

In Pursuit

The Transformation of Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 4:37

March 12, 2016

Today

I wanted to talk to you about transformation. I believe transformation is the necessary result of an active and engaged relationship with Jesus and there is no better story in scripture that demonstrates the power of a transformed life than that of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar's story is so much more than transformation. It is really about God's unrelenting pursuit of Nebuchadnezzar's heart and the transformed life that comes as a result of that pursuit.

Nebuchadnezzar was, without doubt, one of the greatest kings in all human history.

- He was a mighty warrior, wise statesman and brilliant architect. He was also arrogant and quick tempered.
- He, almost single handedly, turned the Babylonian empire into the mightiest nation of the then known world.
- He conquered many nations and subdued many peoples, including the Nation of Judah and the people of God.

Historians attribute the fall of Judah and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, but according to Daniel 1:2 it was God who handed Jerusalem over to the Babylonians. Right from the beginning of the book it is established that while Nebuchadnezzar may be the mightiest of earthly kings, it is God who's in control and at work behind the scenes.

Encounter 1 – University Exit Exam

We've talked the last few weeks about how critical a relationship with Jesus is when facing life's storms. We could argue that the destruction of Judah and the deportation to another country, qualifies as a storm of life. Maybe some of the Jews did feel sorry for themselves.

Among the captives taken from Jerusalem were Daniel and his three friends – Hananiah, Mishael and Azaria. It does not seem from the record that they felt sorry for themselves at all. They were loyal followers of Yahweh and were determined to be faithful in every circumstance. Every challenge was an opportunity to witness about the God of Heaven.

The text tells us that they were granted admission into the "Stanford University" of Babylon. Not just any body was allowed in (free from physical defect, handsome, wide-range of knowledge, well-informed, intelligent) – it was a high honor and right away they start trouble.

They refused to eat what they were given, Why? I suggest the main issue for them was loyalty. By eating food from the king's table, you were acknowledging that he was your provider and sustainer and you were giving your loyalty to him. Daniel and his friends could not, under any circumstance, give their loyalty to anyone but God. By their refusal to eat from the king's table they were saying that they were sustained by God and gave their loyalty only to him.

This put their caretaker in an awkward position because if anything prevented these boys from excelling in school, he would be held responsible. The 4 friends were persistent, however, and in the end God proved faithful.

The final exam was an oral exam and the king, himself, conducted each interview and found that of all the graduating class none compared to those 4 boys. Those 4 boys honored God and turn God honored them above all others. As a result they entered royal service:

- **Daniel 1:20** - "Every time the king consulted them on any matter calling for insight and judgment, he found them ten times superior to all the magicians and exorcists in his whole kingdom".

What does this have to do with transformational power??

God was planting seeds and He used young, captured slaves to do it.

At that time, when nations went to war so did their gods. When a nation lost the war the gods of that nation also lost the war.

To conquer a nation was to say, in fact, "My god(s) is more powerful than your god(s)". On top of that the Hebrew captives were members of a nation comprised of only two tribes. It was an insignificant little nation. And yet, the God of that defeated little nation blessed those that determined to remain faithful only to Him. That could not have gone unnoticed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Always remember that people are watching to see if your talk and your walk are the same.

Encounter 2 – Dream #1 – The Image

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream he can't remember and he was troubled. He called all the soothsayers, magicians, sorcerers, etc. to tell him the dream and interpret it. Of course, they couldn't do it. Never before had the king asked for more than an interpretation of a dream, but this time was different. As a result of their inability to do as the king requested, Nebuchadnezzar declared that all the soothsayers and magicians and sorcerers, etc. would be put to death – all of them, including Daniel and his friends, who had not been invited to the audience with the king.

Daniel asked for time and was given the same dream as well as its interpretation. Once again, the God of the Hebrews was making it clear to the king that he was not really in charge. It was the God of the insignificant Hebrews that set up kingdoms and removed kingdoms (including His own). It is God who is in charge of the future.

Yes, His kingdom is mighty, but it will not last. The next kingdom will not last, nor will the next, not even the kingdom of Iron will last. Only God's kingdom will last. When Daniel finished interpreting the dream the king was convinced that the interpretation was true and in humility he,

- **Daniel 2:46-47** – “Fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel and said, “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery”.

Nebuchadnezzar was impressed and in awe of the God of Daniel, but he was not yet transformed nor was God finished....

Encounter 3 – The Furnace

Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance finally got the better of him. Daniel had said that his kingdom would not last, but, but, but, who did his God think he was anyway!

I can hear him, “I AM KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR!! I'LL SHOW THAT LITTLE DESERT GOD WHO'S THE GREATEST!!”

So, he had a statue made entirely of gold. When the statue was completed, every governor, satrap, counselor, judge and prefect in the nation was called to attend and pay homage to the king by bowing down to the statue.

This story in chapter 3 of Daniel is by far my favorite story in the entire Bible.

- An arrogant king – 3 unmovable followers of God – a really, really, really hot furnace. It just doesn't get any better than that!!

When the time was right the music started and the multitude fell to the ground – except 3.

The King surrounded himself with yes men and they took the opportunity to point out to the king that there were three officials that were not bowing down.

- **Daniel 3:13-18** - Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ “Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ “If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ “But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar went out of his mind. They are talking to the king not the secretary. He has the power!! They are a conquered people!! Obviously, the king has a short memory.... Into the furnace they are thrown. Out of the furnace they walked.

- **Ellen White (PK 510):** “Forgotten was the great golden image. In the presence of the Living God, men feared and trembled”

Humbled, Nebuchadnezzar said,

- **Daniel 3:28-29** - “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ “Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way”.

Nebuchadnezzar has acknowledged publicly the God of Heaven, but he still thinks fear and threats of death will cause changed hearts. Nebuchadnezzar is a slow learner, but we are starting to see glimmers transformation in his life.

Encounter 4 – Dream #2 – The Tree

The King has another dream, which he remembered, but still his sorcerers cannot interpret it for him. Daniel can, of course, but he did not want to relay the meaning because it was specifically about the king.

- **Daniel 4:20-27** - "The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth,²¹ and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged--²² it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.²³ 'And in that the king saw an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, "Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze *around it* in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him";
²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes.²⁶ 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is* Heaven *that* rules.²⁷ 'Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity"
- **Ellen White {PK 519}**: "For a time the impression of the warnings and the counsel of the prophet was strong upon Nebuchadnezzar... Nebuchadnezzar again allowed himself to be controlled by a spirit of jealousy against the kingdoms that were to follow... hardening his heart, he used his God-given talents for self-glorification, exalting himself above the God who had given him life and power.

Encounter 5 – Madness and Restoration

A year went by. One day Nebuchadnezzar was wandering around the top of his royal residence admiring all the beauty that he had made, congratulating himself on his mighty work. Suddenly the dream came true. He was banished from court, ate grass like a cow, his hair grew long and matted and his fingernails grew like eagle's talons. At the end of prescribed time Nebuchadnezzar's mind was restored and this is what he said,

- **Daniel 4:34-37** - "I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.³⁵ "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'³⁶ "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so, I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.³⁷ "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride".
- **Ellen White {PK 521}**: "The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He, who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn--that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, "I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase. God's purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.

TRANSFORMED!!! The king that God had pursued for so long finally got it!! Ah, the joy in heaven!!

Take Aways

How does one story about one king from an ancient culture impact you today? What is the "SO WHAT" of this sermon?

- God is relentless in His pursuit of lost people. He is willing to do whatever it takes. He would that none be lost, including you and me and the prostitute on the corner and the drunk in the gutter and the CEO at Oracle.

What has God done in your life?? To what lengths has He gone in His pursuit of you? Has your experience resulted in positive transformation? Are you different today then you were 6 months ago, 5 years ago, 10 years ago? Can you say, as Nebuchadnezzar said, I praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride".

Blessed be those Hounds of Heaven who will not stop chasing us until we run right into the arms of our God.