The End is Where We Begin: Lessons Learned by a Prideful King

Daniel 4:1-3

 Good morning! Today we are continuing our study of the book of Daniel as we begin looking at chapter 4 of the book. The King of Babylon has just witnessed the saving power of God as He rescued Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace. We saw at the end of chapter 3 that the king was moved by what he witnessed and for the second time he praised the God of Israel for the power shown in that saving act. Today, as we begin chapter 4, the king is sharing with the reader an experience he had later in his life that will show him once and for all that the God of Israel is the one and only God and that all other gods are false. Before we begin looking at verses 1-3 of chapter 4 let us first become familiar with the setting. In his commentary of Daniel, theologian Leon Wood provides us with these important details: King Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon from 605-562 BC. When Daniel interpreted the king’s dream this was the second year of his reign, then after the dream until the king’s experience in chapter 4 of Daniel 32 years had passed, which means that King Nebuchadnezzar was an old man by this time and was nearing the end of his reign. The fact that the king is older is supported by the evidence that after he is restored to the throne, after his seven years of insanity, he only had the crown for about one year after this. So, the events of chapter 4 of Daniel are taking place about 8 years before the end of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, making this approximately 570 BC.

 The next important point we need to make before we read is that verses 1-3 of chapter 4 are written after the events that will be discussed later in the chapter. This is why today’s sermon title is “The End is Where We Begin.” We are starting after all of the events have already taken place. The King is making known to all who read his decree that he has experienced a life-changing event that will forever impact his views towards the God of Israel.

 I would like to give you a fictitious scenario to think about as we move forward today. I know that most of you are parents and that all of you at one time or another were children. I want you to think of a time when you were either a parent or child and had a trip that you were really looking forward to going on. I always looked forward to vacation down south every year because we went away for a week and I just got to do whatever I wanted while at the beach. I also always looked forward to going to the brookside pool because being with friends and swimming was super fun. Did you ever have a situation arise when you were in the car heading to do something fun, but because of your bad behavior your parents turned the car around and took you home? My brother and I used to fight quite a bit, so this did happen to us a few times. My dad would warn us to stop fighting in the back seat and then said that if we didn’t stop, he would turn the car around and take us home. Going home without going to our fun place was hard enough, but then I also had to dread my dad getting in the kitchen and getting the paddle off the top of the refrigerator. Being spanked was not fun and I will never forget the fear I had when I knew I had done something that my dad had specifically told me not to do. I knew there would be consequences to that choice and those consequences were never good. If you have ever faced a situation like that in life then you can understand what the king of Babylon is about to experience. He was an arrogant ruler who did not fear God and refused to give God any of the glory for the vastness of his kingdom. Because of this behavior God would be punishing the king and teaching him some valuable lessons. As we read verses 1-3 of chapter 4 today, we will be discovering what the lessons were that the king had learned. Let’s read our Scripture together:

**“Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and populations of all languages who live in all the earth: ‘May your peace be great! I am pleased to declare the signs and miracles that the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs And how mighty are His miracles! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion is from generation to generation.’”**

First, we need to quickly review the main idea of the book of Daniel. This book was written to show the reader that the God of Israel is sovereign over all the affairs of man. There is no person who has ever lived and not been under the sovereignty of God. All that happens in this world is either allowed to happen or is orchestrated by God. We need to keep this in mind as we move forward.

 As we look closely at verse 1 we will see provided for us the author as well as the audience who will be reading and hearing the words that have been included in this decree. Firstly, the author of this decree is King Nebuchadnezzar himself. As we will eventually see in the remainder of the chapter this account is written in the first person, so we know this was directly from the king. In his commentary of this verse Matthew Henry makes the point that the king in this decree is very straightforward and includes no pomp or fanciness in his greeting. He only refers to himself as King Nebuchadnezzar. What we can conclude from this simplification in his pronouncement is that the king has somehow been humbled. We will notice from this point on in the account that he will be much humbler in his attitude toward God.

 The next aspect of his proclamation in verse 1 is that his audience includes all people, nations, populations and languages. This was possible because Babylon was the most powerful kingdom on the earth at that time. Therefore, most of the people in the world would either be citizens of the kingdom or under the authority of one of the governors. The purpose in addressing this to all the people of the world is to make certain that all people are made aware of what has happened. The king wanted all people everywhere to be made aware and to benefit from the wisdom that he gained through his experience.

 In the close to the greeting he says that this comes in peace. The reason this is so important is because it was not always the case that a proclamation would be received in such a manner. Many times, when the king would send out a decree to be read to the people it involved topics that would not be good news. Sometimes the people were told that their taxes would have to increase, that they were going to have to be ready to be drafted into military service to help the king fight a war or they might be told that there were traitors that were going to be punished. The people receiving this peaceful message would have caused them to feel relief and maybe be more excited to hear what the king had to say.

 As we look carefully at the words in verse 1, we can conclude that the sovereignty of God is over all people, nations, populations and languages. There is no one in the world today that is not included under the authority of God. The Apostle Paul confirms this truth in his letter to the Colossian church **“for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (1:16-17).** King Nebuchadnezzar is showing in his decree that all the world is under the authority of God and that he now understands this fact.

 Another application we can take from verse 1 is that the king was now at peace because he had accepted the authority of God. When we stop thinking that we are the ones in charge of our lives and allow God to be in control this is what will bring us true peace. When we are willing to let go and allow God to be God we can rest in the shadow of His wings. The prophet Isaiah encouraged the people when he wrote these words **“The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You” (26:3).**

 Moving on to verse 2 the king begins to explain that he is going to share with his listeners his own personal testimony. The reason that the king wants to share his testimony is because he wanted his readers and listeners to benefit from the wisdom he had gained. It is most likely that the people of the world at that time knew already that something strange had happened to the king, but what he was going to do in his account was to set the record straight and make certain that all the people knew exactly what happened. He is providing a good example for us that we can emulate as followers of Christ. When we share our faith with others, a powerful way to make the message stick is to share our own pathway to faith. Not only should we share with others what good things God has done for us, but we should also share with others the things that God has done in our lives to get us on to the right path. It is not easy to admit to mistakes and the fact that we need to have something happen to catch our attention, but this is where we can have a huge impact on someone else. God is not only a loving and gracious God, but He is also a God of judgment who punishes those who do evil and make right everything that is made wrong by fallen humanity.

 As a way of application, we need to look to a marvelous example of an Apostle of Jesus Christ who shared his testimony which proved to others how the power of God is strong enough to change anyone who is willing to be used by Him. I am speaking of the Apostle Paul. Let us look at the testimony he shared with King Agrippa when he was being charged by the Jews for blasphemy. In Acts 26 Paul talks about his past, how he began life as a pious Pharisee and how he was a specialist in the law (4-5). He then talks about how he desired to bring all followers of Christ to prison and make the suffer for following Him (9-10). Then he recounts his conversion as well as his new desire which is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with Gentiles (12-18). What Paul did in his testimony is that he shared his error and then God reached into his life to correct him. He was not too arrogant to share his need for salvation. In his testimony he gave all glory to God and used that to try to make others come to faith in Christ as well. Paul and King Nebuchadnezzar do not shy aware from sharing their coming to faith in God. We should not hesitate to do the same thing. Share your story as well as how God used His power to get your attention and bring to faith. This is so powerful and if we are willing to do this it can benefit others greatly.

 We now arrive at verse 3 of the passage today. At this point in his decree the king praises God for all that He has revealed to him. The king first praises God for His works and His miracles. As of this point in the Daniel account the king has been shown the power of God in two unique ways. The first was in the ability of God to allow Daniel the ability to explain the king’s dream to him as well as interpret it. The second miracle we have seen is God delivering the three faithful men from the fiery furnace. After having witnessed both of these miracles as well as the experience he is about to recount in chapter 4, the king is convinced that only the God of Israel has the power to act in such ways. This proclamation of the king is much different than what he stated previously in the book. The king is now saying that he believes that the God of Israel is much more powerful than any of the gods of Babylon. We will see this as he further describes how the kingdom of God is different than the other gods.

 The king ends his praise of God by saying that the Most Holy God of Israel is the ruler of a kingdom that is everlasting and His dominion goes from generation to generation. He has come to conclude that what Daniel told him while interpreting the dream is in fact the truth. The God of Israel is not just a god that deals with a particular issue or concern, like the gods worshiped by the polytheistic religions, Jehovah is the God who towers over all others and He is eternal in His very nature. This is important for us to remember today because we worship a God who cannot die and will always rule. The eternal nature of our God should make us desire to share with others our faith and pass on the knowledge of God’s sovereignty to the next generation. Those that come after us will benefit when we share our faith with them and encourage them to share it with their children as well. We see that God instructed the nation of Israel to do this before they entered the Promised Land. Moses told the people the importance of sharing with the next generation the faith of the Fathers so that the next generation would not forget what God has done. **4 “Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. 8 You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. 9 You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).** This is what we must do for our community and for our children. Make God known to all and share of His power to those who follow.

 Now that we have set the stage for the rest of this chapter, where does this leave us? As we conclude our time together, I would like to leave us with a few questions to think about as we walk daily with the Lord. The first question we need to consider is: 1. In what ways does God show His sovereignty in my life? Think about how God is showing you His power and take the time to allow those lessons to impact your journey. 2. In what ways can I live in the light of God’s eternal kingdom? We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom that has no end. Let us live in a way that shows we trust God in all things and that this world is not our final home. 3. In what ways can I extend peace to others through God’s sovereignty? Just as King Nebuchadnezzar shared peace with his subjects we need to share the peace of God with a world that seems to be so full of violence. May we be known as children of God who work to bring peace to this fallen world and who honor our God in the way that we treat others. God works to bring change to this world through His people. In our daily lives let us share our testimony so that others May be encouraged and will place their trust in Holy God. May we continue to ask God to open up doors so that the good news of the gospel can reach every ear in this world. Amen.