

Daniel 4:37

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 August 1992

Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn to that passage we read in the book of Daniel, chapter 4, and especially verse 37, the last verse of the chapter. 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.

So, when God is after you, he'll get you, might be the motto of this life of Nebuchadnezzar that we're given in the book of Daniel.

When God is after you, he'll get you. We see in this book some account given of how God deals with Nebuchadnezzar.

And we see that there is no escape from God, even though Nebuchadnezzar was the mightiest king in the world at that time. Great political power and influence, yet when God set his eyes upon him, there was no escape for Nebuchadnezzar.

Now God deals personally with people in this way. The book of Daniel has a great deal to say about political events, not only of that time in which Daniel lived, but also in coming centuries.

[1 : 3 3] A great deal that is tremendously important in the overall pattern of the scriptures, understanding how the Old Testament links into the New Testament age.

But although it has that as one of its great purposes, yet we also have here God dealing with individuals, with Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and also with the pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar.

Now Nebuchadnezzar was someone who originally had no contact with the people of God, no contact with the true God, no understanding of all that God had revealed of himself in the scriptures as they were at that time, and with his dealings with the people of Israel.

But God brought him to know these things. So no matter how far we may be away from God, God is able to bring us to himself.

No matter who you are this morning, no matter supposing you may have a great knowledge of the things of God, like Daniel, or you may know nothing about it at all, like Nebuchadnezzar, yet God is able to deal with you, and God is able to meet with you here today.

[3 : 0 3] God delights to meet with individuals, to enter into their lives, and to change them. And if he has set his heart upon meeting with you, then there is no escape from that.

There may be difficulties, you may try to run away, but he will catch up with you, and he will establish that relationship that is for your eternal good.

I'd like to look with you first a little bit of the background to this chapter that we read, God's preparation. Because, you see, although sometimes it might appear to us that God acts suddenly, yet that is not something just out of the blue.

God has been working, God has been preparing. Here we see something sudden and dramatic happening in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, being struck with what we might call a mental illness, where he behaved like an animal.

There's a special name for it. But this thing that happened suddenly, dramatically, was only one stage in God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar.

[4 : 20] In the same way, God may have been dealing with you in your life up to this present time, although you may have not been aware of it. And it may be only as you look back, as we think of some of these things here.

So you can see that, yes, God has been at work, preparing you, perhaps preparing you, for this very moment, for this very day, when you'll come to know the Lord himself.

First, God prepared by bringing Nebuchadnezzar into contact with God's own man. You see, as I said at the beginning, Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king, the king of Babylon.

And yet, God brought him all the way from Babylon, all the way across the desert, all the way across the mountains, all the way across the river, hundreds of miles, to a little place called Jerusalem.

Why did God bring him there? Well, there were various reasons. God brought him there, first, to be a punishment upon his own people, the Jewish people, for their rebellion against him.

[5 : 32] And they were to be carried away into exile to Babylon. No doubt, Nebuchadnezzar had his own ideas about it, too. He was trying to extend his empire, and he was conscious of the threat of Egypt on the south, and he wanted to establish his frontier in that area.

But, there was another reason. Another reason was that God was dealing personally with Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't bring him there just to conquer.

He didn't bring him there just to establish his empire. All these things fell into the pattern of God's overall dealing. But into that overall pattern, God also fitted in this, that he brought Nebuchadnezzar to meet with Daniel.

For Daniel was one of these captives brought from his own land away into exile into Babylon.

There, he was selected as one of those who were promising to be trained up in all the knowledge of the Babylonians and to take a part in their government.

[6 : 45] Because that seemed to be one of the strengths of the way in which Nebuchadnezzar governed he was a wise man and he saw that he could establish his empire by involving people of all the different nations in it.

And so, Daniel was proclaimed to be the very top of his class in the training that he received. And he met with the king and the king, we're told about this in chapter 1, recognized the great gifts that Daniel had.

And that was the first contact that King Nebuchadnezzar had with Daniel. But God was establishing this contact because Daniel was somebody who loved the Lord.

Daniel was somebody who devoted his life to serve God no matter what it might cost him. That even there in Babylon he wasn't prepared to compromise over things that were essential in the practice of his worship of God.

and Nebuchadnezzar came to know this young man Daniel. Now God has also acted in your life perhaps in similar kinds of ways.

[7 : 53] Maybe not in such a dramatic way as with Nebuchadnezzar but he's brought people who are Christians some of the people of God into your life.

Your path and theirs have crossed perhaps come together. Perhaps there are some in your family perhaps some of your friends perhaps here at church in this congregation but God has brought you into contact with these people.

For some people it begins at work. Somebody in their workplace is a Christian. There's something different about them. Their paths cross. There seems to be some interaction. God is already beginning to work.

That for many people is one of the first stages in which God enters into their life. Here it was similarly with Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar thought that he was the great king who governed everything.

But God was governing him and God was bringing him into contact with this man. We see too that Nebuchadnezzar came to know something of God's revelation as well as meeting God's man.

[9 : 00] And this is the second step of God's preparation. In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar had his first dream and none of the wise men could interpret it and then Daniel was brought.

Daniel could interpret and understand this dream and he did so for the king. And the king thought this was absolutely tremendous because here was obviously somebody who was tremendously useful and he rejoiced that Daniel's God had given him this understanding.

He saw this revealing of things to be something tremendously useful to himself. Because you see at this point the dream that had been given to Nebuchadnezzar wasn't something particularly personal although he was mentioned within it as being the head of the Babylonian kingdom it was something to do with the history of the periods from that time on that his kingdom his empire would be succeeded by another and that by another and so on.

And it gives us an understanding of the ages that were to happen after the end of the Old Testament time into the New Testament the coming of the Roman Empire is the last one. And saw this tremendously impressed Nebuchadnezzar and he saw that Daniel was somebody very useful to have around with such understanding like this because of course the Babylonians especially would have laid great emphasis upon the interpretation of dreams.

Well maybe you haven't had somebody interpret a dream for you but you've come in a different kind of way to know something perhaps of the importance of God's revelation.

[10 : 50] You've come to know not just God's people but you've come to know that God speaks to you in his word and God tells you about life and everybody who really reads the Bible and hears the Bible being preached comes to recognize that here is something tremendously useful is tremendously important.

It tells you a great deal about life that you wouldn't have thought of yourself and some very useful things that you discover about the world God has made about ourselves as human beings and how God wants us to live the commandments he's given us and so on and many people may recognize that as Nebuchadnezzar did without going any stage further.

In other words you see something of the usefulness of Christianity something of the usefulness of God's word but you don't take it a stage further to be something personal.

You may make use of some of the things you learn but you haven't really got to the heart of the matter just as Nebuchadnezzar did at that stage. And then the third part of God's preparation was what we may call God's salvation being witnessed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Now again we haven't time to go into all of what was involved in chapter 3 of the book of Daniel but you remember how the three friends Shadrach, Mishaph and Abednego refused to bow down to this idol that the king had set up and they refused to do so because they loved the Lord God and worshipped him only.

[12 : 39] And Nebuchadnezzar was furious and he commanded them to be thrown into the fiery furnace. But then in the middle of that fiery furnace Nebuchadnezzar could see that the three men had not been killed and there was a fourth man who looked like the son of God in the furnace with them.

And they were brought out of the furnace unharmed. And here Nebuchadnezzar saw the power of God to deliver his servants even from his own power the power of the king.

And here was something tremendous something that Nebuchadnezzar could not have conceived of. But he saw there was something real in the lives of these men that caused God to interfere in the course of history to interfere in his decision.

So there was two sides to this. There was the side that really impressed Nebuchadnezzar no doubt. But there was also the side that made him realize this God of Daniels is not just a useful God.

God he's an interfering God. He steps into people's lives. He turns my decisions outside in.

[14 : 14] And you see that perhaps wasn't just quite so attractive to him. But at least he came at that stage to understand something more about God that he was able to deliver those who trusted in him.

But in all these stages of God's preparation working with Nebuchadnezzar the king did not come to a personal knowledge of God nor to a personal trust in him.

He appreciated those things about God that he learned through Daniel and through Daniel's friends. Perhaps he was a little bit frightened by them as well. But there was no personal commitment to this God.

And that may be the position that you're at today. you may know a great deal about God. You may appreciate a great deal about his word and about his salvation through Jesus Christ.

You may see some of these things. You may have been able to witness the effect of these things in the lives of other people just as Nebuchadnezzar saw it in the life of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[15 : 26] But you don't know it for yourself. You don't know this Lord, this one who is able to save and transform your life.

But of course, all of this was merely preparatory in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. We come to the next stage and that is God's warning to Nebuchadnezzar.

God warned him of judgment. And God gave him a reason for this judgment. Daniel in verse 27 says, 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 other words, God was judging Nebuchadnezzar because of his sin.

He had received all this blessing. He had received the acquaintance of Daniel and his friendship. He had received revelation from God.

[16 : 36] He had received an understanding of God's power to deliver and save. Yet he himself was unchanged. Not just in the fact that he hadn't really accepted God.

but that he was still in his sin. He was still persisting in courses of conduct that were totally opposed to what God required. And at the heart of this sin we discover in the rest of the narrative, at the heart of this sin was pride.

You see, it's very unusual for people to cause misery to other human beings just for the sake of doing it. there are such people who delight to do that.

But it's not so common. What is most common is that because we have pride in ourselves or our own achievement or because we have an ambition connected with that pride, we're prepared to ride roughshod over the lives of other people.

And see, isn't that the case with Nebuchadnezzar? he was a great king. There is no doubt that he was one of the greatest men of the ancient world. I read somewhere that he built more brick buildings than any man who has ever lived in history.

[17 : 55] And that's quite something. He totally rebuilt Babylon. He built the great wonder of the ancient world, the hanging gardens of Babylon. All these things he achieved.

He extended his empire far and wide. And he had tremendous visions of what he was going to do and a tremendous pride in what he had done. But in doing all these things, many of them good things in themselves, in doing all these things, at the heart of it was a pride in himself and his own achievement, and as a consequence, he had no regard for the interests of other people.

And his kingdom was established on oppression. He had no concern for those who were poor and those who worked for him and were oppressed.

This is the kind of thing that Daniel was here bringing to his attention. Now, how does your life stand in the light of God's law?

It's not just a question of what do you know about God, how you've responded to God. It's a question of how do you live? Because God is concerned with you as a person who stands before him and a person who relates to other people.

[19 : 16] Are there things in your life that you are unprepared to give up, though you know them to be wrong, and they are hurting other people, and they are harming yourself, yet because of your own pride, you will not let go of it.

Indeed, you cannot let go of it. This was the case of Nebuchadnezzar. Sin had a complete hold and dominance in his life, and God was warning him that judgment was coming because of it.

And he warns us also that judgment comes on our sin. Maybe judgment in this life as it came with Nebuchadnezzar, but certainly judgment in the world to come.

But notice that this warning of judgment was a warning that was given in a most loving way. You see, people caricature what the message of the Bible concerning judgment is, and they make it out to be harsh, as if God is some kind of sadist.

But here, God, through his servant Daniel, lovingly warns King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was God's chosen instrument here. And Daniel knew the king.

[20 : 32] Daniel was concerned about the king. Daniel loved the king. And so in verse 19, Daniel was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. And then, later on in that verse, my Lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversary.

That's the spirit in which Daniel comes. Not rejoicing, not gloating over the fact that God was speaking a word of judgment to this king. And that's the way in which this message of judgment ought to be proclaimed by preachers and spoken about by Christians, not in any kind of sense of gloating over the fact that God's judgment is warned against those who continue in sin.

And so, Daniel, please, in verse 27, in a very personal way with the king, You see, Daniel makes a personal appeal to him.

And God today makes a personal appeal to you. He speaks to you through his word. He speaks to you through me. And he asks you to turn from your sin and to turn to his way of salvation in Jesus Christ.

And he does so out of love and out of concern for you in your perilous condition. But we know that here God's warning was ignored.

[22 : 02] I wonder, have you been ignoring God's warning? God has been warning you, maybe in his own word, maybe also in things that have happened in your life. God has been issuing you warnings, but you haven't listened.

You haven't paid any attention. You carry on regardless. All this was said to King Nebuchadnezzar and we're waiting for a response. What did he say? Nothing.

There was no response. No response this time like the last time when he had praised Daniel for all his wisdom in interpreting his dream. No, nothing like that.

Because this was personal. He was hurt and he was offended by it. And there was no response. And so time passed.

And you see, perhaps, to begin with, perhaps he had been a little bit shaken by this. Perhaps he had even maybe tried to turn over a new leaf in his own way. But time went on.

[23 : 05] Twelve months later is the next verse. Nothing had happened. And perhaps Nebuchadnezzar began to think, well, it's all just a load of rubbish. I know that Daniel is perhaps good at interpreting dreams, but surely he got this one wrong.

And there he was back to his old ways again. His pride was growing again. And perhaps in the meantime he had been getting on with all this work of redeveloping Babylon, building it up.

And there he stood on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, looking out at all his great achievements. And 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.

All my achievements, all the pride in what I've done, the warning was ignored. How many warnings have we ignored concerning God's judgment?

These warnings will not continue forever. The time will come when God will deal with us in judgment. It may be, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, that this will be a judgment in this world to bring us to our senses, even as he dealt with the prodigal son in the story Jesus told, to bring him to his senses.

[24 : 27] Maybe God has to deal with you the long way around, the hard way. If you won't come in an easy way, maybe he will deal with you in a harder way. That's what happened with Nebuchadnezzar.

The warning was fulfilled at the very height of his pride, while he was making these bosses, the doom struck. And at that moment, he was struck by this mental illness, it's something that has been recognized since then, scientifically, that someone has the illusion that they're an animal, and they behave like an animal, maybe a particular kind of animal.

And that struck Nebuchadnezzar, in that moment. And so, the warning that had been given of God's judgment fell upon him.

And God struck him at the place that hurt most. Because, you see, it was Nebuchadnezzar's pride that was the problem, his pride in himself, his glory, and his dignity.

And it was his own personal dignity that suffered. Is there something in your life, similar to this? Some area that perhaps causes you shame, that although you take pride in so many things, you know that there's one area that you can't take pride in.

[25 : 53] One area where you're a failure. You may be great at work. You may be thought of great by others in your workplace, but in your own home, there's failure.

Or perhaps in a relationship, there's failure. Perhaps in the family, there's failure. And God strikes you at that point that hurts your pride most.

God took away Nebuchadnezzar's dignity until he came to see the utter foolishness of his pride in himself. God's need to need to do.

You have to ask, what is God teaching you in it? Is he bringing you to your senses by this, to make you realize that there's no way forward simply by your own pride?

You have to come to do what Nebuchadnezzar did. And the last thing I want to notice with you therefore is God's mercy. We've seen God's preparation in the life of Nebuchadnezzar.

[26 : 59] We've seen also God's warning to Nebuchadnezzar that finally we see God's mercy. The first part of this is that he raised his eyes.

Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes. Verse 34, I raise my eyes towards heaven. Now there's something greatly significant in that.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar had, like all of us in our sin, he had his eyes upon the earth, he had his eyes upon the world, he had his eyes upon himself and upon his own achievements.

He was looking down all the time. There he was on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon and he was looking down on the world and looking down on everything.

His focus was downward. You see, that is the great focus of the sinful human heart and it's the same today. We are caught up with, we are obsessed by what is downward.

[28 : 07] We look down to the material world around us and get our value and our satisfaction out of material things. We look to ourselves and our own achievements.

all of this, our eyes are focused down. But what happened with Nebuchadnezzar when God acted in his grace was that he looked up.

There he was, poor and despised. There he was, eating grass. There he was, turned out from the society of men.

God caused him, in his humiliation and in his shame, to look up.

And he looked up to God and he found mercy in that day. Have you learned to look up? To look away from the things that are down and that are dragging you down?

[29 : 09] To look away from yourself and your own achievements, your own interests? To look to God and to ask, what does God require of me? That is the start of salvation.

So we see the repentance also of Nebuchadnezzar there. He turned his eyes towards heaven and he recognized that God was king.

God's dominion is an eternal dominion. And he came to recognize in the very last words of this proclamation he made, those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

He confessed that he had walked in pride. He confessed that that was his fault, that was his sin. But now he was turning from that, God had humbled him and he was looking to God.

Have you recognized your own sin? Because before you can know salvation, you have to admit your sin. sin. Because Jesus came to save sinners, nobody else.

[30 : 13] And it's only people who recognize their sin. It's only people who come as sinners that are rescued and saved and delivered by Jesus Christ. And so Nebuchadnezzar was restored.

His sanity was restored. His dignity was restored. His kingdom was restored. But surely he was restored in a new way. He was a new man.

Because now he looked at the world in a different way. And here he speaks of it as he rejoices in God. This speaking of God now is not the kind of mere formal way in which he spoke of him before as the God of Daniel or the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

No. Now he speaks of him as the God who has dealt with him. At the beginning of this proclamation he made he speaks of how God dealt with him personally and here he rejoices as he glorifies and honors God.

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.

[31 : 23] All the peoples on 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?

And the very last verse he says, Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and exalt and glorify the king of heaven, because everything he does is right, and all his ways are just.

Can you say that? Can you say that after all that you've been through? you see the heart that says, Why does God allow this to happen to me?

I can't accept a God who dishes out this kind of stuff to me. That attitude is not the attitude that receives the mercy of God.

It is the one who, like Nebuchadnezzar said, God, everything he does is right, and all his ways are just. When he knocked me down, when he afflicted me with this illness, when he caused me to be a laughingstock, when he caused me to be humiliated, his ways are just.

[32 : 36] I rightly deserved it. Can you say that? About your sin, about your shame, and about the things that have happened to you, if you can say that, then there is evidence that the mercy of God is at work in your life.

You recognize the righteousness of God and your own sinfulness. Nebuchadnezzar came by the grace of God, not just to know about God, not just to know people who knew God, but to know God for himself.

Have you responded to his warning? Have you come to know him through the experiences he has given to you, to lead you to himself?

You can come to know him this very moment, if you're prepared to admit your sin and to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Let us pray. Let us never be captivated.