

Some People Have to Learn the Hard Way

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our attention to God's Word, Daniel chapter 4. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar sets up a golden image, a golden statue, and then demands that everyone bow and worship it.

And he is, as you probably expect from Nebuchadnezzar by this point, furious when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow. And in his raging anger, Nebuchadnezzar has these three faithful men thrown into the burning, fiery furnace that has been turned up to eleven.

Heated seven times hotter than usual. And when they come out unharmed, how does he respond to this? He threatens to torture anyone who speaks anything against the God they serve.

This guy, Nebuchadnezzar, is proud, he is angry, and he is brutal. And so I hope that the very first words of Daniel 4 catch our attention.

Daniel 4, verse 1. King Nebuchadnezzar, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you.

[1 : 32] It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. How great are his signs!

How mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. Does that sound like a psalm, that last verse?

We said this together as part of our call to worship today. Did anybody have Nebuchadnezzar writes a psalm on their bingo card?

This is not expected! What is going on here? What has happened to King Nebuchadnezzar? The last time we saw him, he's threatening to torture anybody who speaks anything against these other people's gods.

A God who isn't his God yet. And now this same King Nebuchadnezzar is writing a verse that certainly sounds like a psalm.

[2 : 38] I know that some here are readers, and some of us are not readers, and that's okay. But if you're a reader, then I suspect that, and probably if you're a writer as well, now that I think about this for a moment, you probably understand the difference between first person and third person.

Any readers or writers understand first person? Yeah? Yes, and you would use lots of the I, right? You'd use I a lot. And what about if you're writing in the third person? That's right. Very good. That's third person. How have we received the first three chapters of Daniel so far?

What do you think? How have they come to us? First person or third person? Evelyn? Evelyn?

Third person. That's right.

Daniel is writing, but he is writing as a narrator of this story. And so when he talks about himself, he refers to himself as Daniel. He's not writing in the first person.

[3 : 59] But I wonder if you notice that what switches here in chapter 4, you'll notice this right away in verse number 4. Daniel is not writing anymore.

Somebody else is writing. Do you know who it is? We're going to find out. Verse 4. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.

King Nebuchadnezzar is writing scripture. This should catch our attention. I was at peace and prospering, at ease and prospering in my palace.

Verse 5. I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed, the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.

And I want to remind you of something that we talked about a few weeks back when we were in the very first chapter of Daniel and we saw this diet that Daniel and his three friends put themselves on so that they did not have to eat the king's fatty food and drink his wine.

[5 : 08] Why? Because it had been sacrificed first to idols as part of their idolatrous worship. And what we notice there is these two words. Not in the text, but I gave you these two words.

Descriptive and prescriptive. Do you remember that? And we talked about how what's going on here in Daniel, much of it is descriptive content. Daniel is writing a record, telling us a story like a narrator, like Sophia said.

That does not mean when we read Daniel chapter 1 that we all need to go on the Daniel diet and just only eat vegetables. It's not prescriptive for us in that way.

And something similar happens here in chapter 4 that I just want to call our attention to very briefly. The book of Daniel frequently describes God communicating through dreams.

But we need to keep in mind that this is primarily descriptive for us. Just because we see God communicating through dreams in the book of Daniel does not necessarily mean that God always communicates through your dreams.

[6 : 21] That would be what? Prescriptive, right? I don't know about you. I have had some wacky dreams. I don't think God is trying to communicate to me anything in those dreams.

I just think they're wacky. God is in control of your mind even when you are sleeping. But not every dream contains a message from God.

And I think we should be mindful also that Ezekiel 13 helps us understand that some dreams are the products of our own imaginations. And that's okay.

It's okay to have good imaginations. Whenever we talk about dreams, I hope that we can be people who are committed to humility that lets us learn and wisdom that lets us discern and grace that lets us disagree.

Does that seem agreeable? Okay, let's move on. Daniel's dream, sorry, Nebuchadnezzar's dream makes him scared to death. Scared to death.

[7 : 25] And since Daniel has had previous experience with Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, we would expect that Nebuchadnezzar will summon Daniel. But Nebuchadnezzar does not summon Daniel.

Hmm. Why? Well, because even though Nebuchadnezzar has acknowledged some true things about God in chapters 1 through 3, he is still an unbeliever.

He is still a pagan idolater. He is still a practical atheist. And even though he has benefited from the wisdom of Daniel and his three friends, he goes back and seeks counsel from his magicians and his astrologers, those he knows cannot give him the wisdom that he is seeking.

This is like asking your two-year-old to mow the lawn. They cannot give him the wisdom that he wants. And yet he goes back to them anyway.

Verse 6. So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

[8 : 38] Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation.

At last, Daniel came in before me, he who was named Belteshazzar, after the name of my God, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods.

And I told him the dream, saying, Now, twice in this text, Nebuchadnezzar refers to Daniel by his Babylonian name, and he calls him the chief of the magicians.

I kept wanting to say musicians, even when I was preparing this, Josie. Chief of the magicians.

Now, maybe you have never thought about this. I'm just tossing this out there.

If you were to come up to me, you don't have to do this. In fact, probably shouldn't do this. But if you were to come up to me and say, Pastor Jeremy, you are the greatest of magicians.

[9 : 55] This is not a compliment. Okay? I don't think he's complimenting Daniel here. I think he may be poking at some things here. He is not a Christian.

He's not a follower of the one true God. So he refers to Daniel as his Babylonian name, and then he flatters him. This is very typical behavior that we have seen for Nebuchadnezzar.

Okay, verse 10. The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these. I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great.

The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Children, does this sound familiar? Did you learn about a tree this morning from Ms. Jody?

Good. Its leaves, verse 12, were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

[11 : 08] So far, so good, right? Giant, beautiful tree. It's fruitful. It supplies food for everything. Man and beast, this is really good. So far, so good.

Not a scary dream. Not a nightmare. Verse 13. I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.

He proclaimed aloud and said, Thus, uh-oh, chop down the tree, and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves, and scatter its fruit.

Let the beasts flee from under it, and the birds from its branches. Believe the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field.

This dream has taken a very dark turn, hasn't it? This heavenly creature, this watcher, as Nebuchadnezzar understands it, an angelic being, declares that the tree must be chopped down, and not just chopped down, but then cut off all of the branches, and then strip off all of the leaves, and throw away all of its fruit.

[12 : 34] This tree is totally destroyed, totally devastated, nothing left. And now we begin to understand why this dream scares Nebuchadnezzar to death.

Notice what happens in the end of verse 18. This angel changes pronouns, and the angel suddenly begins to interpret the dream.

This is the end of verse 15. Notice this change in pronouns. What have we been talking about so far? A tree, right? Are you with me, children? A tree. Now look what happens in verse 15, right in the middle.

Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him.

[13 : 43] 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.

The angel talks about a tree. He sees a tree. The angel talks about a tree. But then the angel changes the pronouns.

And instead of it, which we would expect when the angel was talking about a tree, now the angel is using him. And this makes Nebuchadnezzar understandably concerned.

Now some of us, if we were to have this dream, would not perhaps consider ourselves this tree.

And that would be okay. But Nebuchadnezzar can't not see himself as the greatest of all, right?

He can't not see himself that way. And so he is already understanding, even without Daniel showing up and explaining the dream, he is already understanding, this is a message for me.

[14 : 55] And I don't like it that this tree has been chopped down and totally devastated and destroyed and all of its fruit were thrown away. I liked it better when the tree was mighty and strong and beautiful and providing for all of the people and all of the beasts.

Daniel discerns the dream. And then our guy Daniel is momentarily frozen in fear and dread because of the interpretation.

And in this surprising role reversal, Nebuchadnezzar tries to encourage Daniel. Look down in your Bible. Verse number 18.

This dream. I, Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the dream because 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 gods is in you.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while. And his thoughts alarmed him. And the king answered and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.

[16 : 08] Belteshazzar answered and said, my lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies. Daniel is right to be troubled, isn't he?

He believes God's revelation and he genuinely cares about King Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual state before God. Verse 20.

The tree you saw which grew and became strong so that its top reached to heaven and it was visible to the end of the whole earth whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant and in which was food for all under which beasts found, beasts of the field found shade and whose branches the birds of the heavens lived.

It is you, O King, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to the heaven and your dominion to the ends of the earth and because the king saw a watcher, a holy one coming down from heaven and saying, chop down the tree and destroy it but leave the stump of its roots in the earth bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field and let him be wet with the dew of heaven and let his portion be with the beasts of the field till seven periods of time pass over him.

This is the interpretation, O King. It is a decree, notice this, Daniel corrects Nebuchadnezzar's theology. It is a decree not of the watchers.

[17 : 35] It is a decree of the Most High which has come upon my Lord, the King, 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 until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

This is a lot for Nebuchadnezzar to take in, isn't it? But Daniel is more than a wise man. He is much more than a politician or a statesman in the king's court.

Daniel is also a missionary, an evangelist. And so he explains to King Nebuchadnezzar exactly how he ought to respond to the dream. Verse 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.

[18 : 56] prosperity. Daniel tells him exactly how to respond. Repent. Repent. A day after this tree dream, I wonder what King Nebuchadnezzar was thinking.

Maybe a week after the dream, he's just thinking, you know, maybe that really was just a weird, wacky dream and it doesn't really mean anything. Another week goes by and then perhaps a month passes and then two months and three months and with each passing day, I suspect that the dream grew less vivid and Nebuchadnezzar's mind grows more numb, more numb to Daniel's call to repentance.

His heart gets harder and harder like a piece of bread that is left out on the plate after dinner. Perhaps when he first hears the dream, his conscience was going off like a smoke alarm in his head, so loud, so blaring, so annoying, he has to respond to it.

But now a year has gone by and I wonder if perhaps his conscience is more like a little cricket that he can just barely hear anymore, doesn't even notice it.

Daniel writes this next portion of chapter 4 because Nebuchadnezzar can't write it. Verse 28, all this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar at the end of 12 months, 12 months, how patient is our God, how merciful is our God.

[20 : 55] At the end of 12 months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon and the king answered and said, is not this the great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty.

While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken.

The kingdom has departed from you and you shall be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox and 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.

Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew long as long as eagle's feathers and his nails were like bird's claws.

I want to make sure that we are clear about this, that Nebuchadnezzar did not turn into an ox. this is not like the fairy godmother turning mice into footmen for Cinderella's coach or like Merida's mother turning into a bear in the movie Brave or like the emperor Kuzco turning into a llama.

[22 : 51] Nebuchadnezzar is still a human but he believes that he is an animal. Why? Because he has been given the mind of an animal.

Look back at verse number 16. This is when Daniel's retelling the dream. The watcher, this angelic creature is speaking and this creature says, let his mind be changed from a man's and let a beast's mind be given to him.

What does a cat say? Very good.

What does a dog say? Wolf. Very good. How about a monkey? What do you think? Did somebody, there's, I heard a monkey, I heard someone back there with a monkey.

Okay, what does a lamb say? Or a sheep? Yeah, very good. We all know that one. How about a cow? Moo, right? What about a lion?

[23 : 59] Roar, right? Good. Very good. Now, think about this. What are a few of the big differences? Let's just take a cow and a person.

What are some big differences between a cow and a person? Josie, we do not eat grass. Not, not usually. That's good.

We might eat lettuce, but we do not get on all fours and eat grass. What else? Alice? We don't have hooves or horns. Yep. We eat cows.

They do not eat us. Owen? We say words and cows can just moo in their own language, right? Alice mentioned nails and claws and hooves.

That makes me think we trim our nails, right? We take showers and baths and things like that to keep ourselves clean. We don't generally do that with cows, especially not those cows that are just out in the field that are going to turn into burgers, right?

[25 : 07] now, what will happen if you try to talk and the only thing that comes out of your mouth is mooing?

That would be strange and very puzzling and disturbing, right? What if you start eating grass rather than pizza and burgers and chicken nuggets?

We would be concerned about you, wouldn't we? What if you sleep out in some pasture instead of putting your pajamas on and going to bed like a normal person would?

If you start behaving like an animal, people who love you will be concerned about you, and rightly so. They should be concerned about you.

It would be totally bizarro to start acting like a cow. We would think that was strange. We might even say something is wrong with you.

[26 : 17] We might even say you have lost your mind. You're not well. Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and behaves just like an animal.

He lives outside. He doesn't take showers or baths. He doesn't cut his hair or his beard or his fingernails. He eats grass like the cows and he sleeps out under the stars.

Because of his pride and because he refuses to care for the oppressed, God judges Nebuchadnezzar. How? By giving him the mind of a beast.

God wants us to see something here. God wants us to see that sin makes us sub-human. Sin makes us less than human.

It reduces us to the level of an animal. Sin makes us more like the serpent in the garden than like one who is created in the image of the Most High God.

[27 : 29] And so for seven periods of time, Nebuchadnezzar behaves like a beast. Why? Because his heart is already beastly.

All sin, all sin is insanity. nothing is more absurd than sin.

Sin breaks the law given by the sovereign ruler of the universe. Sin disgraces the design of the creator. Sin stomps on the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Sin quenches the power of the Holy Spirit, like when you pinch off a hose and the water can't flow through anymore. Sin exchanges the glory of God for the filth of the flesh.

Sin follows the devil in his rebellion against God. Sin walks in darkness rather than in light. Sin is treason against the king of kings and adultery against the lover of your soul.

[28 : 48] Sin is the ultimate disconnection from reality. All sin is insanity. Jesus tells a story about a man who loses his mind in Luke chapter 15.

First, this man dishonors his father by demanding that his father give him his portion of the inheritance even before his father has died.

What a shameful thing to do. He leaves home. He wastes all of his money. Now there's a famine. He has no money. He has no friends and he can't get a job.

And finally in his desperation, he takes the only job he can get. The very last job any self respecting Jew would ever take.

He's feeding pigs. who knows what a pig says. Very good. He is feeding pigs. He is so hungry out in this pig pen that he wants to eat what the pigs are eating.

[30 : 07] He has become beastly. The beastliness inside of his heart is now coming out in his behavior.

He's hanging out with the pigs and he wants to eat the pigs food. He has lost his mind. Sin does that. Luke 15 verse 16 and he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything.

And then notice verse 17. But when he came to himself he has a moment of clarity. He suddenly finds himself back in his right mind and he thinks about his father and he thinks about the father's home and he commits to going back to the father and repents.

[31 : 26] In Luke 8, Jesus meets another man. this man has also lost his mind.

He's not wearing any clothes. He doesn't live in a house. He lives in a cemetery and his habit is to pick up rocks and smash the rocks against his own body.

People try to chain him up like you would chain up a wild beast and yet he breaks the chains. Who acts like this? Who would ever act like this? Who chooses to live where we bury dead people? Only somebody who has lost their mind. Jesus discerns that this man's problem is spiritual and Jesus throws out a whole crowd of demons from this poor man.

And then we read this in Luke chapter 8 and verse 35. Then the people went out to see what had happened and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind and they were afraid.

[32 : 54] look how Paul describes sin in Romans chapter 1.

Romans chapter 1 I'm going to pick this up starting at verse number 21. Romans 1 verse 21. Halfway through the verse.

verse 21. They became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools. Verse 28. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to what?

To a debased mind. they've lost their minds to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.

[33 : 55] They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, kids, pay attention, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

Paul also describes those who engage in sin as those who have been given over to a broken, futile, empty mind.

You have lost your mind. lost your mind. There is no hope for those who are locked in the straitjacket of sin.

There is no hope. There is no hope in your best efforts to make things right. There is no hope in better behaviors or new habits. There is no hope in cleaner living or cold turkey addiction breaking.

[35 : 09] There is no hope for you in self-help or pulling yourself up by the self-righteous bootstraps. If you want to be set free from sin's asylum, then you must look to God.

And you will not look to God until God renews your mind. verse 34, Daniel, chapter 4, 34.

At the end of the days, I, first person again, who's writing? Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me.

Reason returned. Like the starving son in the pig pen. Like the crazy man sitting at Jesus' feet. God doesn't abandon Nebuchadnezzar to the insanity of sin. Nebuchadnezzar receives new life. And the result of this new life is transformed behavior.

[36 : 38] Worship. Verse 34, I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever. For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and 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?

At the same time, my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me, my counselors and my lord sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, for all his works are right, and his ways are just, and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

I don't even think it was hard for Nebuchadnezzar to write these words, king of heaven. He is a changed man. Some question whether Nebuchadnezzar is truly converted, but I can't help but see Daniel chapter four as a story of grace.

[38 : 09] This is his testimony of how God saved him and rescued him from the insanity of sin, from the beastliness of his own sin.

What does he do? He testifies to God's sovereignty, he admits that there's a kingdom that will last forever, that is not his, that there's a king who is in heaven and it's not him.

He affirms God's power and justice, and he states so plainly what Peter picks up in his first epistle to the exiles, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, my dear, my dear friend, what are you waiting for? Have you lost your mind?

I say that lovingly to you. Have you lost your mind? Not to hear the message of the gospel, of hope that is only in Jesus, and come and receive this hope.

[39 : 16] hope. There is no magic that will turn you from your beastly behavior into the person that God means for you to be.

Jesus is your only hope, and he is the savior that you need. So turn from your sin. Call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Repent humbly and receive God's grace.

Ask Jesus to save you, and God will forgive you. The Holy Spirit will give you new life, and for the first time in forever, you will be in your right mind.

Followers of Jesus, Daniel 4 invites us to remember that God resists the proud. God will bring a day of reckoning.

So take heart, child of God, and don't stop believing that Jesus will make all things right. God resists the proud. Daniel 4 also invites us to remember that God gives grace to the humble.

[40 : 55] God is more long-suffering than you are patient. If God can humble and save arrogant, despotic, bloodthirsty, narcissistic kings like Nebuchadnezzar, he can save anyone.

So keep sharing the gospel. Keep serving your neighbors. Keep loving your enemies. Keep telling your children the good news of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, some of those you minister to will come to their senses. They will receive new life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

God will grant them repentance and faith. They will repent and believe the gospel that you are sharing, and they will join us and King Nebuchadnezzar in worshiping Jesus in his kingdom that will last forever.

forever. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful, and we are humbled as we see this story of Nebuchadnezzar.

[42 : 07] We can all think back across our lives and realize our sinfulness. It's not hard for us to identify our sinfulness.

Would you please give us fresh eyes to see our sinfulness as the insanity that it is? Would you please help us as we find ourselves tempted by the devil to recognize that sin as mindless, brokenness, temporary insanity, beastliness?

Help us to see the filthiness of sin rightly so that we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, run from it. Oh, good Father, give us courage as we share the gospel.

Give us courage to go to our friends and our neighbors. Give us sympathy for them. Help us to see them as someone who is locked in the insane asylum of sin, straightjacketed and without hope.

Give us tender hearts to see our friends and our neighbors and members of our family. Help us as we interact with coworkers and people who work for us and the people that we work for.

[43 : 34] Give us eyes like Jesus had to see those so desperately in need of grace and give us humility as we approach them so that we point to Jesus and not to ourselves.

Father, thank you for your word. We also ask that you would draw this morning by the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the gospel those who have not yet responded in faith to Jesus.

blessed Holy Spirit, please grant life. Grant them life.

Help them to see their sin. Help them to see the beauty of Jesus. Grant them repentance and faith so that they repent and believe this gospel.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.