**The Humble King**

Daniel 4

In the Bible ***Babylon represents the evil empire of this world.*** The feeling is very much Star Wars and the evil, power-hungry galactic empire. Of course, the chief villain in Star Wars was Darth Vader, so Nebuchadnezzar is the Darth Vader of the Old Testament. The mighty, fierce some warrior king. I know Vader wasn’t a king but you get the point.

Daniel 4 gives us the most personal window into the character of Nebuchadnezzar. This is a guy who just did not get the point. Remember the Jonah movie from Veggie Tales? “Jonah was a prophet, oo oo, but he never really got it. He did not get the point.” It was true of Jonah and it was just as true for king Neb.

Review the last two weeks. In ***chapter 2*** Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a giant statue that got obliterated by a small stone. ***The head of the statue was HIM and his kingdom.*** But like the silver, bronze and iron kingdoms, the whole statue got blown apart by the small stone, “not cut out by human hands.” God’s kingdom rules over all kings and all empires, no matter how powerful. Neb summed up the lesson this way:

“The king answered and said to Daniel, ‘Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.’” Daniel 2:47

“Lord of kings.” What do you think that means your highness?

Then **chapter 3**. The fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar got a brilliant idea to build a giant gold statue. Where did that idea come from? Neb, did you completely invert the point of the statue dream? “No, no, it meant that I’m the head of gold. So I built a WHOLE STATUE of gold. I learned from the dream.”

Did you? Call the whole empire together with the world’s largest and weirdest band and demand that everyone bow down and worship the statue of YOU. ***Three Jewish guys won’t bow down***, so Neb throws the guys into the fiery furnace, but they don’t die. They come out and don’t even smell like smoke. The king concludes:

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego… Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” Daniel 3:28-29

You’d think the guy is making progress; that he is understanding more of who God is and what God is capable of. Then we come to **chapter 4**. The king has another dream. Large tree, lots of birds. ***Very Animal Kingdom.*** Abundant shade, abundant fruit, a place of refuge for all the animals. It all sounds very homey.

Then suddenly an angelic figure appears and orders ***the tree to be chopped down***. The stump isn’t removed, but it’s bound with iron and bronze, and then a pronouncement is made about someone losing his mind and becoming like an animal. So the dream shifts from a tree that provides for animals to a man who is acting like an animal. Troubling. Understandable that Neb calls together his advisors and asks for advice. Again, they’re all at a loss except for Daniel.

Daniel makes **the obvious interpretation**: the tree is YOU, Neb. Your kingdom. What a picture of good government: providing a place of safety and wellbeing for everyone in your realm. Protect from outside invaders and from internal criminals. Make sure there is adequate food and resources and infrastructure.

So if the tree is you, your stomach turns because of the scary angel and the fact that the tree gets chopped down. The stump isn’t totally ripped out, so there’s a little hope. But the guy who loses his mind and lives outside like a donkey makes you nervous.

Sure enough, **Daniel explains**:

“You shall be made to eat grass like an ox… and seven periods of time shall pass for you until you know that the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” Daniel 4:25

At this point, if you’re the king, ***you’re shaking in your boots***, waiting for the pronouncement of immediate doom. But that’s not what happens. Daniel gives the king some advice:

“Break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” Daniel 4:27

Here in this counsel there is hope! ***Maybe the vision is of what MAY BE, not of what WILL BE.*** Maybe, as with Ebenezer Scrooge the ghost of Christmas yet to come was just giving a warning and not pronouncing certain doom. And so it COULD have been for King Nebuchadnezzar. If he had followed Scrooge and heeded Daniel’s call to repent.

Alas, he did not. One year later. Walking on his parapet, overlooking his kingdom:

“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” Daniel 4:30

Zap. In that moment of **verbalized arrogance** God speaks from heaven and strikes Nebuchadnezzar mute and the great king of the massive Babylonian Empire is suddenly like a mindless animal, chewing grass out in the field, letting his hair and nails grow long like a crazy person.

After the seven periods of time, we assume were seven years, the king comes to his senses, is restored to his kingdom, and the king declares:

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Daniel 4:37

***Did he finally learn his lesson*** and actually submit to the God of Israel as the King of heaven and the Lord of kings? Unclear. Hard to know. This is the last we hear of Nebuchadnezzar. When we turn the page it’s his son on the throne. And Neb’s son doesn’t do any better than dear old Dad. So if Neb did repent, it didn’t pass on to the next generation.

Still, the words of Nebuchadnezzar have lived through 2600 years of history which means God wanted US to learn from his example and at least hear his words. “Those who walk in pride God is able to humble.”

Today we are going to contrast this arrogant Babylonian king with Jesus, the true king – the Humble King. We are going to walk through Philippians 2, the ultimate Christmas passage in the Bible and point out what Jesus did right, and Nebuchadnezzar did wrong. Overall, our lesson today is best summed up in Luke 14:11.

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:11

***Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself and was humbled.*** “Look at this great Babylon which I have built for the splendor of my majesty!” Zap. Ok Mr. Great King, try being an ox in the field for 7 years, then we will see what kind of great Babylon you can build.

By contrast, **Jesus humbled himself** and was exalted. His humble birth, His life as a servant, His suffering on the cross. We will see ***His mindset, His lifestyle and His blessing*** to inspire us to follow His example and resist the Nebuchadnezzar that lives inside each of us.

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Embrace The Mindset of Jesus: **Humility**

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5

This is a remarkable verse. ***This mind is already ours in Christ.*** We have it. It is yours, it is mine. But we still need to embrace it. We still need to choose this mindset every day. A mindset that results in verse 3:

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Embrace The Mindset of Jesus: **Humility**
  + Consider others more **Important** than yourself

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves.” Philippians 2:3

This was Jesus’ mindset: ***he did NOTHING from selfish ambition.*** He did not indulge his own desires or pursue his own preferences. He did not have a trace of vanity or arrogant conceit. A conceited person thinks very highly of himself or herself and expects others to do so as well. Jesus had the most reason of any human ever to be conceited. The eternal Son of God he deserved nothing but worship, adoration, appreciation and devotion from every person he met. But he did not demand it; didn’t even expect it.

Remember the **10 lepers Jesus healed**? It’s in Luke 17. Lepers had no choice but to group up together because everyone else was afraid of them, fearing their condition was contagious. Jewish law required that lepers live outside of town and wear bells to warn people of their approach. So a group of 10 lepers called out to Jesus from a distance, knowing they weren’t supposed to approach him. He told them to go and show themselves to the priest and as they went, they were all healed.

That’s a very ***cool miracle*** for so many reasons – healing from a distance, without touching the sick people, healing with a verbal command; healing mediated by the obedience of faith – it wasn’t until they moved to obey Jesus that they were healed. Very cool.

But the punchline of the story is that ***only one of the lepers came back*** to thank Jesus. And that guy was a Samaritan, which made it all the more surprising that he was the one who came back.

Jesus deserves thanks and praise from everyone, ***but he did not insist on being worshiped and welcomed as a king.*** He lived a normal life in a small Jewish town. He took care of his mother after his father passed away and helped with his younger siblings too. His public ministry was not based in a palace or with hundreds of servants at his beck and call. He traveled around without a home with a ragtag band of uneducated, everyday men and women – some of them with troubled backgrounds.

He did NOTHING from selfish ambition or conceit. He humbly treated others as if they were more important than him – which is wildly absurd. No one is more important than the Son of God through whom all things were made and for whom all things were made. ***He could have snapped his fingers*** and wiped out every Roman soldier in an instant. He could have vaporized the massive stone walls around Jerusalem. When he was arrested and Peter lashed out with a sword Jesus rebuked him saying, “Don’t you think I could call on my Father and He would immediately send 12 legions of angels?”

Picture that outcome. What would one legion of angels look like? Much less 12… But that wasn’t Jesus’ way. **He was the HUMBLE KING**. He embraced the mindset of humility and through his example we get the clearest picture of what genuine humility looks like.

First of all ***humility is a mindset*** and what that attitude embraces is that other people are more important than you.

So think back on the past week. ***Can you honestly say that you have this mindset?*** I’m sure we would all sit here and think, “Sure, I’m humble. I’m probably the most humble person who has ever lived. It’s amazing how humble I am. People should really take notice.”

* When you’re waiting on hold for a ***customer service agent***, in your heart of hearts do you think that person is more important than you? Or truthfully do you feel like you are about 100 levels of importance above him and it shows in how irritated you get when he finally comes back on the line?
* When ***you’re driving*** and people keep behaving like Florida drivers, cutting you off, driving slow in the left lane, refusing to get into the intersection in the left lane because that’s what it’s for – do you see other drivers out there as more important than you or as ignorant fools who should all get out of your way?
* When you’re ***in a staff meeting*** and tasks are being assigned, do you assess each assignment and rank it compared to your level of importance? If you get a low level task are you upset about it and do you express irritation?
* What about ***at home***? Do you consider certain chores “beneath you?” Do you make dinner, wash the dishes, take out the trash, vacuum, help with the laundry, mow the lawn…

It’s easy to sit here and think, “I’m so humble.” But by this definition I’d be willing to wager that ***most of us are more like Nebuchadnezzar*** than we are like Jesus. Do we consider others more important than ourselves, or do we really want a giant golden statue set up in the living room? Do we really want people to cater to our needs and whims? Of course we do! We are Americans! We expect high quality customer service. We don’t expect to wait on hold or to tolerate delays of any kind.

So this is our first contrast. Jesus was the humble king. ***He embraced the mindset that everyone else was more important than him***, which is what led him to the cross. You and I were more important than his comfort, his life, even his eternally unified relationship with the Father.

Nebuchadnezzar made himself the most important. He exalted himself. He demanded attention and worship. So his tree got chopped down. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. ***Which mindset is yours most of the time?*** You’re the most important? Or others are?

Jesus did a careful comparison between him and you – and do you know what he concluded? **You were more important than Him**. That should absolutely blow your mind. The King of all Kings, the Creator of all things, the Lord of the universe said YOU were more important. Your forgiveness, your salvation, your eternal life – was more important than his ability to breathe. More important than his life. That was the mindset of Jesus. He put you first. Second:

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Follow the Lifestyle of Jesus: **Service**

“And being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death…” Philippians 2:8

The mindset of humility leads to a lifestyle of service. The way of Jesus is the path of downward mobility. Jesus did not come “to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Think of what it meant for the eternal Son of God and Creator of all things **to be born as a human baby**. First, to be carried in Mary’s womb, then to be an infant and a toddler. ***The incarnation*** is one of the most amazing and surprising miracles. How could God become a man? How could the Word become flesh and dwell among us?

It’s incredible enough that Jesus lived a normal human life, raised by a carpenter in a backwater town in Northern Israel. It’s remarkable that ***he simply worked and provided for his mother and siblings*** until he was around 30 years old. The fact that we have no record of his childhood and young adulthood apart from one story about the family’s annual trip to the temple is a sign of Jesus’ simple, humble lifestyle.

This is what servanthood looks like.

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Follow the Lifestyle of Jesus: **Service**
  + Place the **Needs** of others ahead of your own

“Becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

***Jesus lived in perfect submission to the Father’s will.*** He was the obedient son. Israel was a rebellious son. At every opportunity the nation of Israel turned away from God like a proud, obstinate, disrespectful, wayward prodigal. But not Jesus.

Jesus was **the true Son of God** – faithful, respectful, submissive, obedient. He was the true Israel, the faithful Jew. He served the Lord. For 30 years the way he served God the Father was by serving his own family and his immediate community in Nazareth. This is one of the best indications we have that normal, everyday work matters. Jesus would not have wasted 30 years of life doing things that did not matter. His whole life is the example we have of what PERFECTION looks like.

And for 30 years perfection was hard work as a craftsman – working with his hands, earning money to provide for his family. Living faithfully, honestly, a life of service. Some of you have lived and worked for years, for decades, with ***a feeling of being a second class citizen*** in the kingdom of God because you’re not a pastor or missionary. The earthly life of Jesus should release you from that false belief. From the age of 13 or so until he was 30 Jesus almost certainly spent most of his time shaping wood and stone to serve the people of Nazareth. He operated a small family business. He loved and cared for his mother and his brothers and sisters after his father passed away.

Some of you are ***taking care of aging parents*** and are feeling the daily burden of that responsibility. Jesus gets it. He embraced that responsibility. In fact, it was so much on his heart that while hanging on the cross Jesus spoke to John the apostle and asked him to take care of his mother. Remember that? Of course, John knew Jesus’ mother and was already planning to ensure her care. But it was Jesus’ responsibility as her oldest son to be sure his mother was protected and provided for.

That’s what loving service looks like: **it protects and provides**. And often that service feels like carrying a heavy wooden cross. You have to continually embrace the mindset of humility that believes that other people are more important than you and the lifestyle of a servant that places the needs of others ahead of your own.

Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ***Has your humble service put you on a Roman cross?*** Yes, some of you work really hard and have been through some difficult challenges recently. But I haven’t witnessed any public executions these last few months. Still, every small act of service can feel like a death – like a real personal sacrifice.

**You are following the Jesus Way**. This is His path that he marked out for us. It’s the path of humility and service. Of lowering yourself. You must become LESS so He can become MORE. We make much of Jesus by making little of ourselves. We embrace the path of LOVE. And that is the path that leads to the cross. One chapter later Paul says it this way:

* Follow the Lifestyle of Jesus: **Service**
  + Place the **Needs** of others ahead of your own

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:10-11, NIV

***Do you want to know Christ more closely, more personally?*** Paul says the best way to experience the power of his resurrection and fellowship with him is to join in His sufferings – to become like him in his death. When you die with Christ you get to be raised to life with Christ. That is true of salvation overall and of those little daily opportunities to die to your own needs and desires and be raised to life again.

I’ve shared about **Robertson McQuilkin** before, but his example is worth repeating because it’s so unusual in this day and age. He was one of the most significant and influential Christian leaders of his generation, rising to serve as the president of Columbia Bible College from 1968 through 1990. 32 years. But his wife, Muriel, had Alzheimer’s and as it advanced, he was the only person she knew and felt safe with. She would walk from their house to the school, sometimes several times a day, just to find him, to the point that her feet would bleed.

<https://www.ciu.edu/faculty-staff/j-robertson-mcquilkin>

So, he made the hard decision to step down from his leadership position at the school and his other commitments with speaking and traveling, in order to take care of his wife. He said it was no sacrifice to take care of the woman who had loved and served him for over 40 years. It was his true privilege and delight.

McQuilkin was a humble leader. He embraced the mindset of Christ, that others were more important than him. And therefore, he followed the lifestyle of Christ, placing the needs of others ahead of his own.

***What about you?*** Do you follow Jesus? Do you choose the Jesus way or the Nebuchadnezzar way? The way of Babylon is the American way of self-advancement, self-promotion, self-everything. It’s all about you.

But we follow the humble King, who laid down his life for us. Now let’s look at the reward of Jesus.

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Trust in the Blessing of Jesus: **Reward**

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.” Philippians 2:9

Jesus experienced the truth he preached: ***“everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** By humbling himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, Jesus tested that theory to its utmost limits. And He proved it to be true to the greatest extent.

**Jesus was the eternally divine Son of God**, who always was one with the Father, always is and always will be glorious and worthy of all praise. But the resurrection and ascension of Jesus made public and final what was always spiritually true: that Jesus IS Lord. Had Jesus just died and never rose again his teachings and claims would all have been disproven. But by walking out of that tomb Jesus proved it was all true, He really was and is the Son of God and Ruler of all things.

And He promises ***the same kind of exaltation*** to all of us if we trust in Him and follow His way. “Humble yourself before the Lord and He will exalt you” it says in James 4. 1 Peter 5 says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” The writer to the Hebrews says to draw near to God a person must:

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Trust in the Blessing of Jesus: **Reward**
  + Don’t exalt yourself so God can **in His way**

“Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Hebrews 11:6

***And Jesus talked A LOT about rewards in heaven.*** “Your Father in heaven will reward you.” When you pray, when you fast, when you give, when you serve. Do we believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him, who trust in Him, who serve Him, who follow the Jesus way?

The temptation is to exalt ourselves like Nebuchadnezzar did, ***seeking reward NOW***. But Jesus says the blessing is for those who look for reward LATER. “Blessed are you who hunger NOW, who mourn NOW, who are persecuted NOW - for great is your reward in heaven.” And this is the summary teaching from Jesus:

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Trust in the Blessing of Jesus: **Reward**
  + Don’t exalt yourself so God can **in His way**

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:11

The knife cuts both ways. There is ***a promise of reward*** and exaltation, blessing and honor for those who humble themselves now. And there is ***the warning of humiliation***, judgment, dishonor for those who exalt themselves now. Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson the hard way and paid for it for seven years. Most of us can relate.

Anyone who dares take on a leadership role has experienced this. I developed as a leader during college, serving in **the discipleship program at Taylor University** in Indiana. Freshman year I was in a small group. Sophomore year I led a small group and was responsible for discipleship on my floor. Junior year I was in charge of my whole dorm. Senior year I became co-director for the campus.

I’ll never forget this one event where we had all the Discipleship Coordinators gathered for a training, around 50 or 60 people, all of them leaders. I was responsible for the event, along with my co-director. We had ordered pizza, but the breadsticks had not come. I went to my staff supervisor and was like, ***“Steve! Where are the breadsticks?”*** He responded, “You tell me – it’s your event!”

Later, when we sat down to debrief on the event he taught me **a memorable lesson**. He said in that moment I came at him with my sword in attack mode. I came at him like it was his fault, his mistake somehow, when it was clearly my mistake and my problem to fix. He said if I had come to him and said, “Steve, we don’t have breadsticks! I don’t know what happened, can you help?” He would have jumped right in to help solve the problem. But because I went into attack mode, he backed off into self-defense mode.

It’s a small example, but it shows ***the danger of elevating yourself***, even in a relatively minor way. I deflected the blame and tried to place the responsibility on my supervisor instead of taking the blame and humbling myself to own the mistake. And so, my boss wisely put me in my place. I wish I could say I’ve never done anything like it again.

I’m sure you feel the same way. Here is our summary:

**Our Example of True Greatness:**

* Embrace The Mindset of Jesus: **Humility**
  + Consider others more **Important** than yourself
* Follow the Lifestyle of Jesus: **Service**
  + Place the **Needs** of others ahead of your own
* Trust in the Blessing of Jesus: **Reward**
  + Don’t exalt yourself so God can **in His way**

**King Nebuchadnezzar** was, well, the king. He puffed up his chest and said, “Look at this great Babylon that I have built by my great wisdom and power and for my endless glory!” The words were still on his lips when the pronouncement from heaven came, and he lost his mind for seven years. The proud who exalt themselves will be humbled.

***Jesus was the humble king***. Though he deserved endless glory and service, he humbled himself to be born as a human baby, to live a normal, very unglorious life, and then to die a sinner’s death. He became the ultimate servant, suffering and dying for you and me. Therefore, God exalted Him, so Jesus is our inspiring example in every way.

First, ***we embrace His mindset of humility***, believing that other people really are more important than ourselves. Jesus compared himself and you and decided YOU were more important than Him, so He died in your place.

Second, we ***follow Jesus’ example of service,*** putting the needs and desires of other people ahead of our own. Easy to say, not so easy to do.

Finally, we ***trust in the blessing of Jesus***, eternal reward. If you seek reward and blessing and life and happiness NOW that is all the reward you will get. But if you surrender your desires and seek rewards in heaven, God will bless you both now and forever.

Brothers and sisters, let’s choose the Jesus’ way. Let’s follow our humble king.

Pray.

Close with The Jesus Way (Wickham)