

“DANIEL INTERPRETS DREAM.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 4:19-27

Introduction.

The purpose of the book of Daniel is not to teach us history, but to teach us spiritual truth. This is the revelation of God for His people in all ages and in all places. God knew they needed to hear this and He knows we need to hear it.

This book is written so that God’s people will know the Lord Most High rules in the heavens and the earth and that on earth He rules the kingdoms of men and it is the Lord Most High who decides who rules and for how long.

People foolishly say that the God of the OT is not a God of grace and love, but a God of justice and wrath. It is not true and the book of Daniel is further proof.

All God’s warnings and admonitions and rebukes and corrections are grace; and those vessels He uses to deliver them are grace, are gifts, are cause for thanksgiving and worship.

This dream and Daniel’s ability to interpret it are God’s grace to Nebuchadnezzar. Without them he would be left completely in his sin and utterly without hope.

Consider the gift Nathan was to King David, and Abigail before that. The rooster that crowed and brought Peter to his senses and caused him to break down and weep in repentance was grace. So was Paul’s rebuke of Peter. Never despise God’s warnings and humbling, they are grace.

The book of Daniel and the man Daniel are the compassion and kindness of God.

Daniel’s fear and trembling, vs. 19.

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news. Should a doctor withhold bad news? Should a surgeon fear to do a painful surgery? Should the pharmacy tell us all the possible side effects? Should a pastor speak the painful truth about sin?

Daniel is severely distressed, terrified. What should he do? What should he say? Daniel is flesh, human. Daniel has some compassion and pity toward his king. He takes no pleasure in it.

Daniel hesitates for he fears the judgment that is to come. The judgment of God is a fearful and awful thing.

Who else in Scripture like Daniel's hesitated, tried to remain silent? Remember young Samuel:

I Samuel 3:15-18 Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him."

Love for God and love for Nebuchadnezzar required Daniel to speak truthfully and clearly the Word of God and trust the Spirit of God to apply that truth.

True love can never be in conflict with the truth. People whose souls are on the brink need clear words of warning, to hold back is not love but hate.

Like Moses to Pharaoh.

Like Nathan to King David, "You are the man."

Like Elijah to King Ahab.

Like John the Baptist to King Herod.

So Daniel must say, "It is you, O King."

Why is he frightened or troubled? Because the fear of God is real, and His judgments are cause to tremble for anyone who knows anything about God's ways. God's wrath is a serious and sober thing.

The prophets of God were faithful to say whatever God commanded.

Tremble before a holy God and then be bold as lions in the service of God (Timothy Bayly).

This is the duty of every Christian, to find the middle way, the balance of compassion and truth, humility and admonition, sorrowful yet unhesitatingly clear.

In 1974 a German sociologist articulated a social phenomenon call "the spiral of silence." The term "spiral of silence" refers to the desire we all have to avoid negative consequences or isolation in public settings, and so we generally go along with what seems like the popular opinion even if we are opposed. Instead of speaking up, we remain silent. The problem is the influences on public opinion by mass media and social media can make a minority position seem like the majority opinion. And so the spiral of silence continues.

No one likes to be out of step with the prevailing opinion. So it's human nature to keep quiet when you disagree. But silence inadvertently reinforces and condones the opposite opinion.

Standing up for God and the Bible and Truth and defending the life of the unborn or traditional marriage or for sexual morality doesn't make you a bigot or intolerant or a homophobe. There are minority forces in our culture that are trying to silence Christians and push them out of the public arena.

The Irish politician and philosopher, Edmund Burke, once famously said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do [say] nothing.”

Daniel’s heart was good, he took no pleasure in being the bearer of bad news, but out of love spoke the truth in love.

He has, as one writer put it, “a love-driven sadness that cringes to speak the hard word of God, yet a God-honoring obedience that speaks it anyway” (Dale Davies, p. 62).

Daniel proved true to God and to Nebuchadnezzar, a rare combination, a true and faithful man.

The Interpretation of the Tree, vss. 19-22.

The tree was a reflection of Nebuchadnezzar’s personality, or his view of himself. He was great in his eyes, he was all-powerful in his own eyes. He saw himself as all things to all people, the lord of the earth, the great benevolent king upon whom everyone else was dependent.

“All of your lives revolve around me. I am the center of the universe.” He forgot he was, that he was only a man, and the God is God.

The Interpretation of the Watcher, vss. 23-26.

As great as the tree was, there was a problem, there was a great judgment hanging over the king. The judgment was great because only such a great judgment would get the king’s attention.

In the first dream any threat of judgment was four generations of kings away. In this dream the danger is imminent.

May we never be so stubborn or resistant, but learn quickly God’s lessons and corrections. Some diseases of the soul are only cured with great difficulty and great surgery. And of all the diseases of the soul, pride is one of the hardest to cure.

So he will be made like a beast cut off from all humanity and subjected to great disgrace and shame. He will fall from the highest place to the lowest place. He is about to find out how fragile and temporal life is. He is about to find out that he has absolutely no real control over anything.

This would be a kairos moment, a life changing turn point moments in life if he got the message.

The Lord Most High. The interpretation of the decree, vss. 25-26.

This is the big point, but who is it most for? To whom is this point being made? God uses Nebuchadnezzar as an object lesson to remind the Jewish exiles who He is. God uses Nebuchadnezzar to discipline the Jewish for their sin, he is the judgment of God on them. When you are in the midst of God's discipline in a terrible political context you need to hear truth.

Nebuchadnezzar is just one of countless kings who come and go, who rise and fall, who are just pawns in God's grand scheme of things. Daniel 4 is another object lesson for Neb and the Jewish people. Daniel 4:17 and 25 are the key verses to the chapter.

Daniel 4:17 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.*

Daniel 4:25 that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, *till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

There is nothing in this world that does not yield to God. All human events, all human leaders, all living creatures and inanimate objects.

The king saw a watcher descend from the heaven. Everything on earth is under the control of heaven. The angel is God's ambassador, God's servant to do God's will, to carry out and execute God's decrees. God's decrees trump man's decrees.

A person who truly understands the absolute sovereignty of God will not be proud or boastful. This truth humbles all human pride. Being humbled before the sovereign and supreme God is the first step toward salvation. God is God and we are nothing but desperately dependent sinners who have nothing to bring to God to merit any blessing from Him.

The true test of a person's spiritual condition is what they do with this doctrine, do they humbly submit to it or do they resist it and chaff under it.

There is a test in this divine decree to see if the king might be teachable, open to consider repentance.

Daniel's bold advice. Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, 27.

Daniel 4:27 *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 goes one better. Not only does he speak with compassion and candor, with love and truth, he also offers good counsel. Daniel, an exiled slave in the king's court, dares to tell the ruler of the world what to do.

Daniel holds out the possibility of continued ease and prosperity, of favor in the sight of God. Daniel holds out the hope of deliverance. There is no fatalism here, there is room for change and time for change.

Numerous times in Scripture there are cases after a stern judgment is given, there is a change of heart and God relents from sending disaster.

II Chronicles 7:14 If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

God sends warnings for a reason, to warn, to save, to call us back from the edge of the cliff. Nebuchadnezzar is sent to the Jews. The dream is sent to Nebuchadnezzar.

Calvin said that God sends us bad rulers as judgment. What is the proper response to God's judgment? Complain, grumble, blame? Repent.

Daniel is not guaranteeing that no judgment will come, but he holds out the path to that possibility, a path to continued favor with God. God's mercy almost always includes delays and second chances and opportunities to turn back.

It is grace that God has given him this dream, and grace that He sent Daniel to interpret it, and now Daniel holds out what he should do with this grace. Grace calls for repentance and obedience.

It is always a huge gift when God reveals His Word and His will to us, when He tells us the truth no matter how hard it is to hear it.

You may not like the vessel, the people of God often didn't like the prophets. I pray constantly that God will make me simply a vessel or conduit of His Word and truth to this flock. Whether anyone likes me or not, or has trouble accepting it from me, my prayer is that by the Holy Spirit through His Word, God would speak to your hearts and you would hear it and receive it as from Him.

God uses pastors, elders, teachers, friends and neighbors, parents and children, strangers and enemies, politicians, to speak His truth to us. It takes grace and discernment to look past the vessel to hear the truth.

In fact it is most common that God will use a humble vessel or a vessel we don't like to humble us.

Implications and Application.

1. His sin is our sin. We are the man. The tree is us. We are guilty as charged. We all have some Neb in us, we all think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

We glorify ourselves by thinking we are in control and in charge of life, of our plans and futures. We do not live for God and seek to reflect God. We are this man when we refuse to reflect Christ, when we don't have the same attitude in us that was in Him.

Where is Christ most present and most evident in your life, in your conduct? Let us take to heart Daniel's counsel and apply it.

2. **Daniel 4:25** *the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

Every human government is an interim government, it serves at the will of God for the purposes of God. They are all temporary and provisional. None will last long.

Most of the leaders and rulers of this earth never consider that their power and authority and rule are derived from heaven, that they have their office at the pleasure of God. They think they are completely in control of their destiny, so they only look to the right and to the left, before and behind, they don't think to look up and see that

3. Finally let us not be afraid to speak up.

Don't be afraid to stand for Christ and the truth, even if it means you stand alone, for in Christ you are never alone.

Prayer: Holy Father, you have been beyond gracious and patient with us, sending to us countless messengers of your truth and future judgment. You have so often warned us of the wrath to come that when it comes no one will be without excuse. So grant us that grace to hear and understand and believe and respond and repent and obey. Give us ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to your church today, your church in American, your church in Lynden.

Help us to heed your warnings and admonitions and corrections and rebuke, to tremble at them and seen in them the tender compassion offered to us in the cross and by the blood of Jesus, the Savior of our souls who delivers us from eternal judgment and death.