

## **Daniel: One in Whom Dwells the Spirit of God**

### **Daniel 4:19-37**

#### **Introduction**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in the midst of hardships and when faced with difficulties, what are we to do? In truth, we are even now being afflicted and are continuing to face the adversities of the ongoing corona virus pandemic. Pastor Tim Keller, who experienced the catastrophe of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, encouraged us in a video with these four points when the corona virus first began to rage around the world.

When you board an airplane, the flight attendant will remind you that in the case of danger, you must put on your oxygen mask first. You can't help others spiritually and mentally if you don't put your own oxygen mask on first. The four principles needed to avoid burnout are: 1) Extraordinary Prayer, 2) Resilience without Stoicism, 3) Radical Refocusing, and 4) Gospel Resolve.

After more than a year and a half of dealing with the effects of this pandemic, I feel like I'm not doing so well. I'm experiencing a lack of motivation and the inability to concentrate. Today, we will take a look at Daniel, a prophet who walked with God in the midst of hardship. He faced more persecution and adversity than we will ever experience. Let's learn together from Daniel.

#### **Daniel 4:19-37**

<sup>19</sup> Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"

<sup>20</sup> 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,

<sup>21</sup> whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived—

<sup>22</sup> it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.

<sup>23</sup> 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,'

<sup>24</sup> this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> And as 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>29</sup> At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,

<sup>30</sup> 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?"

<sup>31</sup> 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,

<sup>32</sup> 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."

<sup>33</sup> 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 as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and 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;

<sup>35</sup> 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?"

<sup>36</sup> 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 lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

<sup>37</sup> 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.

As we look at the story of the prophet Daniel, let's focus first on the greatness of God's sovereignty. God is in control, even over our enemies and tormentors. Let's open our eyes of faith, which are often short-sighted. Secondly, it is important to humble ourselves in order to trust and obey God not only in times of hardship but also in times of success. Thirdly, I would like to clarify what God's salvation is. If we are unclear about salvation in times of suffering, we will despair. Let's grasp the message of salvation that the Bible tells us. 1) God's sovereignty, 2) faith and obedience, and 3) salvation.

## **The Prophet Daniel**

First, let me briefly introduce the prophet Daniel. He was from a noble Jewish family of high rank. As a young man, he was taken into captivity in Babylon with King Jehoiakim in 605 BC. As part of his policy of governing his vast empire, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar selected the best young men from among the nobility and royalty of various ethnic groups. He wanted them to be educated in the Babylonian way and serve in the royal court. Daniel was one of these young men.

At that time, his name was changed to Beltshazzar, in Babylonian style. This may be similar to the "creation and renaming" of the Japanese invaders of Korea during the Pacific War, who gave the people Japanese-style education and changed their names. In addition to Daniel, there were three others who were given Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

According to the book of Daniel, these young men were truly faithful. They did not eat unclean meat as specified by the Jewish law. Even when they were commanded to worship idols, such as the golden statues built by the king or commanded to worship the king himself, they did not do so because of their faith in the one true God. They refused to give up their faith even though they were thrown into the burning fire and into the pit of lions.

Daniel, in particular, was given the special ability to reveal dreams and speak God's prophecies. This revealed God's sovereignty and plan over the great empires of Babylon and Persia. He also revealed the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God in strange visions (apocalyptic literature). The first half of the book of Daniel (chapters 1-6) is a prophecy of God's intervention in the history of the empire, and the second half (chapters 7-12) is a prophecy of God's plan for the future.

## 1. God's Sovereignty

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was prosperous and content in body and soul, when he had a dream that made him anxious and afraid. In the Bible, dreams are often a revelation from God, showing His will.

*4:4, 5. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the vision of my head alarmed me.*

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a huge tree. The tree became a magnificent tree that "grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven and it was visible to the end of the whole earth" (4:20). It represented the rule and prosperity of the king over the Babylonian Empire. But a holy man came down from heaven and commanded that the tree be cut down.

*4:23. 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,'*

The king who had the dream was not the only one who was afraid and frightened. When Daniel heard the story of the dream, he was "dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him." (4:19). This is because the king, who had boasted of his overwhelming power and prosperity, realized that he would have to submit to the judgment of a holy God.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful man who destroyed Assyria and built the greatest empire of his time. His power was greater than that of Egypt. He also destroyed the Kingdom of Judah and brought down Jerusalem. It is no exaggeration to say that he ruled most of the world at that time with power and prosperity at his disposal.

But, the ruler who was the most powerful in the world, was terrified by a single dream and spent a sleepless night filled with anxiety. In fact, the same thing is previously recorded in Daniel chapter 2.

*2:1—3. In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him . . . And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream."*

No matter how much power you gain and how many things you control, if you are not protected by God, the ultimate ruler of the whole world, you will be tormented by anxiety and fear at the slightest challenge or petty battle. Ironically, it is because people have gained power that they are exposed to envy and attacks from those around them. Their rivals are out to get them for the next position of power. That's why there's a pursuit for more power and success. Power, success, and control are needed to counteract fear and insecurity. It's a vicious cycle.

God reveals to Nebuchadnezzar that He is the ultimate ruler. God shows him little dreams, scares him, makes him afraid, sends Daniel, and reveals to him that God alone is sovereign over all. God clearly shows Nebuchadnezzar that he should humble himself and trust the sovereign God. All things—your success, your power, the things that bother you, your suffering—are under God's sovereignty. They are arranged in such a way so that you will more deeply trust God.

## **2. Faith and Obedience**

Let's look at the meaning of the dream as revealed by Daniel. What was God saying through this dream?

*4:24–27. This is the interpretation, O king: 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, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. And as 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. 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."*

God is asking the greatest ruler of all time, King Nebuchadnezzar, to humble himself and be obedient to God. If you look at Daniel 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, it appears that he has humbled himself before God and has come to have true faith. Amazingly, he repented of making a golden image of himself and commanding the whole nation to worship it. It seems that he came to believe in God.

This is because Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were taken captive from Judah, did not worship idols even though this meant they were thrown into the burning fire. They were thrown into the fiery furnace, but God delivered them. King Nebuchadnezzar witnessed this and was transformed into a humble man.

However, he was still a tyrant. He was greedy with his own prosperity and tormented the poor. Instead of doing the right thing to protect his position, power and prosperity, he continued to work injustice by oppressing and destroying certain people and ethnic groups.

To him, the tree will be cut down, but its stump will be left. ". . . your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules." (4:26), which means there is a lesson for King Nebuchadnezzar to learn.

First, he must know that all the power, control, and prosperity he has acquired is a blessing from God. He likely thought that he should receive the credit for his own power, wisdom, skill and effort. "I achieved this, so I can do with it as I please."

Malcolm Gladwell in his book "Outliers: The Story of Success," says something interesting. He reveals that success and prosperity do not depend on a person's talent, but mostly on their environment. Most of the professional ice hockey players in Canada are born between January and April. This means that the best players are selected around the age of 10, when full-fledged elite training begins. They are the early-born, slightly physically stronger kids who, as a result, are just a little bit better at hockey.

The talents we are born with and the environment we are placed in are things that are provided or given to us. Most of them have been given to us as a blessing from God.

*4:17. ". . . 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."*

In other words, we too must acknowledge that what we have is by the grace of God and not by our own works or deeds. We need to be grateful and humble enough to accept that the talents, status, power, prosperity, success, and achievements that we now think are ours were prepared, given, and entrusted to us by God. Often, suffering, difficulties, and things we would rather avoid, have also been provided for us by God. Isn't this the principle of the gospel?

### **3. What is Salvation?**

So, what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar? Did he change his mind and repent because of the prophet Daniel's revelation of the dream? No, he did not. He did not listen to him. Even though Daniel had revealed the dream and God's will had been revealed to the king . . . . How unrewarding for the prophet!

*4:29, 30. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?"*

King Nebuchadnezzar refused God's hand of salvation and continued his pursuit of power and prosperity. Therefore, he became mentally deranged like a wild animal. He was so anxious and afraid that he avoided people, ran away from the palace, and had to live like a wild animal.

*"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 . . ." (4:31-32).* In a sense, this is an abnormal level of "hikikomori," or withdrawal. If we try to be like God and strive for that level of power and prosperity, we lose our humanity.

This desire for human domination intrinsically harbors the seeds of self-denial. When humans take control, they make a mess of things. (Alister McGrath)

But, if we stop pursuing our own glory and rest in seeking God's glory, we will regain the beautiful humanity that we should have. If we leave behind our pride and lust for power, we are remade into a new person.

*4:34. At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and 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;*

Our desire for happiness, power, control, and prosperity is a necessary and good thing that we are born with. But if we don't pursue them with the goal of giving glory to God and for the love of our neighbor, we will be warped by unbelief, self-love, and pride into thinking we can be like God.

God may throw you into a difficult situation. The suffering and hardships we face now are opportunities for us to humble ourselves before God and turn to Him again by means of the gospel.

If King Nebuchadnezzar had repented, he would have helped those in distress and shown mercy to the poor, just as Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese ambassador to Lithuania, once did to save the Jews from the torment of Nazi Germany. King Nebuchadnezzar could have used the power and leadership he had been given to help and support those around him, rather than to protect his own prosperity and power.

Amazingly, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have received an even greater blessing after this suffering.

*4:36. 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 lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.*

Actually, the same thing has been brought to us by Jesus Christ. Jesus humbled himself and suffered for us, leaving all power, control and prosperity, so that through repentance, we could truly regain our humanity and be resurrected to a life of true blessing. In humility he died on the cross and gave his life to serve us.

This is the exact opposite of the attitude we humans strive for. We think that if we can rise to the top, be at the summit, become the leader who rules over others, then we will be happy and have a good life. But, look at Jesus. He humbled himself for us, died for us, and went down to Hades to win resurrection, life, and blessings for us.

This Jesus is our Savior! Trust him, humble yourself in the midst of suffering, and surrender yourself to God's hands. Use your power and prosperity for the manifestation of God's glory and the happiness of your neighbors. That is the way to great joy and prosperity.