



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 5, 2010  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Sermon Text: [Daniel 4:19-37](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Daniel 4:19-37](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 130](#)  
Second Lesson: [Acts 3:19-26](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 3:1-12](#)

### Learn How to Prepare from Nebuchadnezzar

Humble yourself, or...  
Be humbled

During Advent, as we focus on Christ's comings into our life, we are looking how to prepare for them. Last week we saw from Noah how to prepare by believing God's promises and acting on his promises. Today the Lord takes our attention to someone we probably wouldn't think of as someone we are going to learn from for how to prepare for Christ coming...Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, the country that had defeated Israel and carried off the kingdom of Judah into captivity. You wonder, what in the world can we learn from him about God's coming and celebrating his first coming and preparing for his coming to us in his Word and preparing for his second coming at the end of time? When you read this fascinating story that's in Daniel 4, I think the message is crystal clear. You learn to prepare for Christ's coming by repenting. As you see in the example of Nebuchadnezzar, you can either humble yourself, as Daniel advised, or you can be humbled by the king of heaven, who is wise and just and no one can talk back to him, as Nebuchadnezzar learned to say at the end.

It's an interesting section of the Book of Daniel, Daniel 4. It's not written in Hebrew. It's written in Aramaic, the language of the day that everyone would understand. It's written as a royal decree that King Nebuchadnezzar published after all of these events. Some people kind of scoff at this and say this obviously shows the Hebrew nature of what is written and this obviously isn't Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian writing. They say when you read the historical accounts that have been preserved for us about Nebuchadnezzar, you don't read about him living like cattle out in the fields for all this time. But really, which history writer is going to write that about the king who is in power? You're not going to record that, are you? That's not surprising.

Daniel was one of his chief advisors. In fact, when Nebuchadnezzar earlier had a dream about this great big statue with the head of gold and then silver and then bronze and then iron going down the statue, none of his advisors or his wise men could interpret it. Finally, Daniel stepped forward. The king called him Belteshazzar, which means let Beltis, that false god, protect you. He stepped forward and he interpreted the dream. So Nebuchadnezzar had made Daniel the overseer of all of his wise men.

A number of years later, the king has another dream, which in the reading you heard Daniel interpret. You heard the details of the dream. The king had a dream that really troubled him. It upset him. He knew it couldn't be a good dream for him and that it had

a message that was not going to be pleasant. But he called all of his advisors together and they couldn't tell him. Finally, Daniel has to come and tell him. Daniel hears it and you notice that Daniel doesn't want to tell him what it means because he knows it's not a good message. Who wants to go to the king, the most powerful guy in the world at this time, whose reign literally was over most of the known world in that area at that point in time, a king who had gone from conquering nations to now just sitting around in Babylon and looking at his hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the world, and seeing the walls around the city, which archeologists tell us that two walls encircled the city, and they were each 20-feet thick. He gets to the top of his palace and he can look over all this. He doesn't have to worry about war. He doesn't have to worry about threats. So he's now at a point in time when he is kind of full of himself, and who wants to go tell that king that's in the middle of that good run, "It's all going to come crashing down and you're going to go wander around and start mooing." Who really wants to go tell the king "You're going to go eat grass. You're going to live in the field. And every morning, you aren't even going to have enough sense to get under shelter and the morning dew is going to drench you every day." Really, who wants to go tell the king that?

The king sees that Daniel is troubled by the interpretation of the dream, so he tells him, "You have to tell me. I won't hold it against you. Just tell me." So he tells him. He interprets it faithfully. He interprets it and shows his respect and honor of the king that he was now serving, even as an exile. But I think the thing that is the most amazing is where Daniel kind of goes a little bit beyond what you would expect of a servant. Did you hear that part where Daniel had the audacity to say to the king, "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 then that your prosperity will continue."

Think about that...how would you like to be standing there and telling the king that? Sometimes we're embarrassed to tell someone their zipper is open. We just let them walk around with their zipper open all afternoon. And you're going to tell this guy, who has the power to put you to death, "King, you shouldn't be oppressing people. That's why this bad stuff is coming. Knock it off king. It's not a good idea."

Calling the king to repentance takes a lot of courage. It takes a lot of love for your God, doesn't it? Daniel had to love God to do what is right, and it takes a lot of love for the person also, doesn't it? Daniel's love for Nebuchadnezzar by not just saying "You carried me off into exile. I guess you are getting what's coming to you king-y." That's not what he does. Out of love for this guy, he tells him, "Turn away from your sins. And the Lord, who is a merciful God, perhaps he may have compassion on you."

That to me is an amazing section in this whole area of Scripture. Think about how often you and I, when we see someone that's caught in a sin, we don't want to make waves. We don't want to lose a friend. We don't want to cause problems within family get-togethers by pointing out to someone that what they are doing is separating them from their God. Think of how often we choose the easy thing instead of the faithful thing.

Think of how often God has put us in a place to reflect his love and his concern for lost sinners and instead you and I reflect our love for ourselves, our comfort, our ease, our not wanting to ruffle feathers. Think of how often you and I fail our God. Our God who has loved and forgiven us in spite of who and what we are, how often we've loved ourselves much more than we've loved him and failed to do what you hear Daniel doing here. We are wretched sinners.

We are so wretched that when we do what God says is right, when maybe we do speak up and lovingly, with sweaty palms and knocking knees and churning stomachs, rebuke someone, we have the audacity of our own sinful nature to think that God owes us something because we have done what he has called us to do. Then we get mad at God if it does lead to problems and say "It's all your fault God."

That's why God's love for us is so amazing, that he loves us in spite of how often we have failed him. And he calls us to repent of our failures. He calls us to repent of the times when we have not been his voice when he has put the words into our hearts and into our minds. He's given us every reason to love and serve him and we have chosen ourselves. He still loves us and forgives us for that. That's the amazing thing about our God.

He carried out his threat against Nebuchadnezzar. He makes Nebuchadnezzar go live like an animal. Here's the king of the greatest nation on earth living like an animal. Then just as he said it would happen, it happened. The voice came from heaven. The holy messenger comes and tells him it's all going to happen. It happens. Then God restores him. That's all amazing, but to me it's nowhere near as amazing as the fact that God still loves and forgives you and he loves and forgives me, because we have failed our God over and over. Yet his love his unending. That's why his call to humble ourselves before him and admit where we have failed is so important.

The Lord may not act in our time frame. It's not like it was the next day that he struck Nebuchadnezzar down. Nebuchadnezzar probably forgot all about this. A year had gone by and nothing happened. He probably thought it was nothing. But then when it did happen, it was obvious that he understands that God is the only true God. And he speaks praise and honor of God after God humbled him. He freely admits, to his credit, his arrogance and his sin. Now the question as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar is saying God is the real God is the same as believing in God's mercy...I don't know if I can answer that for you from what we read in Daniel 4. I guess we'll wait to see when we get to heaven whether or not Nebuchadnezzar is there. But the fact that God does act and that his call to repentance is not something that, just because he doesn't strike us dead when we commit a sin, God doesn't really mean this "Repent or I will humble you." God means it. His call to repentance is sincere. It's genuine.

That's the way he prepared the way for Christ's coming to the earth. He sent John the Baptist to preach a repentance that was strong and fierce. We don't like to hear it. We don't want to hear that we need to repent. We are perfectly fine hearing that the person next to us needs to repent. We don't like hearing that we need to repent, but we are

desperate to hear it. Otherwise God's sending his gift of a Son to be our Savior is nothing more than a secular holiday where we exchange gifts, or maybe we throw in a nice religious trinket here and there to kind of sooth our conscience. But if we don't see the need for our repentance, then Christ as our Savior means nothing to us. Then it is all about the gifts and the parties and the cookies and all the other trimmings. If that's the case, woe to us. If that's the case, God will humble us eventually in a way that will be eternal. Just because he doesn't do it in our time frame doesn't mean he won't do it. If we turn away from him, he will send us to hell. That's what he tells us.

So here God has called to humble yourself and listen. Take the time in this season of rushing and hurrying to say, "You know what Lord? I'm rushing and hurrying too much and I'm forgetting about you. Forgive me and send me your Spirit so that I focus on your love, your mercy and your grace and not on my needs and my worries and my wants." I guarantee you that the Lord will bring about a joy like he always talks about, that truly does pass all understanding.