

Second Choice

Pride goes before a fall

I once heard a man tell this story. He was talking to a man who had never sinned. He was talking to a man who had never done anything wrong. As this man told the story of his life, it did indeed seem to be true that he had never sinned. He had never got angry or jealous. He had never spoken out of turn or cheated in any way. He had honoured his parents in everything he did and he had followed God in the best way he knew how.

As he listened to the man tell his story he was truly impressed. This man, it seemed, had never sinned. Then a thought struck him, so he asked the man this question: "You have clearly lived a good life, and I imagine you are very proud of what, are you not?" The man smiled, and replied: "Indeed I am. Very proud." The two men looked at each other for a moment and then the man said: "Congratulations. You have just caught me in my first sin!"

The story of King Nebuchadnezzar that we will read today demands a response. The challenge may be this: we may prove this story to be true. Perhaps the question is: how's your heart? When we hear the challenge of the story before us today, how will we respond? Your response is, of course, your choice. Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream led him to say this to King Nebuchadnezzar.

*²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." **Daniel 4:27***

The invitation this morning is to wrestle with that in your own heart in these moments. So let's pray. "Father we ask this morning, that You would meet us where we are, and in Your love, grace and mercy, move us closer to where You want us to be. Amen."

The challenge is the deep truth that comes at the end of Daniel chapter 4. Verse 37 ends: "And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." God hates pride. God hates pride because pride is what sets us against God. Proverbs 16:8 says: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 16:5 says: “The Lord detests all the proud of heart; be sure of this, they will not go unpunished.” Psalm 101:5 says: “Whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, I will not endure.” James 4:6 says: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Pride sets us against God. Pride puts me at the centre of the universe and understands that the world revolves around me. Pride insists that I am the most important person in the universe. Pride refuses to accept that God is in fact at the centre of the universe and the One around whom everything revolves.

What was the first sin?

*⁴ “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” **Genesis 3:4-5***

“You will be like God.” Adam and Eve fell for it and we’ve been falling for it ever since. Pride destroys relationships: first with God and then with others. It did in the garden of Eden and it still does today. The reason God detests pride is precisely because it destroys relationship with Him and others.

At the beginning of this series we looked at some fantasies some people believe. As I read them now, ask yourself this question: what do you think is the cause of these fantasies?

- If I walk closely with God, He will give me my first choice.
- In my first choice world, I will be happy.
- In my first choice world, I will be secure.
- In my first choice world, I will be able to walk close to God.

Notice how they’re all about me. The cause... pride.

The deep truth is simply this. To live well in second choice worlds requires us to live in humility before God. In Daniel chapter 4 we see how God deals with pride in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. The truth is friends, pride is something we must face and deal with in our own lives. In this chapter, King Nebuchadnezzar gets rudely interrupted. As far as he is concerned, life, his reign are all going along just fine. But then he gets interrupted. And for King Nebuchadnezzar, this is literally a matter of life and death.

What if God interrupts your life?

4 *King Nebuchadnezzar,*

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly!

2 *It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.*

3 *How great are his signs,*

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation.

4 *I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.*

Daniel 4:1-4

King Nebuchadnezzar is at home in his palace, contented and prosperous. A year later he boasts about all he had done.

²⁹ *Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"* **Daniel 4:29-30**

King Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful king in the known world at this time. Babylon is the greatest city in the greatest kingdom in the world at this time. It was a truly magnificent city. The hanging gardens of Babylon is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Some believe that King Nebuchadnezzar built the hanging gardens for one of his homesick wives who missed the trees! The walls of the city were so wide you could turn a four horse chariot around on them. King Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon and he was very proud of it. "Look at what I have done. Look at what I have built." Pride promotes self. "Look at my kingdom, my power, my wealth, my wisdom in ruling over such a great kingdom. What shall I do next?"

He considers himself hugely successful. He has achieved so much. Look at what I have built, accomplished, conquered, achieved... Does King Nebuchadnezzar think he has a problem? Does God think King Nebuchadnezzar has a problem? The trouble with pride is it blinds us, and we cannot see it.

⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. ⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers^[a] and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

⁹ I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. ¹⁰ These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

¹³ "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger,^[b] coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

"Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times^[c] pass by for him.

¹⁷ "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.'

¹⁸ "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

¹⁹ Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you."

*Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! **Daniel 4:5-19***

Why didn't King Nebuchadnezzar go to Daniel first for an interpretation? Maybe it was pride! Perhaps the truth is more that the king knew enough of what the dream meant. It was very familiar to the king. Perhaps he went first to others hoping they would tell him what he wanted to hear. When he does go to Daniel he demands Daniel tell him the truth (verse 19).

Do you have a Daniel? Do you have someone who will tell you the truth even if that's not what you want to hear? I saw a Snoopy cartoon that said: "The trouble with you is... The trouble with you is that you won't listen to what the trouble with you is!"

How about you?

In the story of King Nebuchadnezzar it is the truth spoken that ultimately saves him. But he doesn't like the truth, and so for 12 months does nothing about it. Here's the challenge. We can do the same. Do nothing about the truth, that is!

Friends, we all need a Daniel because we all have blind spots. We are all aware of what we find tempting, but pride is unlikely to make our list.

¹⁹ Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you."

Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— ²² Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

²³ "Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

²⁴ *“This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. **Daniel 4:19-26***

The king is described as a tree, which was common imagery for a king. It is a reminder of how important he is. Verse 12 points out he provides for all those around him. The imagery is of a man who has power and who know how to use it. Here is a picture of human self-sufficiency. King Nebuchadnezzar has need of no-one and no thing, and God simply does not enter into the equation. Pride is the illusion of self-sufficiency: I made myself who I am! There is no sense of him one day being accountable before God.

How about you? How are you doing?

²⁵ *You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. **Daniel 4:25***

Friends, the deep truth is this: you have nothing that God hasn't graciously given to you. Verse 27 of Daniel chapter 4 is a remarkable verse.

²⁷ *Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” **Daniel 4:27***

Daniel confronts the king with great courage. He basically says stop doing wrong, and start doing right. He's saying: “king Nebuchadnezzar, you need to make a change.” Interestingly, doing right and being kind to the oppressed – the change he needs to make – are essentially economic terms. It's about the distribution of wealth, and it teaches us that at the heart of Christian humility – the opposite of pride – is service to others.

Why is it that God hates pride? Because it destroys relationship with God... and with others. The highest example of humility is found in the trinity. Where the Father always serves the Son and the Spirit in love. Where the Son always

serves the Father and Spirit in love. Where the Spirit always serves the Father and the Son in love. And the trinity, Father, Son and Spirit live in perfect relationship in God. There is no pride.

At the heart of Christian humility is to serve people. So Daniel says to King Nebuchadnezzar, you've got to start doing what is right and be kind to the oppressed.

The greatest expression of humility is seen in Christ on the cross.

*Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness. **Philippians 2:6-7***

Jesus came to be a servant. The manifesto of His mission said this: He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; to proclaim freedom for the prisoner; to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind; to release the oppressed.

Who are you serving friends? How much are you following in the footsteps of the Master? How much do you follow in the footsteps of King Nebuchadnezzar and serve self? John Ortberg says this of how pride destroys relationships.

Pride:

- Whispers to be kind only to those I can use or who touch me emotionally.
- Views people as a means to an end.
- Values people only if they are useful to me, meeting my needs, building my Babylon.
- Causes me to be judgemental towards people with problems.
- Feeds my sense of spiritual superiority.
- Causes me to think my material status is somehow my doing, a result of what I can do.

God hates pride because of what it does. King Nebuchadnezzar is about to be interrupted and it is going to be painful. But here's the thing – it doesn't have to be that way! It really doesn't. Perhaps verses 28-37 didn't necessarily have to be written. God's Plan A was that King Nebuchadnezzar would respond to

the warning in the dream. God's Plan B was that he would have to experience the dream. God always prefers Plan A!

The question remains... Plan A or Plan B? God hates pride because it destroys relationship with him and relationship with others. So... how are you doing friends? Living well in a second choice world requires us to face the truth of our pride. This requires a response.

So how will you choose to respond? What will you do?

Preached by Ian Phillips in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 21st June 2020