

A Piece of Humble Pie

Scripture Text: Daniel 4:28-33

Introduction

Humility! It is a defining characteristic of one who follows Jesus Christ. After all, how could anyone who accepts that he or she is a sinner in need of God's grace and that Jesus is Lord of all not be humble. And yet, being humble seems to evade many of us, at least during moments of our lives. It is truly difficult to think of another person being more important than ourselves when we are so very consumed with what we want. Last week, we read about a dream Nebuchadnezzar had that was really a warning from God concerning Nebuchadnezzar's pride. After his other wise men failed to tell him what his dream meant, Daniel came in and revealed it to him. He told Nebuchadnezzar that he was the strong and fruitful tree in his dream that reached to the sky. Like that tree, God, the divine lumberjack, was going to cut Nebuchadnezzar down from his high and lofty position. Nebuchadnezzar would lose his power and glory, and he would also lose his mind. God was going to do this until Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that God was the Ruler over all and that He gives power to whomever He wills. Did Nebuchadnezzar heed God's warning? Not at all! He persisted in his pride until led to his downfall.

God is Patiently Merciful

God not only warned Nebuchadnezzar, but He even gave Nebuchadnezzar time to repent. The very fact God warned him reveals God's mercy. When God shows us what we are doing is wrong, and He gives us the opportunity to change, He is being merciful to us. We have the choice to turn from the wrong we are doing and to turn to Him in faith and obedience. That choice may not be easy, but it is right. After Daniel told the king what his dream meant, he then challenged Nebuchadnezzar to repent. Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar did not heed that warning. Look at the verse below.

Daniel 4:28–30 ²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?"

All that God had warned Nebuchadnezzar through the dream finally came to pass. All that God had said would happen did in fact happen. That does not mean that God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to suffer and to be humiliated. It seems that God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to repent of his sin and to turn to Him and do righteousness. In fact, God gave Nebuchadnezzar *twelve months* to repent. If anything, this shows that God is very patient as well as very merciful. God desires repentance. He is like a parent warning an unruly child to straighten up or he will be punished. Then finally after giving the child time to change his behavior, the parent takes a switch to his behind. God gives us a chance to avoid disaster. God also showed mercy to another group of pagans. He sent to them a reluctant and disobedient messenger, Jonah, to tell them to repent of their wicked ways before destruction fell upon them. Look at the following passage.

Jonah 4:1–2 ¹ *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”*

Jonah knew who God is. He knew that God was merciful and slow to anger, which is why he did not want to go to Nineveh and preached God’s message to them. He knew that God was being merciful to them and that if they repented of their wickedness, God was just and faithful to forgive them of their sin. Even the most wicked people are saved by the mercy and grace of God, if they will simply turn to Him. After a year of God’s merciful patience, though, Nebuchadnezzar remained unchanged and very prideful. The king had not heeded God’s warning and like God promised, he suffered for it.

Our Pride Goes Before Our Fall

Think of something you did that made you proud. Taking pride in our accomplishments may not be wrong in itself, if we remember to give credit where credit is due. Consider Johann Sebastian Bach. He was a very talented composer and organist. When Bach composed music for a Duke, he wanted to make sure he gave credit to God for it. Whenever he began a new piece, he prayed. “Jesus, help me show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people.” Without Jesus’ help, Bach knew he would not be able to complete the task. Before writing even one note, he carefully formed the letters J J at the top of the page, which meant “Jesu, juva”, or “Jesus, help me.” When he was finished the composition, he wrote the letters SDG at the bottom of the page, which stood for *Soli Deo Gloria, For the Glory of God Alone*. Bach hoped that his music would give glory to God when it was played. That is a good way to approach any achievement. Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar had great pride for all that he *thought* he had done. He looked at all of his great accomplishments and gave himself all of the credit. He was very prideful. Look at the following verse.

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?”*

Those are some pretty weighty words about himself. The view from the roof of Nebuchadnezzar’s royal palace was no doubt impressive. Babylon was an impressive city in the ancient world. One of Nebuchadnezzar’s achievements was the famous hanging gardens, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Supposedly, Nebuchadnezzar built this garden for his wife as a kind of mountain in the city to remind his wife of her homeland in the mountains. As Nebuchadnezzar looked at his great accomplishments, he boasted to himself of his mighty power and glory. He said it was he who had done all this. He said, “Look at this great Babylon, which I *myself* have built by *my mighty power* and for *my glory and majesty*.” All of this revealed his enormous pride. When Daniel had to explain the hand writing on the wall to King Belshazzar in chapter five, he mentioned how God had *given* Nebuchadnezzar

greatness, but the king became prideful and refused to give credit to God. *Pride is a form of thievery.* It steals glory that rightly belongs to God. Hundreds of years later, the Apostle Paul scolded the church in Corinth for their pride. Look at the following verses.

1 Corinthians 4:6–7 ⁶ *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.* ⁷ *For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

Even the church is not immune to pride. Believers can fall into the trap of thinking they have done something great when in reality God had given them the resources, the opportunities, and the means to do great things for Him. No doubt, many outstanding achievements may be attributed to Nebuchadnezzar, but sadly he failed to give God the glory for his blessings. His heart was filled with pride and self-importance, and he began to boast of his own greatness and ability. He invited God's judgement, who patiently gave Him what he deserved. As Proverbs 16:18 tells us, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Because of his great pride, Nebuchadnezzar was about to fall down hard, just as the tall tree in his dream fell.

God's Punishes Pride Decisively

God is merciful and God is patient, but, when we refuse to repent after God has warned us, we should expect to be punished. Nebuchadnezzar had the chance to heed God's warning and to avert a very humbling experience, but he refused. Thus, God's punishment upon Nebuchadnezzar was decisive. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 4:31-32 ³¹ *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,* ³² *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."*

God gave Nebuchadnezzar a chance to humble Himself. When Nebuchadnezzar refused to repent and be humble, God did it for him. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the great and magnificent tree was chopped down and the man in the dream was forced to dwell as a beast in the field until he knew that God rules supremely and that He gives power to whomever He chooses. The point was that God raises kings and kingdoms and God puts down kings and kingdoms. He moves them like pieces on a chessboard. The purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and his subsequent humiliation was for him to recognize God's sovereignty. It was for him to acknowledge that God is the Most High, not Nebuchadnezzar, and that God rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will. God is the one in control, not Nebuchadnezzar, and not us. The main theme of the book of Daniel, the main thing we should learn from all of the experiences Daniel and his three friends had, is that *God is sovereign over all things.* There is no room for pride.

Daniel 4:33 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.

Nebuchadnezzar began to act like an animal. Because of this bizarre behavior, he was driven away from people. He lived outdoors with the beasts, ate grass like cattle, and was exposed to the weather. His hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. It is ironic that the king who felt himself superior to all others and who was full of glory and majesty had sunk to a subhuman level. There are a few things to note about the way in which God punished Nebuchadnezzar's stubborn pride.

- *It was quick:* While the words were still in Nebuchadnezzar's mouth, God pronounced His judgement on him. Verse 33 says God's punishment was fulfilled immediately.
- *It was reliable:* God punished Nebuchadnezzar *exactly* as He said. When God tells you something, you can take it to the bank. God is faithful and keeps His word.
- *It was complete:* God tore the kingdom completely from Nebuchadnezzar, and made him to become sub-human. God completely humiliated Nebuchadnezzar.

Pride, indeed, leads to a fall, and sometimes it is a hard fall. When we refuse God's mercy and stubbornly pursue our own selfish, sinful, and prideful desires, we will suffer for it. Our pride leads to our destruction. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that God wants us to receive His mercy, just as he desired for Nebuchadnezzar to turn from his selfish pride and pursue righteousness. God promises forgiveness and restoration to those who will repent. If you are sick with pride, there is a cure, and God is faithful and just to help you. One of my favorite promises in scripture, one that we read every time we observe the Lord's Supper, is from the letter of 1 John.

1 John 1:8-9 ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Are you being prideful? Do you think a little too much of yourself, or not giving God the credit He deserves? Are you not where you should be in your relationship to God? The good news is God is merciful. He desires for people to turn back to Him. What disaster are you approaching that can be averted by repentance? What will you choose to do?

Conclusion

In closing, This passage reminds us how merciful God is, even to the most prideful and most pagan of people. If God was merciful to Nebuchadnezzar and would forgive Him, would He not forgive you, too. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of God's grace and mercy to mankind, and the cure for our pride. Through Christ, we have forgiveness and the promise of a meaningful and abundant life, here and for all eternity. Have you received God's gift? This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!