuchadnezzar is finally restored.

4.The Lord Restores Those Who Repent of Human pride

However long Nebuchadnezzar remained in this animal like state, we are not told apart from these seven periods of time that have to pass over him. That is more of a designation of completeness than it is a definitive span of time. Nonetheless, at the end of this God ordained span of time, however long that was, Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to heaven, and he is restored both in mind and in manner.

Remember, before his humiliation, where were his eyes consistently set? They were set on his glory and his kingdom, and he couldn't see past either. Now by the grace of God he looks to the only one who could restore him out of his misery. By God's grace he repents, which is always an act of God's grace. He recognizes at last who he is and who God is. He knows that he can't save himself and so he sets his eyes on the only one who can.

Friends, when the Lord humbles us in our pride and we by the grace of God see the disgrace of our sin, our only hope for restoration and life with God is that we fix our eyes on repentance and faith on King Jesus.

We hear in this movement in Nebuchadnezzar's life this move from humiliation to exaltation and as Christian readers, we know whose story that sounds a lot like. It sounds like Jesus who was humbled to a far greater extent than Nebuchadnezzar ever was.

Friends, pride tells us, and the gospel tells us that the sinless Son of God, who didn't require the humbling that Nebuchadnezzar required or that we required, nonetheless willingly humbled himself and took upon himself the shame and indignity of our sin. Though he knew no sin, he became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Then having accomplished salvation, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow on Heaven and Earth and under the Earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Friends, Jesus is the only one who can offer us restoration and salvation when we are convicted by the burden of our own pride. Jesus is the only one that we look to when the sin of pride rages within ourselves. Jesus is the only one who makes our worship both possible and acceptable before God.

Notice that immediately after Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to Heaven and he is restored. He worships. Whenever God brings his people to a conviction of their sins, and he renews their hearts and minds by the power of the Holy Spirit and he draws them to himself.

Friends, worship is the inevitable fruit that follows. More than that, worship is also what the people of God continually engage in doing in part as the remedy for the continued temptations that we all face towards pride.

After all, as one commentator put it, "How can we exalt ourselves when we continue to fix our eyes upon Jesus in worship." That's what worship does. It confronts our pride in the ministry of the word and then draws our eyes by the same word ministry and sacrament away from ourselves and onto the King of Glory. That's what word did for Nebuchadnezzar and that's what word does for us.

So, may all of us learn to hate our pride as we continually sit under the ministry of the word and may all of us then set our eyes upon King Jesus and word.

As we prepare to draw to a close, let's consider two short applications that arise from this text.

Application

1. Ask yourself a question; where has pride gripped your own heart? Pride, as C.S. Lewis puts it, is a sin that is essentially competitive. Meaning that in our pride, by its very nature we are constantly engaged in the process of comparing ourselves to other people in order to feel superior to other people.

We may post our achievements on social media in order to broadcast a certain image of ourselves as successful or affluent or clever. On the other hand, we may browse social media posting about their achievements and successes and be filled with jealousy and contempt. Remember that too is a form of pride.

Pride can even manifest itself in the life of our church. We can be filled with pride in the various ways we serve and loathe it when other people in the body don't seem to be serving to the same extent that we are.

Pride can also manifest itself in the way that we relate intergenerationally, with younger families and parents looking down on older families and parents for their way of doing things, and vice versa.

So, in what ways has pride gripped your own heart? Even in the church. In the end, once again, the best antidote against pride is simply to stop thinking so much about ourselves. The frame of mind that all of us need to adopt and grown more and more in is the one that John the Baptist epitomizes when he says of Jesus in [John 3:30](#), "He must increase, and I must decrease."

As one author writes, "When pride threatens you, consider the contrast between a proud person and our humble saviour, and sing with Isaac Watts, 'When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count as lost, and pour contempt on all of my pride.'"

2. Have you trusted in Christ alone as he is freely offered in the gospel? As Christians, pride is a sin that none of us have immunity to. Maybe like Nebuchadnezzar, you have been so gripped by pride in your life that you have never been led to a true conviction of your sin and you've never really trusted in Jesus.

You may know the claims of the gospel and maybe even ascent to those claims. But as James tells us, even the demons ascent in some sense. So, if you have never really been humbled by your pride and never really received and rested on Christ alone, pray that the Spirit would show you your sin. Pray that he would lead you in the way of everlasting. Pray that you would know, as James says, that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

For all of us, be convicted by the sin of pride, but then recognize that we have an advocate Jesus Christ. Turn to him to be restored.

Conclusion.

Consider Romans 13 v 1.

Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.