

A Stumped King

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Amen, and please do have a seat and grab your Bibles to Daniel chapter 4, and let's finish this reading together from verse 34, reading to the end of chapter 4.

From verse 34 of chapter 4. At the end of that time I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.

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.

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?

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne, and became even greater than before.

[1 : 15] 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. What an incredible chapter. Just before we dive in, let's pray together. Our loving and gracious Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning, and we still ourselves in the wonderful truth that you hold our lives and you hold this world in the palm of your hands.

And Lord, as we come to your word now, would you remind us what we hold in our hands? This is no ordinary book. This is your word, and it is life-giving.

Oh, may it come with power to our eyes and ears this morning to change us, to convict us, to inspire us, to inform us, and to mold us. And so, Lord, we declare in the words of Samuel, Speak, O Lord, for your servants are listening.

Amen. So, put your hand up this morning, if you are a regular reader of a magazine. Right in the air, okay, right in the air, so I can see them.

[2 : 40] Excellent. Give me some magazines, I'll take two. Alistair, you've got my eye there. Time. Good answers, we'll see you in a second. Okay, anyone else? Ruth. Women's Weekly.

It's good. Excellent. Another, Ruth. Practice nursing. One more. Derek. Top Gear. Excellent. Brilliant. Well, I'm not so confident in this one, but keep your hands up if the magazine that you read is this one.

O, starring Oprah Winfrey. Anybody? No? Who can tell me who is on the front cover? This is May's edition of this magazine. Who's on the front cover?

Come on, somebody. Oprah. Good. Here is April's edition. Who is on the front cover? Oprah. In fact, have a guess this morning at who has been on every single front cover of O magazine since its launch in 2009.

Oprah. So just in case we the public were in any doubt as to who the star of the O magazine is, her face splashed across every single front cover. Now, we've been working our way through this book of Daniel over the past few weeks.

- [3 : 50] And we've been introduced to this monster of a city that is Babylon. And as we've got to know Babylon as a city, we've got to know the king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar.
- Well, let me introduce you to the best-selling magazine in Babylon this morning. We're just going to call it the Babylonian Time magazine. The magazine that celebrates everything that is great and is wonderful about this city of Babylon.
- And here's the thing about the Babylonian Time magazine. The man in the world, the man in the world, the man in the world, the man in the world, the man in the world, the man in the world, the man in the world, and this king, Nebuchadnezzar.
- And why? Because he is a man who loves his own glory. You'll see in verses 29 and 30 of chapter 4, the words that form the subtitle to every single edition of this magazine.
- Hear Nebuchadnezzar proclaim, is this not the great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?
- [4 : 59] Do you see the heart of this guy, this king, Nebuchadnezzar? What is he all about? He's all about his own glory and he's all about his own fame. He loves himself big time.
- Here's what we're going to hear this morning and it is absolutely stunning. This is the testimony about how this man came to be a worshipper of the living God.
- I think we've got good grounds to understand from this chapter that King Nebuchadnezzar, one of the most powerful men the world has ever known, in actual fact becomes a Christian.
- And because of that, well, the Babylonian Time magazine is going to have to go through a massive rebranding exercise. Whereas before there was a big picture of Nebuchadnezzar on the front cover, now there's a picture of the King of Heaven.
- And whereas before it mentioned Nebuchadnezzar's fame and his greatness, we'll now see what it reads at verse 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's able to humble.
- [6 : 16] This chapter, bookended with praise, is the testimony of how the most powerful human being on the planet has an encounter with the living God, which totally transforms the ways, the way that he understands life.
- And what has he learned? Well, he's learned this about God. That God is in the business of making low the high, and making high the low.
- This is our God this morning. Well, King Nebuchadnezzar, he starts this chapter with his conclusion, verses 1 to 3. We see him make a quite astonishing admission.
- This is the hear ye, hear ye of this chapter. If you've got it there, notice who Nebuchadnezzar in these verses is writing to. All nations of all languages.
- Do you see that? This is a universal declaration that all human beings the world over need to hear and understand for themselves.
- [7 : 21] And remember this is written in Aramaic, the most common tongue of the day. Now why does that matter? Well, that matters because this word is going to get out in Aramaic to as many people as possible, so that as many people as possible can understand who the true king of the world is, and they too can turn to this God for themselves and have life.
- What does he say? He says, praise God. Praise God that he is mighty. Praise God that he is great. And praise God that his kingdom, unlike mine, is a kingdom that lasts forever.
- That is the song of Nebuchadnezzar's heart. And really the rest of the chapter in between the sandwich is the story of how he got there. So verses 4 to 18, not for the first time in this book, Nebuchadnezzar has a distressing dream.

And what's it a dream about? It's a dream about a tree. Has anyone ever had a dream about a tree? Nope, me neither. But it's a tree. It's a beautiful tree.

It's a big tree. It's a fruitful tree. It's a lively tree. But this tree that has everything going for it is a tree that is ordered to be cut down and someone is going to be humbled in quite a unique and quite a powerful way.

[8 : 44] And why? We'll see verse 17. So that whoever this is will come to understand that God is king and he is not.

So you can understand that Nebuchadnezzar, he's terrified about this dream. And what does he do? He summons his dream interpretation squad to give that interpretation a shot. And verse 7, they don't seem to know what it means.

Which I find really interesting. I find that really interesting. Remember in Nebuchadnezzar he has a dream at chapter 2. And when he calls his dream interpretation squad together, they can't tell him what the dream means.

Why can't they tell him what the dream means? Because he wouldn't tell them what the dream was. But here do you notice Nebuchadnezzar tells them exactly what the dream is. And let's be honest, it's not that difficult to work out, is it?

Really? I mean, picture the conversation between Nebuchadnezzar and his wise men. Dear wise men, I've had a dream about a tree. It's a big tree. It's a beautiful tree.

[9 : 54] It's a lively tree. It's a tree that's got an awful lot going for it. And it's about to be cut down. Any ideas, anyone? Any ideas what this dream might mean? I mean, if that came up in your higher English, you'd be delighted, would you not?

Giving that a shot, interpreting that? You're not honestly telling me. You're not honestly telling me that all the wise men in this city of Babylon could not at least have a goal in trying to interpret what that dream means.

Could it be that these men claim to be in the dark because they can't face telling Nebuchadnezzar the truth of the dream because of what it might mean for them? Could it be that these wise men are prioritizing saving their own skin ahead of saving their kings?

Now, why do I think that? Well, look who the king goes to next. He goes to Daniel. Cue stage right, verse 8.

Nebuchadnezzar says, Daniel, in you come. Tell me what it means. Verses 19 to 27. We see Daniel offering this king a passionate plea. Now, how does Daniel feel about this dream?

[11 : 07] We'll see what we're told at verse 19. He is greatly perplexed. If you've got an ESV translation there, Daniel is said to be alarmed.

He's alarmed. Is that not interesting? I mean, picture Daniel in your head. Here is one of God's own people who is living in exile away from his homeland in this pagan city of Babylon.

That's bad enough. But Jerusalem, the capital city, Daniel's home in Judah, and most importantly for him, the place where his God is honored and worshipped has been destroyed.

And by whom? This man and these people. As the readers here, are we not just a tad surprised that Daniel isn't dancing with joy?

At the news of Nebuchadnezzar's upcoming destruction. I mean, might we not be expecting Daniel to be rubbing it in the face of Nebuchadnezzar? I told you so. This is my God.

[12 : 09] You thought you were bigger than him? Would we not expect him to be tweeting to all his fellow Israelites? Team, the moment we've been waiting for is here.

Hashtag Neb for Fel. Right? Do we not expect him to be dancing with joy? He is not delighted with this dream. He is devastated for the king and this news.

Isn't it just a little bit surprising in this chapter? Now, why does Daniel feel like that? Well, could it be that Daniel's heart for God is expressing itself in love for this outsider who doesn't know God?

Could it be that Daniel wants this man, this king, to come and to know and to love the God that he knows and loves? Could it be that Daniel's heart is simply reflecting God's heart for this man?

Do you see how Daniel is deeply concerned and how he deeply cares for this man, Nebuchadnezzar? Now, here's the challenge this poses for us this morning.

[13 : 27] Do we share Daniel's concern for a lost world? Do we share Daniel's heart for people in our lives that do not know this God for themselves?

Do we pray for our lost friends and family that they too would come to know this God? Are we fully convinced in our minds that God wants to reach every human heart with the good news of Jesus Christ?

Do we make every effort to walk alongside people and take every opportunity to speak of Jesus Christ to them? For how does Daniel's loving concern for Nebuchadnezzar, how does it manifest itself in this chapter?

By telling him the truth. What does Daniel say at verse 22? Well, Daniel says what the wise men of Babylon wouldn't say, you are that tree.

Do you see what he says? You are that tree. Dear King, I wish this didn't apply to you. I really wish this didn't apply to you. But that axe, it's got your name on it.

[14 : 39] This one's for you, King Nebuchadnezzar. The question is, how are you going to respond? Is there any hope for this king? Well, what does Daniel say, 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 then, your prosperity will continue. And I think so succinctly summed up by Daniel in that phrase that he uses at verse 26, will you acknowledge that heaven rules?

Will you acknowledge that heaven rules and you don't? Let me ask you this morning, where are you at in that question? Who is it that is king of your life?

You see, that's the question that Daniel places before Nebuchadnezzar because Daniel understands, Daniel understands that the loving thing to do here is to tell Nebuchadnezzar the truth.

[15 : 50] Because it's only by understanding the truth that Nebuchadnezzar can grasp the truth and act upon the truth and turn to this God and be spared and receive grace and mercy.

Do we understand that connection this morning? That warning people is loving people? That the good news of the gospel is only good news when we get our heads around the bad news?

That people are heading for the eternal acts if they continue in their pride and their rebellion against this God? Like Daniel, friends, that should break our hearts.

And we should be so insistent on telling people the good news of the gospel that God sent his son to take the acts for us so that we no longer need to face the acts ourselves.

Are we communicating the truth of the gospel, the good news and the bad news to our friends and family who do not know him? Nebuchadnezzar, would you see that you need to turn from your folly and pride?

[16 : 56] And you need to see that God warning you is his grace towards you. Turn to him and be spared the humiliation which is coming your way. Or will you acknowledge that heaven rules?

So Daniel says, so the question is, what is Nebuchadnezzar going to do with it? Well, 12 months later, verses 28 to 33, we see a humbled heart.

Why is Nebuchadnezzar humbled? Well, see verse 30. Because of his pride. Why? Because our God is in the business of making low the high and making high the low.

And here's the thing for us to see this morning. And I'll be honest with you, here's probably where this chapter hit me the hardest this week in my preparation. The truth of it is, you don't have to dress like Nebuchadnezzar to have a heart like Nebuchadnezzar.

Do we see that pride in our lives this morning? As we think about and look at the things that we have done. As we think about our achievements.

[18 : 05] As we think about our salaries. As we think about our jobs. As we think about our abilities. As we look at the stuff that we have. It's not just a tiny bit inside of us that kind of goes with Nebuchadnezzar's heart here.

It's a constant message, isn't it, that the world is telling us. What is it that we're always, the phrase that we're always using in our culture to describe people who've made it.

People like Alan Sugar. People like Deborah Meaden. Lovely folks. But what do our media say? They are self-made men and self-made women. Now I must admit, I don't know about you, I laugh when I hear that phrase every time.

Exactly what part of themselves did they make? Do you know? Was it the intricacies of the human heart? Was it the sophistication of the human eyes that what they made?

Was it the complexities of the human brain? Tell me exactly what part of themselves did they make? Now what do we mean by that phrase? We just mean that they've got a lot of stuff. That's what we mean, isn't it?

[19 : 13] But is that your heart this morning, friends? Do we not all love our faces to be splashed across the front page of a magazine? Do you have a heart like Nebuchadnezzar this morning?

Are you really him to your own glory? For what happens to Nebuchadnezzar as a result of his pride? Well, as the proverb goes, a fall. He's humbled.

Now just reading on it this week, the medical term for this behavior, boanthropy, eating dirt, behaving like an animal, it's strange reading to us. But the point, surely for us to understand, is that God has deeply and uniquely humbled this man, Nebuchadnezzar.

So what next for Nebuchadnezzar? Well, hear him tell us what he did at verse 34. What does he do?

He raises his eyes to heaven and he submits and he finally acknowledged that heaven rules and he doesn't. And what happens? Well, God restores him to the glory of his kingdom.

[20 : 17] And in fact, at verse 36, do you hear him tell us that it was even better than it was before? Now this isn't a prosperity gospel application. This isn't turn to God and he'll make you rich and make things go well for you.

What I think we're meant to understand here is that Nebuchadnezzar, this man who was so against God, is now at peace with God. Whereas before, his pride had put him at odds with God.

His repentance and his surrender, his white flag to God, his admission that God is king and he is not, has put him at one with God.

So who is king in Nebuchadnezzar's life now? Well, see him re-exclaim his astonishing admission in verses 34 to 37.

Look at it with me if you've got it there. Verse 37. What does he exclaim? 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.

[21 : 34] And this declaration is going to every human being possible so that they would understand that the allegiances of the most powerful man on earth now lie. It really is the stunning of the most unlikely of converts.

But as we move towards a finish this morning let me just try and pull a few of those threads together. And with me would you imagine that you are one of Daniel's original readers?

You get your hands on this book of Daniel, you get to chapter 4 and you're reading it through. The question is probably is one of God's people in exile.

How are you encouraged or what are you thinking as you're reading Daniel chapter 4? Well here's three things I would be thinking and I think three big lessons for God's people and for everyone in general.

Here are the three lessons. Firstly, how awesome is our God that there is no human heart on this planet that he cannot change.

[22 : 38] Isn't that an amazing truth? In this chapter do you see how the worshipped becomes a worshipper? Do you see how the persecutor becomes a professor?

There is no human heart that this God cannot change and there is no human heart that this God does not desire to change. This is our God. And as his people the question for us is do we reflect the heart of God that we see here?

Now just think about it in your own life practically just for a few minutes here. Think about that friend who you've been witnessing to in the office for years and years and years and nothing.

Think about that girl in your class who is the life and the soul of every single party. Think of that boy in your football team who womanizes like there's no tomorrow. Think of that family member who will just not budge from their viewpoint no matter how graciously you try and persuade them and reason with them otherwise.

Does this chapter friends not give us incredible confidence in the power of our God to save and transform any life?

[23 : 56] does this chapter not give us incredible confidence and does it not give us a real beck and call to seek our God in prayer and ask that by his grace he would transform the lives of the people in our lives who we have deemed the most unlikely?

Daniel 4 tells us that there is no human heart that this God cannot change. Praise him. Second thing I would be thinking is that pride is a serious thing. Pride is a serious thing and I need to take repentance very seriously.

For what is God through the prophets told this generation in exile? Is the reason that they are in exile in the first place well it's their pride. Because they worshipped other things apart from God because they tried to be just like all the nations round about him them and because they did not listen to this God when he warned them and told them what was going to happen if they did not follow and obey him.

Do you see it's not just Nebuchadnezzar who's been humbled in this chapter. See in the background here God's people have been massively humbled. So they need to do what Nebuchadnezzar did.

They need to turn back to God. Now let me ask you is that some of us this morning? Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a believer in this God that we're looking at.

[25 : 28] What can I just say we love that you're here. But you need to understand from this chapter that your pride the fact that you want to be king and not God puts you at massive odds with him.

And you need to stop and you need to think seriously about what that means for your life. But maybe you are here this morning and you are a Christian but you find yourself drifting into the pride slide.

You're rushing around your eyes are off of God and they're very much on yourself. You're rushing around from one thing to the next. You're doing life in your own strength. You very much rate your own ability to navigate your way through life and I'll fit God in if I can spare a few five minutes this week but no promises.

Is God by his spirit maybe convicting some of us this morning that we need to slow down and we need to actively and purposefully take our eyes off ourselves and fix them back on him?

Pride is a serious thing and I need to take repentance seriously. Well thirdly and finally from chapter 4 God's kingdom and God's king when he comes will not be like Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon and this is a thrilling truth.

[26 : 58] Unlike Nebuchadnezzar what do we learn in this chapter? Unlike Nebuchadnezzar heaven's king he's going to be marked by humility not by pride. Heaven's king unlike Nebuchadnezzar is going to be marked by compassion not by indifference and oppression.

And to heaven's king's lordship every knee in heaven and on earth will bow and that lordship will last forever. This is heaven's king.

Isn't it incredible that that generation of God's people in exile they didn't know the face of heaven's king but what a joy and what an honor it is that we are a generation that does.

Jesus Christ I mean if ever there was a king who could look out and survey everything all creation and exclaim I made that that exists for my glory surely it was Jesus.

If ever there was a king who could quite justifiably revel in his own achievements his miracles his teaching his obedience to God surely it was Jesus.

[28 : 10] If ever there was an individual who deserved to have his face splashed across the front cover of a magazine surely it was this king King Jesus yet what do we find as we read about him in the gospels instead of exalting himself he humbled himself he left his heavenly throne and he took on our flesh and he lived a life not of lording it over people but by living a life to serve and to save his people and instead of being lifted up on an earthly throne he was lifted up on a wooden cross.

Friends what more humbling thing can be fathomed than for the creature to crucify the creator this is our king John Wesley famously wrote and can it be that great hymn that we love to sing what does he write his mystery all the immortal dies but the grave could not hold heaven's king his humiliation is now over and his victory and his exaltation is on display for the world to see for our God is in the business of making low the high and making high the low this is heaven's king this morning you know let me close just by reading the words of Paul who would write about this king of heaven Jesus Christ he would write to this church in Philippi whose eyes were on themselves and whose eyes he wanted to be on this king and this is what Paul writes about Jesus he writes this who being in the very nature

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 of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father could there be a king who is any different from the king that we read about in this chapter this is heaven's king

Jesus Christ the question this morning and I leave you with this is he your king will you acknowledge that heaven rules so I'm going to close in prayer in just a few moments time but just as we leave this chapter this morning why don't we just still ourselves and let me invite you to use this time to come before this king in prayer and as we stop and as we think about and contemplate God's words this morning and maybe even for the first time this morning you would bow the knee like Nebuchadnezzar and acknowledge that heaven's king rules why don't we do that now our father we thank you for your word to us this morning and we thank you that we see in this chapter that you're in the business of making low the high and high the low and we thank you that you're in the business of transforming lives even today and our prayer is that you would continue to transform our lives and our hearts so that they would beat for the glory of heaven's king

Jesus Christ in whose name we pray Amen