

Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION FIVE: FAITHFUL HUMILITY

DANIEL 4:1-37

10.6.24

MAIN POINT

God is constantly seeking to humble our hearts and draw us to look up at Him, instead of out at our own accomplishments.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was a humbling experience you have had in your life, whether profound and impacting or just funny?

How did this experience shape you for the future?

Has that experience caused you to warn others when they are in a similar situation?

In our text today, God humbled the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel pleaded for Nebuchadnezzar to repent and thankfully, he realized the weakness he possessed before an almighty God and did so. This is the most humbling thing that we can do. We must continually recognize who we are before our almighty God. In the face of pride, the call of God is to repent and humble ourselves. We do this by looking up instead of out.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 4:1-27.

How do you see the king's pride at work even before the dream is described?

What led to King Nebuchadnezzar's pride, and how does this relate to our own lives today?

Why was the king so afraid of the vision he saw? What did Nebuchadnezzar see?

Why might Daniel have been worried about interpreting the dream? What would the dream mean for Nebuchadnezzar?

How does Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar highlight the importance of heeding wise counsel? In what ways does God

demonstrate His mercy towards Nebuchadnezzar before his downfall?

Based on what Nebuchadnezzar experienced (which he would go on to describe), he sent a word of warning to the people of Babylon and beyond. Perhaps this was an open letter of sorts, warning the people to heed the God of Israel who had demonstrated great signs and wonders.

READ DANIEL 4:28-33.

A whole year went by before the vision came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar knew what the dream meant. He knew what was coming if he didn't change his ways. He had been warned clearly. Yet he still looked at his kingdom and took credit for all of the prosperity. He even admitted he was doing it all for his own glory!

How was Nebuchadnezzar's pride confirmed in this passage?

What can we learn from the events in this passage? What should we take away about heeding God's instruction and warning?

It's easy to pass judgment on Nebuchadnezzar for succumbing to his pride when Daniel warned him about that very thing a year earlier. But how do we see that same tendency in our own lives today? And what can we do to help guard against short-term spiritual memory lapse?

So he was driven into the wilderness, just as Daniel had warned him. He ate grass, his hair and nails grew long, and he lived as an animal would. We don't know how long the seven periods of time were precisely, only that it was the right amount of time for him to be humbled.

READ DANIEL 4:34-37.

Did this mean Nebuchadnezzar was truly changed, that he had truly surrendered to Israel's God?

Why is it important that we seek lasting change through repentance and not only momentary change?

How can we apply the principle of recognizing our dependence on God in our daily lives?

At the end of that period of time, God's judgment was complete. Having clarity of thought once again, King Nebuchadnezzar turned to the Most High God in praise. He recognized that God alone lives forever. He alone sets up and brings down kingdoms. He establishes kings and humbles them alike.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where does pride creep into your life and heart the most? What are the unsuspecting ways the pride comes to the surface?

How has the Lord humbled you in these areas? How have those experiences deepened your faith and fueled your worship?

Where are you currently taking pride in your own kingdom? Your work? Your family? Your social standing? What needs to change?

PRAYER

Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal the points of pride within you. Confess and repent before the Lord. Ask Him to reorient your heart toward Him instead of focusing on what you can accomplish on your own.

COMMENTARY

DANIEL 4:1-37

4:1-3. These verses come at the end of chap. 3 in Aramaic rather than at the beginning of chap. 4. As an introduction to chap. 4, the miracles and wonders include the dream in chap. 4 and its aftermath.

4:4-36. The text does not indicate when King Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, nor does it matter for the interpretation of the passage, but it was likely some ten years before the end of his forty-three-year reign. Then God in his grace allowed him one year to repent followed by seven years of madness. Once he came to his senses, Nebuchadnezzar lived another two or three years before dying in 562 BC. No doubt, the king did indeed write the letter. But it was Daniel, as author of the book, who most likely wrote the section that speaks of the king in the third person (vv. 28-33) and records his time of mental illness. The chapter is structured in three sections: (1) a prologue in which the king praises the true God (vv. 1-3); (2) a narrative body (vv. 4-34a) that recounts the king's dream, Daniel's interpretation, the king's illness and repentance; and (3) a concluding epilogue in which the king declares the sovereignty of the true God (vv. 34b-37). The story covers a period of eight years, beginning with the dream, the year afterwards, and then the king's seven-year period of mental illness.

4:7. Nebuchadnezzar called the four classes of wise men to interpret his dream. Unlike the dream of Dn 2, the king told them the dream. But similarly, they could not make its interpretation known to him.

4:8. The king recognized that a spirit of the holy gods was in Daniel. The CSB translation reflects the fact that Nebuchadnezzar persisted in believing in a plurality of gods. But since he had recently been chastened (3:24-30) and knew that God alone could reveal what was hidden (2:47), it is possibly correct to translate the phrase alternatively as a

spirit of the Holy God is in him. Beginning in this verse and throughout the chapter, Daniel is most frequently called by his Babylonian name Belteshazzar, seemingly because this section is written from the perspective of the Babylonian king, not a Hebrew exile.

4:10-12. The king's dream was of a tree whose top reached to the sky. A similar expression was used in Gn 11:4 for the tower of the city of Babylon, the top of which was to reach the sky. The tree provided food and shelter for all the creatures of the earth.

4:13. The watcher, a holy one, was an angel.

4:14-17. The fact that the stump with its roots would remain in the ground indicated the continuation of life. The band of iron and bronze pointed to the protection of the stump. The tree plainly represents a man (the king) because the angel declared that his mind would be changed from that of a human to an animal for seven periods of time or for seven years.

4:19. As a loyal servant of the king, Daniel was alarmed about the dreadful discipline that would befall the king.

4:22-25. The tree represented King Nebuchadnezzar, who would be struck with a mental illness that would cause him to live outdoors with the wild animals (or animals of the field) for seven years until he repented of his pride and acknowledged that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms.

4:26. This is the only place in the OT where Heaven is used as a euphemism for God.

4:27. Daniel advised the king to repent (doing what is right) with the hope that this might prevent God's discipline.

4:29-30. Nebuchadnezzar had no less than three palaces in the city of Babylon. He was walking on the roof of one of them when he was overcome with the glory of the city and was consumed with pride. In his exclamation Is this not Babylon the Great that I (lit I, myself) have built . . . by my vast power and for my majestic glory?, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed himself the source of majesty. He failed to give God the credit and glory as the ultimate giver of all good gifts. Many years later, the apostle Paul scolded the Corinthians for their pride by asking, What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it? (1Co 4:7).

4:31. Having delayed the execution of his sentence against Nebuchadnezzar for a year (v. 28), God disciplined him the instant he became fully consumed with his pride, even while the words were still in the king's mouth.

4:33. Nebuchadnezzar may have suffered from boanthropy, a rare mental illness in which people believe they are actually cattle. One modern case of boanthropy resulted in the patient growing long matted hair and thickened fingernails, much like Nebuchadnezzar, whose hair grew like eagles feathers and his nails like bird claws. Critics contend that secular history has no record of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness.

However, it is questionable as to whether an ancient Near Eastern despot would mention his bout with insanity in official court records which were typically devoted to highlighting his accomplishments. Silence about an embarrassing episode is understandable. Moreover, the church historian Eusebius cited Abydenus, a third-century BC Greek historian who referred to a time when Nebuchadnezzar was possessed by a god. Also, the third-century BC historian Berosus possibly referred to these events when he spoke of an illness that befell Nebuchadnezzar just before his death.

4:34. Boanthropy does not render its victims entirely unable to reason or understand what has happened to them, so it was possible for the king to realize that his own pride had caused his insanity. Realizing the cause of his state, Nebuchadnezzar repented of his pride and acknowledged the Most High God. His sanity returned to him instantly, a signal that God had lifted his sentence.

4:34-36. As an epilogue to the narrative, Nebuchadnezzar glorified God, using words that describe his realization that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion and also aptly summarize the theme of the book of Daniel.

4:37. The last sentence of the chapter summarizes the message of the story that God is able to humble those who walk in pride. Some disbelieve that the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar actually came to a saving knowledge of the true God, but possibly he did.