

THE KING OF KINGS

DANIEL 4:1-33

OUR KING CONDEMNS THE PROUD



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The greatest danger in the world is our own pride. No matter how many or how great any other enemies are, our own pride is a far greater threat. Pride thinks too highly of itself, but thinks too little of others. Pride puffs itself, but deflates others. Pride wants compliments, but never gives them. Pride loves to criticize, but hates to be criticized. Pride thinks only about itself, but never about others. Pride talks up itself, but talks down others. Pride wants to be god, but has no need for God. Pride knows everything, but doesn't know itself.

The deadliest of the seven deadly sins, pride was at the root of the first sin ("you shall be as gods"). In some ways, the whole of Scripture is a warning against pride with many specific verses warning us of its hazard and commending the safety of humility (Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 3:34; Matt. 23:12; Luke 1:52; 1 Peter 5:5-6; James 4:6-7). Daniel 4 presents the same two truths in narrative form: **Pride is our peril but humility is our haven.**

BACKGROUND

Theme of Daniel: The King of kings is still King. God's sovereignty is taught in God over-ruling for the good of his people (ch. 1), in God giving Daniel the dream and its interpretation (ch. 2), in God preserving Daniel's friends in the furnace (ch. 3), and in the King of kings humbling of the greatest earthly king (ch. 4).

Structure of Daniel:

- Faithful Living in Hostile Times (1-6)
- Forward Looking in Hostile Times (7-12)

The story so far

- Be faithful because our King Cares for us (Daniel 1)
- Be faithful because our King Communicates with us (Daniel 2:1-30)
- Be faithful because our King Conquers for us (Daniel 2:31-49)
- Be faithful because our King Commands us (Daniel 3)
- Be faithful because our King Condemns the Proud (Daniel 4:1-33)

Chapter Outline

- The King's Summary of God's Sovereignty (1-3)
- The King's Experience of God's Sovereignty (4-37)



Why should I be so scared of pride?
Let's learn from the life of Nebuchadnezzar.



1. PRIDE IS OUR PERIL

A Fearful Dream (4-17)

Nebuchadnezzar was at the peak of his power but deeply disturbed. He'd had another dream, and this one panicked him (4-5). When the astrologers failed to interpret it, he called Daniel (8-9).

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an exceptionally beautiful and fruitful tree that reached to heaven, filled the earth, and provided food and shelter for animals and birds (10-13). While admiring the tree, an angel came down from heaven, chopped down the tree, lopped off its branches, scattered its fruits, drove away the animals and birds, and left only a stump (14-15). At this point in the dream, the stump seems to morph into a person it is called a 'him' not an 'it.' The stump/man was shackled outside, wet with the dew, and eating with the animals (15). He not only had an animal body and an animal lifestyle, but an animal mind, a state that went on for a long time (16).

At this point the angel pronounces the sentence of heaven upon the man and explains the 'why' behind it. **The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men** (17). No wonder Nebuchadnezzar was panicking. He was pretty sure he knew this man. He was staring at him in the mirror. But he was still hoping against hope it wasn't him.

A Faithful Interpretation (18-25)

The Babylonian magicians and astrologers knew exactly what the dream meant, but were afraid to tell the King. Daniel was terrified too, but by faith overcame his fear and faithfully told the King the fearful truth (18-19). He began by assuring the king that he had zero desire for this dream to come true in the king's life. He then got right to the point. **That beautiful fruitful tree is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth** (22). That was the good news. Then came the bad news. "You're going to be chopped down, and, as if that's not bad enough, you're going to be changed into an animal **until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will**" (24-25). The king needed to learn once and for all that heaven rules and people rule only at God's pleasure. To prove that, the divine lumberjack was sharpening his axe and was about to swing it at the base of Nebuchadnezzar's proud life.



A Flicker of Hope (26-27)

It was a dark and pessimistic message, but Daniel found to a little shaft of light and hope. He promised the king that his kingdom and his senses would be returned to him once he learned **that Heaven rules** (26). Daniel therefore pled with him: **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**" (26-27). There is a possibility, a 'perhaps' that through repentance he might yet avert the judgment (Jer. 18:7-8)

A Fatal Fulfillment (28-33)

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar (28). Though offered hope through humility, the king returned to his prideful ways. Twelve months later, while walking on the palace roof, he puffed out his chest and boasted: **"Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"** (29-30). Judgment was instant and horrific (31-34). Lycanthropy is a rare mental illness where someone thinks they are an animal and acts like an animal. As Sinclair Ferguson put it, "A superhuman empire would be reduced to subhuman proportions."

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

We are all mini-Nebuchadnezzars. Our pride may not be as crude as his. Our boasting may be more 'skillful' and 'cultured.' But we also need to learn who is King (God) and who is not (us).

Pride comes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). We are never at greater risk than when we're high. That's why Spurgeon prayed, "Keep me down Lord and then I need fear no fall." Or, as Paul said, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

God resists the proud (1 Peter 5:5). Pride is the most ugly, disgusting, and offensive sin to God. It revolts and repulses him even more than the sight of a naked king eating dirt repulses us. That vile image is simply a rare opportunity for us to see outside what God sees inside. That's why God resists pride, fights it, and pushes it away. He thrusts the proud as far away as possible from him. He cannot stand the sight or sound of the proud. Peacocks strut around, but God thrusts to the ground.

PRIDE IS A REVOLT AGAINST GOD
AND IS REVOLTING TO GOD



Where can I find safety?
Find safety in the haven of humility.



2. HUMILITY IS OUR HAVEN

The basis of humility is God's sovereignty

The same words are used three times to teach Nebuchadnezzar one lesson: **God is sovereign, not Nebuchadnezzar**. Or as Daniel puts it three times: **that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will** (17, 25, 32).

Why did God preach his supreme sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar? Because there is nothing more humbling to humanity, and because it's often the preliminary work for conversion. Jonathan Edwards remarked: "I think I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those ... on the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners." As Sinclair Ferguson said, our response to and use of God's sovereignty "is the litmus test that indisputably indicates an individual's true spiritual condition."

The basics of humility are repentance and righteousness

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. (27) The King did this, as verses 1-3 remind us and as we shall see next week when we consider verses 34-37.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Humility is salvation. Why is God humbling you? To give you grace (James 4:6). God gives grace only to the humble. Remember the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Lk. 18:9-14).

Humility is safety. God brings hard things into our lives to teach us his sovereignty and and our humility in a way that nothing else can. There's something wrong with our view of God's sovereignty if it makes us proud and look down on others.

Humility is beautiful (James 4:6). There's nothing that attracts God more than humility. Humility thinks highly of others, and little of self. Humility inflates others, and deflates self. Humility gives compliments but doesn't fish for them. Humility takes criticism but rarely gives it. Humility thinks about others first and most, and self last and least. Humility talks others up, and self down. Humility knows itself and therefore knows it doesn't know everything.

THE LOW ROAD TO HEAVEN
IS THE SAFE ROAD TO HEAVEN

Hear > Change > Tell



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Sovereign Captain, steer us away from the perils of pride and towards the haven of humility for my salvation and safety,

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Give an example of a time when you saw the danger of pride in your own life
2. What are you tempted to boast about?
3. Why do you think pride is so offensive to God?
4. How does God's sovereignty humble us?
5. Why does God find humility so beautiful?
6. How can we reduce pride and increase humility in our lives?

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