

CULTURE SHOCK
A King Sized Earthquake
Daniel 4

An earthquake changes everything. The recent quake in Nepal illustrates the fact that **nothing that seems solid is as solid as it may seem!** Nothing is safe from an earthquake. Even the mightiest mountain in the world – Mount Everest – was shaken violently by the earthquake that took so many lives this past week. When earthquakes hit, counselors have to help survivors deal not just with the physical and material impact of the quake, but also with the massive mental impact that the quake has on their perspective about safety and security. It is a tragedy that we must all be in prayer over as the survivors pick up the pieces in the months and years to come. **But what if God gave you a chance to AVOID an earthquake?** Don't you think that the people of Nepal would gladly have changed their routines and plans if they KNEW that an earthquake would hit them on Saturday, April 25th, 2015? Wouldn't you avoid an earthquake if you had been WARNED that it was coming? Maybe not. Maybe we get so comfortable with TREMORS that we think the "Big One" will never come. We are wrong. Your personal earthquake will come. Stacy Dodd experienced his earthquake in the first half of his life, and it cost him everything. But now he is seeing the glory of God in his life in a fashion that he takes no credit for! God's ways are truly amazing.

In our story today, King Nebuchadnezzar was warned in a dream that a great earthquake was going to rock his world in a short time. He was given a WAKE-UP CALL in his sleep, but he failed to hear and to heed the warning that was graciously given to him. **In fact, he had been warned before, but he IGNORED those heavenly TREMORS as well. God had sent these tremors his way in previous years in order to wake him up to the reality of the Most High God.** Do you know what tremors I am talking about? **From the very first moment that the king laid eyes on Daniel and his friends, he knew that there was something divinely different about them. They sent CULTURAL SHOCKWAVES throughout the land of Babylon in all their years as captives.** The king had seen God perform an unprecedented miracle through Daniel when he gave him the facts about a previous dream that the king had dreamed. **This FIRST TREMOR prompted the first utterance from the King that Daniel's God was truly the God of gods and the Lord of Kings.** That was a good start, but it soon gave way to selfish pride when the king made a gold statue that was a perversion of the heavenly dream, and he demanded that it (and he) be worshipped by all men. **That is when the SECOND TREMOR happened in his life. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abenego refused to bow and refused to burn in his fiery furnace, and the king once again had to acknowledge that their God was truly unlike any other god.** This is also the very first time that Nebuchadnezzar actually PRAISED God for a short time for his works among men. The king's ego was bruised by this tremor for a season, but it was not broken. Some 30 years later, the time came for a KING SIZED personal earthquake! Because of God's grace toward King Nebuchadnezzar however, this earthquake became the WORST and the BEST

experience of this proud king's life – to the glory of God! Listen now to the astonishing way that the king introduces the details of this glorious disaster.

Daniel 4:1-3 NIV

1 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.

What an introduction! The first thing that I notice about this astonishing testimony of divine GRACE is that it is directed toward ALL PEOPLE. This is a WITNESS to the glory of God that everyone needs to hear. Some of us might read this story and say, "I am sure glad that God humbles the rich and powerful like this!" But this story is not just for the high and mighty. It is for the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the handsome and the homely. **Every one of us has a PRIDE PROBLEM!** Do YOU struggle with pride? If you don't struggle with it, then it most likely has you in its grip. Most arrogant people DON'T KNOW that they are arrogant! They think that they are just confident and successful. Have you ever been around someone who could not talk about anything but their own accomplishments and experiences? Some people don't know how to talk about anything but themselves, and it always drives people away. Sadly, arrogance like this is often just a cloak for deep INSECURITY. But I have found that we can be arrogant about the most unlikely things. I have known times in my own life when I was proud of my humility, or when I wanted people to be impressed by my spirituality. What a croc! Are you even aware of the pride traps that the devil sets for you? You best pay attention to the tremors that God sends your way! Pride always PRECEDES a FALL!

It is evident that God humbled this king because he now indicates his desire for the prosperity and blessing of OTHERS as he proclaims the goodness of God in his own life. We must remember that this is a king telling the entire world about a period of UTTER humiliation in his own life; and he is sharing it with JOY! When God does a great work like this in a person, then he will not be ashamed to declare his own weaknesses as he declares God's power. I wonder; have you been willing to share the unflattering truth about yourself in order to give a TESTIMONY of God's work in your own heart? I think that it is a necessary part of sharing our story. This king actually says that it is his PLEASURE to share the details of his humbling with the world. Here is how it begins: **Daniel 4:4-9 NLT**

4 "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living in my palace in comfort and prosperity. 5 But one night I had a dream that frightened me; I saw visions that terrified me as I lay in my bed. 6 So I issued an order calling in all the wise men of Babylon, so they could tell me what my dream meant. 7 When all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers came in, I told them the dream, but they could not tell me what it meant. 8 At last Daniel came in before me, and I told him the dream. (He was named Belteshazzar after my

god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) 9 "I said to him, 'Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too great for you to solve. Now tell me what my dream means.

The king was "chillin'" in his palace one day enjoying his luxurious lifestyle when he had a nightmare that woke him up in a cold sweat. **You must know that the king really was successful and very wealthy.** His palace was not just a fancy house on the outskirts of town. His palace was the king of all cribs. The massive home and its exterior walls encompassed SIX MILES of land. You heard me right. His palace was a series of connected lavish dwellings that were linked by magnificent gardens. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon (which may have been inside his palace walls!) were actually one of the SEVEN WONDERS of the ancient world. His palace had a massive tower in its midst from which you could see much of the entire city which was built with millions of bricks that ALL had the king's named stamped into them. We must also keep in mind that this city was the site of the ancient Tower of Babel that is spoken of in Genesis 11. This was a city built on PRIDE.

The king called in all of his advisors, but none of them could give him a valid interpretation of this disturbing dream. So, Daniel was called in at the last. There is no reason given for why the king waited until last to call Daniel in. Perhaps he was so fearful of the dream that he wanted his own Chaldean advisors to come and give a positive twist to this troubling nightmare. (Babylonian Spin Doctors) **Isn't it true that we often only go to those who will tell us what we WANT to hear? Ultimately, those spins don't shield us from REALITY.** At any rate, when he does call for Daniel he affirms that Daniel will be able to interpret the dream because "the spirit of the gods is in him." This is the only way the king knows to address the difference he sees in Daniel. I wonder; do people see the Spirit of God at work in me? **I believe that people are actually DRAWN to those who demonstrate a close walk with God in their lives. God will use our lives to ATTRACT outsiders in!** They may not go to godly people at first, but when their counsels run dry, they will seek out those who are willing to speak truth to them about their lives and about God. **Do people ever come to you for GODLY counsel or advice?** Are you living in such a way that people around you cannot help but know that Christ is the center of your life? **Do their nightmares drive them to your light? Daniel 4:10-17 NLT**

10 "While I was lying in my bed, this is what I dreamed. I saw a large tree in the middle of the earth. 11 The tree grew very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. 12 It had fresh green leaves, and it was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. All the world was fed from this tree. 13 "Then as I lay there dreaming, I saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 The messenger shouted, "Cut down the tree and lop off its branches! Shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit! Chase the wild animals from its shade and the birds from its branches. 15 But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Now let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the wild animals among the plants of the field. 16 For seven periods of time, let him have the mind of a wild animal instead of the mind of a human. 17 For this has been decreed by the messengers; it is

commanded by the holy ones, so that everyone may know that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world. He gives them to anyone he chooses--even to the lowliest of people."

This dream actually seems kind of simple and straightforward. It even contains its own interpretation. But those wise guys could not see it. Daniel did. In fact, he saw it so clearly that he was dumbfounded and disturbed by its clear meaning. The king had to reassure Daniel that he was free to share it with him. **Daniel 4:19 NLT**

19 "Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, 'Belteshazzar, don't be alarmed by the dream and what it means.' "Belteshazzar replied, 'I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!'

Daniel's response to the dream is an indication that Daniel truly did care for this king and his well-being. I think that it reveals that Daniel had prayed for him and his conversion to faith. In fact, this is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon to do while they were being held captive there. **Jeremiah 29:7 NLT**

7 And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

Jeremiah told the people to build houses and plant gardens and marry and have children while they were captives in Babylon. He made sure that they understood that God wanted to use them while there were there. They were not just to idly bide time while waiting for God to fulfill their highest hopes. These difficult words were in the context of a very popular passage in the bible: **Jeremiah 29:10-12 NLT**

10 This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. 11 For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. 12 In those days when you pray, I will listen.

God's plan is seldom the direct, quick route that we pray for. Sometimes, we have to go through our own personal earthquakes in order to wake up. Now, God was sending one into Nebuchadnezzar's life. **Amazingly, Daniel was not celebrating this; he was mourning it. Daniel was mature enough to desire God's best even for those who were responsible for his own earthquake!** This dream's fulfillment was going to be a terrible ordeal for the king and for the people. But God was hearing Daniel's prayers and was answering them according to his divine wisdom and grace. **Grace does not always FEEL like grace!** Daniel gives the meaning to the king in a direct fashion. He tells him what he doesn't want to hear: **Daniel 4:22 NLT**

22 That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

Daniel is like Nathan when he went to King David and said, "You are that man!" He told King Nebuchadnezzar, "You are that tree!" If it had not been for the second half of that dream, that would have been a great word! But the king let his power and his wealth and his position go to his head. God was about to take all of that away from him for a season until he got a reprioritized perspective. Daniel had to tell the king that he was going to literally go INSANE for a period of SEVEN YEARS. This mental illness is actually a disease that has been diagnosed in modern times. It is called "Zoanthropy." I am serious! In that mental state, the king would literally live on all fours and eat grass like a cow. His hair would grow long and be matted and unkempt. His fingernails grew as long as claws, and he was driven into isolation (either by his peers or by his own desire to stay away from people.) I remember as a kid seeing bible tracts that illustrated this king's madness. Even though Daniel told him that the dream also promised that the kingdom would be restored after seven years, I am sure that the king responded with astonishment and grief. Daniel took this opportunity to speak a very direct word of REPENTANCE to the king that he sincerely hoped he would hear. **Daniel 4:27 NIV**

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."

Daniel made it clear that the king needed to repent of his pride and cruelty. He must make a BREAK with his sinful behavior and begin to do that which was right in the eyes of God. He must cease mistreating the people (especially the slaves) of his kingdom in his mad desire to build monuments to himself. Daniel was reiterating the truth that God's kindness could actually lead to his repentance, rather than him having to experience devastation in order to wake up. But Daniel's words fell on a hard, proud heart. Amazingly, the fulfillment of the dream did not happen right away. God gave the king a full year to humble himself, but the king refused.

Daniel 4:28-31 NLT

28 "But all these things did happen to King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 Twelve months later he was taking a walk on the flat roof of the royal palace in Babylon. 30 As he looked out across the city, he said, 'Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor.' 31 "While these words were still in his mouth, a voice called down from heaven, 'O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you! You are no longer ruler of this kingdom.

A full year was plenty of time for the terror of the dream to fade away as the king focused on his prosperity. This is a good time for a warning here for us as well. We often fool ourselves into thinking that our emotions can keep us out of trouble that we have been warned about. A scare of an unwanted pregnancy or a short stint in prison is enough (we think!) to keep us out of trouble ever after. We are wrong. I often encourage people who have experienced some measure of self-made sorrow or sinful consequences to NOT RELY on their personal sense of horror to carry them away from foolishness in the long run. We must ACT on what God has said and build obedience into the rhythm of our lives. This is true repentance. We will see how the king does this in the future in just a moment. But for now, the king is driven from men and loses all of his former glory and power. He is made to look like a fool. God simply spares his life for a time (which is quite a miracle in itself!). When the king is speaking boastfully about his great kingdom, the dream turns into reality. At the end of seven years, the king – like the prodigal son – comes to his senses and looks up to heaven. His words are AMAZING! Imagine hearing this proclamation from the king as a citizen of that nation: **Daniel 4:34-36 NLT**

34 "After this time had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever. His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal. 35 All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, 'What do you mean by doing these things?' 36 "When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored as head of my kingdom, with even greater honor than before.

Imagine how awesome that moment was to Daniel and his friends. God had changed the heart of a godless, pagan king. It is probable that we will one day meet this king in heaven because of what God did for and in him! I wonder; is God trying to get your attention today with this ancient story of a king who winds up acting like a cow? Please don't harden your heart today. Let God do this work in you BEFORE he has to take everything precious away from you in order to bring you close. And once you get close, don't ever move away. The king finished his declaration with words that we need to heed about the rhythm of worship that he kept for the rest of his life. **Daniel 4:37 NLT**

37 "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud."

From that day on, the king made it a PRACTICE to praise and glorify and honor the Sovereign God in ALL that he did. He did not simply let others give glory to God. He chose to celebrate God's sovereign power in his public life so that everyone would know how good God is, even when he has to do a HARD THING in our lives. Oh, that we would learn from the aftershocks of the story of this once-godless ruler.

Let's pray.