

Daniel Series Part 11

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[0 : 00] Do you like happy endings? Well, you can call me a big softie, but I'm a sucker for happy endings.

If I'm paying good money to go to the pictures, I don't want to be shortchanged with a miserable or enigmatic ending. You know, modern films, all very clever, I'm sure, but you leave the cinema and you've been deprived of a happy ending. And as I say, I'm a simple guy, but I do like a happy ending to a film. Give me a *And They Lived, happily ever after*, any day of the week.

Life, of course, is not always so obliging, as many of you will know from personal experience. There isn't always the happy ending that we would desire.

This morning, we're coming to the final chapter in our portrayal of King Nebuchadnezzar. And I'm glad to report that on this occasion, we are blessed with a happy ending. At the beginning of our treatment of this chapter, chapter 4 of the book of Daniel, we identified what we consider to be the pivotal truth of the chapter, and indeed of the book of Daniel. A truth that on more than one occasion now, indeed on several occasions, we have highlighted there in verse 26 of Daniel chapter 4, where the verse ends with these two very significant words, *heaven rules. Heaven rules.* This is the truth around which everything revolves. And over these weeks, we have noticed how the experiences of

Nebuchadnezzar can be understood and analyzed in the light of and in relation to this big truth, that *heaven rules*. We've noticed how that truth was resisted by Nebuchadnezzar. We noticed last Sunday morning how that truth was experienced by Nebuchadnezzar as he was cast down by God and lifted up by God.

[2 : 27] And now we conclude with how this truth is proclaimed by Nebuchadnezzar, the truth proclaimed. Now, there is a sense in which the whole of the chapter comes under the category of the truth proclaimed. Because what we have in chapter 4, perhaps something we haven't explicitly mentioned before, but it's important to be clear on, what we have in chapter 4 is a letter, an open letter, penned by Nebuchadnezzar himself that he directs to the nations of the world. The beginning of the chapter makes that very clear. We have read there, King Nebuchadnezzar, to the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live in all the world. Nebuchadnezzar is proclaiming the truth by means of this letter to all who will listen to this global audience. The bulk of the content of the chapter is a personal testimony in which Nebuchadnezzar describes his experience of God, how he resisted the truth, how he experienced the truth of God's rule in his own life. But at the beginning of the chapter and at the end of the chapter, the verses that we read a few moments ago, we have Nebuchadnezzar proclaiming very explicitly his newfound convictions concerning the rule of God, the convictions that he has come to in the light of and as a result of the experiences he described. And these are the verses that will concern us this morning. Now, we're going to order our thoughts under the umbrella theme of the truth proclaimed in the following way. First of all, the man, the man who proclaims.

Then the message, the message he proclaims. And finally, the manner, the manner of the proclamation. So, these are the three elements we want to consider, the man, the message, and the manner.

And we'll begin by considering the man, the man who engages in this proclamation of the truth. Now, my primary concern under this first heading of the man who proclaims is to contend that the man in question, Nebuchadnezzar, is a changed man, a converted man, if you wish. This is not the unanimous conclusion of all who have examined the evidence. The evidence is what we have before us in the text of Scripture. And some do come to diverging opinions on this matter. And no doubt a case can be made, a respectable, credible case can be made to at least cast some doubt on the genuineness of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion. My own view is as follows, and I introduce it by a general principle,

I suppose. On a question of this nature, I think we do well in erring on the side of charity. I think that's probably a sound principle in life generally, if in doubt, err on the side of charity.

And certainly, that is what I would be inclined to do in the case of Nebuchadnezzar. But of course, I would contend, as I will in a moment, that we don't simply base our affirmation that this is a changed man purely on the grounds of charity. There are solid reasons for coming to this conclusion.

[6 : 23] And we can present them, and we have to do so really in a very brief and summarized way. But we can present arguments in this regard or in this direction by comparing and contrasting Nebuchadnezzar before and after. We've all seen, you know, pictures that are taken before and after some experience.

Well, here we have before us the opportunity to examine Nebuchadnezzar before and after, before and after this experience of God that he describes for us, the dream that he has, the manner in which he is cast down into the state of insanity, and the manner in which he is lifted up, and his reason is returned to him. We can consider him before that experience and after that experience.

And I think that contrast will guide us in the right direction. The first thing I want to say, and to contrast concerning the man, is what we might describe as his personal experience of God.

And let's just contrast what we discover in that regard before and after, first of all, in chapter 2 and verse 47. Now, this is in the context of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. How does Nebuchadnezzar respond following his first dream? Well, there we read in verse 47 the words that he directs to Daniel. The king said to Daniel, Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery. He declares sound truths concerning God. But he declares them in this manner, Surely your God is the God of gods.

Then in chapter 3 and verse 28, following the incident of the fiery furnace, we read that in verse 28, how does Nebuchadnezzar respond to that? Opportunity to learn about God and who God is.

[8 : 33] We read there, Then Nebuchadnezzar said, Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants, and he goes on. What he says is good in as far as it goes, but the praise that he directs, if you wish, is to the God of another, to the God of Shadrach, to the God of Meshach, to the God of Abednego. Compare that manner of expression with what we find in chapter 4 and in verse 2 very especially. It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. We see the contrast. Before, he was talking about what your God has done, your God, Daniel, the God of Shadrach, of Meshach, and Abednego. But now, as he declares and proclaims the truth to his global audience, he says,

I want to tell you about what God has done for me. I think there is there a very real shift in the manner in which he expresses himself and how that reflects an interior reality. Of course, we have also that more personal language at the end of the chapter, in verse 34, at the end of that time, following this experience, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High. I honored and glorified Him who lives forever.

Before this experience, related for us, described for us by Nebuchadnezzar himself in chapter 4, before this experience, Nebuchadnezzar had been impressed by God. He had been impressed by God.

He declares how impressed he is, but he had not been converted by God. And there is a great difference between being impressed by God. It is only now that he can speak of a personal experience of God, and so he does. And of course, as we think of how that relates to ourselves, this is one of the marks of saving faith. The believer has a story to tell of what God has done for him or for her.

Just this past Wednesday at the prayer meeting, Jonathan was speaking on the final verses of Psalm 66 that we've been studying over these past few months. And the opening words of that final section of the psalm begin with these words. The psalmist declares, Come and listen, all you who fear God. Let me tell you what he has done for me.

[11 : 34] This is what Nebuchadnezzar is doing. With the psalmist, he is saying, Listen to what God has done for me. I want to tell you about what God has done for me.

The signs and wonders that he has performed for me. This is the personal testimony of God's work in his life that Nebuchadnezzar declares. And so I ask you, gathered here this morning, do you have a story to tell? Can you, with Nebuchadnezzar, share with others, even in the words that he uses, It is my pleasure to tell you what the Most High has done for me. I want to tell you what God has done for me. I want to tell you what Jesus has done for me, how he's forgiven my sins, how he's given me new life. I want to tell you what God has done for me. So we have in this man a personal experience of God. We have also a genuine submission to God. Here again, we can contrast before and after.

Chapter 2 and verse 46, following the first dream, what do we read? Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him, to Daniel. But then what do we have when we come to the chapter that we're considering in chapter 4 and verse 35? These are verses we've already read, but notice especially the close of that verse, what Nebuchadnezzar says, no one can hold back his hand, the hand of God, or say to him, what have you done? He then goes on to say at the very end of the chapter in verse 37, the final sentence of verse 37, he declares, and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble. Maybe the contrast isn't so immediately obvious as with the previous occasion. But what we've noticed is that following the first dream, Nebuchadnezzar falls prostrate before Daniel. It's before Daniel that he bows down. But now the focus of his attention is on the one before whom Daniel bows, before the God of

Daniel. Notice that Nebuchadnezzar, in the words that he shares with us or that are recorded for us here, does not limit himself to simply a grand declaration of God's sovereign rule. He had done something of that previously, but he declares his own personal submission to that rule. You know, these words that we read, no one can say, what have you done? Now, it seems to me inconceivable that when Nebuchadnezzar declared that he wasn't very clearly thinking about himself, in addition to everybody else. Nobody can say to you, what have you done? I can't say it, and nobody else can say it, because I recognize who you are and my need to submit to you. When at the very end, the very end, he declares, and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble. This isn't simply a general declaration of truth, though it is indeed true. This is an extension, if you wish, of his personal testimony. I walked in pride, and I was humble. That is what happened to me. I recognize that the God of heaven humbled me, and now what I must do is submit to the one who humbled me. And so there is, I think, evidence of a genuine submission to God on the part of King Nebuchadnezzar. Now, this is a man clearly who has been brought up and steeped in pagan religion, and it would be unrealistic to imagine that from one day to next he is completely spared or divested of all pagan influence in his life and indeed in his mindset and worldview. That's not the way things work. But nonetheless, I think we do have evidence of genuine submission to God, which is at the heart of a saving faith.

And so I fast forward, as it were, to ourselves gathered here this morning. What about you?

[16:17] You may not bow down to Daniel as Nebuchadnezzar foolishly did following the first dream, recognizing Daniel's wisdom and his success in interpreting the dream, very impressed with Daniel.

But though you, I'm sure, would not do that, I wonder if there is a sense in which you might be able to relate to a basic mistake that Nebuchadnezzar made. Nebuchadnezzar admired a follower of God.

He thought Daniel was great. He thought Daniel was a great man. He thought Daniel was a man of great integrity. He was a man he trusted, and he highly admired Daniel. But that admiration of Daniel did not take him, the next step, the necessary step to do business with Daniel's God on the first occasion, following the first dream. I wonder if that's something that some might be careless in also doing. You maybe know of a Christian, maybe a family member, maybe a father, maybe a mother, maybe a grandmother, maybe a friend. You know that they're a Christian, and you admire them.

You're impressed by them. You say, well, that person really does take his faith seriously, and I have a lot of time for that person. But I wonder if you leave it there. Or does that witness, that testimony of the one you admire lead you to think, well, who is this God whom they serve?

Who is this God whom they worship? Who is this God that produces in them this life that I admire as so? Do you take the necessary step of moving on to bow down before the God of the one you maybe look up to and admire as so? Well, in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, I think we identify then, in addition to this personal experience of God, this genuine submission to God. But then also, and finally, before we move on to the next part of the message, is in Nebuchadnezzar we find a true knowledge of God. Now, in this matter of his knowledge of God, what you really have is progression. It's not so easy to have a compare and contrast, a before and after, because even before, as I think we've already hinted at, there was a genuine knowledge of God. And so, what we have really is a progression in that knowledge. And rather than develop that here or point out how that is evidenced in the text, rather what we'll do is we'll move on to the next general heading where we want to think very particularly about that knowledge in the message that Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed. So, we leave behind now the man who proclaims the message and move on to consider the message that he proclaims. Let me just read again part of that message as we have it at the beginning and the end of the chapter. And as I read these verses, just three verses, I want you to just think in your own mind, what is the big truth that Nebuchadnezzar is proclaiming? In the content of his message, what is the one big truth that Nebuchadnezzar declares?

[19 : 45] So, listen to the verses. First of all, verse 3, how great are his signs, how mighty his wonders, his kingdom is an eternal kingdom, his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Then let's read it in verse 34 in the second part of the verse. His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And he goes on. We'll leave it there.

What is the big truth that is declared by Nebuchadnezzar? A truth that is repeated both as he introduces his testimony and as he concludes it at the end of the chapter. Does the big truth that he declares ring any bells? Well, of course, it should ring plenty bells because the truth that Nebuchadnezzar proclaims is precisely the truth that he was intended to learn from his experience. This is something that we've considered from the very beginning of our consideration of this chapter. We go back to verse 25 where Daniel is interpreting the dream and identifies what the purpose of this dream and of the experience that it prophesies, what the purpose of it is. Verse 25, you will be driven away from people, you will live with the wild animals, and you will eat grass like cats, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you. There's the purpose, for you, until you acknowledge that the

Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. And then we go on the following verse to find these memorable words, heaven rules. You see, this was God's intention, that Nebuchadnezzar would learn, that he would grasp, that he would buy into, that he would embrace this truth, that heaven rules, that God's kingdom is an absolute everlasting eternal kingdom. And this is precisely what he has learned. And this is precisely the message that he proclaims. There's nothing original here. There's nothing that he's made up. No, this is what he has been taught, and this is what he declares.

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His dominion endures from generation to generation. What he has learned has become his own message. We can't expect him, nor should we expect him to declare what he has not yet learned concerning God. Now, that seems to me a very sensible pattern.

[22 : 31] As we learn, as we learn, so we proclaim to others. I wonder if we follow that pattern in our own proclamation of the truth, as we are taught, as God would teach us in his word and through his word, and in the experiences of life, as we learn, do we then declare and proclaim to others? This is what Nebuchadnezzar does. The message he proclaims is the message that God has taught him and that he has learned. The message proclaimed then is the message he has learned. But we can say one further thing, maybe a pretty obvious, but an important thing to say, that this message, the message he proclaims, is all about God. It's all about the God who rules. His message is about the King of Heaven.

He was to learn that Heaven rules. Well, he has recognized that the King of Heaven rules. And he has learned something of the nature of that rule. We can notice maybe three features of the nature of the King of Heaven's rule that Nebuchadnezzar particularly emphasizes in his proclamation.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that the rule of Heaven is absolute. Notice there in verse 35, 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. The powers of Heaven and the peoples of the earth, a poetic way of saying that God does whatever he will, whatever he will. All are subject to his rule, be they in heaven or on earth. His rule, this rule of Heaven is absolute in its characteristics. No one can hold back his hand. But this rule is also eternal. This was the purpose very particularly of the first dream, that Nebuchadnezzar would understand that the kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom.

Earthly kings come and go to a penny. But the rule of God, the King of Heaven, his rule, his sovereign government is eternal. It is absolute. It is eternal. But Nebuchadnezzar recognizes another characteristic of this rule of God, that it is an active rule. It is personal. We've already noticed something of that, how in verse 2 he speaks of the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. The rule of this God is active. Not simply a God who creates the universe and then lets it be to develop as it may. No, his rule is active. He is a God who is involved in the lives of those he has created. He orders our circumstances personally and minutely and indeed lovingly.

This is the message that Nebuchadnezzar proclaims. Heaven rules. And so we too, in the message that we would proclaim, certainly follow the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar as we learn, as we discover, so we proclaim, so we share, so we teach others. But may it be, or may it certainly share this characteristic that our message is always to be about God. Our message is about God. Our message is about God about God. Our message is about God about Jesus Christ, about King Jesus. This is our message.

[26 : 03] And we must ever and insistently point others to Him and to Him alone. I wonder, is that the message that you proclaim? It is to be proclaimed verbally, but it is also to be proclaimed by a life that is subject to the Lord who has lived subject to the rule of heaven. Moving on to the third and final element in what we want to say. Not only the man who proclaims the message, not only the message he proclaims, but finally the manner that he proclaims it. It is the case that content has priority over delivery, or the manner of presentation. But manner, nonetheless, is important. I want you to just notice some features, three features, related to the manner of proclamation that we find here in Nebuchadnezzar.

The first thing that we notice, and here there is a very dramatic contrast with his previous manner, is that Nebuchadnezzar employs persuasion in addressing his audience rather than force.

The contrast, as I say, is dramatic between verse 29 of chapter 3. Just take a quick glance there to see how following the occasion of the fiery furnace, and Nebuchadnezzar was very impressed by what he saw.

And then what does he do? Well, he decrees a law. Therefore, I decree that any people of any nation or language you say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be cut into pieces, and their houses be turned into piles of rubble. For no other God can save in this way. You see, part of what he says is very good, is recognition that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is a God who can save. In a sense, the content is very commendable. But notice the manner in which he would have people believe. And if you don't believe, I'm going to cut you up into pieces. But notice the dramatic contrast with what follows in chapter 4. May you prosper greatly. It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. No longer the threat of violence if you don't do what I tell you. No, now he employs the power of personal testimony.

This is what God has done for me. Listen to what he has done for me. I want you to be persuaded. I want you to hear and to listen, to consider what I have to say, that you too would come to the same conclusions. This is the manner in which he proclaims the truth by means of persuasion. We can also detect that the delivery is heartfelt, even in the manner in which he begins his address there in verse 1. May you prosper greatly. Now, it is true that this can be understood simply as a standard greeting. We will come across it again in Daniel in chapter 6 and verse 25. King Darius addresses the nations of the world. And he begins in the same way, may you prosper greatly. And yet, I wonder, is it not reasonable in the light of Nebuchadnezzar's experience to imagine that his desire for the good of those he addresses is a heartfelt desire. And so this isn't a mere formality when he says to them and he addresses them, may you prosper greatly. Very intriguing that the root word behind what is translated in our

[29 : 48] English version as prospering, may you prosper greatly, is that very familiar Hebrew word, shalom. Or it's a Semitic word that goes across not just Hebrew. And so here Nebuchadnezzar makes reference to this, as I say, very familiar biblical word and concept of shalom. Now, whether Nebuchadnezzar, given his pagan upbringing, was able to give the content to that word that would do it justice, nonetheless, it is at the very least intriguing. And speaks of one who has a heartfelt desire that those whom he addresses would indeed be prospered, that they would indeed experience the blessing of God, the shalom of God, the well-being that God grants, and that he himself has experienced at the hand of God. May you prosper greatly. His delivery is joyful. Verse 2, it is my pleasure to tell you. It is my pleasure. It's no tiresome duty. It's not something that I've got to do. And well, God has told me you really must tell people about what I've done for you. No. Nebuchadnezzar says, it is my pleasure to tell you. He delights in the telling the story of God's sovereign rule and indeed of God's redeeming love in his own life. Manor is important. Of course, manner reflects heart motivation. Certainly the examples that we've cited of Nebuchadnezzar aren't simply matters of technique, but they are a manner that he employs that reflects his own heart and his own heart-felt desires. The man, the message, and the manner. I want to conclude by just sharing with you one final reflection that relates to the audience, the intended audience of this proclamation of Nebuchadnezzar.

We're told who the audience are. And as I say, we will conclude with this thought. Then in verse 1, King Nebuchadnezzar, to the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live in all the world.

This global audience, it seems to me, reveals important truths that I want to mention very much in passing. First of all, I think it does evidence the genuineness of Nebuchadnezzar's convictions that he has come to concerning who God is and God's rule. You see, it is precisely because heaven's rule is absolute and global, that it is indispensable that all be informed of this reality. You see, Nebuchadnezzar has come to the conclusion that this God, the God of Daniel, is the God over all. His rule is over all. And so it is reasonable that he would then declare that truth to all. All must know. All must submit. It is because he is persuaded of that that he seeks to ensure that everybody hears. Now, it's also true that he was the emperor of the world, effectively, at this point. And so he had the capacity to make known to all. He had the means. But nonetheless, I think his intended audience, his desire that that all here reflects his newfound conviction that God is indeed the one who governs over all.

It evidences also, if we can use language that would seem to be drawn more from the New Testament, but it does seem to evidence the scale of Nebuchadnezzar's missionary vision. He wants everybody to know this God. He wants them to experience this God that he has experienced.

But I would say one further thing. This intended audience is, is it not, a reflection of God's ultimate global purposes? The language of Nebuchadnezzar is the language of the Great Commission.

[34 : 04] It's New Covenant language. It's the language of Jesus to his disciples. It's the language of Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It's the language of heaven, as we've read in Revelation. The language of heaven, that from every nation, from every tongue, from every people, there would be those who would be gathered to worship and praise the living and true God. And so in these words of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps, and no doubt, unconsciously, not something that he was conscious of as he pens this letter, you have a reflection of God's global purposes, of God's worldwide intentions for this, his world.

And of course, these truths leave us with a challenge for ourselves. What about us? Do we believe that all must bow before King Jesus? We live in an age when all is deemed relative.

It's right for you, but it's not right for me. I love Jesus, but not everybody else has to love Jesus. Everybody can find their own way to heaven. Well, Nebuchadnezzar would have no time for such nonsense. He has discovered that there is one God, there is one true God, and he is the only true God.

And do we share that conviction that all must bow before this God, the Father of Jesus Christ? All must bow before King Jesus. Do we have that worldwide vision? The Lord has brought the nations to our doorstep. We don't need to cross continents, though may be that God will call us so to do, but we don't actually need to, to be able to reach the nations of the world. Do we appreciate that they have been brought in order that God's global purposes? What about us? The answer to these questions, it cannot only be a verbal answer. We can't simply verbally or mentally assent. We must demonstrate with actions our professed convictions. What kind of audience would we have who would hear the good news concerning the God who rules? To whom would we direct this message that heaven rules? Let us pray.