

Pride's Downfall and Humility's Rise

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[0 : 0 0] Well, amen to that. And good morning. I just had my welcome to each and every one of you. It's brilliant to see you. It's brilliant to be here this morning and to be able to open up Daniel again. And we're in chapter four. And thank you, Hannah, for reading that. It was a long passage.

But hopefully this morning we'll unpack it a little bit. There's lots to learn from this section that we have read. And really this morning, we're going to see that the proud are brought low and that conversely the humble are raised up. I've got a clicker in my pocket, so I'll be better getting that out. So just to get our minds thinking, I used to play rugby at school.

Now you might think, ah, you're six foot. You must have been okay. But when I was at school, we lined up in fourth year and I was fourth from the end in height. And I don't mean tallest. I mean smallest. I was four foot nothing. And when I played rugby at fourth year, we started playing against fourth, fifth and sixth years. So there was a big range of ages. And I felt like this guy.

Not the guy on the right, but the guy on the left. And that's what I felt like. You know, I was tiny and I was terrified of tackling. And so we were going through this and my dad, he quite wisely told me, he said, you know what? Don't worry about it. Because the bigger they are, the harder they fall. I know he had a point, didn't he? He had a point. Because big guys like that, if you can get them down, they do fall hard because they've got all that weight and momentum and height to fall. It didn't help my tackling or anything, but there we are. It's true. And you know, maybe sport's not your thing, right? But in the economic world and economists, they talk about a phrase, it's too big to fail. Sometimes banks or businesses that are just so rooted in our economy, oh, they're too big to fail. Well, we know that's not the case, don't we? The 2008 banking crisis caused by big companies really being complacent and making poor decisions. And it caused terrible turmoil to the world economy. Well, this morning, we will see that the king of the world at the time, the most powerful, the biggest, he was brought low and he was brought low by God.

So let's just have a recap. You might not have been here the last few weeks. Also, our minds are weak, so we forget, don't we? So we're in Daniel. This is what the world looks like. The pink section is what Babylon is in control of. So it's the Babylonian empire. It's about 600 BC, so about 2,600 years ago. And the Babylonians, they are the rulers of the world. They are in charge.

[2 : 4 8] And Daniel has been a really interesting read. You know, in chapters one to six, we kind of have these stories. I think Archie described them as the sort of, you know, the kids club stories, aren't they? They're the ones that we can remember from our youth. And then in seven to 12, you have these visions. And these visions happen during these stories in chapters one to six. And so far in chapter one, the Babylonians, they invaded from their capital across the map there to Jerusalem.

And they took these exiles out and they forced them to conform into their society. But Daniel and his friends, they resisted and they were, they were honored by God. They were exalted because of their faithfulness. In chapter two, Daniel, he interprets Nebuchadnezzar's first dream.

He was given wisdom by God. And basically that episode pointed to the fact that there was a king of kings coming in the future, a king of kings who wasn't like the powerless nations, the powerless king who was in charge at the time. But because of what Daniel did, he again was promoted. And Nebuchadnezzar actually praises Daniel's God. And then in chapter three last week, Archie, he took us through Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. That was names given by the Babylonians to them. And once again, they were delivered by God out of that fiery furnace because of their faithfulness. God stepped in. And once again, Nebuchadnezzar, he promotes them and he praises their God. And then we have a bit of a time gap before chapter four, where we end up this morning.

Then here we are. And how we're going to look at it, we're going to see the proud brought low, first of all. That's going to be our main section, the proud brought low. And then we're going to see at the end, the humble raised up and the fact that through all this, God is glorified. So let's look at the proud brought low.

So in here, verse one, King Nebuchadnezzar, he is speaking to the world. Now he is doing so in the language of the world. It was Aramaic. Someone else mentioned that chapter one is actually written in Hebrew and so is eight to 12, but these middle chapters are written in Aramaic. It was accessible.

[5 : 14] It was what the world spoke. And what we see there is that King Nebuchadnezzar, he actually wants the world to hear this story. Now that might be surprising considering the content, but we'll look at that a little bit later. So in verse four, Nebuchadnezzar, he is speaking and he is admitting, he says, I am comfortable. He is rich. He's lazing around in his palace. He's the king of great nation of Babylon.

He is on top of the world and he has a dream. So what, right? We all have dreams, don't we? Who's had a nightmare recently or a dream? Don't be shy. Hands up. Yeah. Who consulted a magician?

Nobody? An astrologer? What about an exile from Jerusalem? Nobody? No, I didn't think so. This is weird for us, isn't it? But you know, in the context, dreams, they were so important in that culture, especially for the king. The king's dreams were seen as shadows of events to come. And this is why all these people that they were employed to try and interpret these dreams, to find out what they meant.

And the purpose of that was that so the king could act. He could save his kingdom or he could save himself. So that was why this was so important. And this was why it left him so worried.

We see once again, like chapter two, that all the other people here are hopeless. God isn't with them. And so they can't, or maybe they won't, interpret the dream.

[6 : 57] Now, just to this point, I want to define what I, you know, what I mean in God, I mean the God of Israel, God of the Bible, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I just want to make that clear, because in this, I'm very conscious that in this chapter in the book, there is God mentioned here, the holy gods, various terms like that. But when I say God, I mean God of Israel, the almighty God in heaven that we read about in the Bible. So God is not with them, but he is with Daniel.

Daniel, he is told the dream. Why Nebuchadnezzar didn't go straight to him in the first place, I have no idea. Because Nebuchadnezzar knows, in verse 18 and 19, that Nebuchadnezzar, that Daniel can interpret. And we see in those verses in 18 and 19, that Daniel is terrified.

He's terrified of the consequences of the dream, because he knows exactly what it means. But Nebuchadnezzar says, Belteshazzar, that was Daniel's name that he'd been given. He says, come on, tell me. You know, he was given that wisdom by God. You know, I also think he was just braver.

He was looking out for the king. Potentially, the other magicians and all of those people, potentially they knew the interpretation. If you read it, it's actually not particularly veiled.

It's kind of obvious. But maybe they were scared to say what was going to happen to the king. But Daniel, he wasn't. He was willing to speak the truth, even though it hurt.

[8 : 31] And even though he might, the king might not have liked what he was saying. So let's go through the dream a little bit. I'm going to do it from the second half of the book, where it's the interpretation.

So in verse 20, we have this great tree. This is an artist's impression of what it might look like. A great massive tree. Now in the Bible, trees are often used as a picture of a kingdom.

The Lord Jesus himself, he talks about his kingdom being like the tree which starts from a mustard seed. And this tree is massive. It is beautiful. It expands. It reaches to the top of the sky.

All the living things live under it and are sustained by it. We have a bit of Tower of Babel imagery here, don't we? Reaching for the sky. That man-made tower that the people tried to build.

And yet we know what happened to that. In verse 22, Daniel is explicit. You are that tree, King Nebuchadnezzar. So far, so good, right?

[9 : 36] Nebuchadnezzar is probably sitting there. This is going well. This is all true. But in verse 23, the messenger comes and tells of the felling of that tree. And once again, it might look a little bit like this.

Nebuchadnezzar will be brought low. He will become like an animal, we read, until he finally submits to God. In verse 27, Daniel, having interpreted, he urges Nebuchadnezzar.

He says, King, 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.

Nebuchadnezzar, he is the ruler of the world at the time. He is on top. King over nations and lands. He has the power and the wealth. He lives in the biggest palace. He has all of the nations under him.

But he is a cruel and a harsh ruler. And Daniel knows that. Nebuchadnezzar has killed many, invaded lands, taken their people, killed many, ruthless to his enemies in how he lives.

[10 : 54] And Daniel calls him out and says, you need to renounce your sins. But we see in verse 28 and 29 that 12 months pass.

A whole year passes. Now Daniel's advice, it's either just ignored, or maybe Nebuchadnezzar forgets about this whole dream in this episode.

You know, I think that he just thinks in his heart that I am too big to fail. I'm too big to fail. Look at me. I won't be felled like the tree.

And so we can picture the scene, can't we? That we see in verse 30. Nebuchadnezzar, you can picture it. This is an impression of what Babylon would have looked like at the time.

The gardens were actually one of the ancient wonders of the world. This would have been a beautiful place. And you can imagine, can't you? Nebuchadnezzar strolling out, maybe in a nice morning, looking around. All that's his.

[11 : 59] And you can imagine these words coming out of his mouth, can't you? Let's read them. Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?

You know, I don't think I've heard such a prideful sentence as that. His heart is so full of pride. It's look at me. Look what I have done. And there's a famous phrase, isn't there?

Pride comes before a fall. And these things are common language for us for a reason. I don't know if you've ever said something and it's instantly come back to bite you.

Once again, apologies for the sporting illustration, but that's just where my mind goes with these things. It's sometimes called the commentator's curse. So there'll be a player of a sport and they'll be playing really well, having the game of their life.

And the commentator will go, oh, this player, he's just so good. He's going on to great things just as he smashes the ball into his own net. It's called the commentator's curse.

[13 : 03] As soon as it's out of your mouth, it just something happens. Straight back to bite. Well, that's what happens here. We have this immediate response from God.

A voice came from heaven in verse 31. Nebuchadnezzar, he has called out for his pride. What a shock he would have got.

That rhetorical question. And he actually got an answer. God has had enough. He has waited a year. Patiently, in great mercy, God has waited for Nebuchadnezzar to repent, to heed the call of Daniel, to renounce his sins, but it never came.

It never happened. Likewise, God is merciful to us. He is patient and he gives us time. So please heed the warning.

For here, Nebuchadnezzar, it was too late. So we end with this bizarre situation and William Blake drew this. I'm sure there's artistic license in there, but it gives us an idea, doesn't it?

[14 : 15] King Nebuchadnezzar, king of that great palace, that great nation, the map that we saw, he ends up living like an ox. You know, there's actually a medical term called Boanthropy, which I've learned about in these last couple of weeks.

And it is where someone believes that they are an ox and so lives like it. Nebuchadnezzar, he was brought from such heights.

Picture the palace. In such worldly terms, such heights and yet to such lows. Look at that. The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

And this went on for seven years. We get that from verse 32, where it says seven times. That's not, some people wouldn't think that would be the case, but he reigned for 43 years, so it's very plausible that it was seven years.

And what we do know is that his hair grows to a great length and his nails become like talons. You might be able to see them there. So it's definitely a great length of time Nebuchadnezzar lived like this.

[15 : 19] Once again in Daniel here, we see that God is actually in control. God is the main character. Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, they might seem as the main characters, but God is pulling the strings behind the scenes.

The most powerful is brought down to this embarrassing, the shameful state due to his selfish ambition and his pride. The God of justice, he gave fair warning, but it wasn't heeded, so fulfillment came, judgment came.

Nebuchadnezzar, he can have no excuses, can he? You know, Nebuchadnezzar's pride, it was plain for everyone to see. I think if you knew him, it would have been obvious.

He was a prideful man. You know, maybe ours is less so. We're not world leaders or public figures. I think a lot of it is based to what Archie was talking about last week, about conforming to society.

Our pride is often linked with what other people think about us, trying to be someone or something that we're not. And we're trying to do that for the sake of what others think. It's tied up with our identity, our self-reliance.

[16 : 35] You know, in the modern world, it's often the celebrities that come crashing down, isn't it? We know that. We could think of many examples that have happened in just the last few years.

Their image is completely shattered due to something that they have done, something that they have said, or just something that they are associated with. And if our life is built upon what others think of us, then it can just be taken away in an instant.

You know, in the world of TikTok, Instagram, this perfection that people put out there for everyone to see. Well, this is all a problem of pride, and it is something that can go like that.

Our pride, it might be in our work. It might be in our body image. It might be in our film knowledge. It could be anything. It'll be different for each one of us, but we all, to some degree, have a problem with pride.

You know, why does it matter? Why does it matter? Why does pride matter? Well, it inhibits our relationship with God. It's putting something else first.

[17 : 47] Okay, last week we had the fiery furnace, and Nebuchadnezzar, he's sitting in front of it, watching these three men get chucked in. And next minute he sees a fourth man, and then they walk out, and they are untouched.

Can you imagine seeing the miracle of the fiery furnace, and not throwing yourself 100% towards that God that saved them? Can you imagine that? I can.

It seems crazy. But as Archie pointed out, Nebuchadnezzar, he has conviction that God is powerful, that Daniel and his friends, God, is worthy of praise.

But he hasn't put everything aside to praise and worship him. The problem with Nebuchadnezzar was his heart. It was so full of pride. If he did that, then he would have to admit that he, in fact, was not the one that was in control.

Is that you? Is that you? Do you say, I'm okay, I don't need God. I'm okay on my own. Our relationship with God, it needs to be personal for each one of us.

[18 : 54] Nebuchadnezzar, he knew about God. He knew people who believed in God. He promoted them. He liked them. That wasn't enough. God requires that commitment, a personal relationship.

So if you're sitting there today thinking, I'm okay on my own, let me just assure you that that's not true. Now just before we move on to the second section, just a side note, I think it's really important to see because in verse 17, the messenger explicitly says that the point of these events is to see that God is sovereign in everything.

And so we're not to miss that point. And there's this pattern throughout the Old Testament of kingdoms coming into place, kings getting put in place, having power, and then that getting taken away again, and then someone else coming in.

And we see that throughout the Old Testament. That's why it's great to study these Old Testament books. It made me think of the old chorus, kingdoms may rise, kingdoms may fall.

And the line in that says, nations refuse to hear God's call, but the word of the Lord endureth forevermore. You know, the truth to these things, it gives us peace in today's world.

[20 : 11] We see the SNP leadership going to pot to a degree. We see the UK government as a mess with many different prime ministers coming in and out, and then potentially, you know, maybe labor are going to come in next time.

And we see all this turmoil. We look out of the world, and we see oppressive leaders doing horrible things to people. You know, these things, quite rightly, they shock us.

And we are quite right to pray for them. You know, we can also have a peace that God is sovereign over all. And with the hindsight of history, we can see these things. At the time, Daniel would have been thinking, God, what is going on here?

Why is these things happening? But us looking back with that perspective, we can see that God was in fact in control the whole time. So our second section, and as I say, you'll be glad to know, the next two are much shorter.

The humble raised up. So Nebuchadnezzar, he is raised up as promised. I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.

[21 : 24] Maggie must have known, she's joined us this morning, in the pews. She must have known I was going to talk about it, because at the moment, she's trying to pull herself up onto the sofa, or whatever it is, and she tries to shuffle along and walk.

And you know, she's just that age where she'll fall down a lot, but she gets back up again, doesn't she? I get knocked down, but I get up again. I'll not sing it for you.

But that's what happens here. Nebuchadnezzar is down, literally crawling on his haunches. By the end of the time, his sanity was restored. He looks up to heaven.

He humbles himself. My mind, it went to the Israelites, who look up at that serpent on a pole, to be saved. Nebuchadnezzar looks towards God.

He was humbled by God, and then he humbled himself. And we see in verse 36, that he actually is raised to a greater position than before.

[22 : 24] God judged, but he also fulfilled that promise of restoration. You know, Daniel, it means his name, it means God is my judge. But God kept his promises, and he'll keep his promises to us.

But we need to do our part. The whole point of Daniel is to look forward, is to look forward to a time when God's kingdom would be established forever.

Not a weak, temporary, earthly kingdom kingdom, with someone in charge, who is corrupt. The original readers of this, they would be looking forward to that kingdom, that perfect kingdom that was coming.

And Jesus, he fulfilled these things through his earthly coming. His life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension back to heaven. He established a kingdom unlike anyone had ever seen before, that anyone had even thought of could be possible.

And that was why the Jewish leaders rejected him. This was not the kingdom or the king that they thought they were getting. It was the upside down kingdom. Christ was in fact the opposite type of king to Nebuchadnezzar.

[23 : 44] Jesus Christ, he did the work that allows that personal relationship that is required, so that our sin problem, not just our pride problem, but our whole sin problem, could be dealt with once and for all.

So like Nebuchadnezzar, we've got to put ourselves to the side. Admit that we are in fact, impotent, and throw ourselves fully to the God who can save. We see throughout Daniel that those who humble themselves in faithfulness to God, Daniel, his friends, Nebuchadnezzar, are actually raised up and honored.

Daniel in verse nine, it says that he is chief of the magicians. Don't actually know what that means, but he is in a powerful position. That would have been a big honor to hold.

And his friends have been promoted and are raised up as well. God has raised them up in earthly terms because of their faithfulness, because of what they did for him.

But he did so for his own purposes. They were used in the position that they were in. You know, this isn't a promise that God is going to raise us up in this life.

[25 : 00] That is no, there's no promise there. But God will certainly raise us up in the life to come. That is a promise. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. He was the ultimate example of humility.

He washed the disciples feet. He talked with those who society just wanted nothing to do with, but he had the ultimate humility of going to the cross, bearing the shame.

He did so for us. Likewise, he was honored. He was raised up again to life and sits at the right hand of the father on high for glory and for praise.

So if we are Christians and let's follow Daniel's example, Daniel's friend's example, but ultimately Jesus's example of humility, remembering God's promises are kept.

And finally, we see through all these events that God is glorified. Nebuchadnezzar, he is a changed man. He praised the most high in verse 34.

[26 : 05] I honored and glorified him who lives forever. This is Nebuchadnezzar saying these words. You often, the passages sort of 34 to 35 and the passage at the start as well, you know, these actually read to me like a Psalm, like a Psalm of David, but these were Nebuchadnezzar's words.

We had the transformer, didn't we? Pete always seems to put things in that are so helpful when I'm speaking to refer back to later. Nebuchadnezzar can be transformed by God and so can anyone.

Saul, as mentioned, he was converted on that road. If Saul can be transformed by God, then so can anyone. Nebuchadnezzar, he now knows his place in comparison to God.

I praise 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? Nebuchadnezzar, he is still the ruler of the world.

[27 : 24] He's being put back in that place, but he is glorifying God in that position that he is in. And that is the key. No matter where we find ourselves in life, we might be at the top, we might be at the bottom, or we might be somewhere in between.

But we are to bring praise to God for who he is and what he has done, no matter where we find ourselves. Daniel, he started in the kingdom down here, an exile.

He might not have been chosen to carry on in that event that happened, but he ends up somewhere near the top. Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, he has understood God and who he truly is.

He says these words in verse 37, everything he does is right and all his ways are just. That's the man who just spent seven years as an ox.

Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. Now, if Nebuchadnezzar can say that about God, then what a challenge to us in times of difficulty. All his ways are just.

[28 : 38] Finally, he says this, start at the beginning in verse 3, in his call for the nations to hear these words, to hear the story and to respond. He says that his kingdom is an eternal kingdom.

His dominion endures from generation to generation. Nebuchadnezzar here is proclaiming this news, despite the content, despite the fact that this story shows him living like an ox in that embarrassing, shameful state.

He is proclaiming to the nations that this is God. This is God. And that is our call too. You know, we have the best news to share as Christians.

We have got the best news ever. And it is our call to proclaim that to anyone who will listen. Let's finish with the words of this, the chorus that kingdoms may rise, kingdoms may fall.

It carries on like this. Things that we love last for a day, but in the morning fade away. Take God at his promise. Put your faith in Christ.

[29 : 48] Trust him for salvation and eternal life. Let me just pray. And then we're going to look at some questions on the screen. We can just think about them.

Or if you want to scan it, you can put your answers in as well. Let me just pray about these things. God, Father, just thank you for your goodness. Thank you for your word.

Thank you that you have established a kingdom through Jesus that is forever and ever. That is untainted. And that all your ways are just.

We thank you for these things. We pray that the truth of these things will sink into our hearts over the course of today and this week. And that we will be encouraged and challenged by what we have heard. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.