I RAISED MY EYES TOWARD HEAVEN

Daniel 4:1-37

Key Verse: 34a

“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.”

In the last lesson, we learned what true worship is through Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Their worship included their willingness to give up their lives. Man’s battle in worship is to worship the true God or any man-made image including the self. May we be truly love and worship God by holding to the cross of Jesus, in which we can see God’s love and self-sacrifice.

Today’s passage is King Nebuchadnezzar’s personal testimony of how he came to know the Most High who is sovereign over the kingdoms of men. We can see God’s great mercy and relentless effort to save one pathetic soul, even taking away the mind of man and giving the mind of an animal to humble the proud. This gives hope for the salvation of any wretched sinner. We cannot also overlook that there was Daniel in the life of Nebuchadnezzar for this work of God.

This chapter starts with King Nebuchadnezzar’s confession of faith in the Most High God to the whole word. He says in verses 1-3, “King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of ever language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” What a contrast to the beginning of chapter 3 in which he made an image of gold for the worship of himself by all people in his kingdom! Now no more talking about his kingdom and his dominion, but the kingdom and dominion of the Most High God. He wants to share how this change was possible. It was because the Most High God performed miraculous signs and wonders for him. Let’s see the description of his testimony.

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contended and prosperous. 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.” God uses dreams to draw pride out of men’s hearts as Job 33:14-17, “God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride.” Now God speaks through the Bible, though we cannot ignore dreams. In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar’s mind was so troubled that he could not sleep. This time he was terrified because of the images and visions of his head while lying in his bed. So he commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before him to interpret the dream. He told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for him. Verse 8 says, “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.)

Now Nebuchadnezzar’s talk with Daniel begins in verse 9: “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.” When Daniel was called chief of the magicians, it must have embodied both mystical things, and education, culture, science, and wisdom, all of that. It is most certain that at this point, Nebuchadnezzar had been with Daniel for around 30 or 35 years since the event in this chapter most likely took place in the final stage of his 43 years-reign, and Daniel served the king at the royal court. One thing the king clearly knew about Daniel is that the spirit of the holy gods was in him. This expression is written 3 times (8, 9, 18). In NKJV, he said, “the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.” We can conjecture that Nebuchadnezzar got an idea of the holiness of God from the holiness of Daniel. Daniel must have lived a pure and holy and virtuous life. Daniel’s life reflected the Spirit of the Holy God whom he believed and worshiped and served, different from all the wise men of Babylon who served Babylonian gods. Daniel was full of the Spirit and wisdom. The king could notice this, particularly at a crucial time. So despite his frightening and terrifying dream he was sure that no mystery was too difficult for Daniel, so he could interpret the dream.

The dream was first about a tree in the middle of the land that grew large and strong with its top touching the sky so visible to the ends of the earth. 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. What a wonderful tree! A tree was frequently used in ancient times to symbolize a great ruler or nation. [Ezekiel 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Ezek%2031.3) says, “Consider Assyria, once a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches overshadowing the forest; it towered on high, its top above the thick foliage.” Seeing the great tree was just part one of the dream, which was so good.

Here is part two of the dream. After seeing the tree, he saw a messenger/watcher/angelic watcher, a holy one coming down from heaven. The angelic watcher 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.” What an ominous message! We expect an angelic voice to be good and nice. Yet this was not the case. And the voice said, “But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.” This was probably the stump remained in the ground with a fence around it, its root being still alive.

The angelic watcher continued, “Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times/seven years pass by for him.” Here suddenly comes a personal pronoun “him.” The mind of a man is to be taken from him and the mind of an animal is to be put in him. What human mind can grasp this message! How weird it is! How strange! The clear message is 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. Yet, none of the wise men in the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar could understand and interpret it for him. But the king was sure that Daniel could, because the spirit of the Holy God was in him.

At this what was Daniel’s response? Verse 19 says, “Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him.” Why was he greatly perplexed and terrified? Daniel’s such a response shows what kind of relationship he had built with the king. Most probably Daniel had been a shepherd for the king, praying for the salvation of this soul. Nebuchadnezzar was not a stranger to Daniel, though he was a pagan king, who had oppressed the people of God. To Daniel the king was God’s given sheep under his care. So he could not imagine that King Nebuchadnezzar would become like a wild animal for seven years in God’s punishment. It was the king’s being made a worst mental patient. Upon hearing this Daniel’s heart was broken in perplexity and terrifying. The king could notice this and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Daniel had a genuine concern for the soul of the king. We are reminded of Samuel, who was troubled and cried out to the Lord all that night when he heard the word that the LORD was grieved over Saul and would reject him as king (15:11).

Daniel answered the king, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” Daniel’s shepherd heart and compassion for the king was true. Now Daniel had to tell the truth. After describing the tree just as Nebuchadnezzar did concerning his dream, Daniel said, “You, O king, are that tree!” This would hurt the king, but Daniel had to speak what God had revealed to him. Daniel continued, “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.” It could mean, “O king, you received such a blessing, surely from God, but you could not bear it.” After saying, “You, O king, are that tree!”, Daniel confirmed the message from heaven, “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.” This could be a sufficient interpretation of the dream.

However, Daniel had to say more in verses 24-27. “This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:” To Daniel the king really had to get God’s message that is against him. Then Daniel repeats the angel’s message, “You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be trenched with the dew of heaven.” Daniel extended the meaning of the angel’s message, saying, “You will be driven away from people…you will eat grass like cattle.” And Daniel made the point of the holy one’s message very clear: “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.” This key message is spoken 3 times (17, 25, 32). Daniel also revealed the message of hope clearly: “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.” We see that in Daniel’s interpretation his shepherd hearts is overflowing. His final words are this: “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.” In his advice, there was no compromise. Nebuchadnezzar had to repent of his sin and have a right relationship with the Most High God and as a result do what is right and be kind to the people under his care.

Yet, King Nebuchadnezzar remained unrepentant. Verse 28 says, “All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?” Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and self-centredness became sky-high in his mighty power and glory.

Here the phrase “twelve months later” is very meaningful. It indicates God’s great patience. God waited one whole year for this man to repent after giving him the warning message in his dream. In truth, God waited for Nebuchadnezzar’s repentance for nearly 35 year plus one more extra year, placing Daniel in his life in a mysterious way. God is a patient God. Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 3:9, “…He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

God is patient, but his execution is drastic when the time comes. Verse 31 says, “The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven.” The king’s last word “for the glory of my majesty” was overlapping the first word of the voice from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar.” The heavenly voice continued, “Your royal authority has been taken from you. 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.” Here we are to know that God opposes the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Pride goes before destruction (Provers 18:16). And Proverbs 11:2 says, “When pride comes, then comes shame”, and 29:23, “A man’s pride brings him low.” The proud reject the sovereignty of God in their lives and they fall at any moment. Isaiah says in 40:23-24, “He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.” No position is secure when one rejects God’s sovereign rule in his pride. He suddenly falls.

Then verse 33 says, “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.” Do not be surprised that in this passage the expression of Nebuchadnezzar’s becoming like an animal and living with animals is written 5 times (15, 23, 25, 32, 33). Why such repetition? Why such emphasis? It is true; it is a historical fact. This is not an unknown psychological phenomenon. There was a clinical case of boanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946. The patient was in his early 20s. It was reported that he had been hospitalized for about five years. According to the report, his mental symptoms included antisocial tendencies. And because of this, he spent the entire day, from dawn to dusk, outdoors, on the grounds of the institution. His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns. It was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. He was seen to discriminate between grass and weeds, and his diet consisted exclusively of grass from hospital lawns, and his only drink was water. He was cursorily examined that the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the fingernails. What an exact description as written here in Daniel 4! More than the truthfulness of this event, the repetition of this expression excellently testifies to God’s mercy. God lowered, lowered, lowered, lowered, lowered the proud man Nebuchadnezzar to such a degree so that he might repent and acknowledge the Most High God, who is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, certainly over everyone of any kingdom. God’s mercy is truly amazing. God’s mercy triumphs (James 2:13).

Consequently, what is the result of such severe training for Nebuchadnezzar? Verse 34 says, “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 honoured and glorified him who lives forever.” God is the one who not only opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Pro). He lifts up the humble (Luke 1:52). Restoration can be immediate as well as destruction.

Here we cannot overlook how long God waited, displaying his mercy to one perishing soul Nebuchadnezzar until he raised his eyes toward heaven, which was the expression of his repentance. God’s patience and his mercy were woven together to save this one perishing soul. His patience is great and his mercy is great. So Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that every reason I was shown mercy so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” Patience can be understood in terms of the length of the time and also the terms of the severity to bear. This patience and mercy of God gives us hope, hope for anyone. Yet, we should not take God’s patience and mercy for granted, but bear them with a tremble heart. And in that we may serve God’s flock of sheep. Paul said in Romans 9:18, “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wans to harden.” We deeply accept this sovereignty of God. At the same time we are to know again that he does not want to anyone to perish but everyone to be saved.

This chapter ends with King Nebuchadnezzar’s personal testimony, praising God: “I praised the Most High; I honoured 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 honour 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. 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.”

We thank and praise God for his great patience and mercy for the salvation of one soul. Thank God for Daniel’s life of the Spirit and a shepherd. He is the God who opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Lifting up our eyes toward heaven, that is to recognize the King of heaven, the sovereign God, may we live in his mercy and grace. May we humble ourselves before him and care for one soul onto salvation in God’s patience and mercy, as Daniel did.