

DANIEL - PART 4
The Healing of an Egomaniac
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Daniel 4
Subject:	What happened to proud Nebuchadnezzar after seven years of acting like a beast
Complement:	he humbled himself and recognized the God of heaven as the supreme ruler of heaven and earth
Exegetical idea:	After seven years of acting like a beast, proud Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and recognized the God of heaven as the supreme ruler of heaven and earth.
Homiletical idea:	Stay humble before God. (It's not all about you. It's all about God.)
Purpose:	To remind my hearers that we are not the center of the universe. God deserves our worship and praise.

Introduction

It's unfortunate that Lindsey Jacobellis will probably not go down in history as winning the silver medal in the women's snowboardcross at the 2006 Winter Olympics. Jacobellis will more likely go down in history as losing the gold medal. Just before the finish line, leading the next snowboarder by more than 100 yards, Jacobellis took a tumble after an apparent show off move during her last jump. Though she quickly got back on her feet, that few second delay allowed time for the Swiss snowboarder to pass her and capture the gold. Now, it's not my intention to give Lindsey Jacobellis a hard time today. She is an outstanding athlete. To win a silver medal at the Olympic games is a tremendous accomplishment. Only time will tell whether this 20 year old from Vermont has learned a lesson in humility.

I was taught a lesson in humility some years ago. I was at the airport in Portland, Oregon, preparing to fly home to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Not long before my plane was preparing to board, I heard my name on the intercom. I don't like those intercom announcements. I have a hard time understanding what they're saying! : "Will Derek

Morris.....immediately!” But this one was clear! When I showed up at the ticket counter, I was told that my flight to Atlanta was over-booked. Would I be willing to take another flight through Cincinnati? They would fly me FIRST CLASS, and then connect me with another flight home to Chattanooga. I would get home at about the same time. Well, that sounded good to me! The flight to Cincinnati was wonderful. A brand new plane, on its way to Paris, France, via Cincinnati. Wide leather seats in 1st class. Great service. Warm face cloth to freshen up. Gourmet menu. By the time I got to Cincinnati, I was strutting off the plane like I was really somebody!

My connecting flight to Chattanooga was on a little crop duster prop plane. I was sitting in the back seat, right next to the bathroom. I smelled the toilet chemicals the whole way home. Oh, how the mighty are fallen! The wise man Solomon declared, “Pride comes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” I learned a lesson in humility that day!

We all have times when we need to be reminded that we are not the center of the universe. Life isn't all about us. We all need a lesson in humility once in a while. And the individual that we are going to study in our message today was no exception. In fact, he really needed to learn a lesson in humility. His name? King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His story is recorded in Daniel chapter 4.

This testimony, written not by Daniel, but by the king himself, is divided into four sections: a dream, an interpretation, a decree, and a deliverance!

First, the dream. Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, and he was troubled! In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar was troubled because he couldn't remember his dream. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is troubled because he can remember his dream. He tells us the content of his

dream in Daniel 4:10-17. “These are the visions I saw while lying in my 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 beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

[13] "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, 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 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 the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.' “

That was the dream. And Nebuchadnezzar tells us, in Daniel 4:5, “I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.” So he calls his wise men. I’m not sure why he didn’t call Daniel first. After all, Daniel was ten times wiser than the rest of them. But king Nebuchadnezzar called the other wise men first. And Nebuchadnezzar tells us in Daniel 4:7, “When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.”

Now I'm not convinced that they couldn't interpret it. I think that they didn't want to interpret the dream. It was bad news!

So finally, the king called Daniel. Why do we always wait 'til last to listen to a word from the Lord? Why do we put ourselves through such difficulty and heartache before we seek the Lord's counsel? But finally, king Nebuchadnezzar calls for Daniel. And after the king has told Daniel the dream, Daniel is troubled too. Nebuchadnezzar tells us, in Daniel 4:19, "Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him." Daniel is terrified, just like Nebuchadnezzar. The same word is used in the Aramaic. And Daniel is not only terrified. He is greatly perplexed. Astonied in the KJV. The word means "speechless, stunned." So much so that the king tries to calm his counselor! "Belteshazzar," the king said, "do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." And Daniel answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!"

So what was the meaning of the dream? Nebuchadnezzar records Daniel's interpretation in Daniel 4:20-27. "[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 beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air-- [22] you, O king, 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] "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, 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 like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

[24] "This is the interpretation, O king, 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 cattle 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 the kingdoms of men 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. [27] Therefore, O king, 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."

I'm sure that the events of that day left a deep impression on the king. He certainly knew that he demonstrated a prideful spirit. Here is an example of one of his declarations:

I have made Babylon, the holy city, the glory of the great gods, more prominent than before, and have promoted its rebuilding. I have caused the sanctuaries of gods and goddesses to lighten up like the day. No king among all kings have ever created, no earlier king has ever built, what I have magnificently built for Marduk....May the way of my life be long...may my name be proclaimed for good at all future times.

Wow! He certainly thought highly of himself! Wouldn't you agree? Perhaps after this dream, recorded in Daniel 4, and his conversation with Daniel, king Nebuchadnezzar acted less haughty for a while. At least in public. But his heart remained unchanged. The narrative changes now to the third person, an ominous warning that Nebuchadnezzar is about to lose his sanity. We read in Daniel 4:29-33, "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?" [31] The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. [32] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." [33] Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."

History records other instances of individuals acting like animals. The condition is called lycanthropy (wolf-man syndrome) or boanthropy (ox-man syndrome). It's a mental condition where an individual thinks that he or she has turned into an animal, and begins to act like an animal. According to this testimony of Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar acted like an animal for seven years. Someone might ask, "Is there any record of this period of insanity in the cuneiform tablets of Babylon?" And that's a reasonable question. The answer is, "No! And Yes" No, there is no direct reference to Nebuchadnezzar's mental disorder. But should that surprise us? There was no CNN back then! And I'm certain that the truth of Nebuchadnezzar's condition was kept quiet around the palace.

There is perhaps an indirect reference to Nebuchadnezzar's mental disorder on a cuneiform tablet stored at the British Museum that was translated in 1975. The cuneiform tablet is badly damaged, but here are some phrases that are decipherable: "Nebuchadnezzar

considered...his life appeared of no value to...he does not show love to son and daughter...family and clan to do exist...his attention was not directed towards promoting the welfare of Esagalia...he weeps bitterly to Marduk.” (British Museum cuneiform tablet 34113/4) This cuneiform tablet may contain the clearest, though indirect, reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s state during those seven years.

Which raises another question? Who took over the leadership of the kingdom for the next 7 years? Why didn’t the kingdom disintegrate? After all, Nebuchadnezzar was out of the picture. And some scholars date this occurrence near the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s life. Why didn’t the kingdom just fall apart during this seven years of mental disorder? Do you want to hear my opinion? I think that Daniel held things together. Daniel prayed for wisdom, as he had earlier in his life. And Daniel demonstrated his loyalty to the king by leading the government during this time of insanity.

If the story ended there, it would be tragic indeed. But there is a time of deliverance! I’m so thankful that in the midst of the insanity of this life, we can always remember that a time of deliverance is coming! Aren’t you thankful for that?

And Nebuchadnezzar experienced that deliverance. Listen to his testimony, recorded in Daniel 4:34. “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.” When he lifted his eyes toward heaven, when he recognized who God was, and who he was, the madness was over. His understanding returned to him. And the result was twofold: First, he gave praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven rather than directing all of the praise and glory and honor to himself. We read on in Daniel 4:34-37, “Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion;

his kingdom endures from generation to generation. [35] All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" [36] At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. [37] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Nebuchadnezzar also gave praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven at the beginning of his testimony, recorded in Daniel 4:2-3. “[3] How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” Notice—not MY kingdom is an eternal kingdom. Not MY dominion will endure from generation to generation. But, His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. HIS dominion will endure from generation to generation. Nebuchadnezzar has humbled himself before God. He is giving all of the praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven.

The Lord healed this pagan egomaniac. And I want you to notice that Nebuchadnezzar was also kinder to everyone else. Listen to his opening words in Daniel 4:1, “King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world:

May you prosper greatly!” That doesn’t sound like the old Nebuchadnezzar who was always threatening to cut people into pieces and turn their houses into piles of rubble, does it?

Nebuchadnezzar is kinder now. He has learned a lesson a lesson in humility. And he is not only

giving the God of heaven all of the praise and all of the glory and all of the honor. He is also kinder to those around him. And isn't that how it should be? When we humble ourselves before God, we also show humility in our interactions with one another. We are not haughty or arrogant. Isn't that how it should be?

If I could sum up Nebuchadnezzar's testimony in one sentence, it would be this: Stay humble before God. Stay humble before God. Remember who God is, and who you are. And we have a perspective that Nebuchadnezzar never had. We have seen the supreme revelation of God's glory and grace, the supreme revelation of God's mercy and love, in the gift of His Son Jesus to save us all. Doesn't He deserve all of the glory? Doesn't He deserve all of the honor? Doesn't He deserve all of the praise? Let's learn a lesson from a Babylonian king and stay humble before God.

I can still vividly remember the day of the oral defense of my doctoral thesis at Andrews University. Believe it or not, the date was April 1! That's right. April fool's day. And I almost made a fool out of myself! I was excited. I was nearing the glorious conclusion of years of disciplined study. But I needed a lesson in humility that morning. I needed to be reminded that it's not all about me. That morning, April 1, I opened my Bible to read. I had been reading through the book of Jeremiah, and I came to these words. You can call it a coincidence, if you want to. But I know that this was no chance occurrence. This was the word of the Lord for my life at that very moment. This is what I read: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord..."

Did you hear that word from the Lord? Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom! Don't

be a fool, Derek, and start thinking that it's all about you! Stay humble before God. For God abases the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that he may lift you up in due time.

Look around us. We are blessed beyond measure, aren't we? We have gifts and talents beyond what we deserve, don't we? But let's not allow these blessings go to our heads. Give God all the praise. Give God all of the glory. Give God all of the honor. Let us stay humble before God. He is the One who is God of heaven above and the earth below. Not us. Stay humble before God. He is the One who created us, and not we ourselves. Stay humble before God. He is the One who redeemed us at a infinite cost when we could not redeem ourselves. Stay humble before God.

So let us say, with the Psalmist David, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make it's boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together!" That's a lesson that we can all learn from a Babylonian king.