




THE COMMUNITY

The Most High God | CULMINATION OF GRACE

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Daniel 4

Do you remember the discussion question that started this series? We asked people to imagine how they would get a wicked leader to issue a declaration throughout the earth proclaiming the praises of the one true God. In Daniel 4, that impossible scenario occurs. Daniel has faithfully served in the king's palace for years, when God, by a supernatural act of judgment and mercy, opens Nebuchadnezzar's eyes to see His power and sovereignty. After a humiliating interval of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar is restored. He arises to write a letter to all the inhabitants of the earth, in which he gives honor and praise to God. That ancient letter, which has been preserved for over 2500 years, is the fourth chapter of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar opens his letter with praise to the "Most High God." This is a significant break from his past descriptions. If you look back at chapter two, you'll find he talks about "Daniel's God." In chapter three, he is very impressed by the "God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego." But in chapter four, he no longer sees Yahweh as the provincial God of some captured Jews. He is the Most High God, who rules over all.

As he recounts his experiences that led to this change of understanding, he again tells us of a dream that no one could interpret. In that dream, a glorious tree is cut down, bound, and abandoned. The tree is really a man, and judgment is decreed against him so that "the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." That God is sovereign over men, women, and nations, is the central idea of Daniel. The Babylonian conquest of Judah was by no means a conquest of Judah's God. Far from it. That conquest was decreed by God Himself, who "gives kingdoms to anyone He wishes." The focus of Daniel's life and ministry was to show the glory and majesty of God. So is yours.

The dream is really a nightmare, and no one can ease his terror, so Nebuchadnezzar calls upon his trusted advisor – Daniel. As Daniel hears the dream, he, too, is terrified, and greatly perplexed. His discomfiture is not likely caused by an inability to understand the dream, but rather by the difficulty in communicating such an unhappy message to the king.

Notice the gentleness and affection Daniel shows to the king. Throughout the dialogue, he delivers some very harsh truth with enormous grace. He compromises

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What's the Big Idea?

After years of faithful service, Daniel's ultimate goal is accomplished. The glory of God is made manifest through the changed life of Nebuchadnezzar. Celebrate how God's sovereign power, along with Daniel's walk with the Lord, relationships with colleagues, and excellence in work, have led to this unthinkable conclusion.

What's the Problem?

Like in the rest of this series the primary problem is that God's glory isn't known and appreciated in the world at large. Sometimes it's not even known in our lives as evidenced by a desire to live primarily for our own glory.

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neither. It is apparent that Daniel is concerned for the king. In v. 19 he wishes, “if only the dream applied to your enemies, and it’s meaning to your adversaries.” In v. 27, he pleads with Nebuchadnezzar to repent, that his prosperity might continue. This is extraordinary, when you consider that it was Nebuchadnezzar who took his people into captivity. Like Daniel, as we are communicating the difficult truths of the gospel, even to our enemies, our motive must be love.

Daniel explains the truth of the dream’s meaning. Nebuchadnezzar is about to lose everything: his kingdom, his relationships, even his sanity. This is an act of judgment for his wicked arrogance. These things will not be restored until he acknowledges that God is the ruler of all.

A full year later, when no judgment has fallen, and the terror of that night has faded, Nebuchadnezzar observes his kingdom and says, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as my royal residence, by my mighty power, and for the glory of my majesty?” Instantly, a voice speaks from heaven declaring his guilt and the judgment begins.

For seven “times” (probably years), he lives in a state of driveling insanity, like an animal. Only when he raises his eyes toward heaven is his sanity restored. Commentators differ on what happened at this point, but I think he became a true believer in God. He is a new man who finally understands his place before God. In an act of supreme grace, God opens his eyes to see the depth of his need, and God’s sufficiency to meet that need. So he praises, exalts, and glorifies the King of heaven before all the world. It is a remarkable change, but not unlike what God does in the hearts of women and men all over the world every day.

Review the first few chapters and notice how this has occurred. It all started with four college age believers who weren’t just different – they were better. They walked intimately with God. They made good decisions to build relationships, and treat people in a civil manner. And they were devoted to excellence in all their responsibilities.

Over the course of several years, God brought numerous opportunities before them. They were difficult, and looked like challenges, but as the four continued to trust God, build relationships, and pursue excellence, they not only survived, but thrived. And people’s lives were slowly changed. Incrementally, from the first dream of a statue, to the episode in the fiery furnace, to the dream of the tree, Nebuchadnezzar opened to respond in faith. That’s how ministry happens. If you can help your people understand these principals, they too can have successful ministries in secular environments.

What’s Our Response?

The application for this week concerns a heart commitment. Ask your people to commit to staying in it for the long haul. Ministry takes time. God does incredible things, but we need to be patient and faithful.

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What Are the Questions?

Daniel 4

Launch

One way to know what's really important to us is to think about what our mind naturally tends to imagine. What scenarios do you like to daydream about?

Explore

Scan chapter 4.

1. If you are familiar with the epistles of the New Testament, you might recognize the format of chapter four. What does this appear to be?

2. What is the occasion that prompts its writing?
read vv. 1-3.

3. What title does Nebuchadnezzar use for God? What did he call Him in chapters two and three? Why is this change significant?

Read vv. 4-18.

4. For the second time God has given Nebuchadnezzar a prophetic dream. What is this one about?

5. Why is Nebuchadnezzar terrified?

6. Halfway through verse 15, Nebuchadnezzar's dream becomes more literal. In this passage, what purpose is given for the coming judgement he dreams about?

7. What was happening in the real world that necessitated this?

8. How does this give focus to the purpose of your life?

Read vv. 19-27.

9. Why is Daniel terrified?

10. As he speaks with the king, how would you describe his demeanor?

11. How well do you do in communicating love to those you are sharing the gospel with?

Read vv. 28-33.

12. Nebuchadnezzar was warned of this judgement, but still fell into it. Why?

13. When have you forgotten what you know God has said?

Read vv. 34-37.

14. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar will be in heaven?

Review the first four chapters of Daniel.

15. This incredible result did not come quickly, but was the culminating effect of years of patient ministry. What were some of the key turning points that brought Nebuchadnezzar to this expression of faith?

16. In light of that, what should you expect as you seek to have a ministry?

Apply

17. We have said that we are to live to bring God glory. In practice though there are many things that compete with this as the prime motivation in our hearts. What have you found lately in your own heart that competes with living for His glory?

18. What can you emulate from the life of Daniel and his friends that can set you up to be an effective minister of the gospel?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. It is a letter, written by Nebuchadnezzar to all the inhabitants of the world.
2. He is writing to declare the praises of God after God restored him to sanity.
3. He calls him the Most High God. Previously, he identified Him as the God of Daniel, or the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He no longer sees Yahweh as a local god, but as the one true God.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Allow the group to discuss. He likely fears that he is the tree and will be cut down.
6. To show to all the living that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to anyone He wishes.
7. People likely saw that Babylon's triumph over Judah was a triumph over Judah's God. He desired to show His true power and purpose, and vindicate His glory.
8. Allow the group to discuss. We are also to live to make His glory known.
9. Probably he fears what is about to happen to Nebuchadnezzar, and is struggling to figure out how to tell him.
10. He is incredibly gracious and compassionate. (See "What Do I Need To Know About the Passage.")
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. The lack of immediate fulfillment made him doubt and forget what God had clearly shown. Our fallen nature inclines us to do this, despite all that God shows us.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Allow the group to discuss. There is diverse opinion on this.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Slow, incremental success. God is intimately involved in drawing women and men to Himself, but it often takes time and patience. Be faithful!
17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Allow the group to discuss. Hopefully the list will include the three things we've been repeating: intimately walk with God, develop relationships, pursue excellence in all your responsibilities.

Memorize

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.

Daniel 4:37



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