

Bold as Lions, "The Prideful King", Daniel 4, 3/24/2019

Picture from A Christmas Story "Some people gotta learn the hard way." Maybe you can relate...any of you seem to have a pattern of this? I thought about sharing a story from my life, but thought, you have plenty of ammunition already, why give you more? **The story from Daniel 4 today is about a man who had to learn the hard way.** We have learned so much about Bold Faith from Daniel and SMA...but today the lesson is from an unlikely teacher...Neb. The same Neb who destroyed the temple of God and his city and his people, the same Neb that made a statue of himself and required people to worship him, and the same Neb that threw SMA into the fire in a furious rage...This Neb is the preacher God is using this morning. And this should tell you something about God, He is all about fresh starts and new beginnings... You are never beyond his reach of grace and never beyond God using you to do mighty things. If God can use Neb, surely you have not committed a sin too great that God can't use you!

King Neb is the author of chapter 4 in Daniel. He writes his section of his autobiography to tell us an incredibly important lesson he had to learn the hard way. That lesson is pride comes before the fall. **C.S. Lewis- Pride is the chief cause of misery for every nation and every family for all time.** He is right...every corrupt regime throughout history has caused massive suffering. And yet it's not just reserved for kings, the successful, the rich and the famous...it infects every one of us. Pride is insidious and can hide in the deep corners of our hearts... causing us not to say I'm sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me. To self-justify our behavior, to judge others, to be exclusive and marginalize people not like us. And just when we are convinced we don't struggle with pride...God thanks you that I'm not proud, like these all these other people...pride shows up because disguised in good works because some of us have a savior complex. That you are the only one that can rescue someone who needs you, and maybe what they really need is for you to stop enabling their bad behavior so that they can see the real savior, Jesus. However it shows up in your life... Pride will destroy relationships, it will keep you trapped in destructive behavior, make others miserable and the root of pride can keep us out of heaven, because only those who humble themselves can recognize that we need a savior. So we can learn from Neb's journey, because in some ways, it is a journey all of us must take if we are going to be cured from pride in our hearts. **The journey from pride of self to praise of God comes through the valley of humiliation.**

Pride of Self

30 Years have gone by between chapter 3 and 4 and Daniel was likely about 50 years old, Neb was an old and very accomplished king at this point. Fast forward to **Daniel 4:29-30**
The king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Now before we judge him too harshly. Neb's statement from a human perspective was pretty accurate. **Babylon was magnificent**, the most powerful and spectacular city that on the face of the earth at this time. The outer wall of this city stood 355 ft high, 17 miles long. 85 feet thick walls, chariot races took place on top. 50 Temples in the city. One of the 7 Ancient Wonders of

the world were the hanging gardens in the center of the city that he built for his wife... I might be a bouquet of flowers... If Longwood Gardens and New York City had a baby. Such an impressive city that 200 years later, Alexander planned to move the center of his empire to Babylon. What then is the problem? Isn't it true that he built a magnificent city? Maybe some of us wonder, if it's true can it be pride? We can learn the nature of pride from two little prepositions in Neb's statement. "By" and "for".

"By my mighty power" means: I love to think of myself as the cause and origin and controller and source of all my greatness. When I see what I have built, I love to savor the fact that my intelligence and my initiative and my power were the cause of this greatness. It came from me and through me. So pride gets its pleasure from being independent, and self-determining and self-sufficient.

Then Nebuchadnezzar adds, "For the glory of my majesty" In other words, pride is driven by desire for the glory that men ascribe to human achievements. Or as Lady Gaga once sang- "I live for the applause. I live for the way that you cheer and scream for me. The applause, applause, applause." Pride loves to think of itself as the source of great achievement and the recipient of great praise. So I think we've got here the essence of pride: the enjoyment of self-sufficiency rather than God-sufficiency and the enjoyment of self-exaltation rather than God-exaltation. Pride is looking at the good things in your life and saying "I did it" and "I deserve the credit."

Here's why pride gets it so twisted.

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Pride is claiming to be the author of what is a gift. But you say, well I am where I am because I sacrificed and worked harder than others. Sure, but back up...did you choose where you would be born, what kind of education you would receive? Who you would have as parents and the conditions you grew up in? Did you choose the DNA composition that made sure you had all the chromosomes you needed to think and operate? What about the breath in your lungs or your heart that pumps blood? To take credit for a gift is Cosmic Plagiarism. Because God did it and God deserves the credit. And until we can do that with an honest heart, the beast of pride will grow.

Neb is a picture of what lives in all our hearts if we don't deal with it. Now here's what makes it even worse for Neb. He was warned that pride comes before the fall a year earlier by Daniel. Let's back up in the story.

Daniel 4:4-8

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanter, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream.

Summarize...Life is good, on top of the world...but he is haunted by this dream. Daniel is known as the chief interpreter of dreams so he interprets this dream. The dream is about this enormous tree that gets chopped down by an angel and then tree is stripped of all of its leaves and fruit and has to dwell among the animals of the field. Daniel immediately knows the interpretation and verse 19 says that Daniel is dismayed and frightened...it ain't good. And he tells him the truth that Neb doesn't want to hear...you are that tree! He says...

Daniel 4:25-27

*25 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you **until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.***

*26 The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you **acknowledge that Heaven rules.** 27 Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."*

Pride of Self Well verse 29 says 12 months go by for Neb since this confrontation... you can forget a whole lot, if you experience the conviction of God upon your heart, but don't do anything about it quickly...it grows cold quickly doesn't it? You get convicted about porn, greed, anger...I need to do something about that...and then we procrastinate. And yet, God is patient...Why did God wait so long to fulfill the prophecy? MERCY. The same God that was patient with Nineveh, patient with the people of Noah's day, is the same God that is patient with me and you. This is why he gives some of the people in your life so many opportunities to accept the gospel. 2 Peter 3 He is patient because he desires none to perish but all come to repentance.

So fast forward to that rooftop 12 months later- "By my power, for my glory"

Daniel 4:31-33

31 Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."

33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

The Valley of Humiliation.

God was so patient, but when his judgment comes, it comes swiftly and definitively. God is not to be trifled with. This psychological phenomenon that takes place with Neb actually has a name- **Boanthropy**, depicted by famous painting by William Blake, an extremely rare condition, observed in 1946 by R.K. Harrison, a British scholar, who claimed that he observed someone with boanthropy in a mental hospital in the UK. Harrison writes: "His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. The only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the finger-nails. Without institutional care the patient would have manifested precisely the same physical conditions as those mentioned in Daniel 4:33."

God says to Neb- Because you have tried to be more than a man, you will be less than a man. I believe most of us have to go through the valley of humiliation to discover this painful truth: We thought we were strong and we discover that we were weak. We thought we were self-sufficient and we discover that we were utterly dependent on God — for life and breath and everything, we believed we deserved all the credit- and then we discover just how little we can actually control. My brother's boss the picture of Gordon Gecko from Wall Street. Finds out he has an aggressive cancer, no one...not even his wife was there for him. Brother taking him to treatments. A few months later he couldn't even dress himself. Do we realize how dependent we are?

Valley of Humiliation Now, it is important to point out...every bad thing that happens to us is not necessarily because we have a pride issue, and please do not go around trying to spiritually diagnose other people's bad situations. You will end up looking more like an ass than Neb. But certainly, God can and does allow bad things, humbling things, hard things, disastrous things to come into our lives...not because he hates us...and we don't know all the reasons why- we must embrace the mystery of it...but sometimes, one of the things he's doing is shaking us of our self-sufficient pride...because he loves us and knows what the spiritual disease of pride can do.

The Praise of God

Daniel 4:34-37

34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing.

He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" 36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers

and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

DC talk was right, some people gotta learn the hard way...after 7 years living in the valley of humiliation, he finally bows the knee. He lifts his eyes to heaven, and God not only transforms his mind, but he gives him a transformed heart. These are the last words we hear from Neb and the last impression we are left with of him. I believe we will see Neb in heaven.

Let's take a few minutes and talk about us. While our valley of humiliation may not involve chewing our cud, God is patient with us, but is trying to get our attention about the corners of our hearts where pride is dwelling unchecked and call us to humility.

Maybe God is trying to get your attention today. Maybe it is through a valley of humiliation you are experiencing right now. But maybe, in God's mercy, he is getting your attention in advance. There is a cure for the disease of pride.

Ultimately, it is through a deep belief both in the head and the heart that what the gospel says is actually true of me and you. That I am more deeply flawed and sinful than I ever dare admit and at the same time, in Jesus Christ, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dare imagine. A constant dose, 3x a day...one at every meal for the rest of your life.

I want to close by reading to you an email I received from my former pastor at McLean Bible Church in DC. Lon Solomon. I wish all the things that you have said of me were really true in my heart of hearts. But an incredibly flawed man dwells there, and the older I get, and the longer I walk with the Lord, the more aware of this I become and yet the more amazing and precious the gospel becomes to me. God graciously granted me over 45 years of active ministry for Him, and I really tried to be the best I could be for Him. I made many mistakes, but an incredibly gracious God dusted my trail time after time. Thus, the outward ministry looks much better today than the reality of the man whom God used to lead it. But this is the way it should be. As John said of Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease."

You want to kill pride? He must increase and we must decrease.