

Sermon – 26/08/2007 am

Second Dream Interpreted

Study Text: Daniel 4:19-27

In a second dream Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, saw a giant cosmic tree. This was no ordinary dream like those you and I have. This was God's way of speaking to a rich and powerful man who did not know God. He called Daniel, a man in whom was the Spirit of the Holy God, to tell him what the dream meant. How he would respond to the message is another matter.

What is amazing in the passage before us today is the option of avoiding the dire consequences foretold in the dream. Daniel suggested how Nebuchadnezzar might retain his sanity, his position and prosperity. He could turn from sin and seek the mercy of God. Would he listen to Daniel's advice?

Daniel's role was not unlike that of a Christian minister. In love he advises people as to how they can get peace with God and also peace with one another. He tells them how Jesus will take away their burden of sin and set them free. But do they listen? Do they heed this advice? The heart of man is so rebellious. When we are told to do something, our natural reaction is to rebel. Every kind of beast has been tamed by man (James 3). Even the wild brumby can be broken and made useful; but not so easily the heart of man.

Astonished

At last Daniel came to me (4:8). Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel his dream, even the divine decree that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. Daniel was astonished and troubled for a while – so much so that Nebuchadnezzar had to encourage him.

Why did the dream trouble Daniel? Daniel was in the king's service. He genuinely honoured the king as the divinely ordained king of the nation. He did not wish him any harm or evil. He wished the dream applied to the king's enemies rather than the king.

What an amazingly gracious man Daniel was. Here was a man who not long before was arrested and about to be executed by this megalomaniac. His dear friends were arrested and thrown into a blazing furnace by this same man. We might have expected Daniel to have taken delight in any suffering that came upon this man. Or at the least he might have been unmoved. But instead he felt sympathy for the king.

Do you, like Daniel, love your enemies, and those who wish to harm. Jesus acted in the same way as Daniel and told us *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you* (Matthew 5:43).

Application

Daniel was a loyal servant of the king, but was also a faithful servant of God. He was bound to obey the covenant commands and not to lie or mislead the king. He knew what the dream meant because he indeed had the Spirit of God. He told Nebuchadnezzar that the cosmic tree,

the tree that reached to the heavens, fed all who came and sheltered the beasts and the birds, was him. *It is you, O king, who have grown and become strong* (4:22). As the most powerful man on earth he was pictured in the dream as a mighty tree.

What happened to the tree in his dream? It was chopped down and stripped bare with only a stump remaining. This was done by divine decree, by the word of the 'watcher' or holy one. The stump strangely turns into a beast grazing without shelter in an open field. The band of bronze and iron assists in making this transition.

The mighty tree that is chopped becoming a mere stump in a paddock represents king Nebuchadnezzar. He would be driven from his palace and left to fend for himself in the fields. He would be forced to eat grass and be wet with the rain and the dew. We can only imagine what he would have looked like after *seven times* had passed. Was this seven years, seven months or seven years? We are not told, so do not know. What is important is that it was time long enough to complete the purposes of God.

What was God's purpose in subjecting Nebuchadnezzar to this drastic demotion and humiliation? *Till you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men* (4:25). God planned to humble this proud man and make him realise he was not a god but just a man. He ruled at the pleasure of Almighty God. His kingdom would be taken from him in a moment – even though in the dream it was later restored to him.

This dream must confuse evolutionists. A man becoming a beast! Would they regard this as humiliation or exaltation! Evolutionists tell us that man is evolving into some type of 'superman' able to rule the world and solve all problems. On the other hand they also say man is just another animal. I heard a man on the radio speak in one sentence of the 'human animal' that we are, and then in the next being critical of some men who 'act like animals'!

Those who hold the theory of evolution have one main aim – to leave God out of the picture. They are like Nebuchadnezzar who also ignored the true God and called himself a god. Being forced to live like a cow for seven times he would think a little more humbly and clearly about God.

God still has ways of humbling those who exalt themselves and take all glory to themselves. Some weeks ago a man was telling me how his wife was in this top job earning lots of money and was currently overseas on holiday. The other day he was almost in tears as he told me she had been diagnosed with cancer.

Ultimately God humbles every human being in death. Nebuchadnezzar could not defy death, any more than Elvis Presley or Kerry Packer. *Naked I came from my mothers womb and naked I shall return, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21).

It is not belief in evolution *per se* that makes a man proud – it is sin. Sin seeks to exclude God and put self at the centre of the universe. This can be a bold declaration – 'move over God I will take the wheel now' – or it can be a more subtle shift in our focus. We simply stop reading the Bible, stop praying and spend the time making our own plans and doing our own thing.

Does God have rule over your life? Do you still need to learn that God rules in the kingdom of men, not just at the national level but at the personal level also? Do you believe, and do you live as if you believe, that God has fashioned all your days, all your life according to his good pleasure and perfect will (Psalms 39:16, Ephesians 1:11)?

Advice

The message for Nebuchadnezzar was not good. His dream as interpreted by Daniel pointed to a deeply traumatic and humbling experience. It would not come as an accident, but as ordained by God. This was the whole purpose of the dream. God told him beforehand so that when it happened he would understand and might believe.

Jesus told his disciples again and again that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed and be raised on the third day. Why did he tell them all this? So that when it happened they would understand – understand it was not just an accident but God’s plan. And after Pentecost they did understand and started preaching the gospel. Jesus also told them that he was going away but that he would soon return. He would return on the clouds of heaven.

So will you be surprised when you see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven. Will you say ‘this is some strange, inexplicable phenomena’? Many will, but will you? Will you not say ‘well this is just like what I read in my Bible’?

Knowing what lay ahead for Nebuchadnezzar Daniel advised him to break of his sins by being righteous and showing mercy to the poor. Daniel exhorted the king to repent and seek the mercy of God. *What does God require but that you act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8).

Nebuchadnezzar needed to turn from wallowing in wickedness to walking in obedience to God’s righteousness law. He needed to show mercy – for God is merciful. He needed to show justice and stop oppressing the poor -for God is just. Nebuchadnezzar probably made his beautiful place and hanging gardens with slave labour.

Men and nations that become powerful often do so at the back of oppression and injustice. To our shame even the British Empire was not innocent in this matter. Many who were proclaiming the gospel 200 or 300 years ago quietly or otherwise condoned the slave trade. It can happen, and still does happen, today at the individual and national level. What does God say in Micah 6:8?

The words of a contemporary prophet come to mind. Ezekiel cried out to Israel ‘turn from your ways and live!’ *‘I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies’ says the Lord God ‘therefore turn and live’* (Ezekiel 18:32). God is still crying out today to all people – ‘turn and live!’ Every page of the Bible cries out, and every faithful follower of Jesus must cry out – ‘turn and live!’ Just like Daniel and Ezekiel we must call upon people facing the judgment of God to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

Because of the Cross of Jesus, God promises mercy to all who turn to him. He promises life, new life, and eternal life in Jesus Christ. Do you know this life? Are you advising, indeed urging those among whom you live each day to turn and live?

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