

“NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 4:28-33

Introduction.

Pride and politics seem inseparable, where there is one, there is the other. And if ever we needed proof this election year is it. We should tremble at what the hand of God might do. For God is not mocked and He will not have His glory robbed with impunity. His hand of judgment will not be held back forever.

But this story is not just for kings and presidents and politicians. This is a story for every one of us and if we don't learn its lesson we too will be brought low..

Nebuchadnezzar, the great King of Babylon has been sent a messenger in the form of a dream and then another messenger to interpret the dream.

The message is clear:

Daniel 4:24-25, 27 This is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, 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. ...

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.”

True to God's character there is always an opportunity for repentance, a time to turn away from sin and evil and turn to God.

God gave the world 120 years to repent before He sent a great flood in Noah's day.

God gave the people of Israel 350 years to repent before humbling them under the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

Remember Nineveh in Jonah's day. He preached a message of repentance and gave the city 40 days. They repented and were spared God's judgment.

This story is filled with grace. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a revelation of the future in a dream, God sent a servant with an interpretation, through whom God sent an admonition (27) and God gave twelve months to take all of this to heart and turn from his wicked ways (29).

On the judgment day every person who stands before God will be without excuse. God has sent messengers and messages again and again. Mercy loves delays. God's mercy manifests itself often in delays, and second and third chances.

It is God's generous grace that He has revealed Himself to us and opened our blind eyes and ears to the truth and has sent us His servants to preach and teach His Word to you. Don't despise His gifts and His grace shown to you.

The greatness of Babylon and the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar's ego.

Daniel 4:30 and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"

These were not empty boasts. Babylon was truly spectacular. Nebuchadnezzar could look any direction from his palace and see great architectural achievements. He was the master of everything he could see for as far as his eye could see. What he accomplished still staggers historians and archeologists.

King Nebuchadnezzar turned Babylon into the most magnificent and possibly the largest city on earth. Even two hundred years later Alexander the Great saw its greatness and planned to make it the center of his vast empire.

Nebuchadnezzar built a system of huge walls around the city, an inner pair and an outer pair. The outer most wall was 45 feet tall and twenty five feet thick, two chariots could pass on top of it. It stretched 17 miles. The Euphrates River flowed through the center of the city.

He built 53 temples to various gods and three palaces for himself. The largest was famous for its hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. From this central palace he could look out over all he had accomplished.

His words were true enough, but they exposed a great pride that filled his heart.

"I have built by my mighty power for the glory of my majesty."

Nebuchadnezzar was basking in the glory of his own magnificence. "Look what I have done, look at my power and wisdom and ability. Look at how great I am."

Pride loves self, pride boasts in self, pride promotes self, pride is driven by a desire for glory and praise. It loves self-sufficiency and self-exaltation.

A year of grace has been wasted and lost. What should have been a season of repentance became an occasion for further hardening of his proud heart. The year following the dream showed no signs of change, and in fact, he may have become more proud.

It is always foolish to presume on God's patience or abuse His forbearance. It is utter stupidity to provoke the wrath of God and invite His judgment. This is nothing but contempt toward God and His Word.

Maybe it was just a bad dream, and like all dreams they eventually fade away. His conscience grew silent over time. God's repeated warnings grew more distant.

The Daniel Diet vs. the Nebuchadnezzar Diet.

I have heard of the Daniel Diet, it is pretty popular among Christians these days, but I have never heard of anyone promoting the Nebuchadnezzar Diet. I guess it is an extreme form of vegan.

In my study of our text I have learned about two mental health conditions.

Lycanthropy is a rare psychiatric condition or form of madness that involves delusion of thinking you are a non-human animal and then acting accordingly.

Boanthropy is a subset of lycanthropy in which a person thinks they are a cow or a bull (bovine) and they eat grass.

Just when you think you have heard of everything along comes a new word you never heard before that describes a condition you never heard before. There are reported incidents of these conditions in mental health journals.

In a moment God turned him from being a great king to being a cow. From the roof of his palace he was put out to pasture, from eating at the royal table to eating in a field.

He is driven not only from office, but he is driven from men, out of the city and into the fields with the wild beasts.

He who thought he was superhuman and became subhuman. He became what was in his heart, a beast, an animal. He began to reap what he had sown.

God raises up and God brings down. It is nothing for God to remove a leader.

Oh, how the mighty are fallen. For seven periods of time. Whether weeks, months or years, we are not told, but seven years is the strongest possibility, especially given how much time it would take to grow his hair and nails as long as it says.

Mental disorders are one of the saddest realities of our human experience. Anyone who has dealt with it knows the struggle and frustration and despair. This mental illness was especially severe and tragic. God made the king to lose his mind and sent him into a valley of humiliation. He will not have us proud.

Remember Moses who though he was somebody living in Pharaoh's palace, and then spent 40 years on the back side of the desert herding sheep, learning he was a nobody, before God showed Him what He could do through a nobody.

Pride goeth before the fall. The sin of pride.

Of the seven deadly sins, pride is usually listed first and considered the deadliest.

C.S. Lewis writes, "The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." It is no wonder that God detests pride and opposes the proud (James 4:6, Proverbs 6:16-17). It is pride that leads men to believe we can live without Him.

John Calvin said about Nebuchadnezzar: "When God therefore wishes to lead us to repentance, he is compelled to repeat his blows continually, either because we are not moved when he chastises us with his hand or we seem roused for the time, and then we return again to our former torpor. He is therefore compelled to redouble his blows."

Why is God so set against the proud? Why does God declare war on all who are arrogant? The reason is simple. All that we are and have comes from God, including our very breath and heartbeat; apart from Him we have nothing and can achieve nothing. If we take credit for anything or assume anything as our own doing, we are stealing from God.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

We are all born with proud hearts. We got it from Adam who first displayed pride in putting himself in the place of God and thinking himself wiser than God.

The sin of pride must be broken before we can truly humble ourselves and acknowledge the truth about ourselves and repent and put our faith and trust in someone else besides ourselves. We can't receive grace if we don't think we need it. We won't rely on God if we are self-reliant. We must be emptied of our self before we can be filled with God.

That is the secret to killing pride. We must feel our nothingness. Like Moses, like Nebuchadnezzar, we must be reduced to nothing. We must get the true measure of ourselves compared to God. And there are two ways that happens, the easy way and the hard way. If we

don't bend and submit and become humble under the Word of God then God will do it the hard way in the furnace of affliction and humiliation.

“The five scariest words in the Bible are, ‘...and God gave them over’.”

“That he might know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (17, 25, 32).

Implications and applications.

First, it is easy for all of us to think we aren't like Nebuchadnezzar because we don't have what he had, he haven't reached that pinnacle of wealth and success and power. But pride lies not just in having those things but in desiring those things.

People who brag are not the only ones who are proud. People who think little of themselves and are full of insecurities and fears, still can fall into the desires to be self-sufficient and to be thought well of. Any looking to self or hoping in self is the unbelief of pride.

We are all a bunch of little Nebuchadnezzars. Our hearts are full of pride or false humility. We want our own way, we want what we want, we want our wills to be done, we want to be in control, to steer the course of our own lives, to direct our own play.

We seek to glorify ourselves, to build ourselves up in the eyes of others, tearing others down to raise ourselves up. We want some recognition, some praise.

We are all building our Babylon, each day trying to live and work in our own wisdom and strength for our own glory. We are meant to reflect God's glory not rob Him of His.

“That tree, O king, is you.” That tree is us.

“How often even in our life as those who profess to love and follow Jesus does he have to discipline us similarly? Repeating his warnings, reteaching us lessons, disciplining by his hand until we finally learn and confess, repent and change. Where might God be doing that now? Where am I not fully attuned to what God has been teaching me? Where am I tuning out? Where is God by grace continuing to teach?” (Al Gooderham).

Second, may we follow Daniel's example:

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.”

Who has courage to speak to another person about their sin? Who has the courage to call someone to repentance and hold out the hope of Christ's forgiveness?

Daniel was gentle but frank, compassionate but clear, simple and straightforward. May God give us opportunities to call others to repentance, to turn from their own prideful ways and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

And when rebuked by another, may we have the grace to receive it with humility? Who has the humility to accept godly counsel and to repent when the truth is made known? Do we fear God or man?

It is love to be disciplined by God. The same hands that hurt us are also the hands that heal us and hold us and enfold us.

Hebrews 12:5-6 “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Third, politically this is a reminder that God raises up and God puts down. All human leaders are temporary, just filling the gap until Jesus comes in power and glory to establish His absolute rule once and for and over all. All human leaders serve at the pleasure of God, for the purpose of God and for only as long as God allows.

All kings and all leaders have flaws. Pride is a fatal flaw in any heart and especially in the hearts of politicians. Our two presidential candidates exhibit it in spades.

Let us not question or doubt God’s sovereignty, His rule, His authority, and that He is at work in all that happens.

I Peter 5:5-7 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because he cares for you.