

Daniel 4:1-27 – The Straw that Broke Nebuchadnezzar’s Back!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You have probably heard the phrase “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” That was what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He had confessed that Jehovah was the true God of heaven and earth when God revealed his dream and the interpretation to him, but was not convinced of it in his heart. He confessed that Jehovah was the God of heaven and earth when God rescued the 3 Hebrew young men from Nebuchadnezzar 7X hotter fire, but he was not convinced in his heart. But God did not leave Nebuchadnezzar alone. God added one more sovereign straw...one more weight to his conscience... before he collapsed and surrendered. It is about this straw that you will hear about over the next two sermons. Keep in mind that this was Nebuchadnezzar’s account of what happened **after the fact – after his conversion**. Daniel was just the scribe. There is rich insight into how God works transformatively in the lives of his children.

Our headings are: **Nebuchadnezzar’s Praise**, **Nebuchadnezzar’s Puzzle**, and **Nebuchadnezzar’s Provision**.

Our goals are: That you will **be encouraged by the transformative power of Jesus Christ, that you will thank him for his transformative power, and that you will bring his transformative power to the world**.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Praise

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: **Peace be multiplied to you**. 2 I **thought it good** to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has **worked for me**.

1. Before Nebuchadnezzar talked about the sovereign hand of God in his salvation, before he could talk about the troubles that God brought him through, he started praising God. It is a good way to start to pray - like 1st part of the Lord’s Prayer: Hallowed 神圣的 by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth. Was Nebuchadnezzar able to add anything to God’s nature by praise? No. But he understood his need to praise the Lord and show his thankfulness for his redemption. He was a Christian when he wrote this.

Psalms 147:1 Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful. 2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. 3 He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds. 4 He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. 5 Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. 6 The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.

Even angels praise God when salvation comes to mankind.

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Luke 15 summarizes the joy that comes at salvation and praise that goes up to God: 100 sheep – one lost, one found, joy and praise. 10 pieces of silver – one lost, one found, joy and praise. 2 sons – one lost, one found, joy and praise. **The Christian life is characterized by praise**. This is what Nebuchadnezzar wanted.

2. And before Nebuchadnezzar would talk about the sovereign transformative power of God in his salvation, he wished that all his hearers would find peace – true peace – peace in the heart.

He was not wishing a generic 一般的“shalom” like if you see your neighbor outside with his garbage cans. Nebuchadnezzar hadn't wished this kind of peace before when God showed him great signs. This was different. I have no doubt that he wanted his people to listen attentively 用心地 to his words so they would find the path to peace. The persecutor was now a preacher. Yes, God had to humble him in a most degrading 侮辱性的 way, but he was not ashamed to acknowledge his humiliation 蒙受的羞辱 because he has received eternal salvation. And he knew that telling others of this path to peace was a good work... a work that every Christian must perform... a work that evidences true faith. Do you have such a desire? If you realized the greatness of your salvation, you would want the world to receive it...

3. What a difference this was from the time Nebuchadnezzar had his dream and its meaning revealed by God, and what a difference from when he saw the 3 Hebrew men miraculously delivered from the fiery furnace! At those times Nebuchadnezzar only praised God from his lips and his head, but not from his soul. And then he praised God as “your God” not “my God.” In our text today you see how he praised God for what God had done for him... personally.

3 How **great are His signs**, And how **mighty His wonders!** His kingdom is **an everlasting kingdom**, And His **dominion is from generation to generation.**

4. Briefly consider the details of things for which he praise God: God was work was great... mighty... everlasting... He was not mincing 装腔作势的 words. And it is beautiful parallel poetry as well. Great=mighty, signs=wonders.

Kingdom=dominion, everlasting=generation to generation.

God has all power...and that power lasts forever. Maybe this was a Jewish song that he learned. But don't think

signs and wonders are just great things just for admiration. Great things are for instruction!

Psalm 145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all.

Psalm 72:5 They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations.

5. But what great doctrine he captured in his praise! Earlier Nebuchadnezzar had said: Which God could stop me? Now, he acknowledged a limit to his kingdom and professed that God had an unlimited kingdom. He had accomplished many great things as King of Babylon, but here he confessed that it was God who was ruling everywhere for all times! Now he was acting like a true convert!

Nebuchadnezzar's Puzzle

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation. 8 But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying: 9 "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation. 10 "These were the

visions of my head while on my bed: "I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. 11 The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. 12 Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it. 13 "I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 He cried aloud and said thus: **'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.** Let the beasts get out from under it, And the birds from its branches. 15 Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, **Bound with a band of iron and bronze,** In the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, And let him graze with the beasts On the grass of the earth. 16 Let his heart be changed from that of a man, Let him be given the heart of a beast, And let seven times pass over him. 17 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, **In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'** 18 "This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you."

1. We will not examine the details of what Nebuchadnezzar saw in this vision as the explanations will come in the next point. We will only highlight unique things in his vision. In short, he saw a great, magnificent tree that was destined to be chopped down to a stump, then it grew again. This was done for the good of the tree, so that it would acknowledge that God rules over all men and controls every single thing that happens in this world. The vision puzzled him but God provided the meaning of the vision.

Nebuchadnezzar's Provision

19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished 震惊 for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. So the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!

1. (First up, sometimes our greatest provision is instruction!) Now when Daniel (Belteshazzar) realized the meaning of the dream Nebuchadnezzar had seen he was shocked and was silent for 1 hour. (Do you realize how that would have been strange and awkward 尴尬?) But the king insisted that he needed to know the meaning. So Daniel told him.

20 The tree that you saw, which **grew and became strong**, whose **height reached to the heavens** and which could be seen by all the earth, 21 whose **leaves** were lovely and its **fruit abundant** 充足, in which was **food for all**, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose **branches** the birds of the heaven had their home— 22 it is you, O king, who have **grown and become strong**; for your **greatness has grown** and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth. 23 And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, **'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots** in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him **graze with the beasts** of the field, **till seven times** 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 They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you...

2. God's Angel (the Watcher) would bring the great and powerful Nebuchadnezzar to his knees and put great fear in him by making him live outdoors among wild animals, like a wild beast, for 7 years – God's number. He would eat plants like animals...or raw meat. God would literally "drive" him into the wild. He would possibly be kept in chains in order to protect him from this raving lunacy. His provinces (branches) will be taken away. His deputies 副手 (his leaves) would not plead

allegiance to him. **His wealth** (his fruit) will be scattered. **The tallest tree** was going to be cut down and left as stubble. And yet, God's sovereignty would prevent anyone else from taking over Nebuchadnezzar's throne. This was quite an amazing thing - to not have a king for 7 years and not appoint another. That God would keep Nebuchadnezzar's throne open was further evidence of his sovereignty. (Interesting that Babylonian history ignores this 7 year period and leaves some blank years in Nebuchadnezzar's life. And who would want to announce that their king had gone "insane" for a time?)

...till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. 26 And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules.

3. God's judgment would continue until Nebuchadnezzar submitted to God in his heart...and until he removed the love and worship of himself. It is amazing how God sometimes works. He took David and Joseph from the sheep to the throne, but he now took Nebuchadnezzar from the throne to the sheep. What a lesson Nebuchadnezzar had to learn!

Ps 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted 折磨 That I may learn Your statutes.

Ps 83:17 Let them be confounded 混淆 and dismayed 沮丧 forever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish, 18 That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.

27 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. Daniel gently but strictly urged the king (before his conversion) to take his advice and submit to God.

Hebrews 13:22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation 劝勉 for I have written to you in few words.

And how wonderful his words: put off sin by faith, put on righteousness by faith. What sins did he have to put off? Pride, intemperance 放纵 excessive luxury 奢侈, adultery, tyranny 暴政, robbery, violence, and oppression of his subjects. (Of course it wasn't obedience that would save Nebuchadnezzar, but faith. His obedience would be evidence of his faith.) What courage! **What love Daniel had for the King** in heaven and the king on earth... to not hide the truth! Do you love your family and friends to this degree? Is it not this that our arrogant 骄傲的 world needs so badly to hear? Will you tell it to them? Idols are everywhere. God's name is treated as a useless word. The Sabbath is now for shopping and sports. Children are trained for kindergarten to spy on their parents for the government. Murder is done for money, it is praised, and no one is executed. Adultery and perversions are heralded 欢呼 as freedoms. Theft is redefined and performed by the State. When the state wants to help the poor, it justifies stealing from the rich instead. Lying is now an art form by students, and those in public places. And all of these things are grounded in covetousness 贪欲 North America badly needs a return to God to for this glory and for our good. We are running on the fumes 油 of past godliness. The arrogant need to give up their epicurean 享乐主义的 ways. The arrogant need to bend the knee, not to pleasure and self-indulgence 自我放纵 but to the Holy One of Israel who sees, knows, and is ashamed of their sins. Maybe the Lord will keep our blessings!

Conclusion:

What a process God had to take Nebuchadnezzar through for his salvation! He was a crazed 狂热的, 疯狂的 indulgent, epicurean. He had to become like a mad animal to receive God's grace. But after receiving so great a gift he wanted to talk about it. Now some people like to speak of their salvation because they hope to get praise, but not so with King Nebuchadnezzar. He wanted men all over the world to be saved and to praise God for who he was and what he did for them.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. For most men, salvation is a process, often a long process. Don't panic when people with whom you are sharing the Gospel don't immediately believe. Keep piling on the straws.
2. Don't compromise on the message. It is about the work of Christ, not man's ability. Teach it in its fullness. Don't shy away from doctrines.
3. Be thankful that you are in God's kingdom. He gives salvation to whomever he pleases and he was pleased to give it to you.
4. Stay humble. If you must boast, boast that Jesus Christ died for your sins.

Finally, do you have to be punished before you can profit from God's grace? Does God have to redouble his blows? May it not be so to you! May you surrender to Jesus Christ! Humble yourself before him and ask him to make you his child and take away your sins.