

Boanthropy. Do you know what that is? It's a psychological disorder where a person believes that he is an animal. Could this be what causes our children to eat the way they do at the dinner table? No. Boanthropy is a bit more involved than that. If your children were really afflicted, they would answer your summons with grunts, and would sleep outside with the coyotes and jackrabbits.

In our sermon text today we meet a famous king who was afflicted with this strange disorder. His name was Nebuchadnezzar and he was the king of Babylon during the time of the prophet Daniel. For a period, Nebuchadnezzar went from living in a magnificent palace to surviving in a muddy pasture. Why? Because of his pride. He refused to acknowledge that his greatness was a gift from God. He did projects for his glory and not for God's glory. So God cut him down to size. Sinful pride is not just a problem for kings and celebrities; it threatens to make animals of us all. What's worse, it threatens to pull us away from our place in heaven's palace. So let's see what Nebuchadnezzar's experience teaches us about pride and how God wants us to deal with it. Our thought today: Humble Yourself or Be Humbled.

We travel to Iraq, to a city there called Babylon. Babylon was the largest and most magnificent city of the ancient world, a city with as many as 2 million inhabitants. Nebuchadnezzar's capital was an excellent example of early city planning. The city was divided into a number of rectangles by wide roads named after the gods of Babylon. The wide boulevard running down the center of the city was 1000 yards long. The royal palace was a marvel covering (when courtyards were included) hundreds of thousands of square feet. Near the royal palace were the famous Hanging Gardens, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A system of canals regulated the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers for use in irrigation. Hundreds of impressive temples, shrines, and altars dedicated to the gods of Babylon could be seen throughout the city. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of two huge walls that surrounded the city, each more than 20 feet thick.

Nebuchadnezzar had conquered the land of Judah and taken hostages. One of them was Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar put Daniel and others through an intense training course to become workers in his government. Daniel ended up being one of his most trusted advisors. Even though Nebuchadnezzar had conquered his people, and taken him captive, Daniel was still respectful and cared about his ruler.

One day, Nebuchadnezzar had a nightmare while he slept. In this dream the king saw a large tree that reached up to the heavens. It was so tall that it could be seen from anywhere in the world. Birds and animals of all kinds found shelter in it. But then an angel appeared with the command to cut down the tree and to strip it of all its leaves. All that would be left was a stump.

Nebuchadnezzar had no idea what the dream meant and neither did any of his advisors except for one: Daniel – the same Daniel who would spend time in a lions' den. It was no mystery to Daniel that the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and God was saying that he was going to cut him down to size if he didn't repent of his pride. But look at how Daniel approached the matter. He said to the king: "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!" ([Daniel 4:19b](#)) Daniel seemed to really care about this king – a king who had destroyed Daniel's beloved homeland and took him captive. We might expect Daniel to rub his hands together in glee and announce: "Hey man, you're finally getting what you deserve!" Instead Daniel urged

the king not to let this happen to him. He said: “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 4:27).

How does Daniel’s attitude compare to yours? Do you too desperately seek and pray for the salvation of others? That’s easy to do for those who are family and friends, but what about those who make your life miserable? Seeking their salvation doesn’t mean that we ignore the hurt they cause. Daniel didn’t ignore Nebuchadnezzar’s sins; he pointed them out! But he didn’t do so in a self-righteous manner, but to get the king to see that he needed God’s forgiveness. What a good example Daniel is. I need to be more caring like he was and more bold. I often shy away from pointing out sin because I’m afraid what the other person will say when I should be more afraid that if this person doesn’t repent of that sin, he or she will spend an eternity in hell.

How did Nebuchadnezzar handle Daniel’s advice? Considering that nothing happened to the king for the next twelve months, he must have taken to heart the warning and humbled himself. But one day after that Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace surveying the great city of Babylon when he boasted that he had built it all proving his greatness. Before those words died away, however, other words resounded from heaven. God spoke promising now to carry out the details of the dream. And just like that Nebuchadnezzar went from king to crazy as he believed that he was some sort of wild animal. He left the palace and hit the pasture where he remained, hair and nails growing savage-like long, until he repented.

Do you see any parallels between Nebuchadnezzar’s life and yours? No one here lives in a palace, but we enjoy comforts that Nebuchadnezzar could not have imagined. Central heating and air conditioning. Airplanes that zip us down to the tropics in a matter of hours. Comfortable eyeglasses that help us read and see the world around us. It’s not just that we take these blessings for granted; we also often think that we’re somehow responsible for them. “It’s my hard work that allowed for the tropical vacation,” we muse. “It’s my smart saving plan that led to the purchase of this car,” we think. We even feel smug when we read news reports out of Iraq, Nebuchadnezzar’s old stomping grounds, and shake our head at all the bombings taking place in Mosul and Syria – as if we have something to do with the peace we enjoy here! Who gives us all these blessings, brothers and sisters? Who makes us prosperous? Who gives us peace so that we can get drive from one end of the country to the other without the fear of encountering a single roadside bomb? Is it not the God who made heaven and earth?

Like Nebuchadnezzar we may acknowledge this truth from time to time, but God doesn’t want us to be humble once in a while, he wants genuine humility all of the time! And if he doesn’t get it, he may put us flat on our back or out to pasture as he did Nebuchadnezzar. When he does, don’t curse God; thank him. For what God ought to do is not just put us on our backs but bury and forget about us.

God showed this kind of patient love with Nebuchadnezzar. In fact the dream already made clear that the king’s animal insanity would only be temporary. It was to continue for “seven seasons.” We don’t know if this meant seven years, seven months, or seven weeks or just a definite period of time. Was God now saying that he would re-create a new attitude in Nebuchadnezzar in his own time and in his own way? That’s certainly what God accomplished. Listen to what the king said when God brought him to his senses: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was

restored. 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... Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:34, 37).

From palace to pasture...and back to palace again. We pray that Nebuchadnezzar remained a humble believer so that we will see him in the palaces of heaven. But pray also that you remain a humble believer.

We are in no less need of humble repentance than Nebuchadnezzar was. Like him, we have seen repeated instances of God’s power, whether in many, many Bible stories or in instances in our own lives. We have—and to a degree that Nebuchadnezzar had probably not—also seen repeated instances of God’s loving preservation and protection of his people—again, whether in many, many Bible stories or in instances in our own lives. And yet like Nebuchadnezzar we are all too inclined to think that we had more than a little to do with whatever success we have had in our lives, that we are the architects of the grand Babylon that is our lives.

We too need to, along with Nebuchadnezzar, raise our eyes to heaven and humbly acknowledge that all that we have is ours only because God has chosen to give it to us, and we need to realize that he could rightly and justly at any moment take it all away from us, even to the point of making us live like animals here on earth as an even worse existence approaches us in eternity. Therefore we need to repent now while there is still time!

Such repentance is a major part of the Advent season, a major part of heeding John the Baptist’s call to “make straight paths” (Matthew 3:3), to level the mountains of pride in our hearts in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Then, having raised our eyes toward Heaven and humbly confessed our sins, let us turn our eyes expectantly toward Bethlehem, where we will soon see God’s own Son, born of a woman, born under law that he might fulfill it in our place—and also born under a curse—the curse of our sins, that he might be treated like an animal by Roman soldiers and, even worse, treated like a sinner by His Heavenly Father whose “ways are just” in order that to pay for our sins.

When Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that God was the true God, he received both his sanity and his kingdom back. When we trust in the promised Messiah as our Savior from sin, something far greater happens. We become “heirs...of the covenant God made with OUR fathers.” (Acts 3:25). That is, the covenant that God made with Adam and Eve to send a Savior, the covenant that God reaffirmed with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the covenant that God affirmed throughout the centuries, gradually revealing more and more detail until “the King of Heaven” came to this earth.

Through him we have been made heirs of a kingdom next to which Babylon’s splendid hanging gardens and Nebuchadnezzar’s royal robes pale in comparison. You and I have “prosperity [that] will continue”—and not just for a generation, as Nebuchadnezzar’s did—but instead “from generation to generation” (that is, “forever”), for “his dominion is an eternal dominion”!

Lord make me humble. Help me really see that every blessing I enjoy is a gift of your undeserved love. Help me to recognize that whatever I do, I do to your glory. And if you have to, put me flat on my back for seven seasons to work this attitude in me. Amen.