

This morning, I am in the fifth week of a sermon series through the Old Testament book of Daniel that will take us up until the summer. To recap, God has allowed Israel to be conquered by Babylon as discipline for their sins. The main characters in this story are Daniel and his three friends, commonly known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who are attempting to remain faithful to their God despite being in exile and being faced with the attempts of the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, to reprogram them into loyal Babylonian servants. Up to this point, despite God's clear challenges to Nebuchadnezzar's pride, the king has yet to bend the knee to God. But in chapter 5, we get a unique view of the world from the king's perspective:

Daniel 4:1–37 - 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, enchanters, astrologers 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 Beltshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy **gods is in him.**) ⁹ I said, "Beltshazzar, 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, 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 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.”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.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.

Those who walk in pride, God is able to humble. Three questions that need to be answered from this passage: What is humility? Why does he want us humbled? How does he humble us?

1) What is humility?

Humility in this passage appears to be the natural result of an accurate appraisal of ourselves in the light of God. Seeing God for who He is, and seeing ourselves in comparison to God, naturally leads to humility, giving all honor and glory and obedience to God. One verse that sums up humility well:

Romans 12:3 - *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.*

Pride may come when we compare ourselves to others, but humility comes when we compare ourselves to God and come away not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to, but giving all honor and obedience to God. God warns Nebuchadnezzar in a dream to lay down his pride. But he does not listen. And the humbling eventually comes at this moment:

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?”*

Nebuchadnezzar at this moment surveys Babylon and basks in his own glory, attributing all that he sees to his own mighty power and glory. And God humbles him.

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."*

In other words, everything you have has been given to you by God, who is sovereign over all kingdoms. And until you acknowledge that and bend the knee to Him and give Him the glory and honor He deserves, you will lose your authority and be driven away to live with the wild animals.

I preached through this aspect two weeks ago when we looked at Nebuchadnezzar's previous dream. I won't recap the entire sermon, but we can sum it up with this verse from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 4:7 - *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

Anything good that you have is a gift from the God of heaven. Do not forget this. Do not boast as if it is yours. **We do not praise the quill that Shakespeare used to write *Romeo and Juliet*, and we do not praise the one that God has used for His glory.** God has given. Give him the glory and honor He is due.

If humility is an accurate appraisal of ourselves in the light of God that leads to giving God the honor, glory, and obedience He deserves, then its opposite, pride, would be to mistakenly attribute that which is God's to ourselves and to steal his honor and glory, just as Nebuchadnezzar saw Babylon as coming from his own power and glory. In fact, I love how Tim Keller put it – **pride is cosmic plagiarism.** Plagiarism is when you wrote or created it, but I claim that I did it, and that therefore I deserve the glory and honor. You would naturally be outraged if I plagiarized from you or someone else and did not give the credit where it was due.

Nebuchadnezzar was the great king, responsible for many wonderful things in his kingdom, including one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the hanging gardens of Babylon. And so he says, in pride, look at all I have done, and it's all for the glory of my majesty. I did it, and I deserve the honor.

We are all guilty of that kind of pride. Look at my life. I earned this. I worked hard for this. I worked smarter for this. I deserve adulation, a pat on the back. Look at how good I look. Admire my clothes. Look at how good my kids are. Look at how solid my marriage is. Look at how talented I am. I am so much better than you. I did this. And I deserve it. Praise the glory of my majesty!

What do you have that you did not receive? Think about it. Maybe you're pushing back, saying "But you don't understand where I'm come from and how hard I had to work to get here." Did you choose where you would be born? Your parents? Your century? Your talents and abilities? Maybe you did work hard and overcome many obstacles to get where you are at. But even your work ethic and the opportunities that came your way are gifts from God.

You are a plagiarist. You claim to be the author but it's really a gift.

2) Why does God want us to be humble? Why is humility so important?

I can think of three reasons:

Humility leads to salvation and spiritual power.

Matthew 5:3 - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Remember that an accurate assessment of ourselves in the light of a holy God leads to humility.

The poor in spirit know they are spiritually bankrupt and are dependent upon God for everything.

Just like those who are poor in material things have nothing material to offer, it is the same with those who are poor in spirit. We recognize that we have nothing of spiritual value to offer to God. Not that we in and of ourselves are worthless, because we are all made in God's image, but that we have nothing of spiritual worth to offer to a holy God. We can not save ourselves. We do not measure up to God's holy standard. We are desperately in need of God's grace and mercy. We need help.

Romans 3:22–23 - There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

This poverty of spirit is exemplified by the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14:

Luke 18:10–14 - “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Notice which person comes away blessed, or approved by God. It is the tax collector who simply cries out of his poverty of spirit, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Poverty of spirit is not thinking “God is so lucky to have me on his team.” It’s responding like Peter did when Jesus hauled in that net of fish on his boat – go away from me, for I am a sinful man. It is Gideon or Moses, saying that they are unworthy of the call God has put on their life. It’s Isaiah saying “woe to me, for I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips” upon seeing a vision of the Lord.

Think of Jesus speaking to the church in Laodicea in Revelation:

Revelation 3:17 - *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

Or Paul’s words in Galatians 6:3 –

Galatians 6:3 - If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

We are spiritually poor. We do not measure up. We have nothing to offer. All we can offer is a recognition of our own inadequacy and sin: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” And then, Jesus says, we are blessed. We are under God’s approval.

Humility leads to salvation and to spiritual power. As Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, when talking about discipleship:

“There is the mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it.”

How counter-cultural is this? Poverty of spirit is completely antithetical to the spirit of this world. Our world emphasizes self-reliance, self-confidence, self-expression. Believe in yourself. Express yourself. You can do this on your own. Poverty of spirit is the admission that we don't "got this." It's a recognition that we are shot with sin through and through and always in need of God's mercy and grace. It's an admission that self-reliance is a joke. It's the realization that we can not even take our next breath apart from the power and grace of God. Again, this is not low self-esteem as our world thinks of it, wallowing in our own worthlessness. No - it is a proper appraisal of our condition before a holy God. We can not buy or earn heaven or God's blessing. We can only cry for mercy. We will not trust in ourselves, or think too highly of ourselves.

All we have to do is to present our empty, broken self and let Him fill and keep filled. As Andrew Murray says, *"Just as water ever seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds you abased and empty, His glory and power flow in."*

As Paul said in **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** - But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You want a life of power? Humble yourself before the Lord.

Humility leads to compassion.

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. "

Do what's right and be kind to the oppressed. Think about it. When you think that everything you have is due to your own merit, then you are more likely to look down on others, because they obviously have not worked as hard as you. But you have not walked in their shoes. You don't know their background, or the challenges they have faced. When you recognize that everything is a gift, then that naturally leads to compassion towards those in lowly circumstances, because you know that there but for the grace of God you go.

I have heard it said that **humility is not thinking less of yourself; humility is thinking of yourself less**. The humble are those who are concerned about others, who put others above themselves, who feel compassion for others.

Humility leads to true glory.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

This seems like true glory to us – in our palace, contented and prosperous. After all, he is responsible for the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But all the glory of this world fades. It does not last. You can not stay there. The glory will fade.

⁵I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

But true glory comes to those who humble themselves before God.

Philippians 2:5–11 - In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—**even death on a cross!** ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

True glory comes to those who sacrificially love, who give their lives for others, not to those who point to themselves. **Think of the most meaningful funerals you have been to.** I would bet it was not based on the size of the bank account or worldly accomplishments, but based on the amount of sacrificial love given to people. The humble are the ones who will hear in the end, “well done, good and faithful servant.”

3) How does he humble us?

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...’* 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.*

God cuts down Nebuchadnezzar, but it is not to destroy him but to discipline him, to humble him until he acknowledges that Heaven rules. And then he will be restored.

Of course, a similar thing is going on with Israel in this time period. They have been brought into exile in Babylon, but God is not destroying them. He is disciplining them, and in 70 years, they will be restored to their homeland if they repent of their wickedness.

And so, Nebuchadnezzar finally repents:

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.

And he is restored.

Sometimes our suffering is the result of living in a fallen world. But sometimes it is God’s discipline. Often the suffering we experience breaks our pride, our self-sufficiency, and awakens us to our need for God. His discipline is for our good, for our salvation.

Hebrews 12:4–12 - In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his

holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

Think about parenting. I want my children to be happy. But I do not believe happiness comes by giving them everything they want. Children are born sinful. I believe true happiness will come through disciplining them towards maturity. That will mean that if they lie, I will punish them. Otherwise, they will become liars. If they steal, they will be punished. Otherwise, they will learn that stealing is okay. I bring painful consequences to bear on their lives in order to discipline them towards maturity. **And what child ever thanks you for your wise discipline? No – they think it is too much, for too long.** No discipline is pleasant at the time, but it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

In the same way, we are far from perfect. God on the cross has saved us from the penalty of our sins. And now he is working to save us from the power of sin in our life, because it is still working to destroy us. This is what the Bible calls sanctification. **And God will use the suffering in our lives to discipline us towards holiness.**

And when you are suffering, you feel like you're getting weaker, but you're getting stronger. Just like in the gym.

Remember, humility is the natural result of an accurate assessment of ourselves in light of a holy God. If I know that I am far from the person I should be, and if I know that I can tend towards laziness and self-centeredness, then I know that I need help from outside of me in order to help me become the person I want to be. I need a loving Father's discipline.

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

As long as you believe you are the center of the universe and need nothing, you are headed for an eternal separation from God. You can not be saved unless you recognize your need. In my life, it wasn't until God showed me that my foundation was weak, that I needed Him, that I turned to Him and was saved. And as long as you think you can do this life on your own, even if you gain all this world has to offer, you are living an eternally insignificant life.

John 15:4–7 - Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Humility is the path to salvation and spiritual power, to a life of compassion, and to true glory. Humble yourself before the Lord by looking clearly at who He is and who you are, without excuse or justifying yourself, until you get a clear picture of your need for Him. He will lift you up.

Psalms 139:23–24 - Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.