

“NEBUCHADNEZZAR RESTORED.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 4:34-37

Introduction: When we lose our reason.

Last week we left Nebuchadnezzar out in a field mooing and eating grass and chewing his cud. For a long season God deprived him of human sense and reason and reduced him to an animal.

I called his condition Lycanthropy, the delusion of thinking you are an animal. It seems strange and foreign to us, something belonging to the ancient past. But the condition may be more common than we realize.

We live in a culture that is full of the pride of life and pride of self. We have thrown off God and think we are God, that we can do whatever we want, that we are in control, that we can change the rules.

We think we can change the definition of marriage, that we can change our gender at will, that we are free from all moral and sexual restraints, that we can kill babies and call it choice, we let men in women's bathrooms and call it being inclusive and tolerant and progressive, that we can call good evil and evil good. We think we are the lords of the earth and nothing bad will happen.

Another aspect of our cultures madness is its rejection of and rebellion against authority. Our culture is in a free fall in its hatred of authority, the authority of fathers, teachers, pastors and elders, police men.

We have built a great secular Babylon, a world filled with incredible technological wonders, amazing feats, a world filled with every possible pleasure and entertainment. Technology is our new tower of Babel, making us gods, capable of doing anything. We think we are superior to all previous cultures.

It is madness, it is the loss of reason and a great and terrible judgment is coming. God will give us over to animal like passions and behavior as the rule of reason and law is turned over.

The call for Christians is to learn now to follow the example of Daniel while living in exile in this pagan secular world. How to be salt and light? How to pray for grace and mercy, for

truth and righteousness, for justice and holiness, for the opening of blind eyes and hard hearts.

The book of Daniel holds out hope to the exiled Jews and to us today. God is able to humble the proud and He is able to restore sanity. He has done it before in cultures more wicked and proud and violent than ours. God will show Himself to be God, He will show Himself to be in final control. He will one day put an end to the madness, to the insanity of our world's arrogance and godlessness.

When reason is restored.

If it was seven years we are reminded of how deep are the roots of pride in the human heart and how difficult to root out. God's work of sanctification is always a long, hard obedience in the same direction. Sin's cures are the hardest.

On the other hand, it is God's mercy Nebuchadnezzar's humbling only lasted seven seasons. Daniel had said this in his interpretation.

Daniel 4:26 It was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.

Daniel 4:32 Seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

That word *until* is the glimmer of hope. God shows Himself faithful.

Notice the change in Nebuchadnezzar's eyes. When he looked to himself and to what he did, he was afflicted. When he looked to heaven, he was restored. The affliction comes from God and the restoration comes from God.

This is the essence of humility, to take our eyes off of ourselves.

Counterfeit humility can say, "Oh I am worthless, I am nothing" but its eyes are still fix on itself. True humility looks away and focuses on God. I am nothing and God is everything. Apart from Christ I can do nothing, but through Christ I can do all things.

We see God's power in how far down He can bring the mightiest kings and in how far up He can exalt the humble. If someone like Nebuchadnezzar can be humbled and raise up, no one is beyond God's power. It is cause for worship.

Nebuchadnezzar is a life size picture of all sin and the effects and consequences of sin. It wreaks havoc in our lives. When we rob God of the glory due His name, when we give His glory to another, judgment will fall.

But Nebuchadnezzar is also a life size picture of what happens when we come to our senses and repent and turn from our evil ways and turn to God and His ways.

The most sane people on earth are followers of Christ, the most reasonable and rational people are believers in the one true living God. Sane people worship and follow their creator and God. To not believe in and worship your creator is insane, irrational, rebellious, and treasonous.

Do you realize that it is the mercy of God that you have been delivered from the insanity of your sin and restored to your right mind, reason has returned to you?

Along with all the other blessings of life, health, home, family, employment, church, food and drink, God has given us reason, a sound mind, clear sense and understanding. It is cause for worship and thanksgiving.

The king's confession.

Let's look at the king's confession and see if it is a sincere and genuine sign of his conversion. There are at least four elements to Nebuchadnezzar's confession (see Sinclair Ferguson).

1. He confesses the sovereignty of God.

Daniel 4:34-35 for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
35 ... he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

He acknowledges God to be an eternal God and King, his dominion and kingdom are forever.

He acknowledges the Lord is supreme over all the earth, He alone rules and reigns.

No one can bind God's hands no matter how hard or long they fight against God. Nebuchadnezzar is living proof that the greatest king with the biggest ego is no match for God.

Even the strongest demons must submit to God in everything.

2. He confesses the humbleness of humanity.

Daniel 4:35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,

By contrasting comparison, he acknowledges that he, with all humans, is nothing, finite and ever changing. Even the greatest of men, even the mightiest of kings, even the most powerful tyrants are nothing before the almighty God.

He is reduced to nothing and acknowledges God as the true source of all we have, and all things are according to the will of God.

This is always the sign of a godly person who gets it, who knows who God is and knows who they are, who knows they are utterly and desperately dependent on God for everything. They can say apart from God they can do nothing and by God all things.

Humility is a mark of a truly repentant man.

3. He confesses all God's works are right and all His ways are just.

Daniel 4:37 for all his works are right and his ways are just.

Nebuchadnezzar has been dealt with very harshly by God, he has suffered a huge humiliation, he has been laid lower than all people. He could complain mightily, "why me, why this much, what about those others, why for so long? This is unjust, this is unfair."

But instead he says that whatever God has done is righteous and just, true and fair. In fact, he might even be able to say, he deserved worse.

Psalm 51:3-4 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

God is always just, even if it is incomprehensible to us.

4. He confesses God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Daniel 4:37 those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Proverbs 3:34 Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.

I Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

Can we acknowledge that it is hard to be saved, hard to humble ourselves, hard to die to our sin? In fact, Jesus says it is impossible, with man it is impossible.

Regeneration comes only by the Spirit of God, only as God enables us to look to heaven and repent and be restored.

Was Nebuchadnezzar saved?

Daniel preached in life and words to the king for some 40 years. He was humbled by God in the most extreme way for seven years. Was he saved in the end?

Some commentators, including most notably John Calvin, don't believe the king was truly converted and eternally saved. But many others say yes and I am inclined to lean with them.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Nebuchadnezzar gives evidence of not being like Pharaoh who remained hard-hearted until the end. We see in Nebuchadnezzar the fruit of repentance, first in a good confession and then in giving worship and glory to God.

Further he seems to know the Psalms and quotes Scripture.

Another indicator of significant transformation is that those he once ruled with an iron fist and threatened with death are now coming to him, seeking him out. There is open fellowship.

In the final analysis we cannot know a man's heart, but his seems sincere and genuine.

This chapter begins and ends like a personal letter, a story of conversion, of a profound spiritual experience. It appears that his eyes are truly opened and he has a completely new outlook.

This is the story of a man who had everything and had achieved the ultimate successes. He had riches beyond calculation, he had conquered and subdued and enslaved all his enemies, he had all wealth and power and authority. He lived in luxury and ease with a palace full of wives.

He had won all his battles and achieved every success. But he lacked one thing. Peace with God. He was like Solomon in Ecclesiastes, having it all and realizing he had nothing, it was all vanity, all chasing the wind.

He writes now like one who has made the best discovery in the world, one that trumps everything else. He was found something better to exalt in than himself, and something better to live for than himself.

And then Daniel moves on to the next king, a king who faces the same ultimate questions and issues, but fails to humble himself.

Implications and Application.

This message is *first and foremost a message of hope* for Israel, for all the Jewish exiles enslaved under a proud and pagan king. They too have been humbled under the hand of the mighty God. Just as they have been humbled and brought down for their sin and rebellion, so there is hope that if they repent God will restore them as well. They too will be restored. It is a message of mercy and hope.

This story could be told by Jewish parents to their children, that they could put their hope in the promises of God.

That same message of hope belongs to all God's people living in their Babylon. I believe the hand of God's judgment is on our nation. This message is especially important for us to remember, that when things get far worse, God will restore in His time.

Second, this is a message of humility, which is the essence of repentance and trust. Take your eyes off yourself and your accomplishments. Take your eyes off your fears and faults and failures. Take your eyes off others, stop comparing yourself to others. Turn your eyes away from envy, coveting, wishing for what you don't have. Turn your eyes away from looking down on others, thinking yourself better.

Take your eyes off this earth and this life and look up to Christ, the humble and exalted King. Look to the extraordinary riches of His love and mercy and grace, of what He has done for you that you could not do for yourself.

Lift your eyes to heaven, to the God who humbles the proud and exalts the humble. God's hand is over us not to crush and destroy us, but to discipline us and bring us to holiness and righteousness.

Third, the message of chapter four is the sovereignty and supremacy of the Most High God.

Regarding the coming election, God will choose the next President of the United States. That means that the winner should not boast like Nebuchadnezzar and say, "By my power and my wisdom I have won this presidency."

God rules the kingdoms of men and gives it to whom he will.

Take heart and be of good courage, the sovereignty of God is over this election. God reigns!