

Humble and Grateful

Introduction:

Nebuchadnezzar had already encountered at least three opportunities to understand that all his accomplishments should be credited to the Hebrew God. But because he did not learn this lesson, God gave him a final lesson to help him understand the difference between pride and humility and to have a glimpse of God's character.

The last dream which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, and the experience of the king in connection with it, contain lessons of vital importance to all those who are connected with the work of God. The king was troubled with his dream; for it was evidently a prediction of adversity, and none of his wise men would attempt to interpret it. The faithful Daniel stood before the king, not to flatter, not to misinterpret in order to secure favour. A solemn duty rested upon him to tell the king of Babylon the truth.—Conflict and Courage, p. 253.

The power exercised by every ruler on the earth is Heaven-imparted; and upon his use of the power thus bestowed, his success depends. To each the word of the divine Watcher is, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." Isaiah 45:5. And to each the words spoken to Nebuchadnezzar of old are the lesson of life: "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor: if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." Daniel 4:27.

To understand these things,—to understand that "righteousness exalteth a nation;" that "the throne is established by righteousness," and "upholden by mercy;" to recognize the outworking of these principles in the manifestation of His power who "removeth kings, and setteth up kings,"—this is to understand the philosophy of history. Proverbs 14:34; 16:12; Proverbs 20:28; Daniel 2:21.

In the word of God only is this clearly set forth. Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose.—Prophets and Kings, p. 502.

Humble, gracious, tender-hearted, pitiful, [Christ] went about doing good, feeding the hungry, lifting up the bowed down, comforting the sorrowing. None who came to Him for aid went away unrelieved. Not a thread of selfishness was woven into the pattern He has left for His children to follow... . To all who came to Him for help He brought faith and hope and life. Wherever He went He carried blessing.

The tender sympathies of our Saviour were aroused for fallen and suffering humanity. If you would be His followers, you must cultivate compassion and sympathy. Indifference to human woes must give place to lively interest in the sufferings of others. The widow, the orphan, the sick and the dying, will always need help. Here is an opportunity to proclaim the gospel—to hold up Jesus, the hope and consolation of all men. When the suffering body has been relieved, and you have shown a lively interest in the afflicted, the heart is opened, and you can pour in the heavenly balm. If you are looking to Jesus, and drawing from Him knowledge and strength and grace, you can impart His consolation to others, because the Comforter is with you.—My Life Today, p. 230.

Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the heaven-sent message. One year after he had been thus warned, as he walked in his palace, he said within himself, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built ... ?" The God of heaven read the heart of the king, and heard its whisperings of

self-congratulation... . “There fell a voice from heaven, saying, ... The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar.”—*Conflict and Courage*, p. 253.

There is no position so lofty that God cannot cut down those occupying it. There is no humiliation so great that God cannot raise up humble men to enjoy the richest blessings. The Lord works to humble human pride in whomever it is found, that men may learn to develop a spirit of true submission to His will. He cannot work with men who counteract His purposes. Those who use their perceptive powers to create an order of things which turns aside God’s purposes will lose the powers, which if exercised aright would have increased and strengthened. God honours those who seek Him in sincerity, humbling self and exalting Him. But when men will not consent to walk in the counsel of God, their wisdom is removed from them. They become incapable of knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.—*Letter 35*, 1900.

The strength of nations and of individuals is not found in the opportunities and facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. That which alone can make them great or strong is the power and purpose of God. They themselves, by their attitude toward His purpose, decide their own destiny.

Human histories relate man’s achievements, his victories in battle, his success in climbing to worldly greatness. God’s history describes man as heaven views him. In the divine records all his merit is seen to consist in his obedience to God’s requirements. His disobedience is faithfully chronicled as meriting the punishment he will surely receive. In the light of eternity it will be seen that God deals with men in accordance with the momentous question of obedience or disobedience.—*This Day With God*, p. 352.

The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—*Steps to Christ*, p. 30.

In Daniel’s life, the desire to glorify God was the most powerful of all motives. He realized that when standing in the presence of men of influence, a failure to acknowledge God as the source of his wisdom would have made him an unfaithful steward. And his constant recognition of the God of heaven before kings, princes, and statesmen, detracted not one iota from his influence. King Nebuchadnezzar, before whom Daniel so often honoured the name of God, was finally thoroughly converted, and learned to “praise and extol and honour the King of heaven.”

The king upon the Babylonian throne became a witness for God, giving his testimony, warm and eloquent, from a grateful heart that was partaking of the mercy and grace, the righteousness and peace, of the divine nature.—*Ellen G. White Comments*, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1170.

We should all feel our individual responsibility as members of the visible church and workers in the vineyard of the Lord. We should not wait for our brethren, who are as frail as ourselves, to help us along; for our precious Saviour has invited us to join ourselves to Him and unite our weakness with His strength, our ignorance with His wisdom, our unworthiness with His merit. None of us can occupy a neutral position; our influence will tell for or against. We are active agents for Christ or for the enemy. We either gather with Jesus or scatter abroad. True conversion is a radical change. The very drift of the mind and bent of the heart should be turned and life become new again in Christ.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 16.

Those who experience the work of true conversion in their hearts will reveal the fruits of the Spirit in their lives. Oh, that those who have so little spiritual life would realize that eternal life can be granted only to those who become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust!

The power of Christ alone can work the transformation in heart and mind that all must experience who would partake with Him of the new life in the kingdom of heaven. “Except a man be born again,” the Saviour has said, “he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that can lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will lead to watchfulness. It will purify the heart and renew the mind, and give us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 156.

A deeper and wider experience in religious things is to come to God’s people. Christ is our example. If through living faith and sanctified obedience to God’s word we reveal the love and grace of Christ, if we show that we have a true conception of God’s guiding providences in the work, we shall carry to the world a convincing power. A high position does not give us value in the sight of God. Man is measured by his consecration and faithfulness in working out the will of God. If the remnant people of God will walk before Him in humility and faith, He will carry out through them His eternal purpose, enabling them to work harmoniously in giving to the world the truth as it is in Jesus.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 274.

Daniel 4 Themes:

Pride: In focusing on his own accomplishments, Nebuchadnezzar forgot the God of Daniel to whom he owed his throne and everything else.

Humility: Only after he lost his kingdom could Nebuchadnezzar recognize the God of Daniel as the source and sustainer of his power.

God: God reveals Himself in this episode as the One who establishes kings and removes them.

Life Application: There is a Nebuchadnezzar in everyone. To overcome pride and become humble is an ideal we cannot achieve in human terms. Humility is an elusive goal. As soon as we think we have reached it, it is already lost. But Jesus can give us power to overcome our arrogance and live a humble life. He can change every “temptation to pride into an opportunity for gratitude.”—Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), p. 94.

Commentary:

Pride: Daniel 4 records a personal testimony of Nebuchadnezzar. As the narrative unfolds, the king recognizes that pride was the cause of his fall from kingship and proceeds to recount how God acted in order to bring him to humility. At the peak of his accomplishments (about thirty years after the events reported in Daniel 3), the king had a dream of a gigantic tree that provided shelter and sustenance to all creatures of the earth. Next, due to a heavenly decision, the tree was chopped down. Again, only Daniel was able to tell the king the true interpretation. That luxuriant tree represented the king himself in his arrogance. Indeed, trees and vines are depicted elsewhere in Scripture as symbols of arrogant kings and kingdoms that God eventually brings down (Ezek. 17:1–15, Ezek. 19:10–14, Ezek. 31:3–12). With extreme pastoral sensitivity, Daniel explained that the tree represented the king himself. God would remove him from the throne unless he changed his attitude toward his subjects (Dan. 4:27). Pride, as usual, has repercussions in the social sphere. But the time had come for Nebuchadnezzar to be held accountable for his haughty administrative style. If he wished to escape his dire fate, he had no option but to replace oppression with justice and thus reflect the character of God in the affairs of his kingdom. But the king was not willing to set aside his arrogance and change his ways. A year later, he was reveling in his building accomplishments (Dan. 4:29, 30), which is an irony. After all, “Nebuchadnezzar probably never handled a brick in his life. He had not built Babylon. It had been built by the sweat of the nameless thousands of oppressed slaves, immigrants, and other poor sections of the nation, the kind of teeming multitudes whose labours have built every vaunting civilization of the fallen human race in history.”—Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel*, p. 101. At that very moment the king was afflicted by a mental disease, possibly a mental disorder known as zoanthropy or lycanthropy in which a person thinks he or she has become an animal and behaves accordingly. For seven years Nebuchadnezzar had to live among the beasts of the field. Thus, the one who thought himself to be a god became less than human. As Scripture says: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Humility: Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson God designed for him. After seven years among the beasts, the king had a radical change of attitude: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven” (Dan. 4:34). This look upward signals a shift in Nebuchadnezzar’s mind-set. Formerly, the king used to look down from the height of pride. And as he looked upward, whence all power and wisdom comes, three important things occurred: (1) he was healed from his mental illness (“my understanding returned to me”); (2) he acknowledged God as the sovereign of the universe; and (3) he was restored to the throne (Dan. 4:34–36). As the king himself stated: “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” (Dan. 4:37). No one more than Nebuchadnezzar could recognize the truth that God puts down “those who walk in pride.” But the process of humiliation lasted seven times; the original word most likely means “years” and here must be understood in terms of seven literal years. These seven years refer to a literal time period during which the king, removed from the throne and humiliated, had to live among the beasts of the field. Therefore, unlike the time periods mentioned in the apocalyptic sections of Daniel, the seven years are not to be interpreted according to the day-year principle. As mentioned earlier, twelve months elapsed between the king’s boasting and his period of being under judgment, which lasted seven times. So, at the end of the seven years, the king was restored to the throne. Thus, there is no indication that the time period mentioned in Daniel 4 should be interpreted in any but a literal way. It took a terrible

judgment from God upon the king to awaken his mind fully to realize that the God of Daniel was the one in charge. Why is it so difficult for a human being to become humble? It is because we are all infected with the desire to be served and praised, which is nothing more than the desire to be treated like God (see Genesis 3). But because we cannot become God, pride produces a sour frustration. Humility, however, brings satisfaction. We always can find someone in need to serve, and in doing so, we experience the joy and fulfillment of serving Christ.

Conversion: A question that often emerges in this connection concerns whether or not the king was truly converted. Although some commentators feel that there is not enough evidence to confirm a genuine conversion, there is enough evidence that points in that direction. As we look at the heart of the king's confession in Daniel 4:34, 35, four elements stand out:

1. He confesses the sovereignty of God, who establishes a kingdom that is without end. God "does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:35). There is a hint of the infinite and eternal in Nebuchadnezzar's words when states, "His kingdom is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:34).

2. Nebuchadnezzar confesses also the creatureliness of humankind: "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing" (Dan. 4:35). The king no longer recognizes divine power at a merely theoretical level. He confesses that even the greatest of men (and he had been in his own eyes and, arguably, in the eyes of his subjects, the greatest) are nothing before the majestic Lord. Such recognition is always a mark of the subdued heart; the creatureliness of individuals and their dependence on God is evident. Man is not autonomous; he is dependent and creaturely. His true joy is found only when he has come to recognize that His true dependence upon the divine.

3. Nebuchadnezzar confesses the truthfulness and righteousness of God, "all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice" (Dan. 4:37). God has dealt with him severely, but he acknowledges how true and righteous God's judgments have been. They were appropriate to his sins.

4. Finally, he came to recognize that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (compare with Prov. 3:34). His life was a portrayal of the application that Peter made of the following principle: 'Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time' (1 Pet. 5:6)." The pattern of His saving grace always rests upon this precept of humility.

Life Application

How do you evaluate your own accomplishments when compared to those of others? How do you tell the difference between pride and a high self-esteem? In your opinion, how can we show and experience genuine humility? What is the difference between humility and a low self-esteem? What is the place of humility in church leadership? Do you think a humble leader can be respected and followed? In what ways has Jesus taught humility? On what occasion of Jesus' ministry did He exemplify humility in the most powerful way? What, and how, can you learn from Him? What do you perceive to be the relationship between humility and forgiveness? How difficult is it for you to forgive someone who offends you?