

...To Anyone He Wishes

Purple Part 4

Sermon Date: November 3, 2024

*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. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. *35*All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" *36*At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. *37*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Daniel 4:34-37

Introduction

As we've walked through this crazy series and crazy season, that started all the way back on March 24th, it was interesting to write messages 6 months in advance of what everyone promised would be the craziest election season ever. What I assumed writing this back in March is that, like every election season before, the craziest election season ever was *predictable*. Just because it's antagonistic doesn't mean it isn't predictable. Every time you mess with the idols of power and control, you can predict the reaction will be violent.

Throughout this series, we've taken communion every time. This is a way to symbolically center ourselves in the kingdom, that is not between the two political parties but above them. On Tuesday before or after you vote, we're going to have the doors to the church open for you to receive communion as well. To remind yourself and center yourself, knowing that your identity and future are not determined

by a party but by the one who still holds the whole world in his hands. We want to invite you into that practice on this important day of spiritual formation and Kingdom allegiance.

I'm reminded of the Election Day advice of John Wesley from 1774 in England as recorded in his diary: "I met with those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them 1) to vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; 2) to speak no evil of the person they voted against; and 3) to take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side." Pretty good advice from exactly 250 years ago.

This leads me to today: as both parties jockey for final position and people seek power, I want to focus our attention on an account from history that truly blows my mind to this day.

Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar is considered one of the greatest emperors to walk upon the Earth. He was emperor of the Babylonian empire at the peak of their powers. He conquered Syria and Palestine, and he made Babylon the greatest city in the world. He built a 90-foot statue of himself. He destroyed the Jewish temple and initiated the Babylonian captivity of the Jewish people. This is an important note: Nebuchadnezzar did not believe in God, at least at first. He believed he was God, yet God still used him. Let me be more clear: God, used who everyone would have labeled the wrong person to accomplish his will even though it involved the captivity of God's people for a period of time.

Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 years. This is what we know from secular history, there is a period of time in which he didn't lead. He writes "that for a period of time my kingdom was of no interest to me and I engaged in no building projects." Again, this is secular history. Now, the writing of Kings was often propaganda, and they're not going to make themselves look bad; but all of history knows that the greatest emperor in the world did not reign over his empire somewhere within his reign. He rules before this moment in time, and after this moment in time, but takes a break somewhere in the middle of his rule. Can we talk about how crazy this is? One of the greatest emperors in the history of the world says, "I quit being ruler for a while, but then I started again." This break that we know about from secular

history, is detailed within biblical history. Through the book of Daniel we know what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he says that his kingdom was of no interest to him.

Daniel 4

4^[a]King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! **2**It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. **3**How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. **4**I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. **5**I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. **6**So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. **7**When the magicians, enchanter, astrologers^[b] and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. **8**Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

9I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. **10**These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. **11**The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. **12**Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

13"In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger,^[c] coming down from heaven. **14**He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. **15**But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

*“Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. **16**Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times^[d] pass by for him.*

***17**“The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.’*

***18**“This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”*

***19**Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you. Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! **20**The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, **21**with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— **22**Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.*

***23**“Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’*

***24**“This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: **25**You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. **26**The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. **27**Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to*

accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

Now, pause real quick to grasp what is taking place. The most powerful emperor in the world is writing down a dream that he is given by God, as well as the interpretation of that dream by the prophet Daniel. Now, this is written down later, so all this has already happened. But I think if I had a dream about the problem of my pride and the possibility of things being taken from me, I would be stepping pretty carefully. This is what Nebuchadnezzar records...

28*All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. 29*Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, **30***he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”*

31*Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32*You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

33*Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.*

So what was Nebuchadnezzar doing? Eating grass. He lost his mind. It sounds a lot better to record that he “took no interest in his kingdom and engaged in no building projects”, but the reality we find as recorded in Daniel is that God drove him to madness as a result of his pride and arrogance. So how did God use Nebuchadnezzar? Well, this is what God did next...

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Two Things

The first thing I want you to hear is the proclamation of who God is from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar. "His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom **endures** from generation to generation. Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. Those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

The second thing I want you to hear is the proclamation of how God distributes power from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar. Three times in this single chapter the same phrase is recorded, "The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." How should we view the outcomes on Tuesday? Nebuchadnezzar says, "The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." Whether the person in the White House acknowledges God, loves God, believes in God, or whatever other category we could think of, it changes nothing! Absolutely nothing. It is impossible to not have God's person in the White House because, "The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."

Why does he pick who he does? No clue! None, whatsoever. Why has his free will permitted the things it has? I have no idea on Earth why. But I know, "The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." My faith is not in who is in the White House, but who is on the throne. My confidence is not in the policies that are enacted, the Supreme Court Justices that are appointed, the wars that we choose to be in or not, the status of the economy, the condition of our borders, or anything else you can name. Are their policies that I think are better than others? Absolutely. Are there candidates I would prefer to be in power? Of course.

Conclusion

My primary citizenship is in heaven. My mind is set on heavenly things, not earthly things. I will seek first the kingdom of heaven. And when this world gives me reason to despair and to fear, I take to heart the words of the emperor of Babylon, who was driven from his kingdom and lost his mind because of his pride. Who I believe leans into those in America in 2024 and reminds us, "The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." We are Americans best when we are not Americans first. We are not red, and we are not blue; we are purple. Not the color between, the kingdom above. The color of majesty, of royalty, of our King who is still seated on the throne and is returning again.