

RENOUNCE YOUR SINS

Daniel 4:1-37

Key Verse: 4:27

"Therefore, O king, 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 chapter 4 is the story about King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Through his dream we learn that without God man never upgrades but degrades, even if he is a king. As a donkey needs his owner, man needs God (Isa 1:3). We also learn that God is always ready to bless mankind. God wants man to be happy and never be miserable. God continues to bless those who maintain God's blessing. On the other hand, God does not bless those who take God's blessing for granted, but gives them over to their sinful desires (Ro 1:24). Man is man when he has the mind of God. Man is man when he has the image of God. In this passage we learn that we have to seek God through repentance.

I. Complacent King Nebuchadnezzar (1-18)

Look at verse 4. "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous." Nebuchadnezzar was a great warrior and a mighty conqueror. He fought and defeated many nations and the great Babylonian Empire was established. But it was not he who established the Babylonian Empire. It was God who used him as his servant to establish the empire. God showed him through his dream that God is Sovereign Ruler of the kingdoms of the world and Nebuchadnezzar was a servant. God also showed him that the kingdoms of the world are temporal, like pieces of cloud in the sky. The kingdom of God is forever. But Nebuchadnezzar completely forgot God's visions and revelations. After 20 years he became an egocentric person. One day he was at home in his palace, contented. He was abundantly satisfied with his own achievements, thinking as though he had built the empire with his wisdom and power and for his own glory. He should have thanked God, saying, "Almighty God, your name be glorified." But he did not do so.

In recent time, the American dream has been very popular. Most Americans have studied and worked hard to get a secure job. They wanted to buy an expensive house in the suburbs with a swimming pool and a tennis court and a two-car garage. Each dreamed to have a beautiful family with several kids. This dream was tantalizing. But there is a problem. Those who fulfilled this dream soon became very complacent and enjoyed all kinds of petty pleasures by watching television and eating very delicious food and going around to 176 ethnic restaurants. When man lives this kind of life, he cannot be high-spirited. Instead, he can be

complacent, forming many bad habits. Then Satan appears with a smiling face and captures him and puts him in a place of torment. One young man received UBF training. Usually UBF trains a man to be a shepherd, Bible teacher, scholar and administrator, which are essential qualities in being a leader. But this young man only learned the principle of administration. Then he made \$3,000,000 in New York and bought a big house in Manhattan. At the age of 37 he retired and began to enjoy his life with his money. He soon became idle and proud. Moreover, after 6 months he was no longer happy with what he had. So he began to fight with his wife. His happiness depended on the ebb and flow of his wife's emotions. His wife soon died because of breast cancer. Then he married a woman who had a shamanistic Christian background. He said, "My wife uses two rolls of toilet paper to cry during the nighttime and sleeps during the daytime. I can hardly sleep. Nobody cooks for me." In two years' time, his hair turned white and he looked like a porcupine.

We can see another example of this in King David. He was known as a man after God's own heart (Ac 13:22). Even though he was the youngest in his family, he loved God and was obedient to his parents. By defeating the champion Goliath, he became very popular among the women of Israel. When David loved God, whatever he did, God gave him success until he established the united kingdom of Israel. God blessed him to live in the palace as king of Israel. But David became complacent. While all the other soldiers went out to fight in the springtime, he slept late. Then he committed adultery and murder. Complacency or "easy-going" sounds good. But they are a hotbed of evil and corruption. God made King Nebuchadnezzar prosperous. But he did not remember God's grace. He abandoned God and placed himself at the center of the universe, not knowing the truth that all men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field (1 Pe 1:24). When he did not thank God he claimed to be wise, but he became a fool (Ro 1:22). When he became proud, God could bless him no more. He needed humbleness training. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Ja 4:6).

When the fourth king of Israel, Rehoboam, was proud, God split ten tribes from Israel and gave them to Jeroboam, who was not spiritual, but political. So Jeroboam made golden calves and placed one at Bethel and the other at Dan in order to let the people of Northern Israel worship God at Bethel and Dan instead of going to Jerusalem to worship God (1 Ki 12:29). He was very political. This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth (1 Ki 13:33,34). He was warned by God's prophet but he did not change his ways (1 Ki 13:1-3). Because of his stubbornness, he became the object of God's wrath and a bad influence to his descendants. The author of Kings summarized each evil king as follows: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in his sins, which he had caused Israel to commit" (1 Ki 15:34). God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

King Ahab was a very petty man and a hen-pecked husband. Even though he was a king, he envied Naboth's vineyard and wanted to buy it. But Naboth refused to sell it to him (1 Ki 21:1-3). Then Ahab lay in bed and cried and refused to eat. Then his wife removed Naboth and took his vineyard and gave it to him (1 Ki 21:4-16). In this way, Ahab shed innocent blood. Thus he committed a great sin against God. But when he heard through the prophet that disaster would fall upon him, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then God forgave him (1 Ki 21:25-29). King Ahab may be the most disgusting man in human history. But when he humbled himself, God gave him grace.

In the past, King Nebuchadnezzar looked awesome and glorious in his palace. But now he was afraid and terrified by his own dream. One night, one young man had a dream. He was going to visit his sheep's house with an American woman missionary. Suddenly, around 30 disfigured lepers surrounded the American missionary and wanted to attack her with axes and hoes and clubs. Then the young man hid her behind his back and took out his switchblade and began to grab the hair of the lepers and stabbed all the lepers' hearts one by one and destroyed them all to save the American woman missionary. It was a terrible dream, yet the young man was not terrified by the dream. But King Nebuchadnezzar confesses that he had a dream that made him afraid and terrified (5).

What was the content of the dream? While lying in his bed, the king looked, and there before him stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruits abundant. And on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. In his dream he saw a messenger, a holy one coming down from heaven. 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. 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. 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. The holy one declares the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (13-17).

Because King Nebuchadnezzar had no God in his heart, he could not keep the mind of man. The mind of man in him degraded into the mind of an animal (16). God wanted to punish him because of his spiritual blindness so that he might somehow come to know that the Most High is

the Sovereign Ruler of history.

II. Renounce your sins (19-37)

First, you are the tree (19-27). On hearing the king's dream, Daniel was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. When Daniel was alarmed, the king was also alarmed. Then Daniel cordially answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!" (19) "You, O king, 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" (22). In short, God upheld him to be the king of a great empire. But he abandoned God, so God was going to punish him. The punishment he had to receive was to become an animal man and live that way for seven years (23).

Daniel was an alien and a POW. Nevertheless, he spoke to the king straight-forwardly, "O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king" (24b). He continued, "You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle." Here we learn that when a man lives leaving God out, he becomes an animal man. We also learn that God in his great mercy helps man come back to his senses so that he might know God. God never gives up on men. God even helped King Nebuchadnezzar by severely punishing him for seven years. God punishes, but he is merciful. Look at verse 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 wanted to restore Nebuchadnezzar's power and kingship when he repented.

What did Daniel say to him in conclusion? Look at verse 27. "Therefore, O king, 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." This verse indicates that King Nebuchadnezzar was an unjust and oppressive person. We find through excavation that the Babylonian civilization was the most glorious compared with any of the civilizations throughout history. In order to make his palace and his kingdom, King Nebuchadnezzar did many evil things. He invaded other countries and took their property. He captured innumerable people as prisoners to use as labor power for his building projects and killed useless people like sitting ducks, regardless of number, even 100,000. That was not right in the sight of God. He had to repent of his injustice and cruel oppression of God's people. So Daniel said, "Renounce your sins...." Here we learn from Daniel that he was truly a messenger of God. He clearly delivered the gospel message, "Repent and come back to God." This message seems to be insolent to the despotic king. But it was the good news of great joy. When a sinner repents and comes to God for his mercy, he can see God. He can also see the kingdom of God. So Daniel, risking his life,

delivered the gospel message to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Second, King Nebuchadnezzar receives training (28-37). This part seems to be the repetition of parts 1 and 2. But it is a vivid picture of the training scene of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king heard Daniel's interpretation of the dream, that he must renounce his sins. However, he did not repent. He became even more arrogant. In his arrogant mind, Nebuchadnezzar said in verse 30, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" From God's point of view, it was not the king's achievement but people's blood and suffering. Most of all, in the sight of God the king became conceited and fell into hallucination; he became an animal man. King Nebuchadnezzar had a glorious kingdom. But he lost the image of God and degraded to an animal man. Before the holy God, he was nothing but a vicious and brutal animal. So the king was driven away from people by God and ate grass like cattle. 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 (33). When he received animal man training, he looked exactly like a punk-rocker, with prostitutes' nails and the voice of many mountain dogs. This scene of God's training is the exact picture of the king's inner man. It also reveals that his animal man life was unhappy in proportion to his luxurious palace life. Fallen men always long to live their lives with unlimited freedom, leaving God out of their lives. Fallen men hate most to study the Bible and receive divine discipline. Fallen men do not honor God or thank God. These animal men only want to enjoy fun by having many animal man parties. But in light of Bible teaching, they are nothing but animal men. One Senator severely accused a hardworking colonel of the U.S. Army of his illegal activities. But later we found that the Senator was nothing but an animal man, enjoying all kinds of animal parties. So his accusation turned out to be accusation against himself because of his animal man behavior. Man has to be a man. If one wants to be a man, he must have God in his heart. He must have the image of God in his heart. He must have the holy desires of God in his heart.

What happened next? The animal man, King Nebuchadnezzar, raised his eyes toward heaven. In verse 34, "raised my eyes toward heaven," means he looked up to God for his mercy. Then what happened? Verse 34 says his sanity was restored. In light of this verse, an animal man is also a mental patient. Medically speaking, there is no mental patient. Mental patients are the ones who form bad habits. Some form the habit of idleness. Some form the habit of lying. Mental patients are all proud and "easy-going" people; basically, they are sneaky liars. Through drastic training in the field, Nebuchadnezzar realized that he was king by God's grace. So he could not but praise God. He praised God in verses 34b-35. "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. 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." When the king repented, God gave him grace. His mental sickness was healed. His honor and splendor were returned to him for the glory of his kingdom. Advisers and nobles welcomed him to resume his kingship. In short, he was restored to his throne and became even greater than before.

In this passage we learn that even though King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the greatest kingdom in history, when he had no God, he was nothing but an animal man. He was also a mental patient. We also learn that God is always gracious to us when we come to him with a repentant heart.