

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

09 June 2024

Learning the Lessons God wants to teach us.

Text: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase". *Dan. 4:37*

The King was tricked into making a situation that was supposed to eliminate the three wise men from Judah.

If you know the story the king was sad to put the three in the furnace but he was caught by his own pride.

He had no choice but to do what he had decreed.

And they survived.

So the king is now able to honor the God who saved these three men who the king had come to appreciate.

Nebuchadnezzar is one of the strangest kings who ever ruled an empire.

He seems to make a fresh start at different times to serve the true God, but somewhere along the way he slips back.

It is very easy to get full of yourself when you are a king.

That is why God did not want Israel to have kings.

He wanted Israel to depend on Him, not some person who would be full of himself.

We have to admire Nebuchadnezzar for allowing the three to eat the food they wanted to eat in order to please God and remain strong.

He seems to have accepted Daniel's God after the Hebrew lad revealed the secrets of the king's dream.

We cannot condone his throwing the three into the fiery furnace, but he repented and made a decree that forbade anyone to speak anything against the God of the three men.

To say that Nebuchadnezzar was completely dishonest and hypocritical seems unfair.

On the other hand, however, he certainly did not remain true to the vows he made.

He loved prosperity, with all the amenities that accompany it, and refused to exercise the personal discipline necessary for a life that honored and pleased the God whom Judah worshiped.

The story before us has some elements of a flashback, as we are given many details of Nebuchadnezzar's past conduct, although the story opens and closes in the present time.

A testimony based on an experience.

Patrick Henry is reported to have said, "The only way I can predict the future is by looking at the past."

How true that is.

Most predictions today are based on past performance.

Every generation must learn for itself that the stove is hot.

Someone went so far as to say, "Experience is not the best teacher, it is the only teacher."

As Nebuchadnezzar begins the story, he looks backward.

Something had happened to teach him a great lesson.

He was ready not to give testimony concerning it.

Those of us who are Christians can identify with this king, though he lived many centuries ago and never embraced either the Christian faith or Judaism.

He was, however, influenced by the monotheism and the high moral standards that are a product of it.

Everyone who lives today in a Christian land is both influenced and benefited, to some extent, by the Christian faith.

Someone said that anyone who lives in a Christian land without identifying personally with Christianity is actually a parasite, because they enjoy the blessings but refuse to accept the responsibilities of the Christian faith.

Looking backward.

Nebuchadnezzar was living comfortably and enjoying great prosperity when a dream frightened him.

He called for his staff of fortune-tellers, magicians, wizards, and astrologers, but they could not explain the dream to him.

Finally he called Daniel.

We wonder why he did not call Daniel first, since he had made him chief of the fortune-tellers and had great confidence in his ability.

Perhaps the king used Daniel only on special occasions and felt his lesser staff members could handle this situation.

The dream consisted of a huge tree in the middle of the earth that grew bigger and bigger until it could be seen by everyone as was loaded down with enough fruit for the entire world to eat.

Wild animals rested in its shade, and birds built nests in its branches.

Various animals ate from it.

The king then saw an angel who gave orders to cut the tree down and chop off its branches, stripping its leaves and scattering its fruit.

Yet the angel ordered the destroyers to leave the stump, with a band of iron and bronze around it, in the ground.

He then ordered dew to fall on the man in the dream and let him live with the animals and plants for seven years, having the mind of an animal rather than that of a human being.

Daniel explained that the dream applied to the king himself, who had grown tall and strong so that his power extended over all the world.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the supreme God had decreed that he would be driven away from human society to live with wild animals, eating grass like an ox and sleeping in the open air where dew would fall on him, for seven years.

After that, he would confess that the supreme God of the universe controls all kingdoms.

The angel ordered the stump to be left in the ground because Nebuchadnezzar would become king again when he acknowledged the God who rules the world.

Daniel then told Nebuchadnezzar that if he changed his way of living, he would continue to be prosperous.

Although Daniel did not say it, the implication is that if he failed to do this, the dream would come true.

Nebuchadnezzar did not obey the prophet.

A year later, while walking around on the roof of the royal palace, the king boasted about how great the city of Babylon was and took credit for building it in order to display his own power, might, glory, and majesty.

Before the words were out of his mouth, God spoke from heaven, told him he would be driven away from human society, and then enumerated the very things that were present in the vision.

The words came true, and Nebuchadnezzar suffered the fate Daniel had predicted in interpreting the dream.

The king's hair grew as long as eagle feathers and his nails as long as bird claws.

Fortunately, at the end of seven years, the king repented and was restored.

He sang praises to God when his captivity was ended and he was put back on the throne.

This is the background for the king's testimony in the first few verses of this chapter.

Don't learn the hard way.

Nebuchadnezzar went through virtual hell on earth before he learned about God and yielded to him.

Some people are so strong willed, and bent on sin, that they must suffer many things before they finally yield to the Savior.

If it takes this to lead someone to Christ, God has a way of bringing it upon a person.

Others, however, do not have to go this far in sin.

They give their hearts to the Lord in the tender years of their lives.

The hymn writer sang: Early let us seek thy favor, early let us do thy will, blessed Lord and only Savior with thy love our bosoms fill.

The foreign missions board of a major denomination ran a survey and found that the conversion experiences of the missionaries appointed by the board that year took place at an average of less than nine years of age.

We can be deep into sin and be delivered by the grace of God, but how much more wonderful to commit ourselves to the Savior before the evil days set in upon us.

You see, even when the grace of God saves us from sin and hell, scars often remain, and somehow we cannot be as equipped for service in the Lord's work as we might have been if we did not have the years of sinning.

Where are you today?

If you are out in the wilderness with Nebuchadnezzar?

Turn to the Lord.

You do not have to wait seven years as he did.

You can come to Jesus now.

There is no end to the blessings God will give to you as you give him more of yourself.

The more you give the more he gives.

And then, one day, he is us and we are him, now and forever more.

Amen.