

COW BOY

DANIEL 4:19-37 NOVEMBER 7, 2018

Well, the midterms are finally over. Now maybe we'll get a few months off from the door-to-door canvassers and the non-stop robocalls. One of the things I find fascinating about every election is how different people have different assessments of what the election is "all about." You'll hear them say things like, "This election is all about the economy." Or, "it's all about immigration." "This election is all about your opinion of Donald Trump." And, of course, every election is a mixture of many different issues.

We've been a few months into Daniel now. So, what would you say if I asked you: "What is the Book of Daniel all about?" There's no single answer. Depending on who you read or your own personal experience with the book you might say the focal point is prophecy or miracles, maybe how God delivers His people. Some say it's all about the doctrine of sovereignty. All of those elements are found in these passages.

As we've been moving through the chapters, something that keeps jumping off the page, at least in my own thinking, is the powerful operation of God's grace. God's grace for His people *and* God's grace from His enemies. For believers, we see God's grace working powerfully that they might *endure* and be used. For non-believers, we see God's grace working powerfully that they might be *evangelized* and be saved.

These themes come up again tonight, as we pick back up in Daniel 4, verse 19. We're in the middle of a Gospel tract that Nebuchadnezzar wrote and then sent throughout his kingdom toward the end of his reign. He was recounting the story of his conversion. The worst man in the world finding *grace* in the eyes of the Lord.

In his tract, Nebuchadnezzar told about a dream he had that had troubled him greatly. When the astrologers and magicians once again failed to interpret the dream, Daniel was brought in, as he had been so many years ago. Nebuchadnezzar recounted the dream and then we pick up the story in verse 19.

Daniel 4:19 - ¹⁹Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. So the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, *may* the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!

Now *this* is grace! Look at how Daniel speaks to the pagan king who had destroyed Judah, taken him captive, threatened his life, tried to *kill* his best friends and embodied ungodliness day in and day out. Look at Daniel's words and his reaction.

Did he have Stockholm Syndrome? No, he was simply saturated by what we call *agape*. He was full of the love of God and had become an agent of *grace* there in the palace of Babylon. For Daniel, grace wasn't just given that he might survive his years in exile. It was for so much more. It operated *through* him. We can see it in this relationship he had with the king.

They *cared* for each other. They had a deep friendship. Daniel didn't want anything bad to happen to this man, despite all that he had done. Now, this is remarkable because (as readers) we know Nebuchadnezzar doesn't *deserve* this kind of care or compassion. He doesn't *deserve* forgiveness

or mercy. But agape and grace are all about the undeserving. Grace can't be earned, it's given. It's precisely for those who do not deserve it.

That's the grace that is not just given *for* us, but it's given *to* us to then pour out on others. Paul said in Romans 5 that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." And that love is then meant to be shown to others. That's the way Christianity works. We see it here in Daniel's selfless compassion toward Nebuchadnezzar. We see it in the example of people like Elizabeth Elliot, who went to share the Gospel with the Auca Indians just 2 years after they brutally murdered her own husband. That's the regular, powerful operation of God's grace in the life of a believer. Not that we go on hating our enemies, but that we love them and seek their salvation the same way that Jesus Christ sought ours.

You see this kind of graciousness and compassion and, quite frankly, it's the greater miracle than the interpretation of a dream. But it's the common supply made available to all Christians.

Daniel 4:20-22 - ²⁰"The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be seen* by all the earth, ²¹ whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home—²² it *is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

This is pretty straightforward. One point I'd like us to notice is that, in this dream, not every element stood for something. There's not a specific interpretation for every single item. In parables or prophecies, I think Bible commentators sometimes get a little carried away, where *every* color and *every* noun gets interpreted, and we just need to be careful to not be making things up as we study God's word.

Daniel 4:23-25 - ²³"And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, *bound* with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him'; ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵ They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

The main message from heaven was: God is in charge. The watcher said, "This is the **decree** from the Most High God. He is the *only* One who rules and He will accomplish His will *no matter what*." That's a great reminder after *any* election, whether it goes your way or not.

Notice, too, that the watcher says, "**THE** kingdom of men." Just one. God loves the whole world and sits enthroned above the whole thing. Nebuchadnezzar may have been the most powerful man on the planet at the time, but in reality he was just supervising one little condominium in a corner of human history.

But, because of his great pride, he was going to be judged. And it seemed like what the Lord was going to punish him with was a bit unusual, right? A few years ago an Ohio judge was making the news for his unconventional sentences. He would often give those convicted a choice between regular jail time *or* some strange second option instead. For example, a woman pled guilty to animal neglect and cruelty and her sentence was to spend 8 hours picking up garbage in the smelliest part of the city dump. The judge's philosophy is to try to make each case as personal as possible in order to get the attention of the offenders and serve the purpose of stopping their behavior from happening again.¹

Now, God wanted to *rescue* Nebuchadnezzar. According to that purpose, *this* was the Lord's plan, a plan that included mercy and grace.

Daniel 4:26 - ²⁶“And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump *and* roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules.

In wrath, God remembers mercy. And here we have a wonderful portrait of the Lord's salvation: When Nebuchadnezzar would bow his heart to heaven, God would throw in a kingdom along with the forgiveness of his sins. In Ephesians 2 Paul talks about how God loves to “show the exceeding riches of His grace,” allowing us to “sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.”

In verse 27, Daniel ends his interpretation, and then gives Nebuchadnezzar an *invitation*.

Daniel 4:27 - ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

Having delivered the message of judgment, Daniel immediately tells his friend, the king, the *way out*.

There's nothing wrong with preaching about the coming judgment. In fact, it's *necessary*. But we also need to preach about the *rescue* available to anyone and everyone. I find myself thinking of the street preachers who just have the sign saying “THE END IS NEAR!” Or talking about hell on a megaphone. Ok, that's true. And maybe the Lord asked you to go out and preach in the street. But tell people about the *deliverance*, not just the damnation.

Here Daniel gives Nebuchadnezzar a clear path to rescue: Be righteous and show mercy. As New Testament Christians in the Church age we have the fullness of God's revelation in a way that Daniel did not, but the way out of judgment is effectively the same: Be righteous and that righteousness must produce fruit.

So, are we talking about salvation by works? No, of course not. The Bible is clear on that. After all, Jesus Himself said that, to be saved, your righteousness would have to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, which everyone understood to be impossible. So, how can a person “be righteous” and escape judgment? The Bible says they *receive* it through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans 3 that righteousness is revealed through faith in Christ on all who believe. When a person repents and believes in Jesus, He *gives* them His robe of righteousness. And, just as Daniel said that righteousness would be visible in the life of the true believer, the same can be expected today.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZSTu98-Cus>

God's grace doesn't just look the other way on sin. No, a believer must *repent*. Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke that He came to call sinners to repentance and that if you don't repent, you're going to perish. But *when* a person repents, they can expect God to respond with love and mercy and grace, just as *Daniel* expected in regard to Nebuchadnezzar. Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar didn't go for it.

Daniel 4:28-29 - ²⁸All *this* came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.

Even after all that, God *still* gave him a *year!* This is astonishing grace, great longsuffering. But, finally, God's mercy *expired*. And Nebuchadnezzar says, "all this came upon me." When it comes to judgment, there's no fall guy. We've all seen the movies where the mobsters are on trial, but they convince some low level thug to pretend like *he's* the mastermind, so he gets the conviction and the real bad guys walk free. That's not how it happens in God's court. Here's how it went down.

Daniel 4:30 - ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

Archaeologists have found that Nebuchadnezzar had *millions* of bricks stamped with his name. In fact, 90-95% of the buildings throughout the region were made with bricks which all had his name stamped in them. They estimate that he used something like 15 million bricks.² And, brick by brick, he wrote, "Me. Me. Mine. Me. Me." This man had some real pride.

Daniel 4:31-32 - ³¹While the word *was still* in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³² And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

No one had to tell the Lord what Nebuchadnezzar had said. God doesn't rely on tattlers. He was listening and watching. When God spoke, the message was the same. We can be sure that our God is consistent. He's not going to change the rules of engagement partway through. He does what He says He'll do in regards to judgment. But that also means that His *grace* is the same, too. And that is good news. God's grace cannot spoil in your life. It's not a battery that eventually loses it's ability to power. God doesn't move the boundary lines. He's up front about His standards and His principles and His plan.

Daniel 4:33 - ³³That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*.

Now, commentators are quick to explain this away as a *psychological* disorder. They label it *lycanthropy* or *boanthropy*. Nebuchadnezzar just went crazy for a while.

There are a couple of problems with that perspective. If this was *just* a mental illness, then the suggestion is, had Nebuchadnezzar just had his prozac, everything would've been back to normal. But that's not what Daniel is presenting in the book. There's something supernatural happening here.

² <https://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/babylon/nebuchadnezzar-brick.html>

First of all, human beings cannot digest grass.³ But secondly, this becomes a matter of Biblical interpretation. How can we draw a distinction between this event and the fiery furnace? Or the lion's den? The way we interpret God's word needs to be consistent. And we don't need to try to explain away the miracles in the Bible. We serve a miracle-working God and we don't need to be embarrassed by that! This was not an organic, chemical imbalance. God *judged* Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 4:34-35 - ³⁴And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation. ³⁵All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

The *worst* man in the *worst* state was still reachable by God's grace. No one you know is in a worse condition than Nebuchadnezzar was in verse 33. And yet, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes: While there's life, there's hope. Pray for those family members. Pray for those enemies. They, too, *can* be saved.

When Nebuchadnezzar finally relented, he turned from his sin and to God in praise and suddenly this awful, wicked man sounds a lot like David, the poet king. He's like Saul turning to Paul. Look at the *power* of God's grace in this transformation. The king of Babylon reminds us that true, saving faith, must be marked by transformation. Just saying "Lord, Lord" doesn't make a person saved. It's a faith that repents, believes and obeys the will of God that marks real conversion.

Daniel 4:36 - ³⁶At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me.

Notice here the generosity of God's grace. He gives Nebuchadnezzar not *just* rescue, but gifts and rewards as well. God's grace toward us is so rich and giving and generous, it follows that that same grace working *through* us would also be generous toward others.

Daniel 4:37 - ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

As he leaves the pages of Scripture, he does so with a warning. This isn't just a story to tell around a campfire. Nebuchadnezzar says, "I'm talking to *you!* Don't make this mistake like I did. Believe God. Go His way. Give your life to Him." If you're not a Christian here tonight, the Bible is clear: Judgment is coming for you. You can't escape it. If you don't repent and believe in Jesus, you're going to die and go to hell. But God is a God of grace and mercy and rescue. If you will believe on Him, you will not perish but instead receive everlasting life.

For the Christians here, this passage reminds us to enjoy, celebrate and utilize the grace of God. The same power that pulled you out of your sin now operates *in* you to minister to others, especially the undeserving. Especially our enemies. And we can be sure that God will continue using His powerful grace in our lives as He accomplishes His will day by day, all around the world.

³ <https://www.health24.com/Natural/News/Can-humans-eat-grass-20140113>