

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – From Pride to Humility – 25-31 Jan 2020

Christ would have us learn lessons from the conversion of king Nebuchadnezzar. As the story of the book of Daniel unfolds to fourth chapter, we find Nebuchadnezzar fully confident in himself, his kingdom and his gods. After all, he was introduced as the one who “besieged” Jerusalem, taking God’s people captive (see Daniel 1:1). He is described as ruler over all nations, whose dominion stretches “to the end of the earth” (Daniel 4:22), and so Nebuchadnezzar is the great leader and builder of Babylon’s power.

If God’s purposes are to be carried out, and if Nebuchadnezzar and his subjects are to be drawn to do more than just acknowledge the only true God of heaven and earth, something drastic is going to have to happen, something that will shake Nebuchadnezzar’s entire confidence in the wisdom and superiority of Babylon. That is what Daniel four is about!

The fourth of Daniel also speaks to each of us today – it seeks to subdue anything that occupies the first place, God’s place. Through David the Lord portrays our true position: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14). There is nothing we have, or ever will have, for which we can say, ‘See, this is what I have done. This originates with me.’ All we possess comes from God, all good things come from God. When we are swallowed up in the diversions of earthly pride, it is the unpleasant job of a God of love to do whatever He can to save us (see Ephesians 5:13-14; Revelation 3:19).

Chapter four of Daniel opens with some incredible words from King Nebuchadnezzar, words that show the radical change which has taken place in his heart. “Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are His signs! And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:1-3).

It is interesting that this chapter of Daniel was actually written by Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that he was once the despotic ruler of a heathen nation, one of “the basest of men,” now turned Bible writer, speaks plenty of the grace of God. Nebuchadnezzar is only one name among many recorded, not to mention the great multitude whose names are not recorded, whom the grace of God has turned from sin to righteousness. It gives us plenty of hope.

Why is Nebuchadnezzar now praising the God of heaven rather than the idols? Read his conversion testimony (Daniel 4:4-9). The language of these verses is almost identical to Nebuchadnezzar’s experience in the second chapter. He has a dream upon his bed. The dream troubles him. He cannot understand the dream, though he feels it is important. All the wise men of the kingdom are called in to make known the interpretation of the dream, but they cannot help the king. Finally Daniel is called in. The king seems to have forgotten how impressed he was with the God of gods (Daniel 2:47). Now the God of heaven is bringing the king full circle. He often does that in our lives (see Numbers 22). When we forget how God has revealed His will to us in the past, he reminds us in the present. But if we persist in sin, despising His grace, He will eventually honour our free choice (see Numbers 22:20-35).

The Bible teaches that “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:17-20). Nebuchadnezzar seem to linger between light and darkness. More than anything else he wants to understand this dream. He senses its importance as it relates to himself. Yet his conscience knows that the knowledge that comes from Daniel’s God brings responsibility; it calls us to move away from darkness and obey the light (see 1 John 1:7).

At last Nebuchadnezzar is face to face with Daniel. In a sense of relief, coupled with a degree of anxiety, he shares his strange dream with this servant of God (Daniel 4:10-18).

Now we can really see that God is bringing Nebuchadnezzar over the same ground as in chapter two. There is one point, one important truth, that must have been impressed upon

the king's mind from the very inception of this dream. Before Daniel or any of the wise men were called to interpret what all of this meant, one message was clear. This dream was given to Nebuchadnezzar, "to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Daniel 4:17). In chapter three we found that Nebuchadnezzar did not like the idea of being replaced by other kingdoms. He sought to preserve his power by setting up an image all of gold and having every subordinate nation bow in allegiance to it. Thus he hoped to defy the decree of God. The plan failed. God is ultimately in charge of the powers of this earth. It brings us to another important principle, namely, how to relate to the civil powers.

The words are clear in chapter four of Daniel. The God of heaven gives the kingdom of men to whomever He will. He gives it even to "the basest of men." This does not make God responsible for the cruelty of such rulers. It was never God's perfect will to allow evil men to exist, let alone to rule over others. It is our own disobedience, going all the way back to the garden of Eden, that creates the difficulties. One of the chief points of the fourth chapter of Daniel is that God has ordained the earthly sword of justice. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" the Bible says, "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (read Romans 13:1-9). Notice that each "Thou shalt not" quoted by Paul applies to our relationships to fellow human beings. Our duty to civil power lies in loving our neighbours as ourselves. At the same time, there is a counterbalancing principle enunciated in the Bible. It is the principle that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Read Daniel 4:19-27 for the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. There is a great lesson to be learnt from the way Daniel approached the king with this message of rebuke from heaven. Truly Daniel had observed the king's failure to follow the light of truth he had previously been shown. Yet he was not rash in admonishing Nebuchadnezzar. He approached this monarch with great prudence and tact, delivering a message that was calculated to humble his pride. Daniel was meek in his approach (see Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). Judging from the king's response, we might conclude that he was half expecting the warning from heaven. Nebuchadnezzar received this message well. It made such an impression upon his mind that for one year he continued to prosper in his kingdom.

In the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar we find a fitting illustration of the basic principles and issues involved in every person's conversion. We see ourselves in Nebuchadnezzar as self-exalted, self-reliant, self-deceived sinners. Nebuchadnezzar felt no need of God. He haughtily indulged in the thought that he himself was the source of his successes in life. He needed to be awakened to the greater reality of God's sovereignty. So do we. We see that the circumstances of divine providence humbled the king. He acknowledged God as the Most High. However, much like us, Nebuchadnezzar endeavoured to retain his own glory while giving lip service to Jehovah. He mingled with his religious profession a measure of self that would preserve his pride, and it nullified the power of divine truth in his heart. And again, through the course of divine revelation and providence, Nebuchadnezzar was brought still lower that he might abandon every vestige of self-reliance. God must be our all in all or nothing at all. The way to God is the way of the cross. Only through a total renunciation of self-love, self-glory, self-reliance can we truly know who we are and who God is. God leads, enlightens, preserves and saves even the basest, most sinful of men. Nebuchadnezzar's conversion extends great assurance and hope to every one of us, no matter how low in sin we have sunk. God's love knows no boundaries. It appears that pride was the main obstacle standing between Nebuchadnezzar and God. It is probably the same with many of us today. No wonder Daniel's remedy for the king was to break off his sins by "showing mercy to the poor" (Daniel 4:27). Helping the needy rather than withdrawing from them in contempt is a positive approach to eliminating pride. Micah spoke of the same remedy for pride when he said, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). Through the process of humility the once proud Nebuchadnezzar had become one with his Maker. He definitely did not seem to have any immediate complaints about what he had experienced, only thanksgiving. We can be sure he will not have any complaints when the realities of eternity break upon him. Neither will any who put their trust in Christ.