

Date: 07-26-2020
Series: The Book of Daniel

WHEN THE KING BECAME AN ANIMAL (Daniel 4)

On February 22, 1911, Gaston Hervieu climbed the Eiffel Tower to test a new parachute for pilots. He checked the wind, took a nervous breath, and began the test. His silk parachute filled with air, then sailed safely to the ground. Hervieu did not make the jump himself; he used a 160-pound test dummy. To one man this was an outrage. Franz Reichelt was an Austrian tailor who was developing a parachute of his own. He criticized Hervieu's use of a dummy as a "sham" and, one year later, on the morning of Sunday, February 4, 1912, arrived at the Eiffel Tower to conduct his own experiment.

As Reichelt posed for pictures he announced, **"I am so convinced my device will work properly that I will jump myself."** Gaston Hervieu pulled him aside and tried to stop him. Hervieu claimed there were technical reasons why Reichelt's parachute would not work. The two men had a heated discussion until, finally, Reichelt walked away.

Modern parachutes use 700 square feet of fabric and should only be deployed only above 250 feet; Reichelt's parachute used less than 350 square feet of fabric, and he deployed it at 187 feet. He had neither the surface area nor the altitude needed to make a successful jump. Hervieu was not the only one who had told Reichelt that his parachute suit would not work. It had also been rejected by a team of experts who told him, **"The surface of your device is too small. You will break your neck."**

He not only ignored experts, he also ignored his own data:

- He tested his parachute using dummies, and they crashed.
- He tested his parachute by jumping thirty feet into a haystack, and he crashed.
- He tested his parachute by jumping twenty feet without a haystack, and he crashed and broke his leg.

Instead of changing his invention, he clung to his bad idea in the face of all evidence and advice.

This 70-second film from 1912 is what happened:

[Play Video]¹

What we have in this story is an age-old problem—an age-old sin—that has plagued humanity since the Garden of Eden. And we see this same sin in our text today in Daniel 4 as well.

Of course, Daniel 4 is the famous story of the most powerful king in the world in the sixth century before Christ—Nebuchadnezzar—losing his mind and living like a wild animal due to God's punishment for this age-old sin.

¹ So Reichelt put his parachute on and jumped from the Eiffel Tower. He fell for four seconds, accelerating constantly, until he hit the ground at sixty miles an hour, making a cloud of dust and a dent six inches deep. He was killed on impact.

And it is that sin that caused him to lose his mind that I'd like to speak to you about for a few minutes this morning.

Title: When the King Became an Animal

(Prayer)

Bethany Hamilton, a 13-year-old believer in Christ who grew up in Hawaii and loved to surf, was out on the waves with her friends one warm October morning in 2003. One minute, she was enjoying the surf and sun, but the next, out of nowhere, a shark attacked her and dismembered her entire left arm. By the grace of God, she did not die that day but survived this horrible event and a year later wrote a book about it that became a NY Times bestseller. That book was made into a movie in 2011 that made an amazing \$47 million dollars at the box office. A lot of people around the world were hearing about the great God that Bethany Hamilton served. Today, they continue to hear. Hamilton is 30-years-old, married to a pastor, and continues to speak across the globe about how God has used this horribly tragic event in her life to His own glory and honor.

In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar is doing what Bethany Hamilton did by writing her book. He is writing to the entire world of his day about a horrible period in his life, and in it, as in Hamilton's book, he gives praise and honor to God. Look at v. 1:

Daniel 4:1-3-----¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king, **To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:** Peace be multiplied to you. ² I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that **the Most High God** has worked for me. ³ **How great are His signs,** And **how mighty His wonders!** His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion is from generation to generation.

If you were Daniel or any other Jewish person living in Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar wrote this world-wide personal testimonial, would this have been an encouragement to you or a discouragement? A huge encouragement!

But hold it!

This doesn't seem to make sense. In the book of Daniel, one minute, N is singing the praises of **his** gods, and the next, he is singing the praises of **Daniel's God**. What's going on here?

In chapter 2, Daniel tells the king his dream and interprets it. And N says:

Daniel 2:47-----"Truly **your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings,** and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret."

So here, N recognizes the greatness of God.

But sometime later in chapter 3, N makes a statue of his false god and commands people to bow down and worship before it.

But then at the end of chapter 3 N sees the power of the true God (who protects the 3 Hebrew men in the fiery furnace) and says:

Daniel 3:28----- “**Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego**, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him...”

So here N is acknowledging the greatness of the true God once again.

What about chapter 4? Same thing.

In 4:1-3 as we saw---he praises God.

In 4:30, he’s praising N:

Daniel 4:30-----“Is not this great Babylon, that **I have built** for a royal dwelling **by my mighty power** and for the honor of **my majesty**?”

But then at the end of chapter 4, after God in His mercy works in His life again, he is back to praising the true God again:

Daniel 4:37-----**Now I**, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor **the King of heaven**, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice.

So what’s going on here?

N is fighting the same battle that you and I and every other human must fight on a regular basis:

(and this is the sin that I was referring to at the beginning of this message)—he is battling against the sin of..

- Glorifying **self** rather than glorifying God...
- Of seeking **first** our own kingdom rather than the kingdom of God...
- Of exalting our own accomplishments rather than exalting the God who makes them possible.

Our problem is the problem Paul spoke of in Philippians 1:21:

“...all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.”

John the Baptist had it right when he said: **“He must increase** and I must decrease” (John 3:30).

And Jesus put it this way: **“...seek first the** kingdom of God and His righteousness...”

NY Times columnist David Brooks (a conservative writer) wrote the following about the cultural shift that has overtaken America:

“...there's abundant evidence to suggest that we have shifted ... from a culture that [once] emphasized self-effacement—I'm not better than anybody else ... to a culture that emphasizes self-expansion.” [i.e., self-glorification]. In the same article Brooks calls this the “magnification of self”—the massive glut of self-esteem that has overtaken our society.

So the problem that N is dealing with is not simply pride, but the battle for who he will glorify with his life. Will he live to exalt his own greatness, or God's?

Now what happens next in this chapter is this. In vv. 4-27, N writes about another dream that God gave him (prob. 40 years or so after the one in Daniel 2) in which **he sees a tree that grows** so high that everyone on earth could see it. V. 12 says that it was a beautiful tree and that it had enough food for everyone on earth. But suddenly, it gets cut down to the ground and is ruined.

Once again, N's men could not interpret this dream, but Daniel is able to do this, and the news is not good for Nebuchadnezzar. In vv. 20-26, Daniel tells N that **he** is the tree that is over the whole earth that will be cut down—he will lose his rule as king. Notice v. 25:

Daniel 4:25-----²⁵ They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, **till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.**

After Daniel tells him the bad news, he tells the king how he can escape God's punishment and the loss of his kingdom in v. 27. Here's Daniel **THE PROPHET**:

Daniel 4:27-----“Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being **righteous**, and your iniquities **by showing mercy to the poor**. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

Now, does the king do this? Unfortunately, no. He doesn't listen to God's prophet and he pays a huge price. (God even gives him **an entire year** to get right—to do what is right in the sight of God and be merciful to the poor—but he doesn't listen.)

Daniel 4:28-33-----All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of the **twelve months** he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” ³¹ **While the word** was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell

from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³² And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. **They shall make** you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." ³³ **That very hour** the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

The lesson here is this:

When we make ourselves the God of our own lives, God will punish us until we recognize that we're really only puny human beings.

God made Nebuchadnezzar (who believed he was a god) an animal in order to realize that he was really only a human being.

Now, once N finally decides to humble himself rather than acting as if he is God, his sanity returns and he gains control of his kingdom once again.

And at the end of this long world-wide testimony that he wrote in Daniel chapter 4, he writes these words to the people of his day as well as us as a warning:

Daniel 4:37-----³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. **And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.**

Application

In Philippians 2, Paul says:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)-----You must have **the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.** ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; **he took the humble position of a slave** and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ **he humbled himself in obedience to God** and died a criminal's death on a cross.

My theology professor Gary Yates said that N was a human king who acted like a god. But Jesus was a divine king who acted like servant.

So first, we must recognize how wrong it is to make ourselves the rulers of our own lives—only God should have that authority.

And second, if we refuse to give up our autonomy (our desire to be God and do what we want to do), God will have to punish us and humble us until we repent.

At the end of 2017, the starting quarterback of the Philadelphia Eagles, Carson Wentz was injured and his backup, Nick Foles, had to finish the season as the starting quarterback. Some Eagle's fans thought the season was over. But Nick Foles (who is a dedicated believer in Christ) ends up taking them to the Super Bowl, winning it all, and earning the Super Bowl Most Valuable Player award!

In the next football season in 2018, Carson Wentz was still recovering from his injury but was ready to play by Game 3, and Foles would return to backup.

There was a lot of discussion and argument regarding Foles as the backup. Should the Super Bowl MVP really be relegated to backup? Long time, knowledgeable football fans, ex and current players and coaches all were adamant that their choice---Wentz or Foles---was the right and smarter one.

Well Foles ended up losing his job as the starter. And many people were shocked that Foles took his demotion to backup QB so well. But in his 2018 book *Believe It*, Foles wrote:

What they saw as a riches-to-rags sports story, I see as part of God's divine plan. I've said all along that my desire is to play for God's glory, not mine, and that's exactly what I plan to do. My unique path from backup to Super Bowl MVP to backup again is a powerful message to share with people, and God has given me an ideal platform to do that from. To cheerfully return to a backup role after reaching the pinnacle of the sport contradicts everything the world tells us about success, fame, money and self-worth. To me, it's a tangible reminder that we are called to humility and to a life of service....

Some people might think I deserve a better deal, but it's not about what I deserve. It's never been about that. The truth is, I've already been given far more than I deserve--a wonderful family; a job I love; grace and forgiveness; great friends, coaches and teammates. Everything I have is a gift from God, and I'm thankful for all of it. I am where I am now because of God's grace, and I'll continue to follow wherever he leads.

(By the way, Nick Foles is currently working on a master's degree at Liberty University and plans on becoming a pastor.)

(Closing words)