

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Daniel 4:28-33  
Sermon Title: "Knocked Down and Cut Deeply" (Deformation)

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“King Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful and longest reigning kings” during the time known as the Neo-Babylonian Period.<sup>1</sup> The Babylonian Empire was the powerhouse of all countries in its time, and King Nebuchadnezzar was the grateful beneficiary of it all.

He kept the Babylonian Empire strong for decades. They had a military force second-to-none, and they had a treasury that could compete with Fort Knox. Nebuchadnezzar could tell his armies to overtake a country, and they would without a problem. He could tax regions without an angry mob or political legislation to stop him. In due course, the king would overrun Israel and take control of the capital Jerusalem. He shipped away their people and made them his slaves in his vast domain. Nebuchadnezzar could do whatever he wanted, and nobody inside his country or outside it could challenge him. He was supreme master of all he surveyed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 691.

Along with all the political and economic reforms that he instituted through his dominion, King Nebuchadnezzar also reformed the religious practices of the people, bringing back the old worship of the ancient Babylonian gods, especially of Marduk who was known as the storm god. It was thought that Marduk rules the gods with absolute power and basically did as he pleased, like Zeus would do on Mount Olympus despite what the other gods said. King Nebuchadnezzar loved having a vast kingdom to hold his huge ego. He wanted a god to back him up and give him even more power over his subjects. And his subject did fear Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, as Nebuchadnezzar basked in the light of his supremacy and might, he overlooked on crucial matter. The one and only God, the Lord God almighty, was using the Babylonians to accomplish God's will for the people of Israel. They had sinned so badly that they didn't know what it was to be God's people anymore. They wouldn't hear what the prophets were telling them – even the priests were becoming corrupt – so God used Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar to ship them away from their homes, essentially shipping them away from their sinful lives.

But God didn't mean to transform his people only. He meant to transform King Nebuchadnezzar as well.

He was using Babylon as a tool to wake up Israel from their sinful slumber, and God was using the king of the most powerful nation in the world to draw him closer not to Marduk's but to the Lord God.

The Lord God revealed himself to Nebuchadnezzar on a couple of occasions. When he was having troubles with a bunch of dreams, and none of his magicians or astrologers could find an answer, he sent for Daniel who gave him all the answers by the will of God. Through Daniel God was staring Nebuchadnezzar in the face, trying to convince him to drop this Marduk worship for allegiance to the one true God. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that Daniel's God was the God of all gods, but that didn't mean he let go of his Babylonian gods.<sup>2</sup> He still kept them close.

Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated this by building a 90-foot statue of gold for all to bow down and worship. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego wouldn't bow down, but that did impress the king. "Your God might be the God of all gods, but you still have to worship these other gods like I do, like my people do." For their insubordination, Nebuchadnezzar had the men thrown into an extremely hot fire which killed some of his soldiers. But it didn't kill Shadrach, Meshach, and

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Daniel 2:47.

Abed-Nego. And the king saw this. And the king saw God once more, in the form of another figure standing with the three men in the fire. Once more, Nebuchadnezzar praised the Most High God and blessed the God who saved the men. He even decreed to his dominion that all people could never speak against this most High God, or else they would be cut into pieces and their houses burned to ashes.<sup>3</sup> This was how powerful and intimidating Nebuchadnezzar was.

Yet, once again, the king held on to his own Babylonian gods. He did not cast them out, and bend his knee to the one true God.

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream in Chapter 4 of Daniel's book. Again the magicians and astrologer couldn't interpret it. Only Daniel could, because Daniel was God's servant, and the dream was from God. God was staring Nebuchadnezzar in the face one last time.

The dream involved a mighty tree, full of leaves, strong in its trunk, food for all, shelter for every beast. This tree was Nebuchadnezzar himself, and God called for somebody to chop it down. "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Daniel 3:26-29.

birds from its branches. Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze.”<sup>4</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was going to lose his kingdom. Everything he worked for, everything he owned: taken away. The money, the power, the fear, even the royal clothes on his back: gone. It would get so bad for Nebuchadnezzar that he would go mad. He would be driven away by all people, and he would literally eat grass like oxen. His oily hair would grow down to his waist, and his twisted fingernails would grow as long as knives.

The most powerful king of the most powerful nation was reduced to nothing. The Lord God finally had Nebuchadnezzar where he wanted him, and he was going to change the king through his humiliation.

We talked last week about formation: how we were formed in the image of God by God himself, but how sin has molded and shaped our words, our attitudes, our outlook on life. Sin forms us into porous people who are open to sin’s attacks, so that it may do more damage to our insides. Sin also forms a hard shell around our hearts, so that we have no opportunity to feel or think different, feel and think the way God wants us to feel and think. We cannot get rid of our own sin – only God the Father through Christ may do

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel 4:14-15.

it. Sometimes the way God may rid us of our sin may not be pleasant. It's not always the way we think it should happen.

God truly works in mysterious ways, so we don't know how God may handle us. Our sin might be so deep that it takes great excavation to get it out. It would take more than an oil drill to remove it. Our hearts may be so calloused that it would take more than jack hammers and explosives to break it up. Our attitudes may be so sharp that it would take more than a diamond-coated drill to wear us down. When God means to get rid of our sin, God may do so in dramatic, unpleasant ways.

But we believe in a loving God, right, who would never harm us? Our sin is doing great damage to us, our relationships, our direction on the path of life. God means to heal us. If God means to get rid of sin, God may pull it out like pulling teeth. But God won't hurt us? It hurts because the sin doesn't want to leave. It hurts because we fight against God, and may think it is our right to hold on to our sin. Sin doesn't leave quietly, especially if it has convinced us to act certain ways that have made us arrogant and uncaring, unteachable and unchangeable.

Surgery is not a pleasant thing, but it is sometimes the only thing that gets rid of the problem. Iodine or alcohol on a wound burns like the dickens, and it may

be the only things to eliminate any infection. We don't know how God works all the time, but sometimes God knocks us down, or lets our selfish, idiotic decisions knock us down. And while we are lying on the floor, humiliated, embarrassed, trying to look proud by lifting ourselves up but we can't, God may let us stay down there, so that he may work on us as God chooses.

C.S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* came out in theaters last month. This is one of my favorite stories, mainly because of the change that occurred in one character. You, who have seen the movie, might remember Edward's and Lucy's cousin, Eustace Clarence Scrubb. Eustace had no friends in school, because he was such an annoying know-it-all. He loved to boss people around, especially his cousins, thinking he was more important than they. The kid was a nightmare to live with, until... until he arrived to Narnia with his cousins and boarded a ship that took him to a strange, solitary island. Eustace came across the cave of a dragon, and inside were treasures that would make kings and queens envious. Eustace thought he could be more self-important and more arrogant with all that money and blink at his disposal. He put a golden bracelet around his arm, and filled his pockets with the treasure, until he got tired and feel

asleep.

When he awoke, he had turned into a dragon. He didn't know it at first, but he soon realized what he was, and didn't like it. He found his cousins and the ship's occupants, who wanted to kill him, and he convinced them all that he was Eustace. He suffered with the bracelet digging into his arms, because his arm was too big for it. He suffered from being cut off from other human beings, who didn't want him living too closely to them. He hated how he looked, and he wanted to be a boy again. He hated the fact that he had been such a nuisance to everybody, and he wanted to change.

Change came, when the great lion Aslan visited one night. In the book, not the movie, Aslan tells Eustace to follow him. They come to a well of water, in which Eustace wants to bathe, but before he can, Aslan tells him that he has to undress first. Eustace doesn't understand, because he is a dragon with no clothing. Aslan means that Eustace has to scratch the dragon's scales off himself. He tries to remove the scales, but he cannot scratch off all the scales. They keep regenerating. So Aslan says that he has to undress Eustace with his long claws.

"The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart," Eustace said. "And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse



than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling [the scales] peel off.”<sup>5</sup> Aslan kept peeling until all the scales were laying on the ground. Eustace was now smooth and smaller than he was. Then Aslan picked him up and threw him into the water. After a good swim, Aslan re-clothed Eustace, and he was never the bratty, nuisance of a kid anymore.

In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar is eating grass, is sleeping on the ground in the middle of forests and fields, is talking nonsense like a lunatic, and nobody wants him around. How the mighty has fallen! “Ultimately Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom is the kingdom of God.” Nebuchadnezzar himself was not his own ruler, but a ruler of God ruled by God. “The king has only to acknowledge that fact to regain his sanity and his throne.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to move from formation to transformation, from how sin has been forming us to surrounding to God’s hand to reformed us, we sometimes have to travel the path through deformation. If sin is a derangement of what God created us to be, then God means to deform what sin has made us to be. We may not be a happy, joyous process, but it is the only

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<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader: Book 3 in the Chronicles of Narnia*, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Daniel*, 126.

process that will change us. Call it what you will: walking through the fire, being lifted from a deep pit, finding the light at the end of a long dark tunnel.

We are not our own. Our lives are not ours but God's, bought at a price of Christ's own blood. Once we acknowledge this, healing may occur.