**Series: Stand Up For Jesus #4**

Daniel 4:1-37; Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-31; Ps. 119:1-8 November 4, 2018

**Summary: Nebuchadnezzar learned from personal, painful experience that pride goes before a fall. The obvious lesson is that we cannot stand up for Jesus if we are full of pride!**

A celebrity was being interviewed on TV. The talk-show host asked, “Can you recall the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?” “Yes,” she answered. “Next question, please!” Most of us would like to forget our embarrassing or humbling experiences. King Nebuchadnezzar, however, was willing to reveal the most embarrassing experience of his life. The mighty king learned from personal, painful experience that pride goes before a fall. Much of this chapter is expressed in his very own words.

We often read how governmental officials try to put a positive spin on the latest scandal. Having “Spin Doctors” is nothing new; the ancient kings spin-doctored their achievements praising what was noble, while remaining conveniently silent on their weaknesses and defeats. Historians have to struggle with accounts of events from opposite and biased points-of-view in order to get to the truth. Nebuchadnezzar’s pride was considerable, and if God had not intervened, we would be left with an incomplete record. But God stepped in, and the King confessed all.

The lesson of this chapter is that God hates pride because it prevents us from honoring Him. In fact, theologians who have analyzed the nature of sin say that the essence of sin is pride. The middle letter of sin and pride is “¡”. All the way back to the Garden of Eden--and even before with the fall of Satan--pride has caused us to put ourselves first above God, above His Law. All 7 of the 7 deadly sins stem from pride, which I suspect is why the church fathers placed it first. The 6 remaining sins are offshoots of pride, along with all other sins.

Pride is arrogance, presumption, conceit, vanity, selfishness, self-trust and self-satisfaction. Though easily defined, it is more easily recognized in others than in oneself.

* We can be caught up in our talents, accomplishments, positions and paychecks;
* We can be puffed up by our recognition and awards;
* We can start believing our performance appraisals!

And we can lose sight of the fact that--all that we are, and all that we have, comes from God. An ancient Hebrew proverb declares, “He who takes his rank lightly raises his own dignity.” Yet I suspect there are some who have prayed, “Lord, let me prove to You that making CEO, or President of my Company, or General, or a millionaire, won’t ruin me!” Some people get to the top of the ladder of success only to discover they’re on the wrong ladder. At that point, it’s time to re-define success.

Nebuchadnezzar’s downfall began when he took stock of his kingdom; in verses 28-30 he surveys the splendor of Babylon and gets caught up in its grandeur. The city possessed one of the “7 Wonders of the Ancient World”, the famed “hanging gardens”, constructed especially for his wife, Amytis who had been raised in the mountains of Media. This impressive structure was a series of elevated gardens within multi-tiered terraces, with ingenious hoists constructed to raise water from the Euphrates river for irrigation. The king clearly takes full credit for the wonders of his capital city in verse 30: *“Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”*

Then he heard a “*voice from heaven*” (vs 31). The timing was perfect; the king could not possibly miss the purpose of God’s displeasure at the words he had just spoken. I can’t think of anyone who would more wish they could take back the words they’d said, but it was too late. Daniel, the king’s advisor, had warned him, and the king had even twice recognized Daniel’s God as the greatest of all, but in spite of personally seeing the power of the almighty God of heaven he still chose to do things his way.

The king became mentally ill and behaved like an animal. His hair and nails grew unruly, and he likely resisted anyone trying to groom him. It is likely that Nebuchadnezzar was kept for his own safety in a secluded private location where he could be under supervision and care, also keeping his condition hidden from public knowledge. He remained in this condition, as Daniel predicted, for 7 years. He sounds like an ancient Howard Hughes only much worse.

Nebuchadnezzar was not where he should have been. The king was in the swamp of self-will. In vs. 14 he is described as a tall tree that’s about to be cut down to size. When we get lofty notions of ourselves we cannot prosper. Pride isolates and cuts us off from both God and others who might offer assistance. Nebuchadnezzar became cut off and debased. He became like an animal in appearance and behavior. The Babylonian officials who served him ran the empire during his infirmity.

The king’s root problem was that he was an unbeliever. As such, he was on his own, yet thinking that he could prosper that way. Pride leads people to feel no need for God, to feel independent of God. They’re on their own, thinking that’s a good place to be. But God can make us see that self-reliance will bring us eternal ruin.

We see throughout the book of Proverbs how people who refuse wise counsel and advice from others are refusing to be helped. Pride says “I don’t need anyone.” A bi-product of pride is stubbornness, perhaps best expressed in an old Scottish prayer: “O Lord, grant that we may always be right, for Thou knowest we will never change our minds.”

Pride cuts us down. A Company commander had a young soldier, an E-4, who refused to clean his room. The soldier told his 1SG that cleaning rooms was beneath a soldier of his rank. The Commander called him into his office and asked what rank should clean rooms. The soldier replied, “None above an E-3.” The Commander stated: “You are now an E-3; so go clean your room.”

How was Nebuchadnezzar delivered from his degrading madness? Verse. 34: *“At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever.”* Like the Prodigal Son, he came to his senses only after suffering a great humiliation.

President Abraham Lincoln was known for his humility; the stresses of his administration were quite humbling. Lincoln disclosed during a period of severe trials and opposition, “I went to my knees because I had nowhere else to go.” The Good News, the leveling Gospel message of grace, makes ordinary persons feel extraordinary--and makes the extraordinary feel ordinary.

Humility--looking to God rather than to one’s self--is necessary for restoration. Kings are often called “sovereigns”, yet Nebuchadnezzar rightly proclaims God’s eternal sovereignty (vss. 34-35). The book of Proverbs states that “*the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.*” We declare our plans as though we are firmly in control, only to find ourselves overruled by God.

The king learned the hard way that the way up is down. Upward mobility comes from humility. *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* (Janes 4:6). One of the early church fathers (Bernard of Clairvaux) wrote that “humility is a necessary prerequisite for grace. When we are humbled, grace is on the way. The humble person has changed humiliation into humility.” He went on to say, however, that “It is no great thing to be humble when you are brought low; but to be humble when you are praised is a great and rare attainment.”

Nebuchadnezzar admits in vs 35 that no one, not even a king, can hinder God, and none can justly question God’s actions. We are not to evaluate or appraise the plans and precepts of the Almighty. The king admits that his punishment had been proper and that he was in no position to complain. In justice, he was punished; in grace he was restored. The Apostle Paul echoes these words when he says, *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”* (Rom 11:34). In his struggle to make sense of his suffering, Job realized: *“Can anyone teach knowledge to God?”* (Prov. 21:22). We often arrogantly question God, as though we could possibly fathom His unsearchable understanding, instead of humbly submitting to His perfect will. How can we question the God who offers us free salvation?

In vs 37 the king declares that “all” God’s works are righteous and His ways just. In other words, God’s actions correspond to His standard of righteousness. If God does something, it is right!

Those who have attained a significant achievement know how difficult it is to struggle with pride. Eventually that wears off, and reality sets in, along with lots of increased responsibility. We need to remind ourselves that when we stand before God none of these things we deem so significant will matter. How we have trusted in God and how we have treated others is what will matter.

Pride kills thanksgiving. This Babylonian king thought that he was solely responsible for his success, and so he took all the credit. It’s amazing how we blame God for our woes yet we praise ourselves for our victories. Proud people are seldom grateful because they never think they’re getting as much as they deserve!

In light of this incident, how do we handle praise from others? To be humble is to have a right estimate of ourselves. This means that we avoid both bragging and putting ourselves down. It is impolite, even insulting to argue with people who wish to complement us, yet how can we receive praise with humility? By first of all, accepting the compliment (as a gift from God) with a simple “Thank you”; we may even express how much we enjoy using our spiritual gift and then follow-up by acknowledging the Source of our success with a simple “Praise the Lord.”

Humility is not denying the gifts we have but admitting that these gifts come through us by the Holy Spirit, not from us, because Jesus took all my sins including my pride to the cross. To God be the glory!

Billy Graham stated, “I’ve never known a person whom I thought was truly filled with the Holy Spirit who went out and bragged about it or sought to draw attention to himself.” This does not mean that we should develop low self-esteem; it means that we need a balanced view of ourselves. We are what we are by the grace of God. Pride keeps us from seeing ourselves as God sees us. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less.

With every negative restriction in Scripture there is an implied positive command; for every “Thou shalt not” there is a “Thou shalt”. So it’s hard to dwell on the sin of pride, without bringing up the virtue of humility. It’s easy to feel down by focusing on faults, but humility causes us to recognize where our strength truly lies. We live the Christian life, not by our own power, but by God’s might. As the old hymn Rock of Ages says: “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy Cross I cling.”

The lesson again here is that we cannot stand up for Jesus when our hearts are full of pride.

**Prayer**: Gracious Lord, accept us in spite of our weakness, enable us to prosper by Your power, and then help us to give You the credit. May others see the miracles You are working in us; may others be convinced that our lives testify to Your ability. If any here are without Christ, may they humble themselves and receive His free gift of eternal life. In our lives, Lord, be glorified. Amen.