

## The Singular Path that Leads to Heaven

### Daniel 4: 28 - 35

This is a story about a king, with a lesson for kings and presidents just as valid today as it was 25 centuries ago.

It's also a story about every one of us if we're to make to heaven. One way or the other we must learn this lesson, or we will perish.

But if we learn it, we are in for the greatest joy in the universe.

So, what I would like to do is look at your story and mine in this text first, and then look at its relevance for the current election because I know it's on everyone's mind.

What Daniel describes in this story is the pathway of a man from the pride of self to the praise of God through the valley of humiliation.

And it's the same pathway that every person in the world must walk if he wants to get to heaven and have eternal life.

Ever since Adam's first sin we have all been born with his disposition:

Do you remember what the essence of that first sin was?

It was the abandonment of childlike dependence on God in favor of God-like dependence on self. And ever since then, all people everywhere have been born with this sinful nature of pride.

This is bad news, because God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13).

In Isaiah 2:11 God said, *"The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day."* God hates pride, and He opposes the proud.

But God also loves proud sinners. That's why he sent his Son into the world to save us from the power and the penalty of our pride.

So Jesus says in Matthew 18:4, *"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus came into the world to convert people from God-like dependence on self to child-like dependence on God.

And then he died to pay the penalty for our pride and to show us the way of humility and to send all our boasting skyward toward God and not toward ourselves.

So God has provided a path that leads from pride to the kingdom of heaven and to eternal life. That's what the Bible is all about.

This is what this story in Daniel 4 is all about.

It has three stages:

It starts with the **pride of self** and leads through the **valley of humiliation** to the **praise of God**.

Let's look at these three stages in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

We are in the early 500s BC in Babylon where the Jews had been taken into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar is king of this great empire and he knows it. His heart swells with pride.

This is **stage 1** in the path. It's where we all start. Let's look at it carefully in verse 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?"*

Can we learn from these words what the nature of pride is?

I think so. We can see at least two parts to pride.

One is found in the word "**by**" and the other in the word "**for.**"

First, he says (v. 30), "*Is not this the great Babylon I have built **BY** my mighty power.*"

Then he says that he built it "*for the glory of my majesty.*"

**BY** my power and **FOR** my glory!

This is the lub-dup in the heartbeat of pride.

"*By my mighty power*" means:

I love to think of myself as the cause and origin and controller and source of all my greatness. When I see what I have built, I love to savor the fact that my intelligence and my initiative and my power were the cause of this greatness. It came from me and through me.

So, pride gets its pleasure from being independent, and self-determining and self-sufficient. "*By **MY** mighty power I have built this great Babylon.*"

Then Nebuchadnezzar adds, "*FOR the glory of my majesty! I have built this great Babylon **BY** my power and **FOR** my glory.*"

In other words, pride is driven by desire for the glory that men ascribe to human achievements.

Pride loves to think of itself as the source of great achievement and the recipient of great praise.

The origin of great achievement (*BY my power!*)

the recipient of great praise (*FOR my glory!*).

So, I think what we've got here is the essence of pride: the enjoyment of self-sufficiency rather than God-sufficiency and the enjoyment of self-exaltation rather than God-exaltation.

Now don't make the mistake of saying to yourself right now ...

"Well pride is surely not my problem, because I'm a loser.

I don't feel self-sufficient at all.

And I don't expect anybody to exalt me because I'm not pretty or I'm not smart or I'm weak.

So pride is not my problem."

Be very careful here. Don't let Satan trick you.

I did not say that pride was the achievement of self-sufficiency or the achievement of self-exaltation. I said that pride is the enjoyment of them, the delight in them, the desire for them.

You may see your life as a total failure and feel crushed this morning and still have pride as the driving force of your life.

The very pain you may feel at being a failure may be owing to the desperateness of your desire to look successful and to taste the glory of human praise.

One person may go to a party and brag and boast and draw attention to himself and his achievements.

Another person may go to the same party and be so fearful and insecure that he hides in corners and tries to avoid people.

And both of these persons may be driven by pride.

The strong person doesn't believe the grace of God is needed.

The weak person doesn't believe the grace of God is sufficient.

And since God is not their portion, man is— the praise of man is —

One person, fearful that he won't get it, hides.

Another person, hopeful that he will get it, brags.

Same disease, different symptoms.

And all of us have it to one degree or another. *"By my power and for my glory I have built this great Babylon!"* The first stage of our journey is pride.

What's your Babylon?

The **stage 2**, by the grace of God, is the **valley of humiliation**.

And don't miss that word grace!

**God bends our stiff necks and pushes our face to the ground because that's where the streams of life are flowing.** Verse 31:

While the words were still on the king's lips, a voice came from heaven  
...

*"This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; You will eat grass like cattle."*

I call this the VALLEY of humiliation because it is a long way down from being the king of Babylon to being a beast in the field. Oh how far this great king fell!

The reason God made Nebuchadnezzar act like a cow that eats grass, with hair as long as eagles wings and nails like a bird's claws—the reason he did that was to **show us the animal-like nature of pride.**

When man tries to become like God, he becomes like an animal. Pride puts man in a class with the beasts of the field. This is the point of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity.

**Stage 2** on the pathway that leads to heaven is the painful discovery of this truth.

We thought we were strong, but we discover that we are weak.

We thought we were weak, and we discover that we were protecting our ego.

We thought we were self-sufficient, and we discover that we were utterly dependent on God—for life and breath and everything.

So I urge you, if you have never been there, go to the valley of humiliation.

Let yourself feel the insane and animalistic nature of pride. And when you have tasted the bitter grass of that field, come to the final stage of our journey – the praise of God.

The pathway to life leads from the pride of self through the valley of humiliation to the praise of God. 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.”*

What is the biblical opposite of pride?

This text teaches that the opposite of pride in man's strength is praise for God's sovereignty. This is what Nebuchadnezzar sings about when his sanity returns. Verse 34b–35:

*“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 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?”*

This is the King talking here!

This is what the valley of humiliation is for.

The opposite of human pride is a song of praise to the sovereignty of God.

Two great revolutions take place as you come out of the valley of humiliation on the way from the pride of man to the praise of God:

One is an **intellectual revolution** - a revolution in the way we think about God.

It is described in verse 32b. The voice from heaven says that Nebuchadnezzar will eat grass like cattle *"until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."*

The biblical way out of the valley of humiliation is a revolutionary change in the way we think about God.

The truth that God rules the kingdom of men must grip our minds, and the sovereignty of his will must become the deep solid foundation of all our thinking.

The second revolution that takes place as you come up out of the valley of humiliation is a **spiritual revolution** - a revolution in the way we serve God.

Nebuchadnezzar was persuaded in his head now that the slogan "By my power and for my glory" is the slogan of an ox or an ass in the field.

The true slogan is now "By God's might and for God's glory."

He learned in the valley of humiliation. Will we?

But he didn't just learn it in his head; he felt it in his heart.

This is the point of verse 34, "*I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.*"

The only person who does justice to the sovereignty of God is the person who believes it in his heart.

Watch out for a person who wants to talk about the sovereignty of God but has no song in his heart.

The biblical opposite of pride is not pondering the sovereignty of God, but *praising* the sovereignty of God—delighting in it, resting in it.

I hope this is your this morning.

It's the only possible journey that can lead us to heaven.

Three stages are ...

Stage 1: the pride of man

Stage 2: the valley of humiliation

Stage 3: the praise of God.

Wherever you are on the road, take another step toward God and away from pride.

### **An Application to the Coming Election**

I close with a simple application of the text as it relates to the upcoming election. One simple and awesome truth:

God will determine the next leaders of our country. Verse 32b: *The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to anyone he wishes.*



God will give election victory to whom he chooses. Now there are two things this **does not** mean:

First, It does not mean that you don't have to vote.

**God oversees and governs elections by governing the voters.**

*"He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth" this includes the United States of America. (v. 35).*

Second, God's sovereignty over elections does not mean that God approves of all the policies of those who win elections.

Sovereign rule over sinful men is not God's endorsement of their policies.

There are two things God's sovereignty does mean as it relates to the election: It means that winners should not boast like Nebuchadnezzar and say, "By my power and my wisdom I have won this office."

But he should be humbled under the mighty hand of God . . . *"who rules the kingdoms of men and gives it to those he wishes."*

It also means that we should take heart and be encouraged by the sovereignty of God in this upcoming election.

If your candidate is elected, be happy. If not, it's okay to be disappointed; ***God still reigns!***

So, let's do our best to keep things in perspective: We're not electing a Savior – We already know and are sure of who our Savior and Lord is.

We're just voting for imperfect, fallible, and sinful human beings to do what we don't want to do or are unable to do.

In fact, I'd say we have much bigger fish to fry – like helping others find the singular path that leads them heavenward. Amen.