

Kingdom Authority

Daniel 4

Good morning, my name is Nebuchadnezzar. A long time ago I was the most powerful man in all the world. I was the king over a kingdom that stretched across the whole known world. If you do not know much about me, I understand as it has been 2600 years since the time of my acclaim. But I am here this morning not to tell you so much of my personal accomplishments, but to tell you about God's working in my life. God has laid it upon my heart to tell you of my conversion. I went from being one of the most cruel, self-worshipping men in all of human history to being a worshipper of the one true and living God. And this happened all by God's amazing grace!

As an aside, before I share my story of God's salvation in my life, I want to encourage you to tell your story! **Tell your testimony often and tell it to everyone. It is the most important part of your life!** I could tell you of earthly accomplishments in my life that dazzled the whole world in my time. . . of an empire of stunning gardens, of luxurious cities, of economic prosperity and of a world peace that allowed people to live in security. **Yet all these accomplishments that were the headlines of my day, these are mostly forgotten now and what is left?** Only the spiritual impact that came to me and through me to others.

Application: Tell your story of God's salvation. Tell it to your children, to your grandchildren, to your neighbors, to your co-workers, to everyone! I know that you may feel fear in thinking about it. I am afraid today. **But the LORD is with you.** He loves for you to tell what He has done in your life. **And your testimony is the one part of your life that will matter after your body dies and a tombstone is set over it.** If I asked your children, "Please tell me your dad's story." Would they be able to tell it?

From the moment God redeemed me, I committed to telling my story to all peoples and nations and languages . . . to people all over the earth. I was so happy when the prophet Daniel told me that he was going to write down my testimony for all to read. He even wrote my testimony in Aramaic instead of Hebrew so that people all over the world could know of the greatness of the One true and living God!

I never tire of declaring **the signs and wonders** that God had done to save one like me! I still find it hard to believe that God would have mercy upon one

who was so filled with pride and self-will and rebellion against Him. But praise God, He did!

The LORD's kingdom alone is an everlasting kingdom. His dominion alone endures from generation to generation. The LORD alone does all that He pleases. At one time I thought that MY kingdom would last forever. At one time, I thought I had the power to do whatever I wanted to do. How foolish for me to think that! Well, let me tell you about it.

I was living a very comfortable life . . . never really thinking about God and consumed with my own plans for my own life. **I was sitting in my palace without a care in the world looking at all the stuff I built and accumulated and created.** I had no fears from any dangers . . . I was healthy . . . I had wealth beyond anyone's imagination . . . I had as many wives and concubines as I wanted . . . I had no enemies powerful enough to threaten me. **Nothing disturbed my mind! UNTIL . .**

One day was napping in my palace when I saw a dream . . . I woke up in a cold sweat shaking with fear. **For a long while after I awoke, I lay still on my bed thinking about the visions that had been given to me.** I knew that this was not an ordinary dream, but one given to me by God. **Nearly 30 years earlier,** I had had a similar dream . . . I think your pastor told you about it two weeks ago on a Sunday morning. I had not had a dream like that for 3 decades. But now, God visited me with another like it.

I immediately called all the wise men in my kingdom to come so that they might tell me the meaning of my dream. I still believed in my Babylonian gods and in the servants of my gods. Looking back, I cannot explain why I did not immediately call upon Daniel. He was the only one who could explain that first dream. **I think that when a heart has turned from the LORD we look to the world for answers to our big problems. Friends, do you ever face problems that trouble you?** Problems in your finances, your family, your marriage, your emotions, your work? **I urge you to take your problems to people who know the LORD.**

Principle: Do not look for wisdom to help you with life problems among those who refuse to acknowledge the LORD as God.

All my magicians, astrologers, enchanters came before me. They tried to explain my dream, but none of them could really help me. Until after all those who denied the LORD had their say, Daniel finally arrived. Now we Babylonians called him Belteshazzar . . . that is the name I gave to him when I worshipped other gods. I only use this name now because all those in Babylon hearing my testimony would not know Daniel by his Hebrew name. **I knew that I needed**

someone who walked with God to tell me the will of God. So I called for Daniel. He was the one who helped me early in my life with the meaning of my first troubling dream.

When Daniel came before me with hope I said, *““O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. 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. Its leaves 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.” (Daniel 4:9-12 [ESV](#))*

Then as I was laying in my bed with this vision, suddenly a “watcher”, a holy one . . . **your people call this being an angel** . . . came down out of heaven and he shouted to me, *““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. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. **Let him be wet with the dew of heaven.** (HIM? I felt dread at this word.) **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. 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.” (Daniel 4:14-17 [ESV](#))*

Belteshazzar, this is the dream that I saw and that left me trembling. The command to chop down the tree terrifies me. **And I grow in my fear as I think of the other parts! Please tell me what this means!!** All of the wise men in my kingdom had no clue. But I KNOW that you are able to interpret the dream for me because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

I remember looking at Daniel and seeing his eyes turn down to the down. **A tear rolled down his face as he looked at me.** For some reason, Daniel genuinely cared about me. **For a long time he would not speak and I could see that he was distraught by the dream too!** The longer he waited to speak, the more the ache in my stomach intensified. I finally told him, *“Belteshazzar, do not be afraid to tell me what the dream means. Whatever it is, I want to hear it.”*

At last Daniel said with sadness in his voice, *“My lord, I wish this dream would be about those who hate you. I wish the interpretation which I will give you would be about your enemies and not you!”*

I thought, “Oh no. This is not good!”

He continued, “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 of the field found shade, and in 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 heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.” (Daniel 4:19-22 [ESV](#))

OK. Go on.

“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:

I held my breath as my legs shook underneath me.

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.” (Daniel 4:23-25 [ESV](#))

I did not know what to say. I felt strong and healthy. How could this be?

I remembered on two occasions that I had declared that the God of Israel to be the one true God. Yet both times, I returned to my other gods. Was the dream telling me that I would once again proclaim Daniel’s God to be the Most High God who rules over all of the world?

“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.

I did not know what this meant, but I was glad that a stump was left. I knew that where a stump is left that life might come back into the tree.

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.”” (Daniel 4:26-27 [ESV](#))

Daniel was bold that day! If any other man at any other time had told me that I needed to repent of my sins and begin to obey the LORD, I would have had him killed! I thank God for His faithful people who are willing to speak hard but true words. As I look at your own world, I think, “We need more Daniels!”

Truth: We need more faithful servants of God willing speak His truth to a prideful world.

Well, I believed everything that Daniel said and told him that I would break off my sins and turn to the LORD! I meant it when I said it too. Then I dismissed Daniel.

For several weeks, I woke up thinking about the dream and about Daniel’s words, “Break off your sins!” “Practice righteousness!”

I feared God’s promise of judgment. I have to say that for those several weeks I fully expected to the fulfillment of my dream!. **But God’s judgment did not fall upon me . . . not the first month, nor the second and by the third month . . .** and I say this to my shame . . . I forgot all about my dream and about the LORD’s call upon my life for me to repent.

I have to warn you all. Often the LORD spiritually awakens us with fearful happenings in our lives. And for a time we listen to Him and even make an emotional confession of repentance, only to return back to our former way of life. That is what I did . . . twice! **My return to my other gods revealed that my repentance was not genuine, but only superficial.** Such a repentance does not bring the LORD’s mercy to bear upon our lives. **Your pastor shared last week,**

Principle: It is common for dramatic events in life to spiritually soften the heart of the unregenerate only to have that same heart harden to deeper extreme.

Twelve months passed me by and the dream was so far in my rearview mirror that I had forgotten all about it. One big problem though! God had not forgotten what He promised! I reflect on what one of God’s apostles said about these delays by God in bringing promised judgment to pass.

“do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8-9 [ESV](#))

It was a big mistake for me to interpret the delay as God’s indifference or impotence to bring His judgment upon me.

So nearly a year to the date of my dream, I was walking along the roof of my royal palace looking out over the glorious city that I had built. I was so impressed by all that I had accomplished in my life and I literally said outloud, *“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”*

Looking back, I can hardly believe that I thought those thoughts and said those words. **What a fool I was to believe that I could do anything apart from the LORD. What do we ever have that does not come from the LORD?**

Yes, I used my intelligence and talent to rule over my kingdom well. But who gave me intelligence and who gave me talent? Yes, I used my physical health and financial wealth to do some great things. But who gave me my health and who gave me my wealth? **I now know that everything I have comes from the LORD. He deserves all the credit.**

“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?” (1 Corinthians 4:7 [ESV](#))

Why did I not see that then? **Answer: My pride kept me in darkness.** I truly believed that **my success came from ME.** I simply did not acknowledge God in my life. As both the apostles James and Peter would say, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5)

These words of boasting were still echoing from my lips when BAM!!! A voice from heaven said, *“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.”* (Daniel 4:31-32 [ESV](#))

As soon as this message came, **I was immediately struck with fear and in a snap I found myself on all fours braying like a donkey.** My servants rushed over thinking I had a stroke or something.

But my physicians checked all my vitals and I was healthy as a horse! **The big problem is that I thought I WAS A HORSE!**

After a season of trying to help me, my physicians recommended letting me live as I wanted. They let me act like the animal that I now thought I was. They let me grow my beard and hair long. My nails grew out like a hawk's claws.

My handlers let me graze upon grass like an ox. They let me avoid baths and sleep out in the muddy fields. They kept me from all human company some for my own protection and some because there was no sense in me being around other human beings. **This lasted for seven years just like the dream foretold!**

In those seven years, people ask me whether I was conscious of my condition or not. **I remember having some sense of my humanity and feeling the shame of my condition, but I also remember having a no desire to change.** God had placed a kind of stupor and darkness over my heart that I did not even perceive the humiliation of my state. UNTIL . . . UNTIL THE SEVEN YEARS WERE UP.

I remember the morning well. **That morning something like a light pierced my mind and my heart and my reason returned to me.** I recognized immediately how I was living and how humiliating the past seven years had been. **I also remembered Daniel's words to me 8 years earlier. He told me to repent of my pride, repent of my wicked deeds, repent of my oppression of the poor.** I cannot explain it, I can only describe it.

For the first time, I saw the holiness of the LORD and I saw the darkness of my heart. I realized that I am nothing before Him and that He sees everything perfectly. **My first response was to flinch away from Him in terror, but then He called me to draw near to Him to receive mercy and favor.** He told me that He loved me and that He could clean up a heart like mine if I would come to Him in faith. So I did. **I simply came to the LORD with a heart now humbled and ready to worship the LORD alone as God.** I repented of my sins, of my willful pride, of my desire to rule my own life, my longing for others to praise me. And I turned and gave thanks to the LORD who is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. I called upon Him in faith to rescue me! And HE DID!!

Right there dripping with dew from the field, I lifted my eyes and voice to the LORD and I cried out, **"You alone O LORD live forever and ever. Your dominion is the only dominion that lasts for all time. Your kingdom endures from generation to generation without weakening. Every person on the face of the earth is like nothing . . . like grasshoppers when they stand before You! You do everything according to Your will just as you please. Not one person can**

stop you for doing exactly what you purpose to do. Not one person can challenge you and say, “What have You done?”

The LORD is so very gracious! He gave me a new heart . . . a heart of worship. He returned my sanity to me. He restored my kingdom and gave me back my honor. Now, I, Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven. All His works and ways are right and just.

Friends, I tell you, the LORD is able to humble any person . . . no matter how great or small. I urge you to listen to God while He is still speaking to you. I thought that I could make that choice at any time and so I did not think it important to trust in God right when He was near to me. And then I became like an animal . . . unable to think straight. Friends, do not delay! We do not have the ability to control our own mind and heart. If your heart is softening today, run to the LORD now for His mercy! One of the prophets, Isaiah, said it best. I wish I had listened to him earlier!

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7 [ESV](#))

The Lord was so near to me on two separate occasions and I took that for granted. I am amazed that He gave me one more opportunity! What a God of grace!

Here is my life verse now: *“Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.””(Jeremiah 9:23-24 [ESV](#))*

Thank you for letting me share with you today!

Now I wish to share in brief three thoughts as I listened to King Nebuchadnezzar tell his story to us. I thought of three redeeming actions of God to bring salvation to our lives.

Three Redeeming Actions of God

Action #1: In His grace, God meets us.

Action #2: In our pride, God defeats us.

Actions #3: In His love, God completes us.

Three Redeeming Actions of God

Action #1: In His grace, God meets us.

The LORD is not compelled to meet us at all. He would be a just and righteous God to let us swim in our own pride and self-will. But in love, God reaches out to us even when we are not reaching out to Him.

Three times earlier in Nebuchadnezzar's life, God in grace met this proud king. The LORD met him early in his reign in the example of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they refused to eat the king's food and drink the king's wine. Neb. personally observed how their God caused them to be ten times more wise and more strong than all the others youths who ate the king's food. This impressed him!

The LORD then met Nebuchadnezzar in the second year of his reign through the dream of a giant statue. This dream told Neb of his kingdom ending and of the rise and fall of three more kingdoms in the Gentile world. It also told Neb of a future king and a future kingdom that would last forever. Neb was so impressed by the LORD at that time that he declared, **“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”** (Daniel 2:47 [ESV](#))

The LORD then met Neb in the middle of his rule when he had Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to his statue. The LORD not only protected these three men in the fire but the LORD walked with them! Neb at that point exclaimed, *“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”* (Daniel 3:28-29 [ESV](#))

Three times the LORD meets Neb to awaken him to the LORD's goodness and glory and three times Neb is impressed, but not humbled . . . not brought to faith. I make a point of this because I believe that the LORD has done that for you. I believe that there have been times in your life when the LORD visited you in His grace to show you that He is real, that HE is God, that you need Him!

Question: What have you done with those visits? Neb set them aside. He remained proud and independent to the point that he forgot that the LORD had visited him at all. Have you done that?

Application: When the LORD visits us, let us open the door to Him and not shut Him out.

Here in the story Neb told us today, at the end of his life, he reached a point where he felt everything was going great! He did not miss the LORD at all. He felt like he had no worries, no problems, no needs. He was living the “good life”. He did not deserve another opportunity. The LORD had no obligation to meet with a man who three times turned away from Him. Yet the LORD in grace chose to meet Neb once more time.

In the prosperity of his later years, Neb. was lying in bed one night and the LORD came to him with a dream. And the dream shook Nebuchadnezzar. It awakened him to a sense of his weakness and his mortality.

Friends, we cannot presume that God will keep meeting us after we turn away from Him. I thank Him that He is gracious and He often comes to us more than once. But I urge you to open your heart now! If you talked with Neb today, he would tell you that he wasted his life living in self-will. He would tell you his regrets that he did not turn to the LORD sooner!

One more word of encouragement. Never give up on the LORD meeting with a son/daughter/brother/sister/friend who refuses to acknowledge the LORD in their life. Perhaps God is not through with them. Pray!!

Truth: We wait on the LORD in prayer asking Him to meet our friends and family who are far from God. We KNOW that God in grace meets rebellious people with a purpose to save them. Let us wait on the LORD for that!!

Action #2: In our pride, God defeats us.

The LORD brings us to desperation and weakness in order to get our attention. When we are strong, pride most often prevails. Our weakness does not guarantee that we will humble ourselves before the LORD. But without weakness, few would ever look up to Him.

Neb. was told in a dream that disaster would strike his life, yet for 12 months He ignored God’s message. If we know our own hearts, we are not

surprised at Nebuchadnezzar's reluctance to repent. If we know our own hearts, we understand that Neb's delay is predictable. Our hearts are THAT HARD and THAT WILLFUL.

The question is not whether God will defeat us in our pride. That is certain.

Truth: The LORD will not allow our pride to prevail.

The question is "how will I respond when God defeats my pride?" Many harden their hearts all the more when God defeats them. Judas did that. Cain did that. **How will you respond when the LORD brings personal defeat to your pride?**

When I read the book of Revelation, I find that the judgment of the Tribulation does not soften many people to the LORD. Three times, John records that the people do not repent even in the face of disaster. For instance, in Revelation 9, God foretells of a plague that kills one third of the human population on the earth.

"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." (Revelation 9:20-21 [ESV](#))

What will it take for God to get your attention? When I was in college, I heard a preacher say, **"Your arms are too short to box with God."** It caused me to ask, *"Why do I keep resisting the LORD and His sovereign rule over me?"*

Action #1: In His grace, God meets us.

Action #2: In our pride, God defeats us.

Action #3: In His love, God completes us.

The greatest KING came to us in love. He humbled Himself by taking on the form of humanity and suffered on a cross in our place. He did this out of love in order to rescue us from our pride and sins. He did this to make us whole.

The LORD did not send His Son Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved. **The LORD did not make Neb. lose his mind and live like an animal to condemn him, but to rescue him.**

Friends, if the LORD is bringing harsh and painful trials into your life right now, please know that it is because the LORD loves you that He brings these troubles to you. His intention is to rid us of our pride that keeps us from worshipping Him alone.

Truth: God's intention is not to deplete our lives of meaning, but to complete our lives and fill them with meaning.

Friends, Neb's story reminds me how prone my heart is to wander from the LORD and to trust in my own abilities to make it through life. In truth, if the LORD leaves us to ourselves, we would all depart from our love for Christ. If the LORD stopped shining His light into our hearts, we would all grow dark with sin. If the LORD withdrew His grace, we would all stagger in the drunkenness of our pride. We need Him . . . every day, every hour, every moment.

This week I read a devotion from Charles Spurgeon that stirred me to pray for more grace. Here is the prayer that Spurgeon urged me to pray, *"Lord, keep us everywhere. Keep us when we're in the valley so that we do not grumble against Your humbling hand; keep us when we're on the mountain, so we do not lose our balance by being lifted up; keep us in youth, when our passions are strong; keep us in old age, when becoming conceited in our wisdom, we may therefore prove greater fools than those who are young and silly; keep us when we come to die, in case at the very end we should deny You! Keep us living, keep us dying, keep us working, keep us suffering, keep us fighting, keep us resting, keep us everywhere, for everywhere we need You, O our God!"*

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
(Ephesians 2:8-10 [ESV](#))