

Pride – Daniel 4

See this little acorn? It is amazing to me that such a small little thing can grow into a huge oak tree. There is a park not far from here that has a bunch of old oaks. Some of them are easily 50, 60, 80 feet tall. And they are beautiful and provide shade and food and shelter for all kinds of critters. And it all starts with a tiny acorn like this one. Just amazing.

But aren't you glad trees can't talk? *"Hey, look at me! Look how big I am. Look how far my canopy stretches. Critters from all over get shade from my limbs."* And another one says, *"Yea, you're big but you're old and don't produce acorns like you used to. I'm only 200 years old and I produce way more acorns and I provide food for deer and squirrels and pigs and all kinds of animals. Look at me!"* While the mesquite tree just rolls its eyes.

Think about it. What part does the tree itself provide in its maturity? Does it cause itself to grow? Does it make wise decisions that keep it healthy? Can a tree decide where to grow because the soil is better over there? No. How does it happen? Mother Nature? Mother Earth? Karma? Good luck? No. God does that and He does all of that.

How can you possibly see one of these huge oak trees and not believe in God? Seriously, I don't have enough faith to be an atheist just because trees! Now, **Isaiah 55** says that one day the trees of the field will clap their hands in joy but for now God knew better than to allow them to speak because nobody wants to hear a proud tree, right? And nobody, especially God, wants to hear a proud person for the same reason.

God has given you everything you need and more to make wise decisions and to make money and to have the energy and the intelligence to make you grow into a strong, old oak tree of a person where you are today. And the last thing anybody wants to hear is you brag about it because that is called pride and nobody likes a proud person.

Now, what is amazing is that nobody here is a proud person, are you? If I were to ask each of you separately, I bet not one of you would admit to the sin of pride but we all know somebody who is proud. And you wouldn't be lying. It's just almost impossible to see pride in our own lives especially compared to those proud folks over there, right?

We are continuing our sermon series on what we struggle with and pride is a tricky one. Satan has made it so easy to see in other people but almost impossible to see in ourselves. And when we do finally conquer it in our lives – when we finally get rid of all

pride in ourselves – the first thing we are tempted to do is say, “Look at me. I don’t have any pride.” And Satan says, “Gotcha!”

Let’s turn to **Daniel chapter 4** to see a man who desperately needed to learn this lesson. Daniel is in the Old Testament between the books of **Ezekiel** and **Hosea** toward the back of the Old Testament. I told Morris I was going to preach on pride this Sunday and he suggested I preach on **Daniel 6**. I looked at it and asked him how Daniel in the lion’s den had anything to do with pride. He said because the lion’s had pride. Get it? Pride? Lions. Anyway, I told him I was not preaching on lions this week and I was proud of it. 😊

**Daniel chapter 4** is where we are and we are learning about the king that was in power for part of Daniel’s life. Daniel outlived several kings and most of them recognized that God’s power and His Spirit were on Daniel and gave him great wisdom. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he didn’t know what it meant. It was evidently very vivid and he remembered it distinctly and thought it must mean something so he called all the smartest guys in the kingdom to help him understand it.

He should have just started with Daniel because just two chapters previous, Daniel had not only explained the dream but actually told the king what the dream was. But evidently some time had passed (we think 25-30 years) and he wasn’t thinking about that so he called everybody in and told them that the dream was about a big, beautiful tree. He said this tree was huge and strong and beautiful and it provided food for all kinds of animals.

But then an angel came along and said to chop the tree down but to leave the stump. So, Daniel, who is called Belteshazzar, heard from God and was able to interpret the dream. In **4:19** it says that Daniel was perplexed for a time and I don’t believe it was the dream itself that perplexed him. Daniel had to tell the king some bad news. So, let’s start in **Daniel 4:24** and read through the rest of the chapter. It’s a fascinating passage.

*This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: <sup>25</sup>You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox 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 all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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 that then your prosperity will continue.”<sup>28</sup> All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>29</sup> Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, <sup>30</sup> 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?”<sup>31</sup> Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. <sup>32</sup> You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”<sup>33</sup> Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. 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. <sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> 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?”<sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> 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.

In all of that, the very last sentence is probably the most profound. “*And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*” But...like I said, none of us are proud so we don’t have to worry about it. Right? We are talking about those people in those other churches that are proud. Not us. I’ve heard it said that pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it. We can’t stand to be around proud people and we all know some proud people but how do we know if **we** are proud? That’s the million-dollar question and we will spend some time figuring it out.

First, what did King Nebuchadnezzar do wrong? Was it a sin to have a huge palace? Was he wrong for conquering other countries? Can a man not live in luxury? No, that wasn’t the problem. The problem was that God knew his heart and his heart was proud. What he did

and what he said was proud. So, God gave him a warning in the form of a dream and was willing to show him grace according to Daniel's words. But the sin of pride was strong in ol' King Neb. Look at **verse 30** again. *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?"*

Some of you might remember a man named G. Gordon Liddy. Liddy once said, "I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me." (*The Christian Century*, Sept. 28, 1977, p. 836.) Liddy went from being a lawyer and FBI agent to being convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and illegal wiretapping for his role in the Watergate scandal during the Nixon administration, for which he spent several years in prison.

Can you see a resemblance between Liddy and King Neb? Why do you think that is? I'll tell you why. Because the Bible says in **James 4:6** that *"God opposes the proud but shows grace to the humble."* That's the verse that King Neb had tattooed on his heart after this was all over but God makes it pretty plain how He feels about pride.

Listen to what else God said about pride. **Proverbs 21:4**, He said, *"A proud heart is sin."* **Proverbs 6**, He said, *"These things doth the Lord hate: A proud look."* **Proverbs 16:5**, *"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."* **Proverbs 8:13**, *"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogance."* **Proverbs 16:18**, *"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."* **Proverbs 29:23** says, *"A man's pride shall bring him low."* And **Proverbs 11:2** says, *"When pride comes, then comes shame."*

But **James 4:6** sums it up, and you ought to jot that Scripture down; it's a very important one. It sums up God's view toward pride. It says, *"God resists (or opposes) the proud but gives grace to the humble."* **Daniel 4** is a graphic illustration of that very basic truth. When you are proud, God fights against you; when you are humble, God gives you grace.

But how do we know that King Neb was proud? It's pretty easy to see in him but I want us to all be on the lookout for these when we look at ourselves. First, Neb was proud in his **heart**. And I see that from his description of his dream. We didn't read it but go back and look at **verses 10-12**. *These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. <sup>11</sup> The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. <sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.*

That's how King Neb saw himself. He's the great tree. He's the mighty oak that provides for the whole world. Everybody look at him. And the thing about it is that he wasn't wrong. He really was that great tree. Daniel even said so in **verse 22**. *"Your Majesty, you 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."* So, if Neb really was that tree, then what's the problem? It's not bragging if it's true, right? No! No! No! I hate that saying. It is definitely bragging when that's who you are in your heart and you take the credit for it.

Athletes are horrible about that. You know, the stats are there to prove it. I'm a great ball player. I worked really hard to get where I am. I spent a lot of time and a lot of effort to become the greatest to ever hit a ball with a stick. Look at me.

You know who else is bad about this? Pastors. Oh, it's usually a little more subtle but it's so easy for a pastor to look around at the big building and the thousands of people and all the programs and for him to look out at his "kingdom" and think, *"Look what I did. I was pretty wise to hire that associate pastor. I was pretty wise to add that guy and get rid of that other. Yep, look at what I did."* And it may be true. He was wise to make those decisions and he is a good preacher and a great pastor. But all those gifts come from God and THAT is what needs to be in our heart, not pride.

There is another way we see that King Neb was proud. First, we see it in his **heart** but we also see it in his **deeds**, his **works**. Do you remember the occasion that led to the three Hebrew boys being cast into the fiery furnace? It all started in the chapter just before this one. The very first part of chapter three says, *"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, 90 feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon."* Now, King Neb had just had another dream where his kingdom was represented by a giant statue and here he is commanding everybody in the world as they knew it to bow down and worship this statue. So, this is a thinly-veiled command to worship the king. That's pretty proud. Good thing we never do that kind of stuff.

Jose Cubero was one of Spain's finest matadors back in the day. Want to guess what his last words were? *"Aah! This bull has killed me!"* Only 21 years old, he had been enjoying a spectacular career. However, in this 1958 bullfight, Jose made a tragic mistake. He thrust his sword a final time into a bleeding, delirious bull, which then collapsed. Considering the struggle finished, Jose turned to the crowd to acknowledge the applause. The bull, however, was not dead. It rose and lunged at the unsuspecting matador, its horn piercing his back and puncturing his heart. (Craig Brian Larson)

I know that some of you are successful at what you do. I don't think we have any matadors here today nor do we have any kings but we do have some successful businessmen and women. You have done well. You made some money. You have worked hard, went to school, started at the bottom and made it to the top. Or maybe you have raised kids that turned out well. Or your boss gave you a raise and promotion. Good for you!

But unless your first reaction is to thank God for what He has done in your life then you are in danger of the sin of pride. When somebody says, *"Hey, good job!"* Your answer should be an humble, *"Thank you. God has blessed me."* Have you ever heard Franklin Graham being interviewed. This guy has it down. *"Hey, Mr. Graham, how many Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes have you packed this year?"* And Franklin always says something like, *"Well, by God's grace we have packed 70 trillion, zillion, brazilian boxes this year."* I love that! He always gives God glory. His deeds, his works are for the glory of God.

Lastly, we see that pride is not only in the **heart** and in the **deeds** but it also comes out of your mouth. It's in our **words**. King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of this as well. In **chapter 4, verse 30**, Neb says, *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"*

"I, Me, My" three times in one sentence. Jesus said in **Matthew 15:18**, *"But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them."* Pride was in King Neb's heart and it came out of his mouth like the bucket coming out of a well. That ought to be probably the first sign that we have a pride problem. It's hard to tell what's really in your heart and it's hard to see that our deeds are prideful sometime but listen to what comes out of your mouth. Is it about you? Is it what you know and what you have done and what you think? Okay...king.

Let me close with this. A minister, a Boy Scout and a computer genius were the only three passengers in a plane. The pilot came back and said the plane was out of fuel and was going down. The problem was there were only three parachutes for the four people.

The pilot said he had a wife and three kids so he ought to get a parachute. So, he grabbed one and jumped out. The computer genius said he needed one because he was the smartest guy in the world and the world needed him. So, he grabbed a chute and jumped out. The minister turned to the Boy Scout and said, *"Son, I've lived a full and abundant life. You are young so you take the last parachute."* The boy said, *"Relax Reverend, the smartest*

*guy in the world just grabbed my backpack and jumped out.” True story right there.*

😊 (Notice how I even made the minister the good guy?)

Well, true or not, God has the power to humble the proud person and He will. You are much better off humbling yourself before God AND before others. **1 Corinthians 4:7** says, *“What do you have that you did not receive?”* What do you have in your life to be proud of? God has given that to you. He provided it all. Give Him all the glory and don’t have pride in your heart, your deeds or your mouth.

**\*Music\***

It was pride that brought down Lucifer. It was pride that brought down the angels. And it was pride that made it necessary for God to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross to pay for all your sins, including pride. Do you have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus? You can. It’s the only way to Heaven. Give your life to Him today. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and just believe in Him and let God change your life. Do it right now as the music plays.