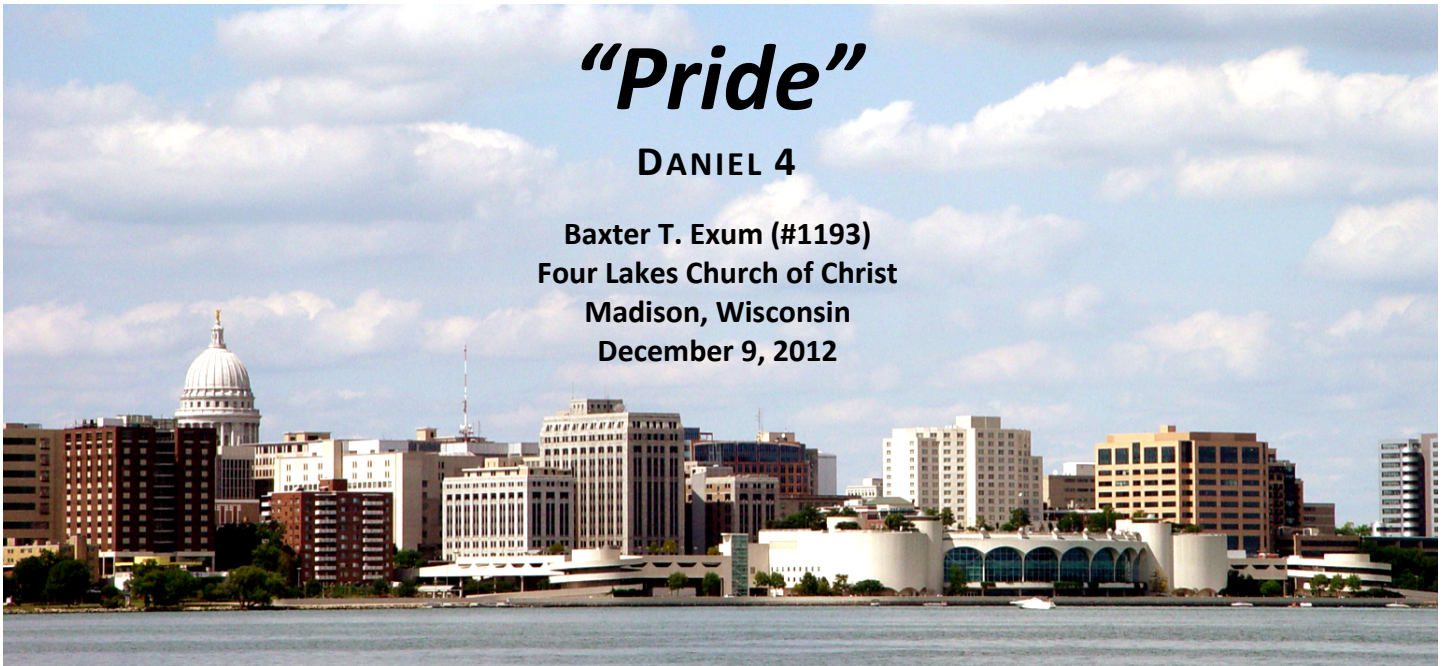


“Pride”

DANIEL 4

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This morning I would invite you to think with me about a sermon request that has been turned in by one of our members, and in order to cover this request, I would like for us to study what is basically a press release from one of the most evil kings to ever rule on the face of this earth. We know that most national leaders will from time to time need to make a statement. In our own nation, Jay Carney has this responsibility. He is the President’s press secretary and is responsible for communicating with the media. We also know that from time to time the President himself will need to address the nation directly – perhaps to answer questions, perhaps to give direction and comfort in a time of national tragedy, perhaps to issue some kind of challenge. This morning, though, I would like for us to travel back in time roughly 2600 years as we look together at a chapter of the Bible that was written not by a prophet, not by one of the patriarchs, not by a priest or some other kind of godly leader, but by a foreign king. The passage is found in Daniel 4 (p. 1392), and the passage is written by none other than Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. And as I said, it reads almost like a press release. It appears to be a document issued by the government to address a rather unusual situation. We know that at this point in world history, Babylon was perhaps the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

Several weeks ago, we studied Joseph and the fact that Joseph helped lead Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth at that time. Well, more than a thousand years after Joseph, Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, sent his son Nebuchadnezzar, to wage war against Egypt in the summer of 605 BC in the Battle of Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar won that battle. However, as he was away leading the army in battle, his father died in August of that year, so after the battle, Nebuchadnezzar returned home to take the throne, and from that point forward, Nebuchadnezzar served as a powerful king. During his reign, he also conquered the Southern Kingdom of Israel. He captured Daniel the prophet in one of the early raids and he eventually leveled Solomon’s temple and the city of Jerusalem in a massive attack in 586 BC, when he took the rest of the Jewish nation away into the Babylonian Captivity. The book of Daniel outlines some of what Daniel experienced during those years of captivity. Early on, as a very young man, Daniel and his friends set themselves apart by refusing to eat the king’s food. In Chapter 2, Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the huge statue with the golden head. Daniel is then promoted into a position of leadership in the empire. In Daniel 3, we go on to learn about Nebuchadnezzar’s command that all people bow down to a massive golden image. Daniel’s friends refused, they were thrown into the fiery furnace, but they survived.

By the time we get to Daniel 4, by piecing things together, it appears that maybe 30 years have gone by. Nebuchadnezzar is firmly established as a world leader, and yet something really strange has happened. At first, Nebuchadnezzar just suddenly stopped appearing in public. But as days turn into months and months into years, people start to get curious – people start to get nervous – and this goes on for seven years. The king is nowhere to be found. But suddenly, the king is back, and Daniel 4 serves as an explanation. Today, this would be one of those announcements where we tune in at 7 o'clock at night, and the same thing is on every channel. No matter where we turn, we see the president sitting in the Oval Office, and he is getting ready to make an announcement. After seven years of the world's most powerful leader being away for some unexplained reason, we get the announcement in the opening verses of Daniel 4,

¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: May your peace abound! ² It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.

And with that announcement, the most powerful man on the face of the earth at that time is getting ready to explain where he has been for the past seven years. And again, this is an account written in the king's own words. As Daniel assembles his book, he feels that it is very important that we hear from the king himself, and so we have an entire chapter in the Bible written by a pagan leader – in fact, by an evil king who had taken God's own people into captivity. But in spite of who wrote this chapter, we have an amazing commentary by a man who learned an incredibly powerful lesson about the danger of one particular sin. One of our members has requested a lesson on the fact that "God hates the proud," and our member specifically listed King Nebuchadnezzar as an example. A lot of time has gone by since this press release was first issued, but we are about to learn some powerful lessons that have definitely been carried over into the Christian age. In our Scripture reading this morning, Silas read from James 4, and in that passage, we learned that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. As we study Daniel 4, I would like to use that as an outline. First of all, God is opposed to the proud, and then secondly, God gives grace to the humble. Both of these lessons are taught very clearly throughout this chapter. As he explains why the king of the world's mightiest nation was now worshiping the God of a small conquered nation and as he explains his seven year absence to the people of his own kingdom, let us please notice the king's own words, starting with Daniel 4:4,

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ⁶ So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. ⁸ But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, ⁹ "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation. ¹⁰ Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it.

¹³ *I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. ¹⁴ He shouted out and spoke as follows: ‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast’s mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.’*

¹⁸ *This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.” ¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar replied, “My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth ²¹ and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged — ²² it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth. ²³ In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,” ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. ²⁶ And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.”*

²⁸ *All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. ²⁹ Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king reflected and said, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹ While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it*

on whomever He wishes.”³³ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagle’s feathers and his nails like bird’s claws.

³⁴ But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”

³⁶ At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

I. Again, as we look at this chapter, let us notice first of all, that **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD.**

And of all people on the face of the earth at that time, Nebuchadnezzar had every reason to be proud. We go back up to verse 4, *“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.”* At this time in his life, the king had every reason to feel confident and secure in his position. As the king himself says, he was *“at ease”* and *“flourishing.”* Perhaps you have heard of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon – this is the king who built that! History tells us that Nebuchadnezzar’s wife was from the mountains. His wife was a little homesick, so as any good husband would do, King Nebuchadnezzar built her a mountain – right there in the middle of the city – and it was huge! It was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. He brought in native plants that his wife would have been familiar with, and these plants required approximately 8,200 gallons of water every day. The king, therefore, brought in engineers, and they designed a way for the water to be pumped up so that the water could then flow down through the gardens. One source tells us that the garden structures were 300 feet tall. It is hard for me to picture that. But you know, we have a building in Madison that is nearly 300 feet tall. The distance from the ground floor to the top of the statue on top of the dome of our state capitol is 284 feet. King Nebuchadnezzar built his wife a garden taller than that!

And I haven’t even mentioned the city of Babylon itself. The city itself was protected by 15 miles of double walls. The walls were 85 feet tall and 27 feet thick. The walls were so wide, in fact, that chariots could race around the city on top of the wall. This room, by the way, is 30 feet wide, so the walls of the city were nearly the width of this room that we’re in. The chariots, therefore, could pass each other on top of those walls. Historians tell us that there were 2 million people living in Babylon at the time – that is nearly the population of the city of Chicago, three times the size of Milwaukee – the largest city in the ancient world at that time.

Inside the city, the king lived in one of his three palaces, his favorite being the one that that was 350 yards long by 200 yards wide. Most of you have been in our home. Our home is roughly 1,700 square feet. Here in this country, we might consider a home rather large, we might consider it to be a mansion if it has more than 10,000 square feet. Our own White House has 55,000 square feet. King Nebuchadnezzar’s palace (if I have figured this correctly) weighs in at 630,000 square feet. It was absolutely massive. That is roughly the size of the Louvre in Paris. And remember: This was his favorite of three palaces!

The king, therefore, was at ease and flourishing, and nobody could get through to him. God, though, in his gracious mercy, breaks through to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. His dream was of a huge tree. If you've seen pictures of the desert southeast of Baghdad, then you know the kind of area we're talking about here, and you know that a huge tree would be rather unusual. Nebuchadnezzar, then, sees this tree providing life for the whole area, but the dream suddenly turns into a nightmare as a messenger comes and orders the tree to be cut down. In the next dream, the king sees a man who lives outdoors like an animal, even to the point where the man even thinks like a beast of the field. Well, Nebuchadnezzar is obviously concerned by this, nobody has an answer, so he calls in Daniel. What I find interesting is that when Daniel hears the dream (in verse 19), he freezes for a little bit. Daniel, God's messenger, is **"alarmed"** by the message. He hesitates. The meaning of the dream is something that Daniel almost hates to communicate. Through the years, it is almost as if Daniel has come to love the king. He was hoping that the dream would apply to the king's enemies, but that was not the case. Daniel, then, gives the message: King Nebuchadnezzar would be humiliated by God. Thankfully, the fact that the stump remained was a glimmer of hope – if the king would repent, the kingdom would be restored at some point in the future. And so the message (the main point) comes in verse 27, **"Break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity."** Thankfully, when God sends judgment, in his gracious mercy he also sends a warning, and that is certainly what he did here. The warning comes through Daniel: Turn away from sin! Start taking care of the poor! Start thinking of someone other than yourself! Start thinking of the poor as being just as important as you are!

How did the king respond? We don't know, but we do know that days turned into weeks and weeks into months – 12 months go by, the king is strolling on the roof of his palace, and starts talking to himself. In my Bible, I have underlined all of the references to himself in verse 30, **"Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?"** As those words were coming out of his mouth, God said: That's it! No more! And from that moment, the king basically lost his mind and started living like a wild animal, just as the dream had warned. This went on for seven years. As we read in the book of James, **"God is opposed to the proud!"**

And we need to realize: God is just as opposed to arrogance today as he was 2,600 years ago! Today, we may not build ourselves a mountain, but pride has a way of sneaking in on all of us. When we do something bad and blame others, that's pride. When we do something good and hope everybody notices, that's pride. When we try to make ourselves look good as we make the mistakes of others look really bad, that's pride. When we put our own needs ahead of others, that's pride. When we would much rather live our lives our way instead of God's way, that also is pride. The danger with pride is that it can be very hard to recognize. And what I mean by that is this: When you steal, you usually know it. When you commit adultery, you know it. When you murder somebody, you know it. But when a person is arrogant, it is very difficult to recognize. Very rarely will an arrogant person ever come to that realization on his or her own. And yet, as we learned from Proverbs 16:18 this past Wednesday evening, **"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."** Nebuchadnezzar had everything, and yet he had nothing. As James says, **"God is opposed to the proud."**

II. **But going back to James, there is a second idea we need to consider in this chapter, and that is: GOD EXTENDS HIS GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

Starting in Daniel 4:34, we find that at the end of that 7-year period, after living like an animal for 7 years, King Nebuchadnezzar raises his eyes toward heaven, he comes to his senses, and he starts praising God. For seven years, this world leader lived like an animal, but remember the dream – the tree was cut down, but the stump and the roots were left. That little spark of life was still there. After seven years, just like the prodigal son, King

Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses. After seven years, King Nebuchadnezzar finally understood that God was in charge. And with that recognition, the Lord extended grace (once again) to this pagan king. His power and honor were restored, people once again went to him for advice, and he was able to go back to ruling as he had done before. King Nebuchadnezzar finally got the point: God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble!

As I look back over this chapter, I find it interesting that God (many years ago) could have just destroyed this king. That would have been the easy way out. But instead, God sent a dream, he sent Daniel, he waited, he taught a painful lesson, and then he restored the king to his former glory. God does not destroy when he can change. And to me, that is encouraging. To me, that means that if God can work with King Nebuchadnezzar, he can also work with me. He can work with all of us assembled here this morning. His purpose is not to destroy, but to change. If we are overcome with sin, he wants us to change the way we think. He wants us to change the way we live. And so the message is: If we are overtaken in sin, God is inviting us to come to our senses. He wants us to come back. He wants us (like Nebuchadnezzar) to raise our eyes toward heaven.

Conclusion:

The good news this morning is that we do not need to learn this lesson the hard way. Today, 2,600 years later, we now have the benefit of 20/20 hindsight! In other words, we can look at Nebuchadnezzar, and we can say: We don't want that! And so instead of being humbled, instead of being humiliated, we have the option of humbling ourselves! As the Lord himself said in Matthew 23:12, ***"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."*** And the greatest example of this principle is Jesus. In Philippians 2:8-9, the Bible explains that, ***"Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name."*** In that regard, Jesus is the most humble person to have ever lived, and the Bible teaches that he humbled himself by becoming ***"obedient."*** This morning, we have the ability to follow that example. We humble ourselves before God by becoming obedient. In response to God's offer of salvation, in all humility we accept the offer on his terms – we turn away from sin, we confess the name of his Son, and we allow ourselves to be briefly immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would invite you to write it down and bring your concern to the front. We would be honored to go to God on your behalf. If you have any questions or concerns on any Bible subject, let us know, and we would be glad to study with you. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, we can help with that. Let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com