

Daniel Series Part 7

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[0 : 00] What is the big truth that you most need to understand, come to terms with, and live your life in the light of? What is the big truth that once grasped and recognized allows you to place everything in its proper place and live your life with direction and a grounded and genuine sense of purpose? In Daniel chapter 4, indeed throughout the book of Daniel, but very particularly in chapter 4, we are given the answer. It's just two words, the big truth that recurs time and time again throughout the book. And the two words are to be found in verse 26 of Daniel chapter 4.

I'll give you a moment just to be able to have that verse before you. Daniel chapter 4 in verse 26. Maybe as you just scan the verse, you have identified what those two words are. They come at the end of the verse. Two words, the big truth, heaven rule. Heaven rules. This is the key to understanding everything. It is, of course, a poetic, if you wish, certainly a memorable way of declaring the big truth that God rules. God rules, expressed, as I say, in this memorable way in the book of Daniel.

Heaven rules. God rules. God is in charge. God is on the throne, and His rule is active, it's permanent, and it is perfect. The purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is to declare this truth in such a way that is recognized by all without exception and by Nebuchadnezzar in particular. I want you to notice an intriguing detail. Before we move on to explain how we're going to consider the chapter, but just notice one intriguing detail that we find as we contrast the record of the dream in the chapter and its subsequent interpretation by Daniel. Notice in verse 17 when Nebuchadnezzar is recording the dream that he had had, and notice how even in the record of the dream its purpose is identified.

There in verse 17, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign. This is the reason of the dream.

This is its purpose, so that the living may know. Now, who are included there? Well, you are certainly included. I think all of us here are living, so you are included. The purpose of the dream is that you would understand that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men. But notice this intriguing contrast in how the dream is then subsequently interpreted by Daniel in verse 26. We've already noticed the verse, but let me just read it there. 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. The living are to recognize this truth. All are to acknowledge this truth. But Nebuchadnezzar in particular was to recognize this truth in his own life. And so, as we think of today, today, and those of us who are gathered here, it is also the case that you personally must understand and grapple with this truth, just as surely as Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge that heaven rules, so must you. This is the big truth that God wants you to acknowledge as you hear the message of this chapter, the message of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Given that this is the big truth, our treatment of the chapter will revolve around this truth. We will preach four sermons on the chapter, three of them about

[4 : 43] Nebuchadnezzar in relation to the big truth, and one about Daniel, also as it relates to this big overriding, fundamental truth that heaven rules. About Nebuchadnezzar, we will consider his relationship with this truth in the following way. First of all, the truth resisted, and that will occupy our attention this morning. The truth resisted, but then the truth experienced, and then finally the truth proclaimed. That will be for subsequent occasions. This morning, we will think about the first of those aspects. The truth, the truth that heaven rules resisted by Nebuchadnezzar. As regards to Daniel, we will limit ourselves to one sermon, the truth lived out, and we'll do that this evening.

So, this morning, the truth resisted. Nebuchadnezzar resists this truth that heaven rules. It was a very foolish thing for him to do, but it is, it has to be said, a very common act of folly. It is, indeed, a very contemporary attitude to this truth that heaven rules to resist it. We don't want it to be true. It's

uncomfortable for us that it might be true, and so we resist it. We resist it as a society, and we resist it as individuals. We don't want to recognize and to come to terms with this truth that heaven rules. Many here this morning are guilty of resisting this truth, and I include Christians in this diagnosis. What I want to do this morning is to identify the reasons or the ways in which Nebuchadnezzar resists the truth. Very briefly, we have to just make it very clear from the facts of the event that Nebuchadnezzar is, indeed, guilty of resisting the truth. We've read the chapter, so we don't need to spend much time on this. He is given a dream, a God-given dream. He is told very clearly and explicitly the purpose of the dream, the purpose being that he must recognize that heaven rules and consequently repent of his sins. Nebuchadnezzar refuses to do so. So, the facts are clear. The truth is presented to him, and he chooses to resist the truth. Now, before we move on to consider these reasons, let's just remind ourselves that it's not so different today. God has clearly revealed in his Word, we've read it, we've sang it, it's crystal clear in his Word before us that he rules.

And as the one who rules, he is the one who has set out for sinners such as we are, what we must do, that we must acknowledge his rule. And the manner in which we acknowledge his rule is, as with Nebuchadnezzar, by repenting of our sins and putting our trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he has provided as the one who is able and willing to forgive us our sins. And we acknowledge his rule, not only as we recognize Jesus as our Savior, but as we obey him as our Lord. But we resist. We resist. We are not willing to do so. We are not willing to hand our lives over to Jesus Christ. We are not willing to submit to him as our Lord. And so with Nebuchadnezzar, we resist this truth. Why does Nebuchadnezzar resist? Now, as we notice the reasons, I would urge you to seriously ask yourself the question. As we notice the manner and the ways that Nebuchadnezzar resists, seriously ask yourself the question, is this something that I am doing? And while it is true that there is a particular application to those who are not

Christians or have never acknowledged and submitted to God's rule, as was the case with Nebuchadnezzar, the call to repentance that was directed to Nebuchadnezzar is one that is permanently directed to all, including Christians. And our response to that call to repentance reveals the extent to which we have submitted to the rule of God. So why does Nebuchadnezzar resist? The first thing I want to say is this. He'd heard it all before, the dream that we've read and its interpretation. While the message of the dream was dramatic and disturbing, it was not a new message for Nebuchadnezzar. It wasn't a novel message. He'd heard it all before. Remember his first dream of the statue.

And it's crystal clear message that God's kingdom, in distinction to Nebuchadnezzar's and subsequent worldly kingdoms, God's kingdom is an eternal kingdom. The message of that dream was also crystal clear. God rules. He rules eternally. So the message of this dream was not a new message for Nebuchadnezzar. Was he disturbed by his first dream? Yes, he was disturbed. He was greatly disturbed.

[10:29] Disturbed to the point that he was willing to kill all the wise men because they were not able to reveal the dream to him. But he resisted the truth. He was presented with the truth, but he resisted the truth.

What did he go on to do? Well, we've been considering the book. You know what he went on to do. He went on to build this statue of gold, that all the citizens of the kingdom would bow down before this statue of gold that he had built. Daniel's friends cast into the fiery furnace because they refused to do so.

And then what happens? Well, God speaks to Nebuchadnezzar again, and he speaks to him with the same message. He says, Nebuchadnezzar, you think you rule. You think the fate of these men is in your hands, but you're wrong. I rule, and I will deliver these men because I rule, not you. This was a message that he had already heard. Heaven rules, but Nebuchadnezzar resisted the truth. And now for the third time that we know of, there may have been other occasions, but the third time that we know of, this same truth is vividly brought to his attention. We're told in the chapter that he was afraid and terrified, and yet he still resists. You see, he'd heard it all before. He'd heard it all before. There is, we can detect, a growing and dangerous familiarity with the message. There is an evident and sobering hardening of his heart. He'd heard it all before. I wonder if that sounds familiar to you. Have you heard of the blacksmith's dog? The story is told of a blacksmith who bought a dog, a young puppy. And he took the dog to his workplace, to the yard where he engaged in his work. And on the first morning that the dog was there, when the blacksmith took out his tools and began to use his hammers and instruments on the anvil and the great noise that it made, this young dog,

as you can imagine, was terrified by the noise. And the young dog barked and barked incessantly as the hammer banged on the anvil. And he couldn't be consoled. He barked and he barked and he barked throughout the day.

A couple of weeks later, every day had been the same. A couple of weeks later, you could detect a slight change. When the blacksmith began to bang on the anvil, the dog would bark, but he wasn't as distraught as before. He would bark, but he would then, after a while, calm down. The weeks passed, and when the work day would begin and the dog was sleeping there in the workshop of the blacksmith, when the blacksmith would bang on the anvil for the first time, the dog would wake up, would look around, and go back to sleep. Until after a few months, when the blacksmith would bang on the anvil, the dog would sleep right through the whole thing. No effect. Is that true of you for the gospel?

You can remember a day when a preacher preached about eternity and preached about your soul and preached about the urgent need of repentance and you were disturbed. And you thought, this is urgent.

[14:06] I must do something about this. But you resisted. And you can remember a day, maybe sometime later, when again you were disturbed, but you did nothing. And today, water off a duck's back.

You're like the blacksmith's dog. You can hear about hell and eternity and about sin and about judgment. No effect. No impact. You see, there's something of this in Nebuchadnezzar. He'd heard it all before.

God rules. I know that. I've heard that before. And so he resists the truth. He'd heard it all before, but I think there's another reason why he resists the truth. I think the next reason is this, that he was in a comfortable place. Notice what he himself says as he describes his condition.

There in verse 4, I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. This is the moment when God comes to him with this dream that is to impress upon him that heaven rules. Where is he? Well, he's in a very comfortable place. Is not this verse a description of what we all want out of life? At home in my palace, contented and prosperous. What more could a man ask for?

[15:31] Surely the description of a man who has it sussed. The description of a woman who has cracked this whole life business. At home in my house, the mortgage paid off or well on the way to paying it off, contented and prosperous. What more could I ask for? Is not this city full of folks chasing this dream, this panacea of happiness and prosperity? At home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

I wonder, is this church populated by such men and women? What about you? Nebuchadnezzar is happy. He's successful. Everything's cool and he's just chilling in his palace.

The last thing that he wants is a nightmare. The last thing he wants is to be challenged and shaken. The last thing he wants to be challenged. The last thing he wants to be challenged. The last thing he wants to hear is that all is not well with his life and with his soul. This is a message he does not want to hear because he is at home in his palace, contented and prosperous. So what does he do? Well, he resists the truth. He doesn't crassly declare, I don't believe this stuff. He doesn't accuse Daniel of being a miserable liar in order that his head be chopped off for an insolence.

But he might as well have done so as he slides the truth to the very bottom of his imperial entry on his things-to-do list, dealing with the call to recognize that heaven rules was way down, way down that list, way down where you never get to it.

[17:28] You see, he was at home in his palace, contented and prosperous. He's just too comfortable to do business with the living and true God, too at ease to bow the knee and acknowledge the King of Heaven.

Why does Nebuchadnezzar foolishly resist the truth? Because he heard it all before. He was in a comfortable place. But also he resists because he was blinded by his own inflated view of himself. We have, I believe, a description of his own inflated view of himself in the dream in verses 10 to 12. These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed. I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong, and its top touched the sky. It was 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. This first part of the dream is really a description of Nebuchadnezzar's own estimation of his importance and glory. Now that opinion that I am expressing is, I accept, open to challenge. You might respond, and with considerable reason, well,

hang on, is this dream not a dream that is heaven sent? Is it not God who is sending this dream? Yes, that is true. Is it not the case that it is God speaking through the dream? Yes, that is so. But I would contend that God speaks through the dream by means of granting to Nebuchadnezzar a dream that begins by painting a picture of Nebuchadnezzar and his glory that Nebuchadnezzar would recognize, would celebrate, would celebrate, and indeed would own. You can just hear him cry in his sleep as he comes to the end of the first part of the dream. That's me. I'm the tree. Daniel didn't need to interpret that part for him. I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar very quickly identified as a description of himself, of his kingdom. And it's not that the picture painted is a false picture. In verse 22, the interpretation makes it very clear that it's not a false picture. Daniel himself says, you, O king, are that tree.

It's not a false picture. But rather, it is a picture that paints Nebuchadnezzar in a flawless light that simply does not square with the evidence. Let me just give you one example. Compare the dream's portrayal. Very vivid and poetic, certainly, but the dream's portrayal of all being fed and finding refuge under this tree. Even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, everybody is generously provided for by this tree that represents Nebuchadnezzar. But how does that square with what Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar in verse 27? In chapter 4 and verse 27, 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. Well, where do the oppressed come into this? Have we not been told that under this great tree that represents Nebuchadnezzar all are generously provided for?

[21 : 10] Ah, but all are not generously provided for. There are the poor and the oppressed, perhaps the very laborers on the building sites of Babylon. And has it not always been so? When megalomaniacs build their empires, the poor are oppressed. Even today in Qatar, as they're building the stadiums of the World Cup, the talk is of the migrant workers, oppressed and suffering. The Taj Mahal, the pyramids of Egypt, and we could go on. You see, this dream, it is a God-given dream, but in this dream, God presents to Nebuchadnezzar this image of himself that he has of himself, of who he is, and there is truth in it. But the dream also reflects Nebuchadnezzar's own self-deception concerning his condition. Nebuchadnezzar sees himself as successful, as powerful, as wise, but he also sees himself as benevolent, just, and kind. He's a good guy with no urgent need to repent, what's all this talk of repentance? Doesn't God know all that I have done? Doesn't God know how I provide for the whole world from my bounty? Me, repent? What is God on about?

What about you? Perhaps you're not as delusional as Nebuchadnezzar. I certainly hope you are not. But I wonder if you come to a similar conclusion. Maybe your conclusion is, well, I know I'm not perfect. I know I do things that I ought not to do. I know I'm not all that I ought to be, but I'm basically a good guy. No urgent need for you to acknowledge that heaven rules and to repent of your sins. Oh, yes, others, bad people, they should repent. They should confess. They should seek mercy from God, but that's not an urgent need for me. Why does Nebuchadnezzar resist? Because he's blinded by his own inflated view of himself. But he also resists. He also avoids the truth by looking for answers in the wrong places. The dream that Nebuchadnezzar has is undoubtedly a problem for him. It has disturbed him. He's comfortable. He's prospering. And then there's this fly in the ointment, this dream, this pesky dream that he's frightened by and terrified by. And what is he to do with it? Well, if he's had a dream, what is he to do? Surely it's a no-brainer. He summons Daniel, surely. He's already had a dream. He already knows who it is in his kingdom who can interpret dreams.

He's already declared to all and sundry that Daniel and Daniel alone has the wisdom and the discernment, the spirit of the gods. Surely he will go to Daniel to seek the interpretation, but he doesn't.

And he doesn't, not because he doesn't realize that Daniel can give him the interpretation, it's because he doesn't want Daniel's interpretation. He doesn't want to hear what Daniel has to say, and so he calls all his magicians and all his enchanters and all the quacks of the kingdom to give him, to give him an interpretation that he wants to hear, that he's comfortable with, that won't disturb him. He needs answers, but he looks in the wrong places.

There's a revealing, finally, in verse 8 of the chapter. Notice the way it's presented to us by Nebuchadnezzar himself. Finally, Daniel came into my presence. When all else had failed, finally, oh, okay, we'll listen to Daniel. Anyone but Daniel was preferable. You see, Nebuchadnezzar is deliberately avoiding Daniel. More importantly, he is deliberately avoiding Daniel's God with whom he does not want to do business. He's in need of answers. He is in need of peace for his soul. He is

in need of forgiveness. But he will search for answers everywhere except where the answers are to be found. And what about you?

[25 : 42] Do you recognize that there is something missing in your life, an absence of purpose and peace in your life, a sense of guilt, an unsatisfied longing for freedom? And where are you looking for answers? Are you looking in the perfect relationship, in the lovely family, in a good job, in status, in power, in all of these places, looking for answers that will not be provided?

Many of these things good in themselves, but that will not provide you with the answers that you need. Only Daniel's God can provide you the answers you require, and he provides those answers clearly and eloquently and generously in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Why does Nebuchadnezzar resist? Well, he resists by looking for answers in the wrong places, but let me suggest another reason he resists. Nebuchadnezzar just had too much important stuff going on.

Let's just read verses 29 and 30 and see how we, from these verses, can come to that, I think, reasonable conclusion. Verses 29 and 30 of chapter 4.

He's carrying on in his palace, comfortable and prospering. 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? It's quite a picture that is painted for us. There's Nebuchadnezzar, a master of all that he surveys. Now, my concern isn't at the moment to see what happens at this point, or even to dwell on the exceeding sinfulness of this prideful declaration. That's not my concern. My concern is this. Why is it that Nebuchadnezzar expresses himself in this way at this point in his life, at this particular moment in his reign? Could he have not expressed himself in this way at any point, even in the preceding twelve months? Why at this point does he observe all that is before him and declare in this way, is not this the great Babylon?

[28 : 07] Well, I would suggest that there is a reason why he declares himself in this way at this particular point in time. And the reason is this, that it is at this point that Nebuchadnezzar had concluded his massive building program of temples and palaces and hanging gardens and temples and fortifications and all the rest of it. You see, he had this big plan and he's concluded the plan and he looks on it as an artist, contemplates the canvas of what he has painted. As an architect or an engineer today perhaps looks on the finished building with satisfaction. And he declares himself in this way.

Now the point is this, if that was true at this point, twelve months on, where was Nebuchadnezzar twelve months before? Well, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to work it out. He was a year from finishing all his buildings. He was a year from finishing his master plan. He had important stuff to do. This was not a convenient time for God to come and call him to repentance. He had big plans.

His buildings were going up, the palaces were being built, but they weren't finished yet. And he had to finish his plans. He had laid out the plans for his life and nobody was going to interfere with the important stuff that he had to do. He was close to finishing, but not quite finished.

God comes in this dream and he threatens to mess everything up. What would recognizing that heaven rule do to his plans? Well, you can forget about the temples to pagan deities for a start. That's just for starters. He had too much important stuff going on. I wonder, and we don't know, I wonder if when Nebuchadnezzar had the dream, I wonder if the thought went through his mind, well, you know, I really must deal with this. But I'll just finish all these buildings. I'll just finish this master plan. And once it's finished, I'll sit back and think about the dream and think about the interpretation and do business with the God of Daniel. I don't know if he thought that. But certainly he resisted the call to repentance, the call to recognize that heaven rules because he had too much important stuff going on. What about you? Do you resist bowing the knee to King Jesus because you fear that it could mess up your carefully constructed plan for your life? Just too much important stuff going on to recognize that heaven rules and to repent of your sins and to place yourself at the disposal of the one who rules, that he would govern your life, that he would determine what your plans are, that he would move you in the direction that he wishes, maybe very different to the plans that you have. Nebuchadnezzar resists because he had too much important stuff going on.

[31 : 16] But there's a final thing I want to say, and with this I close. The bottom line, all of these things that we said, I think, are contributing factors that would explain why Nebuchadnezzar resists the big truth that heaven rules. But the bottom line, undergirding, if you wish, or overarching all of

these things, the bottom line is that he doesn't really believe the message that is brought to him.

The conclusion of it, the summary of it, the essence of it is there, recorded for us in verse 27, by Daniel as he interprets the dream, therefore, O King, be pleased to accept my advice.

Here's an executive summary for the executive of the kingdom. 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.

What is it that Nebuchadnezzar needs to believe and do? Well, he needs to acknowledge that heaven rules. This is at the heart of the matter. And the evidence that he genuinely is acknowledging that heaven rules will be by repenting of his sins, his sins of commission and his sins of omission, as he has failed to provide for the poor and the oppressed, and no doubt has been guilty himself of oppressing them in some measure. You see, evidence that he truly believes will be found in his repentance.

What else does he have to believe? Well, it all ties in together, but he has to believe that failing to do so, failing to repent, would bring upon him the announced judgment. This terrible judgment that had been announced by God, that he would become like a beast of the field, believing would have involved him saying, yes, that is true. That is true. That is what will happen to me. And had he truly believed that, what would he have done? Well, he would have done what was necessary to avoid it. He would have repented of his sins, but he doesn't repent of his sins. And so his failure to repent very eloquently portrays to us his unbelief. He doesn't believe. He's disturbed. He's terrified. He's shaken. But he doesn't believe, because had he believed, he would have repented. And indeed, this judgment would have been averted.

[33 : 46] What about you? Do you believe that heaven rules? Do you believe that heaven rules?

And you say, well, I do believe in the coming day of judgment. The Bible speaks of judgment. I believe that that that is a day that is coming. Perhaps you say, as it's presented, this truth that heaven rules, you're able to say, yes, that's true. I believe that. I believe that heaven rules.

But I ask you this, have you repented of your sins and put your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Do you live your life in submission to him as Lord of your life? Because if you have not done that, then you don't truly believe. Because true belief would drive you to the cross. It would drive you to Jesus. It would drive you to the one who is ready and willing to forgive you and to grant you eternal life and to grant you forgiveness and grant you a place in his family. And your intellectual assent to the truths of the Bible are of no value if they do not bring you to the cross and to repentance and to trust in Jesus Christ. And so I say, do you believe? Do you believe that heaven rules?

You see, this is the most important truth you must grapple with and you must come to terms with.

Because if with Nebuchadnezzar you resist this truth and you push it to one side and you leave it for a more opportune season, then judgment will come as it came, as it came to this man.

This is a great truth. It is a truth not to be resisted, but a truth to be embraced and to be acknowledged. And as you do, to do that which you must do, repent of your sins and trust in the one who has been provided for you as a sufficient Savior. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

[36 : 04] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.