

Who's the Boss?

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[0 : 00] All right, King Nebuchadnezzar. To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you.

! It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs! How mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures from generation to generation.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed, the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.

So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation.

At last, Daniel came in before me, he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my God, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. And I told him the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw in their interpretation.

[1 : 15] The visions of my head as I lay in bed with ease. I saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. He proclaimed aloud and said thus, Chop down the tree, and lop off its branches.

Strip off its leaves, and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it, and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field.

Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him.

[2 : 18] And let seven periods of time pass over him. The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end, that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.

This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw, and you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.

Belteshazzar answered and said, My Lord, may the dream be for those who hate you, and its interpretation for your enemies. The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived.

It is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.

[3 : 37] And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its root in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, and the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him, this is the interpretation, O king, it is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my Lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will.

And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you, from the time that you know that heaven rules. Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity. All this came upon king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of 12 months, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?

While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken, the kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will.

Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men, and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

[5 : 44] At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to 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.

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say to him, what have you done?

At the same time, my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right, and his ways are just, and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

This is the word of the Lord. Isn't Daniel just the most wonderful, exciting book to read? It's just wonderful. Okay, and you'll find an outline of my talk inside your bulletins.

[6 : 51] Who's the Boss? That's the title of our series, and it's the key question in the book of Daniel, and basically in the whole Bible. It is the key question at the heart of the whole Bible.

Just think about it, walk through it with me for a moment. In Genesis chapter 1, we're introduced to the God who made the world. Why? So that we know that he's the boss.

In Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve rebel against God, trying to assert themselves as their own bosses in place of God. Even before the end of that chapter, God steps in in judgment against Adam and Eve.

He is in that moment reasserting his status as the boss of the world, and he sentences Adam and Eve to death for their high treason. The story of the gospel is the story of how God appointed a new man, a second Adam, his very own son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the boss of the world forever. And the call of the gospel is the call to repent, to turn away from our rebellion, rejecting the rebellion of our ancestors and of our first father Adam, and humbly submit ourselves to God's rule again, mediated through his King Jesus.

[8 : 08] Now I hope you can see then how this message, this gospel, this news, is at one and the same time a message of rebuke and a message of comfort.

See, it's a message of rebuke to sinners because very clearly it answers the question, who's the boss? It's not you.

Right? It's God and his appointed King Jesus. And on the other hand, it's a message of comfort to the saints, God's people, because it means in the end, no matter what plagues us now or threatens us now, no matter what sin or wickedness seems to be holding sway at the moment, we know that God rules and King Jesus is going to reign forever and ever.

So neither Satan, nor sin, nor death, nor any dictator you care to name will rule forever. Jesus is the boss.

He already has begun to reign, in fact, when he rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens. One day he will return to set up his kingdom on earth and he will reign over us forever.

[9 : 21] So that's what we're all waiting for, a never-ending golden age with Jesus as the boss. We know it's coming because God has promised it is coming and he is sovereign.

All of his plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He's the boss over all the big things in the world and over all the little things, over all the good things and even over all the bad things.

Now, essentially then, Daniel chapter 4 is a wonderful story about how King Nebuchadnezzar, of all people, came to learn this glorious news. I don't mean exactly that he became a Christian.

So, I mean, we've seen this kind of thing before in the story, haven't we? Nebuchadnezzar seems to make great strides in understanding at the end of almost every chapter. Perhaps he comes close to converting or to realizing that the God of Israel is the only, the one and only true God, his creator. And some people think that that's finally what happens here. But personally, I'm just a little bit skeptical about that for a couple of reasons. In part, I think it's anachronistic.

[10 : 28] We've got to be careful not to read the New Testament back into the Old Testament too much. Rather, we're trying to understand how the flow of salvation history develops and leads towards the New Testament.

And in part, because as far as I know, we have no evidence from history that Nebuchadnezzar made a radical break from Babylonian religion or anything like that, which I think is a pretty gaping silence.

So anyway, I'm not trying to overstate the case, but when I say that King Nebuchadnezzar came to learn this glorious news or even the gospel, what I mean is that he came, he heard and understood a sort of gospel, if you like, a message with a gospel shape, not exactly the Christian gospel, but essentially, the Christian gospel.

And, in this chapter, he responds with a sort of repentance, which may or may not have been absolutely thorough and deep and lasting, but at least in its own way, it's written down here to point us to what the right response to the gospel is.

Does that make sense? Okay. So I guess that's just a bit of a caveat before we dive into it. Now, the episode begins kind of like one of those detective stories where you get a snapshot of the end at the beginning.

[11 : 45] I was watching a show recently where the opening scene, one of the main characters was kidnapped and tied up. And then it cut to something like 24 hours earlier.

And the rest of the episode was where everything was sort of peaceful and calm 24 hours earlier.

So the rest of the episode was, you know, how did it all go wrong? That's what you're sort of wondering. Well, Daniel chapter 4 is a story a bit like that, except that obviously it's positive.

We've seen what a stubborn, angry, pagan king Nebuchadnezzar was, fervently committed to his idolatry, so ferociously opposed to God's people that he tried to burn a few of them to death last week.

But now, as we begin chapter 4, you'll notice at the beginning Nebuchadnezzar speaks in the first person which is striking, isn't it? It's as if Daniel shares the pen with him because Nebuchadnezzar wants to give his own personal testimony of how God worked in his life to reveal the gospel to him such that it almost seems appropriate to talk about Nebuchadnezzar's conversion or his salvation or something like that.

So, point one on your outline, verses one to three is about global gospel proclamation.

Nebuchadnezzar's global gospel proclamation. And so, I want you to notice how like the Christian gospel, Nebuchadnezzar's gospel was for a global audience.

[13 : 10] He describes it as a message for all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth. This is a global proclamation that Nebuchadnezzar wants to make, a message that crosses cultures and languages just as the Christian gospel is not merely for Jews but for Gentiles too.

It's not merely for Europeans or Westerners but for Indians, Africans, Chinese too. And isn't it wonderful to be here this morning with a whole array of God's people drawn from all the ends of the earth.

This gospel message is for every single person on the planet. Secondly, it's a message of peace. Nebuchadnezzar greets us with these words, peace be multiplied to you.

Reminds me of the song of the angels at Jesus' birth. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace with those whom he is pleased. Or when Jesus rose from the dead three times at the end of John's gospel he greets his disciples with the words peace be with you.

Because the gospel is a message that brings peace. We've just read about it in Ephesians 2 as well, haven't we? It's a message about a king who is, at least for now, not declaring war, not declaring judgment, but offering forgiveness, offering peace, a day of salvation.

[14:31] Thirdly, notice how Nebuchadnezzar talks about the signs and wonders that God has performed for him in verses 2 and 3. It seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

How great are his signs? How mighty his wonders? Now, signs and wonders. This is a language that the Old Testament believers would have associated with Moses. It's much more specific, say, than just mighty works or miracles, that kind of language.

When the Bible talks about signs and wonders, it is always in the context of new revelation and a new mighty redemption, a new mighty act of redemption, right?

Some grand leap forward in salvation history or a very important covenant moment. So the archetypal moment is the Exodus when God rescued his people out of Egypt with signs and wonders, spectacular plagues and he led them through the Red Sea and then he revealed himself to them at Mount Sinai.

That was when he performed for them through Moses signs and wonders. And then this gets picked up in the New Testament because through his death and resurrection, Jesus came to accomplish an even greater Exodus for us.

[15:45] He led us out of slavery to sin and into his kingdom. And so, of course, Jesus performed signs and wonders to signal the new redemption and revelation he was bringing.

Just as the Apostle Peter says in Acts chapter 2 verse 22 that God attested to Jesus by doing mighty works and wonders and signs through him.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar is saying that that is the kind of revelation and redemption he experienced and thus wants to proclaim to the world. It's an extraordinary thing to say.

And then fourthly and finally, of course, notice what the essence of the message is because it's always about this. Nebuchadnezzar wants us to know about the kingdom of the Most High God, that it is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

The Bible is a story about the kingdom of God, which, of course, is why the book of Daniel is a story about the kingdom of God and the gospel is a message about the kingdom of God.

[16:50] Last week, Nebuchadnezzar tried to set up his own everlasting kingdom. Do you remember? He built a statue of gold from head to toe. In doing so, whether wittingly or unwittingly, he was defying or forgetting about or ignoring the plans that God had revealed to him for the future of the world.

But the point of this chapter is that somehow he has learned his lesson. And now he wants us all to know not that his kingdom is going to last forever, but that God's is.

The God of Daniel and his friends, who finally he acknowledges is the Most High God, not just Daniel's God. So you see, that's where we're going. That's the snapshot of the end.

But how did Nebuchadnezzar have such a change of mind and heart? So the story begins in verse 4 with Nebuchadnezzar at ease in his house and prospering in his palace.

Of course, what he means is that everything was hunky-dory for him, both personally and politically, which at one level is lovely. You know, what a gift from God to have a stable, happy home life and fulfilling work.

[17:58] But at another level, we all know, don't we, that ease and prosperity are often both the result of and the cause of great wickedness.

I doubt that everyone in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was living as comfortably as he was. But Nebuchadnezzar was not a servant king. He was just a typical pagan ruler.

And likewise, ease and prosperity are often the cause of much arrogance and ignorance of God. How difficult it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Or in Ezekiel chapter 16, Ezekiel describes the sin of Sodom and he says this, Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom. She and her daughters had pride, excess of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. Prosperous ease.

A dangerous combination for sinful hearts because instead of giving glory to God, we all too often grow selfish, complacent and arrogant. Maybe you've heard the old joke about cats and dogs.

[19 : 06] They say, Dogs think, you feed me, you pet me, you take care of me, you must be God. Cats think, you feed me, you pet me, you take care of me, I must be God.

Dogs have masters, cats have servants. See, it's really about saints and sinners. The righteous respond to God's care with thanks and honour and praise.

The unrighteous person see it as evermore proof that they are at the centre of the universe. So this is the situation that Nebuchadnezzar found himself in as our story begins.

Prosperous, at ease, complacent in his wickedness. Until, in God's grace, he received another troubling dream.

In verse 5, I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed, the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. This is a lesson for us, isn't it? God, in his grace, often disturbs us first to bring us peace in the long run.

[20 : 13] That's exactly what's happening here. So, as he is wont to do, Nebuchadnezzar called in all of his wise men to help him interpret the dream. The bunch that proved so useless only a couple of chapters ago, and they prove useless again here.

Even though this time Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been happy enough to tell them the dream, they have no idea what it means. So they couldn't even do that. Eventually, someone finds Daniel. At last, he comes in, and Nebuchadnezzar recounts the dream to him.

The dream was about a large tree, tall and strong, beautiful leaves, abundant fruit. I am kind of imagining the home tree in the first Avatar movie, if that helps you. But anyway, it's a whole ecosystem of itself.

It's a whole civilization in one ginormous tree. And all the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens are sheltered under it. Everyone everywhere is being fed from it.

But then, here comes the troubling bit in verse 13. Nebuchadnezzar said, I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.

[21 : 20] He proclaimed aloud and said, thus, chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches, but leave the stump of its root in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze amid the tender grass of the field.

Let him be wet with the dew of heaven, let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's and let a beast's mind be given to him. And let seven periods of time pass over him.

The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.

Now that last sentence is clearly the most important one, isn't it? And as you may have noticed when we read it, it is this sentence that gets repeated in a few different ways throughout the chapter because this is where the whole purpose of this chapter is explained, the whole purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation is explained in that one sentence.

What happened to Nebuchadnezzar happened to the end that, right, or with the purpose of achieving this thing that the living, and I think that's most of us, may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.

[22 : 42] So three things. Number one, the Most High rules. Specifically, the Most High rules, the kingdom of men. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar happened to teach us that God is sovereign, that God is the boss, and that he is the boss down here over the kingdom of men, you know, not just up there.

It's not as if his rule is kind of restricted to heaven while down here other powers and forces are running amok beyond his reach. No, even in the midst of all the sin and wickedness of the world, the Most High rules over the kingdom of men.

God is sovereign. He's in control. He's working his purposes out. He's in control of the big things and the little things. He's in control of the good things and even the bad things. And number two, what happened to Nebuchadnezzar happened to teach us that God gives it or gives the kingdom of men to whom he wills.

And we've seen this before in the book of Daniel back in chapter two, that God is the God who sets up kings and removes them. So do you realize that God appointed Nebuchadnezzar to rule in his time just as he appointed Pontius Pilate, Emperor Nero, Genghis Khan, Henry VIII, Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Anthony Albanese, Donald Trump and Xi Jinping.

Adrian Schinner. Penny Wolf, the vice chancellor of the university, your parents, your boss. God is always sovereign. He's sovereign over every single thing in this world and specifically here, what the angel told Nebuchadnezzar is that God gives the rule over his world, authority in this world, to whomever he wills.

[24 : 34] brothers and sisters, this doctrine is confronting. I get that. God's sovereignty, it's hard to get your head around intellectually and emotionally.

But actually, this is also a doctrine of great comfort. And the Bible consistently teaches it in the context of when God's people are going through hardship and suffering.

this seems to be the thing they especially need to know. Because what a comfort it is if you trust God that you are never going to have to live a moment of your life where God has lost control or some ruler is sort of running him up beyond his reach.

Every ruler you have ever endured or ever will have to endure was appointed by a God. Sorry, by our God. A God who is good and wise. Far wiser than us and far gooder than us.

It's a word, Tom. And a God... No, it's probably not. And a God that we can trust. But number three, what happened to Nebuchadnezzar happened to teach us that ultimately God wills to set over the kingdom of men the lowliest of men.

[25 : 59] Now isn't that a strange and beautiful punchline? Especially when you look around the world at the moment at the men God has appointed to rule temporarily. I think we should take this verse in two senses.

There is sort of an ambiguity or a double meaning to the word lowliest which I think is really helpful. Is it about the fact that God is going to upend human society and put the first, last and the last first? You know, the people at the bottom on top and the people at the top on the bottom. Or is it about the fact that God is going to exalt a man or a people who are humble and lowly in their character and their spirits? Of course, the answer is yes.

Partly because the two things are so inextricably related. You see, this is a promise that in the end the wicked, oppressive rulers of this world, people like Nebuchadnezzar who are living in prosperous ease will be toppled.

The people who climb their way to the top in this wicked and corrupt system of course are generally wicked and corrupt. And in the end, the lowliest of men and is those who humbly trusted God and therefore probably by and large didn't make it to the top in this life.

[27 : 18] in the end they will be exalted. And of course, again, this is what makes the Christian gospel so beautiful, isn't it? That God has appointed a man who was born in a stable, a man, Jesus of Nazareth, to rule his world forever and ever precisely because he descended from glory, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. The lowly man becomes the king forever.

And more than that, of course, Jesus promises that his saints will get to reign with him. Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. The point is that in and through Jesus, all the lowliest of men will ultimately be exalted to reign over the earth.

At first, Jesus' disciples were just like the rulers of this world, weren't they? Jostling for position, arguing with one another about who was the greatest. But little by little, by the power of Jesus in our lives, as he works his teaching in us, and one day in one glorious flourish of transformation, we will be the humble servants that we need to be in order to rule over God's world forever fit.

[28 : 54] Not just to live in the kingdom of God as subjects, but to share in ruling over it, to reign with our Lord Jesus. Okay, so those are the three things, but we're sort of slightly getting ahead of ourselves now because Nebuchadnezzar hasn't learned this lesson yet, has he?

So in verses 19 to 27, Daniel provides the interpretation of the dream. He begins in verse 19, now very troubled himself, and he says, my Lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies.

I think this is really precious, actually. Daniel wants Nebuchadnezzar to know from the start that he loves him. I mean, that's basically what he's saying, isn't it? Before he has to break this very difficult news, he wants his king to know that he is not at all glib or gleeful about what he has to say. He absolutely wants the best for the king. Meanwhile, he isn't going to sugarcoat it. You can imagine how tempting it might have been to hesitate and hold back at this point.

How is the king going to respond? Will he be furious? Does he still have that big furnace? Will he be grateful, hurt, pensive, or indifferent about the whole thing?

[30 : 12] Daniel has no way of knowing. And it's interesting, isn't it, that even after Daniel does speak to the king, we're actually not told how Nebuchadnezzar reacted immediately, you know, responded to the interpretation.

And I think that's supposed to keep the spotlight, you see, then, on Daniel's faithful proclamation, not on how it was received. I think Daniel is being held up as an example for us again.

When you try and share the gospel with someone, you never quite know how they might respond, do you? And ultimately, you are not responsible for their response, but for your faithfulness in bravely passing on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and adorning your proclamation of the truth with an evident and sincere love.

That's what Daniel did. So in verse 22, Daniel states very clearly and directly, it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong.

Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven and your dominion to the ends of the earth. You are the man. And skipping down to halfway through verse 24, he says, sorry, he says, this is the interpretation, O king, it is a decree of the Most High which has come upon my lord the king that you should be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.

[31 : 42] You should be made to eat grass like an ox and you should be wet with the dew of heaven and seven periods of time shall pass over you till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

There is a rare psychiatric condition called boanthropy where people start to believe that they are a cow or an ox and they start grazing and mooing, etc. Some people think that's maybe what's being described here.

I don't really think we can be certain. I'm not a doctor but I think it's pretty hard to medically diagnose someone from thousands of years ago. But clearly what God intends to inflict upon Nebuchadnezzar is designed to humiliate him and to teach him a lesson.

And of course just to be absolutely doubly clear this is not how we should interpret every instance of this disease or symptoms like this. But in this case that was God's purpose in it.

And Daniel says that this delusion will afflict Nebuchadnezzar for seven periods of time. I think most likely he means seven years but that's not for certain either and again it's not that important.

[32 : 46] The important thing is that after the seven periods of time in verse 25 the lesson God is trying to teach Nebuchadnezzar is that the most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

But look in verse 27 at how Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar to respond to his gospel. Therefore O king let my counsel be acceptable to you break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

And so again let me mention three things about Daniel's call to repentance that I think help us to understand the call of the gospel in every age and generation. Number one see how Daniel frames it as counsel.

Counsel. That's because responding rightly to the gospel as a matter of wisdom. Don't be a fool. If God rules and he is going to establish his kingdom on earth by appointing the lowliest of men then the wise thing to do the sensible thing to do is to humble yourself stop resisting God's rule and God's plans.

Humble yourself and accept God's appointed king and humble yourself actually so that in the end you'll get to reign with God's king too. And secondly Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar break off your sins by practicing righteousness in your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed.

[34 : 14] That's because responding rightly to the gospel is a matter of righteousness. It's the right thing to do. True repentance is not just about feeling sorry for your sins or for yourself.

It's about turning away from your sins and turning towards righteousness. righteousness. Brothers and sisters this is not in contradiction to salvation by grace or justification by faith.

It's just the opposite. God's grace is what saves us from our sin so that we can practice righteousness. God's grace is the only way that sinful people like Nebuchadnezzar are ever able to do this.

Repentance entirely depends on God's grace. It's not an alternative to it. And so of course what Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar here is just the kind of thing we see all over the place in the scriptures when the gospel is preached.

People are called to repent, to obey the gospel, to turn back to God, to put away their sins and so on. Not so they can practice works righteousness or establish their own self-righteousness or something like that but practicing righteousness is not simply something that flows from believing the gospel.

[35 : 29] Now it is actually intrinsically built into the very act of believing the gospel. Believing the gospel is the righteous thing to do. In fact it is the first righteous thing that any person can ever do.

Thirdly notice how Daniel describes the result of repentance or the possible result of repentance. he tells Nebuchadnezzar to repent that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

Now the uncertainty in this statement I think is clear and important because it is a good reminder that God doesn't owe anyone forgiveness because they repent. Now even though repentance is righteous it doesn't make up for all the wrong that we have done.

Turning away from your sin and turning back to God is about throwing yourself on his mercy not demanding his forgiveness.

And I take it Daniel is saying here that if Nebuchadnezzar does that that it might have immediate consequences for his reign over the Babylonian empire God might not send this humiliating affliction upon Nebuchadnezzar at all and he might get to enjoy a long and happy rule but again even more than that as this passage points forward to King Jesus you know a bit like the way the Old Testament sacrifices point forward to the atonement of our Lord Jesus Daniel is prophetically pointing Nebuchadnezzar forward to God's kingdom and how we enter it he is inviting Nebuchadnezzar to humble himself because if he does it just might be that he will get to join the kingdom where the lowliest of men reign where the meek inherit the earth but in verse 28 Nebuchadnezzar did not heed Daniel's counsel we don't know if he you know took it seriously for a little while and then forgot about it or if he totally just brushed it off all this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar after 12 months because of his proud heart verse 30 is not this great

[37 : 32] Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty there are way too many first person singular pronouns in that sentence Nebuchadnezzar doesn't understand grace he doesn't understand that everything he has is a gift from God and that it can all be taken away from him if he doesn't give glory to God walking on the roof of his palace being high up over the city is obviously a pointer not just to his physical location but to where his heart is at as well Nebuchadnezzar's life was about self exaltation a typical Gentile ruler lording it over his subjects looking down upon those he was oppressing not the lowliest of men until God in his severe mercy cut him down and what a mercy it was because of course in verse 34 we come back to the snapshot we were given at the beginning the problem with true humility with true repentance is that arrogant sinners we just can't do it you know it's not in here it's not something we possess by nature or can manufacture ourselves but God in his grace and mercy humbled

Nebuchadnezzar he taught him the lesson that he could never have discovered for himself and he certainly wasn't seeking just like the way the gospel comes into a person's life and humbles us and so verse 34 at the end of days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned 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 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say to him what have you done at the same time my reason returned to me and for the glory of my kingdom my majesty and splendor returned to me my counselors and my lord sought me and I was established in my kingdom and still more greatness was added to me now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of

heaven for all his works are right and his ways are just and those who walk in pride he is able to humble

I mean it's a glorious conclusion isn't it and I haven't left us any time really to go through the details of it but you see this is the story of how Nebuchadnezzar learned the gospel and learned to praise God and Nebuchadnezzar finally saw the light but what about you have you learned the lesson of this chapter number one that God rules he does according to his will as Nebuchadnezzar puts it both in heaven and on earth and none can stay his hand resistance is futile neither angels nor human beings we are not God's peers we are not sorry we are God's creatures it's not our place to judge God but his place to judge us we have a tendency to think that we are wiser that we know better that God should explain his ethical framework to us you know I don't quite like all the Old Testament laws really not sure about God's sexual ethics I do this or I do that

I don't like judgment or God's wrath or hell and again friends I get it but in the end who cares your opinion is nowhere near as important as God's and of course neither is mine so number one God rules number two God appoints men to rule under him and of course the New Testament consistently draws out the implications of this for us regarding how we are to respect our rulers and submit to them pay our taxes work heartily for our masters for instance in Romans chapter 13 just as one example Paul says let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment we're not going to go through all those details but this is what the

Bible consistently teaches us that even when we have terrible leaders even frightening leaders we should submit ourselves to them we treat them respectfully and we should entrust ourselves to the God who stands above them the God who appointed them and who will one day hold them to account for how they have ruled and of course thirdly and most importantly the God who will one day appoint over his everlasting kingdom the lowliest of men our Lord Jesus Christ Jesus is the one who is gentle and lowly in heart and he humbled himself even to the point of death on a cross and that is why God's kingdom is only for those who humble themselves and submit to him in Australia today are we not a nation living in prosperous ease we are complacent about judgment as if the good times will never end as if our own skill or power made us the great nation that we are rather than

[43 : 11] God's sovereign grace and providence let me finish with these words of Daniel just as relevant today as they were the day he spoke them to Nebuchadnezzar let my counsel be acceptable to you break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed!

that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity let's pray loving father we thank you for this precious passage and for the doctrines it teaches us please humble us father now even by your severe mercy if it's required so that in the end we might be exalted we thank you for our lord Jesus who humbled himself and now reigns as the name above all names as he deserves pray that you help us to keep clinging to him and walking as his disciples learning from our master that in the end we might enjoy being co-heirs with him and reigning with him we pray these things in Jesus name amen