



“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

Pride or Humility?

L565. Date: June 1980. **Text:** Daniel 4:24-27. **Topic:** Humility; Nebuchadnezzar; Pride.

Central Truth: God humbles the proud, but exalts the humble.

Behold the power of personal testimony! It is recognized as valid authority in the field of business, in a court of law, and in the exercise of religion. Today, the lesson deals with the personal testimony of a pagan king who came to recognize, praise, and believe in the Lord God.

The fourth chapter of the book of Daniel is the written testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar reporting the circumstances by which he came to reverence the Lord God. The time of the events is not given. Circumstances indicate that they came between the thirtieth and thirty-fifth year of his reign. That would have made Daniel forty-five to fifty years old, and would have been some twenty-five to thirty years after the fiery furnace events of chapter 3.

The significance of the events of chapter 4 can be expressed in these observations. (1) It was reported by Nebuchadnezzar himself. (2) It was sent to *“all people, nations, and languages”* in the empire. (3) It was announced by a predictive dream interpreted by Daniel. (4) It came to pass in exact detail as it was foretold. (5) It brought the king to the recognition of and submission to the true God. (6) It was included in Holy Scripture as part of the inspired record. The significance could hardly be overstated.

The lesson revolves around the two attitudes of pride and humility. It demonstrates the truth of Proverbs 16:18, *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”* It is a historical demonstration of the truth of James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5, *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth*

grace unto the humble.” A proper response to the study should be a humble spirit before God.

I. PRIDE IS SIN

King Nebuchadnezzar was a great and able ruler. He was the monarch who brought the Babylonian empire to its greatest power on the world scene. He was an able administrator, a skilled warrior, a great builder, and the greatest national leader in his generation.

King Nebuchadnezzar was also a very temperamental man. One of his problems seems to have been the control of his temper. (See Daniel 3:13, 19.) Another weakness of the mighty monarch was the problem of pride. It was in that tendency to pride that his greatest problem lay.

God had to teach the great king a lesson in humility. So greatly had he extended his kingdom that he had forgotten the God of heaven. (He had been mindful of Him when Daniel interpreted his first dream, and when the three Hebrews were delivered from death in the fiery furnace, but had since forgotten God.) All the earth must recognize the sovereignty of God.

Why is pride so sinful? Pride is a kind of idolatry! It makes the individual the center of his world. It attributes the blessings of God to one's personal ability. It ignores God. It elevates man.

When the Bible says God “resists” the proud (James 4:6; I Peter 5:5), it means He sets himself to do battle with the person filled with pride. He who is proud is challenging God to a contest. What greater sin is there than that? Therefore, God “scatters the proud” (Luke 1:51) because He “hates the proud look” (Proverbs 6:17). Before God, the proud person will “stumble and fall” (Jeremiah 50:32).

King Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson the hard way. How much better to accept the Bible witness concerning it and humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He might exalt you in due time (James 4:10; I Peter 5:6).

II. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of solemn import. He saw a tree which grew to such magnificent heights that its branches covered the whole earth; all the beasts of the field and birds of the air received food and protection from it. Then a “watcher” from heaven came down to call for the tree to be cut down. Its stump and roots were preserved; however, and after seven seasons had passed, the tree grew again.

What was the purpose of the dream? It was as expressed in verse 17, *“to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.”* Nebuchadnezzar must recognize and confess that the God of heaven (the God of the captive Hebrews!) was and is sovereign over all persons and powers in heaven and on the earth.

Who was the “watcher” which proclaimed the coming judgment upon the king? He is identified only as “a holy one.” Doubtlessly, he was an angel come as the messenger of God to announce the purpose and work of God on the earth.

Every generation needs to learn that there is one higher than humans who rules supremely and sovereignly in the world. He places whom He will in positions of national and international authority. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that he held his office only because God had appointed and permitted it. Things are not happening by accident in the world of men. God is working out His divine and eternal purpose day by day.

The sovereignty of God is one of the attributes of God. That means He has always been sovereign, is sovereign now, and will remain forever the sovereign ruler over all that exists in the tangible and intangible realms. He does not change. He is the eternal sovereign God.

III. GOD IS MERCIFUL

A. Warnings of judgment are a sign of mercy. God does not warn to frighten, but to turn men from their sins.

Nebuchadnezzar was given warning of a dread judgment which was coming upon him. He would become insane with a type of mental illness called *boanthrophy* (thinking one's self to be an animal). In his case, it appears he thought himself to be an ox. He lived outdoors and ate vegetables rather than a regular diet. That condition was predicted to last until seven cycles of seasons (seven “times” means seven years) had passed.

What should the king do in the light of forewarned judgment? The prophet Daniel counselled him to (*“break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor”* (verse 27). Such a course might turn judgment from him *“if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility,”* verse 27), or at least delay its arrival.

The New Testament follows the same pattern of showing mercy by warning of judgment. God delights to forgive rather than to destroy.

B. Delay in judgment is a sign of mercy. It was one full year (*“at the end of twelve months,”* verse 29) before the forewarned judgment came. And

it came even then because the king continued in his course of self-deifying pride.

It was his custom to walk on the upper parts of his palace and look across the beautiful city of Babylon which he had built. It was one of the largest and finest cities of the world. It was surrounded by a system of double walls, the outer one seventeen miles long and wide enough for chariots to pass on its top. It had eight gates which allowed traffic to pass in and out of the city. It had wide streets decorated on either side by enameled bricks. Its “hanging gardens” were considered one of the seven wonders of the world. It was filled with elaborate temples to the gods worshiped by the Babylonians. It was such a lovely city, he thought it a proper tribute to the glory of a ruler as wonderful as he!

As these thoughts passed his mind, and were spoken by his lips, a voice fell from heaven, saying, “*O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee*” (verse 31).

God's delay in mercy did not effect humility in the great and gifted king. He is like so many others who do not use delay of judgment as opportunity to seek the Lord, but who use it as indication that judgment will not come at all, and so continue in their sin (Romans 2:4, 5).

C. Recovery from judgment is a sign of mercy. God did not judge King Nebuchadnezzar to overthrow him, but to correct him. He wounded him to heal him. The king recovered as the Lord had said. King Nebuchadnezzar lost his sanity, as was predicted. He thought himself to be an ox. He was put outside the functions of government and the contact of society (“*driven from men,*” verse 33). It is most likely that he was kept in some secluded royal forest and field, rather than being cast out to roam the countryside and live with the animals. His hair grew long and his nails were uncut. The judgment was severe.

God had foretold in a dream that such would not be the end of the mighty king. Though the tree was cut down (referring to the loss of his dominion as monarch), the stump would be protected by a band (or fence) of iron and brass. Even in his insanity, the king was protected by the power of God and the watch care of his family and ministers of state.

It is possible that Daniel had informed the officials that the insanity would be but seven years duration. Therefore, they cared for the king the more carefully while waiting for his mental health to return. God was merciful to the king, in spite of his sinful pride, and restored him according to His promise.

IV. HUMILITY IS BEST

The way of humility is the way of wisdom. It may not seem so to the man filled with pride, but sacred history gives dramatic witness that there is no substitute for a humble and contrite heart before God (Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2).

Mental health returned to Nebuchadnezzar after he received spiritual healing. (He lifted up his eyes to heaven before his understanding returned to him, verse 34.) The order of the statements in his testimony indicates the meaning of spiritual healing before mental healing. He came to a sense of humility and dependence upon God before he was fully recovered. Sickness had come because of pride; health could come only after humility.

With the display of his submission to God, Nebuchadnezzar's mind returned to its full ability and sanity. He manifest his humility before God as he *"blessed the most High, and . . . praised and honoured him that liveth for ever"* (verse 34).

Hear the king's own testimony: *"I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"* (verses 34, 35). What a testimony to the sovereignty of God and the limitation of man. And to think the testimony came from the lips of a formerly pagan king!

The king's testimony sets forth some important aspects of the Bible doctrine of God. (1) God is above all as *"the most High."* (2) God is eternal for He *"liveth for ever."* (3) God is unchanging because His *"dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation."* (4) God is great for *"all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing"* before Him. (5) God is sovereign since *"he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."* (6) God is independent since *"none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"*

What a beautiful expression of the doctrine of God! And remember that it came from the lips of a formerly pagan king! That is a good passage of scripture for the Christian to memorize and hide in his heart. That is a doxology of praise to Him whom Christians call "Father."

Judgment had come upon Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride. Deliverance came because of his humility. That is a gripping Old Testament illustration of the New Testament principle, *"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed, with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and*

giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you, in due time” (I Peter 5:5, 6). Jesus himself said. “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he who humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

Learn the grace of Christian humility. Humility is not self-effacement. It is not the demeaning of human personality. It is not weakness or cowardice. It is strength brought under control. It is recognition of the supremacy of God over the affairs and persons of men. It is a recognition of and submission to the higher power of God for the good of man.

This study has been designed to warn of the dangers of pride and the benefits of humility to the end that it might develop in you the wholesome spirit of humility before God.

1. Why is Daniel 4 such an important passage?
2. What is pride?
3. Why is pride a sin against God?
4. How does God “resist the proud” (James 4:6)?
5. What is meant by “God is sovereign”?
6. How does the lesson show the sovereignty of God?
7. What is mercy?
8. How did God show His mercy to Nebuchadnezzar?
9. What does Daniel 4:34, 35 teach about God?
10. How can you overcome pride and cultivate the grace of humility?