

It is striking that the first people to heed God's call to "prepare a highway" for the return after the exile (Isaiah 40:1-3) were the authorities and rulers in Medo-Persia. The Persian king Cyrus was the one God commanded to open the way back from exile for the Jews into the Promised Land. God can move heaven and earth to care for His people and even prompt pagans to make decisions on behalf of His people! In this week's notes, we study how God can humble rulers and move them to confess the Lord's greatness for the praise of His glory.

Mon/Tues: Read Daniel 4

Devolved into a Beast

Exhibit number one of the typical, proud ingratitude so common among the great is the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, under whom Daniel the prophet served for many years. Through the Spirit of wisdom in Daniel (see Daniel 4:9, 18) God blessed every aspect of Nebuchadnezzar's rule. Did the king respond with gratitude? Well, he briefly praised Daniel's God in delivering the three from the fiery furnace and marveled at Daniel's interpretation of the golden image in Daniel 2. But pride in his own power and wealth eclipsed such momentary spiritual insights. Even after Daniel was ushered many years later into his presence and with compassion told the king that the cutting down of the tree in his dream meant the kingdom being taken from him, Nebuchadnezzar refused to repent as Daniel urges (Daniel 4:27). Instead, one year after this warning from Heaven, we see the king of Babylonian again boasting in his own works as he beholds the mighty city of Babylon, which "he" built (Daniel 4:30). But while the word was still on his mouth, God struck the king with the insanity, as Daniel had predicted, and removed his royal authority and power. For an extended period of time, (Daniel 4:32's 'seven times'), God would drive Nebuchadnezzar to eat grass like an animal until he was humbled to the point of confessing God's rule over all things in Daniel 4:34-37.

Meditate and Pray: Learn the warning of Daniel: the first sin we must "break off" (Daniel 4:27) is the sin of ingratitude, and its even more terrible companion - swelling pride. Without the humbling of our proud natures by the grace of God, we will descend into increasingly animalistic behavior. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is first envisioned as an image of a man (Daniel 2) but then devolves down into the world of beasts. The Babylonian kingdom is exposed as bestial and abnormal for all to see! Such are the dehumanizing effects of ingratitude and pride. No wonder Paul records this same degradation in Romans 1:21-25. Sing about our need for the Lord Jesus to lift us out of the bestial effects of our sin, using Psalm 73's words from the old 1650 Scottish Psalter:

²¹ Thus grieved was my heart in me,
and me my reins oppressed:
²² So rude was I, and ignorant,
and in thy sight a beast.
²³ Nevertheless continually,
O Lord, I am with thee:
Thou dost me hold by my right hand,
and still upholdest me.

Weds/Thurs/Fri: Read Daniel 4:19 and 4:27-4:34**Freedom and a Right Mind**

The goal of God's devastating chastisement of the king of Babylon was to bring the king "to his right mind," able finally to see that the Lord's dominion over his life was almighty and all-encompassing. This profound change of mind on the part of Nebuchadnezzar comes in Daniel 4:34ff. Many see in these verses the conversion of this mighty king as he for the first time bows to the Lordship of the one true God, much as in Jonah 4, where God appears to convert the king of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah.

Though we may not be able to ascertain with certainty that this king was converted, it is good for us to ask the question more generally: What exactly does this "change of mind" mean when God brings down the pride of men to save them from their sins? Here are three elements that had to have occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's heart if a true conversion occurred in his life:

- 1) A softening of Nebuchadnezzar's heart towards the God of Daniel. How it must have cut the king to the quick for Daniel, whose God had been so ignored and rejected by the Babylonians, to so lovingly speak of his concern for this wicked ruler's suffering the consequences of his dream. Daniel says in Daniel 4:19, "Would that the dream applied to someone else, and not to you, O king!" Oh, may the Lord give us such a grieving heart for those who oppose us and our Lord so that their hearts would be softened by the God they have so grievously offended!
- 2) A new revulsion on the king's part toward his own sins. He must have taken to heart the warning of Daniel (Daniel 4:27) about his sins and iniquities, particularly his oppression of the weak and helpless. In short, it has always been the Holy Spirit's job to "convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8-11), and we ought to see that Spirit bringing the king's heart and mind under deep conviction of sin in order to experience the saving grace of repentance.
- 3) A breaking of the dominion of sin and Satan in the king of Babylon's heart and life. Dominion-breaking must take place. As Dr. Sinclair Ferguson has said, while many folk will readily admit that they sin and that their sins need forgiveness, few realize that the ultimate problem is that *they cannot stop sinning because they are in bondage to it!* That is the deepest truth of our sin problem. It is an enslavement which requires God Himself and His power to rescue us! This was the case for Nebuchadnezzar and it is for us as well.

Meditate and Pray: Only when God had softened the king's heart, creating a hatred of his own sin and breaking the dominion of sin over his life, could Nebuchadnezzar be said to have been "in his right mind" and "brought to his senses" in Daniel 4:34. Sing the following hymn # 644 as a prayer that the Lord would guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus, so that you are continually spared from the pride of deluded self-exaltation. May we with humble, clear-mindedness sing:

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

*May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.*

Sat/Sun: Read Mark 5:1-20**Freedom and Submission**

We ask the question again: What exactly does it mean for a sinner, lost in the bondage of sin and blinded by Satan, to come to his senses and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? We could also ask this question of ourselves as believers *who still have the tendency to wander into the mental fog of sin...* what does it take for God to bring me to my senses when I have wandered into sin?

Look at the Gadarene demoniac, “sitting and clothed in his right mind” in Mark 5:15. Here is a man who lived with no chains, ruling his dark world with deadly force. No one was able to approach him as he ran through the tombs naked and cutting himself. He was a law unto himself. But now, he sits in willing chains of loving submission to the Lordship of Christ! He sees where his allegiance lies.

The proof of his submission is in Mark 5:18-20. One can understand why this man desperately wanted to go with Jesus in the boat and to escape the spiritual hardness of the area where he grew up. But when Jesus tells him instead to go home as a witness to the glorious saving power of Jesus Christ, he submits and goes. That is what being in our “right minds” means. It means we know who is boss and follow His lead in the submission of faith.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about that submission in hymn # 301:

*Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore:
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set my Savior forth.*

*Arrayed in mortal flesh,
He like an angel stands,
And holds the promises
And pardons in His hands;
Commissioned from His Father's throne
To make His grace to mortals known.*

*Be Thou my counselor,
My pattern, and my guide,
And through this desert land
Still keep me near thy side:
Nor let my feet e'er run astray
Nor rove nor seek the crooked way.*

*My advocate appears
For my defense on high;
The Father bows His ears,
And lays His thunder by:
Not all that hell or sin can say
Shall turn His heart, His love away.*

*But O what gentle terms,
What condescending ways,
Doth our Redeemer use
To teach his heav'nly grace!
Mine eyes with joy and wonder see
What forms of love He bears for me.*

*Great prophet of my God,
My tongue would bless Thy name,
By Thee the joyful news
Of our salvation came,
The joyful news of sin forgiv'n
Of hell subdued, and peace with Heav'n.*

*Jesus, my great high priest,
Offered His blood, and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside:
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne.*

*My dear almighty Lord,
My conqueror and my King,
Thy scepter and Thy sword,
Thy reigning grace I sing:
Thine is the power; behold I sit
In willing bonds beneath Thy feet.*

