

Daniel 4:29-37
Lift Your Eyes to Heaven

29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.

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?"

31 While 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."

33 That 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.

34 And 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.

35 All 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?"

36 At 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.

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.

The world doesn't see much value in affliction. When our business fails, when our health takes a downturn, when we are betrayed, when we lose a loved one, or when we are visited by some sudden terrible disaster like Job or the inhabitants of the Gulf Coast who were in the path of Katrina, all the world can see to do is to get back up, to get over it, to seek to regain the place we were when we fell. So if I can extend the Katrina analogy, when New Orleans is wiped out, all the world can think is ***rebuild, rebuild, restore, make them everything they once were, yet again.***

Some however know, because they have been taught, as Nebuchadnezzar was taught, that often affliction can be a great blessing, in fact sometimes disasters can be the most valuable experiences imaginable. Why is that? Well because as the Puritan Pastor Thomas Watson put it "***When God lays men upon their backs, then they look up to heaven.***"

Often it is a lack of affliction, that can be the real curse. For instance, in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus the beggar that Jesus tells in Luke 16, the Rich man was never afflicted, throughout his lifetime he received only good things, and those things became his only concern. Wealth and the accumulation of earthly possession became his hearts delight, his idol, and his gaze never lifted above the things that he had accumulated. Lazarus, on the other hand, had nothing but affliction, he was crippled, diseased, and penniless. In that position, he had no earthly thing to rely on and nowhere to look to for help and hope but heaven. In Lazarus affliction worked to produce salvation, but the unafflicted Rich man never saw his spiritual poverty and went to hell when he died.

Up to verse 29 of this chapter, King Nebuchadnezzar had never known real affliction either. He had been troubled by his dreams and even miracles, and as a result he had occasionally glanced heavenward, but no sooner had Daniel provided the explanation, or the miracle occurred than he once again set his gaze resolutely on himself and his empire. He had been standing on his roof and looking out at the city that **“he** had built for his mighty power and for the honor of his majesty” when he was finally visited with real affliction. From that point onwards for 7 times (which is probably years) Nebuchadnezzar’s kingship was stripped from him, he went from the position of mightiest king on earth, to that of a beast of the field. The very God who had exalted Him and warned him against pride, showed Nebuchadnezzar that He could cast him down at will.

That was a great fall, and a terrible affliction, to go from the palace to being so mad you think you are an ox and roam the fields eating grass. And yet it was not meant for Evil, quite the opposite it was meant for His good. God even told Him, I’ll preserve your kingdom during your madness. That is partially why the stump was banded with brass in the dream, to show that he would be bound in madness but still irremovable. A farmer once he has chopped down the tree pulls up or breaks up the stump, but band it in Iron and Brass, and he can’t. Nebuchadnezzar’s nobles and his enemies won’t be able to remove him in his affliction. God had warned Him he was going to do it, and He even told Him, I am going to do this until your pride is completely broken and you acknowledge that I am sovereign and give me your praise and worship.

Now that couldn’t happen while Nebuchadnezzar was looking out at all the stuff “he had done” and “he had made” Nebuchadnezzar was much too great in His own eyes to have any room for the God of Heaven. He saw no need of such a God anyway. Was not power and ability in his own hand? Was he not a god himself? He created cities, he destroyed others, if he wanted something, he took it. He did whatever he thought was right, and no one was in a position to tell him otherwise.

But when all that was taken away, when he was in the fields at night, and no longer in his palace, he looked up at the night sky, up at the heavens, and what did He see?

He saw the truth of what David had declared in Psalm 19 – ***“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard.”***

He saw in a moment that his mighty city of Babylon was a mere speck compared to the majesty of God’s creation. He knew also that by comparison to the stars, Babylon would be here today and gone tomorrow. And He also knew that as quickly as Babylon would disappear, he’d be gone sooner still. And what had Nebuchadnezzar done but add a few civic improvements. What a contrast with God, who had created the Universe and yet as Nebuchadnezzar himself said “He lives forever”. Finally the veil was lifted from his eyes and he was granted his reason to see himself as he always was, poor and lowly and destitute and needy. And he saw God as He is and praised Him as he saw himself as he was and the God of creation as he is.

But brothers and sisters, I don’t want you for a moment to think that it was merely because He was cast down that Nebuchadnezzar was able to see the truth and turn to God. Plenty of men and women are afflicted and cast down to the very depths and yet their eyes are never opened, all they can think is I’ve got to get back to where I was. At the end of those seven years, Nebuchadnezzar could have gone back to being the same idolatrous megalomaniac he was at the beginning of the story.

Take the example of our modern day Nebuchadnezzar Saddam Hussein. Here we have a man who goes from supreme ruler of Iraq to living in a hole in the ground, and then to captured and on trial for his life. And yet he is just as wicked and arrogant today as he ever was. Ask Saddam what his problem is and he would say, these afflictions that have brought me low. Ask Nebuchadnezzar and he would tell *you the problem was my pride, and my sin, and my idolatry.*

Was the difference between the modern day Nebuchadnezzar and the ancient one? The Sovereign electing grace of God. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, he walked in pride, but when he was cast down it was so that the Holy Spirit might do His heart changing regenerating work so that Nebuchadnezzar was brought in his humbled condition to spiritual life for the first time, and was able to say in effect I once was blind, but now I see. The same thing happened to Paul, on the Damascus road, he was cast down, physically blinded and brought very low, but it wasn't until he received the Holy Spirit that the scales fell off his eyes, and he was saved. Paul in the dust on the Damascus road had to acknowledge that he had been wrong and that Jesus was Lord and Savior, but it wasn't until the Lord regenerated his heart that he had the faith to trust the very one who had brought him low and whose servants he had been persecuting.

The same was true of Nebuchadnezzar, you could have made Him an Ox for 70 years not 7 and without the work of the Holy Spirit he wouldn't have risen much higher than I wish I didn't live in the field and eat grass. The palace was much nicer. Brothers and Sisters, If the heart is still stony and wicked, affliction won't change that. Affliction can prepare the heart as the plow breaks up earth, but you can plow a field till doomsday, but if that's all you do – will you get a crop? NO Unless a seed is planted you won't get a crop. Only when God himself has planted that gospel seed in a prepared heart do you get a true conversion.

To go back to an earlier analogy, I happen to believe that New Orleans was a city given over to great wickedness, but destroy it and without a national change of heart, all we want to do is build exactly the same city again, but we're going to try in vain to make it harder to destroy this time. In that sense, the affliction didn't do much good at least not on the grand scale. I know that is a terribly unpolitically correct thing to say, but as with people, nations that are given time by God to repent and don't, don't continue. I would be repeating Jonah's sin of not wanting to tell Nineveh they needed to repent if I didn't point out that nationally we have great need of repentance and faith in Christ and that it will not go well for us if we don't. I personally hope and pray that we will, the examples of Nineveh and Nebuchadnezzar show us that there is no nation and no individual beyond hope. Our God is sovereign, he does according to His will, and reforming America or even Europe once again, is not hard for the one who in six days created the entire universe.

Well let me leave you with two applications –

The first, is to those of you who already trust the same God that Nebuchadnezzar praised and extolled. Many of you have gone through that Nebuchadnezzar, Paul, Prodigal Son experience of being humbled that you might be raised up to new life in Jesus Christ. I hope this letter of Nebuchadnezzar will help you in particular as you seek to understand your own affliction, and to know that as Robert Leighton put it “*Adversity is the diamond dust Heaven polishes its jewels with.*” and that to you who are called according to his purpose, afflictions will work for your good and that whom the father loves, he chastens. In the midst of chastening, you have difficulty believing that don't you? Well sometimes in the midst of a spanking, your kids really do have a hard time believing its for their good and a sign of your love.

But if you know that, then Brothers and Sisters, what great good news you can give to those who do not trust Jesus and yet who are going through affliction. You maybe the only person who will not simply encourage them to get back to where they were. You can open the scriptures and show how affliction was used for Nebuchadnezzar's eternal good, and how it can be used for theirs. It may well be that your own story can reinforce that point.

I daresay brothers and sisters, almost all of you know someone who is in the midst of being afflicted right now, who desperately needs to hear that message. Why are we so embarrassed to tell them what we know to be the truth?

The second is to those who have not yet come to that truth. My hope is that today you've realized that the only thing that stands between you and God's mercy freely offered to you is Pride. All you have to do to be saved, is to simply give up your faith in yourself, and instead turn in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows already that you can't save yourselves, that is why he sent His Son into the World to die on the cross in your place, and to give you a righteousness that you could never have of yourself. I hope you will come to that knowledge, without having to be greatly afflicted. I hope that this very day you can truly confess **"Now I 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."**