

Advent 2
Daniel 4:19-37
December 5, 2010

Intro – God, also through His servant Daniel, Belteshazzar, worked hard for King Nebuchadnezzar's repentance. Nebuchadnezzar desperately, for his eternal good, needed to humble himself before his God, the LORD. But that would never happen apart from the application of God's holy Law to the king, then, and only then, would the Savior be able to apply His love, mercy and grace to the king. And this was God's goal. God wanted to rescue the Babylonian king, probably the greatest of Babylonian kings, from sin, death, and hell. Then God could work through the king to share God's truth with many in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

Humility, however, was not in Nebuchadnezzar's vocabulary. In order for God to lift us, He must first bring down. Down, then up. Repentant, then trust. Sick, then healed. Lost, then found. Dead, made alive. Blind, then seeing.

Since Nebuchadnezzar was so into exalting himself, God worked hard to humble him so that the Lord could lift him up with mercy, through forgiveness, to true glory.

God Humbles People Only to Lift Them Up.

Nebuchadnezzar was an extremely gifted and able achiever. To begin with, as general of the armed forces of Babylon, he defeated all opponents and expanded the Babylonian Empire's borders to their greatest extent.

As king, he made the capitol, Babylon, beautiful and doubled its size with a whole new half on the west bank of the Euphrates. He organized and ably administered his empire. He excelled in architecture, engineering, planning and building. One of the seven ancient wonders of the world was the famous hanging gardens of Babylon. He engineered and built them. He understood hydraulics and on and on the list goes.

There was a problem, though. All this went to his head, as we say. He took the credit for all he achieved. He saw the chief purpose of his life as bringing glory to himself.

That is sinful.

1 Corinthians 4:7 says, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" It's God asking that question. He knows everything we have we received because He Himself is the One who gave it to us.

We are sinful people, too. That shows when we let pride and haughtiness get us. It is easy to feel superior to others because of intelligence, skills, talents and abilities we may have that others do not, or have them to a higher degree than others have them. This shows in reverse when we resent and think badly of others simply because we are envious of what they have and we do not.

We also find it easy to brag or to take the credit about every success and achievement or bask in honors others bestows on us.

Then, too, it is easy to take advantage of other people and look down on them or use them as if all others exist to serve us instead of us serving them.

One hears all the time about leaving a legacy. That can be taken or meant OK, but often it means only that we want to be remembered fondly or as important or at least as significant for even future generations.

God says that we have received from Him all talent and ability. We owe Him thanks for enabling us any achievement, in school, at work, in business or government. Today's reading from Romans 15 clearly and repeatedly says that our purpose in life is to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and "accept one another ... in order to bring praise to God" and "so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy." There's the purpose and goal of our lives, to glorify God and to see everything we have as from God and not because we deserved or earned it but because of His mercy for us sinners for Jesus' sake.

God had His 1 Corinthians 4:7 for Nebuchadnezzar. It came one night in the form of a dream about a magnificent tree that got cut down by or at the command of a messenger from heaven. (Did you remember that the word angel means messenger?) I'm sure the king had this foreboding sense that it was about him and when Daniel, that faithful worshipper of the one God, was the only one able to explain the dream to him, that lets us know it was God calling for the king's repentance lest a judgment befall the king.

And Daniel, the prophet of the LORD, respectfully, but directly, preached repentance to Nebuchadnezzar calling for him to repent, to show fruits of repentance by ceasing his sins and wickedness and helping the oppressed.

This law preaching warned Nebuchadnezzar of harsher law if he did not humble himself before the one true God. He would be humbled in a most horrifying way. He'd suffer mental illness, thinking he was some kind of animal and acting the part, until he humbled himself in from of God.

Nebuchadnezzar quickly forgot about what God has said. A year later, from the roof of his palace, the king crowed, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

God answered, "No, it isn't!" "Right now that dream will happen." And the king lost his mind. He suffered zoanthropy. He thought he was an animal. Scripture here says he ate grass and lived out with the cattle. Until one day, Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven. He humbly acknowledged the Most High God. He praised and glorified God. He repented of His sin. He even notified his kingdom that God alone rules. Heaven alone establishes kingdoms and kings.

And God exalts the humble. He who exalts himself will be humbled. Pray this happens before Judgment Day, especially by means of God's Word. He who hears God's Word and humbles himself will be exalted. God in mercy and grace will forgive him his pride, all his sin, and lift him up as His child for eternal life. Jesus humbles Himself for us and He is God! He thus earned forgiveness and the glory of heaven for us sinners. Let us repent of pride, haughtiness, self-centeredness. Our humility does not earn heaven either. Only God's mercy and free grace for Jesus' sake gifts it to us.

Repent and believe the good news of Jesus! Amen.