

O Lord, It's hard to be humble!

Text: Dan 4:9-18

Play video before I speak.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCyYuLQ7Ws>

Lord, it's hard to be humble, when I am perfect in every way. ... but I'm doing the best that I can. It's a prayer I pray often... no just kidding.

This was a tongue in cheek song that Kenny Rogers sang at a concert quite a few years ago. But it can also serve as a title to today's teaching.

Humility can be really hard. Really really hard. especially today. and I'm not sure if its because I'm getting older (and slowly greyer), or because society is making it that way, but the world doesn't make it easy to be humble. And before we get into why, lets look at the context of todays text.

Now we are going to be looking at this same moment in Daniel for the next 2 weeks, because there are 2 pretty big things going on here that we want to talk about, and we can't do each of them justice in just a 25 minute sermon. But this week we will just focus on pride.

So what has King Nebuchadnezzar done now? As we have seen in the last 3 chapters, the king has really shaken up the lives of the jews that were exiled from Jerusalem, and in each occurrence the God of the jews comes through, and you can see that there is a journey that he is being taken on. And we are coming in to the story straight after Shadrach, Meshach and Adebnego were saved from the furnace by God, and Nebuchadnezzar has started to warm up to their God, by letting them worship Him, and we even see the king at the start of chapter 4 lifting praises up to God.

SLIDE Dan 4:2-3

God is really using Daniel and his friends in this foreign land to show His power there, and this is a real testament to what can happen when we stay faithful to God even when the odds are against us and time is hard. The king has started to praise God. But God isn't done with Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, and we see a repeat of the first dream. He asks the magicians and other astrologers first, then asks Daniel, the chief of the magicians. Who had done such a brilliant job with the last dream. why he didn't ask Daniel straight away, I don't know. But that's what he did.

And here is the dream:

and there before me **stood a tree in the middle of the land.** Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its **top touched the sky;** it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its **leaves were beautiful,** its **fruit abundant,** and **on it was food for all.** Under it the **wild animals found shelter,** and the **birds lived in its branches;** from it **every creature was fed.**

Then there is an order for the tree to be cut down knocked down to its root, but its root is saved and is in good condition to grow again. It is bound with iron and bronze so it is strong and protected, and it can be revived.

King Nebuchadnezzar's initial thought, and we can see this in his comment to Daniel, was that this was another kingdom falling, maybe a victory coming, and God had come through for him. So he says, don't be alarmed, it's all good. I'm not afraid, this is good for us.

Daniel's Interpretation

And we have to admire Daniel's honesty here, He sees the bigger picture. He sees that the tree is actually Nebuchadnezzar. He's like, "well... I'm sorry to say, that this is about you, and you need to repent and change how you are ruling, or you will really pay".

Most people, like the king here, would look at the tree and see that the tree is knocked down and see that if they were the tree then it would be a shaming, and embarrassment to be reduced to the roots. But they don't see that that is where God does the work... but that's next week.

We are going to stop the story there and focus on the King's pride here.

Nebuchadnezzar's pride

I want to look at why and how Nebuchadnezzar was humbled in such a way. You see **we don't always know when pride is taking over**. Especially when we are good at something, or we have worked really hard for something. When we are done we want to feel a sense of accomplishment, and often we do. And that is good, but we need to be careful how far we take it.

Facebook and social media

SLIDE One example that is apparent today is the use of Facebook. ***(I don't want to be all cliché here and knock all social media, most of you will know I am very active myself on a few social media sites)***. I was reading a news article last year, and they were saying how recruiters are checking out peoples Facebook pages to see achievements of prospective employees, so they were advising people, especially graduates, to promote themselves on their Facebook profile.

And I am not knocking what social media is trying to be. Living away from friends and family, its a really great way to keep in touch. But sometimes it's hard, to look on the feed page and amongst all the cute cat videos and dogs in minion and super-hero costumes, I see everyone saying... look how good I am, look what I've done and you haven't, or look how good I look.

Of course there is a social network, Linkdin, which is about promoting yourself professionally, and acts as a kind of online CV that you keep updated, and for professionals this is really good, and designed for that.

And instagram is just to show off what we are eating, and thats another issue in itself and we definitely don't have time for that. And yes, I might be guilty there too...

So right now, it is very hard to be humble when we have to say how good we are to get by in life and promote ourselves. It's hard to be humble when we have to try and make ourselves look perfect in life. So where do we draw the line?

And when we are always promoting ourselves in life, its going to have an effect on our relationships.

Youth Group Discussions

We have been focusing on pride and humility for the last couple of weeks in the youth group, and this week we had quite a big discussion on what pride can do to a person. If two people in a friendship are both prideful, always and only talk about themselves, and build themselves up, then that is not a friendship at all.

I asked two questions to the youth this week. SLIDE

How can prideful behaviour breakdown friendships? How can our pridefulness have an effect on our relationship with God.

Both questions had the same answer. *It's hard/non-existent because we are so focussed on ourselves.* They are a smart group.

If we are always looking at how great we are, how can we have time to look at how great God is. To be thankful for anything, when we are so reliant on ourselves. A church community is so amazing because people are relying on each other, and relying on God. **Then we see the kind of Kingdom God is wanting to build.**

Just like in Kenny Rogers song at the start, its hard to be humble when you are perfect in every way. ***Or maybe its just hard to be humble when you THINK you are perfect in every way.*** When you have built up such a big a successful kingdom that is feared. When you have become a hugely successful king that people fear and obey. When you have something so big and great and worked so hard to achieve.

SLIDE Even in his own words, a year after the dream and Daniel gave his interpretation:

28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. **29** Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, **30** he said, ***'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?'***

You see, the problem that God had with Nebuchadnezzar's attitude was that his pride was getting in the way of his relationships. His relationships to the people around him, and his relationship to God. He wasn't seeing the reality of the situation.

He had become so blind to it that his view of reality had been completely warped, and he didn't even think of the possibility that he was the tree in the dream, and had made everyone around him so scared of him that they were too afraid to tell him otherwise. Even if the other magicians knew it. But Daniel saw God's authority as being greater than the king's, so was unafraid to tell him the truth.

But God didn't take the kingdom away from him. God saw the good gifts that Nebuchadnezzar had, the leadership qualities, and said, you are good, but I can make you better, if you just let me in. Your way is good, but my way is better. Trust me. Don't be so proud and blind to think you can be greater than me.

Our pride can blind us into thinking we can live without God. Our pride can blind us into thinking we don't need God. So much that we can forget that we are even merely human beings. It's not wrong to feel good about ourselves.

I have a lot to be proud of this year in my personal life. The marathon, raising so much money, being the lightest and fittest I have been in over 10 years. Speaking a new language more fluently. But the moment I start to compare that to other people, or say that I did that without any of God's help, or that I don't need God in order to achieve that, I have lost the plot.

In fact I could not have accomplished any of that without God leading the way. To help me carry on during the hard long training sessions. To keep my focus on the purpose and not how great I was to do what I did.

There are times when I struggled with these prideful feelings, but I really do feel I keep my eyes on God during this time to keep me humble.

SLIDE You see, **Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less.**

Next week I want to look at what happened when He was at Rock bottom. Because that place on its own is a quite special place.

But It's the last verse of that chapter that sticks out this week. 'And those who walk in pride He is able to humble.'

Jesus' example

And if can look for any ultimate example of living a humble life, we can look to Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. SLIDE Paul explains this to the Philippians in the second chapter of his letter to them.

This whole section shows this, and it is one to mark in your bibles, but one point I would like to make is in verse 6. That Jesus, even though He knew He had equality with God, didn't use it to His advantage. Thats one of the highest things that anyone could use to make themselves look good. But instead Jesus didn't use it for His glory but for God the Father's glory.

Be humble or be humbled. Pride always comes before a fall.

God wants us all to be humble, its a character trait he calls from all of us when His Word talks about being conformed to the likeness of Christ. He shows us through situationsn and tests in our life, through our perseverance and character building, He shows us through the entirety of Jesus life, and in our journey to being more mature. But we need to watch out, because if we can't learn this, then God is the one who does the humbling and that can look quite messy.

But even if we are ever in that place where God has to humble us, there is always a redemption story ready to follow. God doesn't humble us to destroy us, He humbles us because He loves us and wants the best for us, and next week, we'll see what that looked like with King Nebuchadnezzar, and the time of hitting rock bottom he went through after this moment of sheer pride.

Response

There was a lot to take in this morning, so I'm going to finish now just by praying, but I want to encourage you this week to be a bit self-reflective.

Ask God to show you how much you really lift up and encourage your friends. Can your relationships be improved by focussing on the other person more. Of course its a 2 way thing. But maybe your focus on them might trigger their focus on being more outward focussed themselves. When I do this, I always find that little bit of pride I need to take back to the cross and ask God to work more in me.

Because thats how Jesus relates to us. He died for us, His focus in His life was us, so that we can live our lives focussed on Him. And thats a pretty good example to follow.