

## Pride or Humility? Week 3 The Lion's Den

By Maddi Baugous

Good morning. My name is Maddi Baugous, and I am here, at the invitation of Mandy. So thank you for extending this invitation and inviting me here to preach this morning. I am the university minister at Nebraska Wesleyan here in Lincoln. So my full time job is I just get to work with college age students.

That's what I do on the day to day, which also means on Sunday mornings. I'm a pastor who doesn't get a preach on Sundays. What is that? So it's great when someone says, would you like to preach? And of course, I love being able to go to different churches and to just share messages. So it's wonderful to be with you all this morning.

Before we begin, I'm just going to take a moment to center. And this is so I feel centered to prepare the word, and I invite you and encourage you. You can close your eyes as well. We're going to take three deep breath. And then, I'll close with a prayer. So may we breathe in.

And out.

Breathing in. And out. Breathing in.

And out. Gracious and loving God. May the words of my mouth. And the meditations of all our hearts. Reveal your sovereignty and love. And your name. We pray. Amen.

So we are continuing this journey through the Book of Daniel, and I should say, and I should note that sometimes you should check what the theme is going to be before you agree to preach, because the theme is talking about pride and the not so the not fun pride, but the pride where we sort of wrestle with it.

And so maybe I felt a little bit called out thinking, oh, I got an ego issue, but we're going to look at the story from the book of Daniel, and we're continuing in sort of that, that story that Mandy and sort of talked about the last few weeks. And so we're greeted again with some familiar characters that you may have heard of.

So we have King Nebuchadnezzar or and of course, this is a complicated character. This is a king who we know has anger issues. He has just put three men in a furnace. He has tried to build an idol of himself. He is so egocentric and focusing on himself. So we're going to take a look at what his story can reveal to us about the ideas of pride, and also humility.

So chapter four, the Book of Daniel, begins with a story in which Nebuchadnezzar is starting to sort of describe and say that he had this dream, and he's searching for clarity on what this dream could mean. And the story actually involves his own internal monologue in which he's saying, I had this dream and I'm greatly frightened. So I want to share a little bit of what this dream is that he is describing.

This is how he describes it. Upon my bed. This is what I saw. There was a tree at the center of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew great and strong. Its top reached to heaven, and it was

visible to the ends of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful, its fruit abundant, and it provided food for all the animals of the field.

I found shade under it. The birds of the air nested in its branches. And from its from it all living beings were fed. Immediately. For myself, I think this is a beautiful depiction. It's a beautiful image of this beautiful tree that stretches out beyond all of the earth. The animals find comfort and respite. This doesn't seem scary at all.

Honestly, it sounds sort of like the star of a Disney movie. And of course, too, we know that throughout our Christian tradition, trees are often really associated with this understanding of sustainability. With this understanding of flourishing and new life. Just think that our Scripture begins. The Bible begins with this story in the Garden of Eden, in which there is this beautiful tree of knowledge.

And then when we get to the end of our canon, we have the Book of Revelation that ends with the story of a beautiful tree of life. There is something great about these trees. It's something to show that there's something amazing about to happen. So why would Nebuchadnezzar be afraid of a tree? Well, maybe because it's what happens next in the story.

Because his dream of this beautiful large tree starts to crumble and it turns into a nightmare. He describes it as this. I continued looking, and the visions of my head as I lay in bed. There was a holy water coming down from heaven. He cried aloud and said, cut down the tree and chop off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit.

Let the animals flee from beneath it and the birds from its branches, but leave its stump and roots in the ground with a band of iron and bronze, and the tender grass of the field. Let him be bathed with the dew of heaven. And let his lot be with the animals of the field. And the grass of the earth.

Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him, and let seven times pass over him.

Yikes. That's what I'll say is this beautiful tree has now been destroyed. It's been cut off. All the leaves have been removed. The animals that were once part of this sustainable ecosystem have been scattered. Nothing is left except a stump in the ground. And two, there's this interesting depiction where there's this person who comes. A holy watcher is what the NIV uses to translate this.

It's also thought to sort of mean a lookout, someone who's watching. And at the time that Daniel was written, a holy watcher would sort of indicate that it's a messenger from God, that there is a divine being who is saying, ooh, maybe there's something that we need to change. And so Nebuchadnezzar is probably recognizing that, what have I done?

What is going on? What is this tree to represent? So he wants answers. He wants answers to what this nightmare could actually be all about. And so he calls on all of the magicians at the time, all of the dream interpreters. If he probably had Google, he'd search it up online. Say, what does my dream mean? But he looks and he's looking to see.

What does this image mean? All of the people who he brings forth could not interpret it. They said, I don't know what it means. King. Finally, he then calls on Daniel and Daniel. He says, oh, I know

what it means. And you can guess. King Nebuchadnezzar is not going to like the interpretation, because this is the interpretation that Daniel offers.

It is you, O King. And I'll add, it's you. You're the tree. You have grown great and strong. Your greatness has increased and reach to heaven and your sovereignty to the ends of the earth. This is the interpretation, O King. It is in a degree of the Most High that has come upon my lord, the King. You shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the wild animals.

You shall be made to eat grass like oxen. You shall be bathed with the dew of heaven, and seven time shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives to whom he will, as it was commanded to leave the stump and the roots of the tree. Your kingdom shall be reestablished to you for the time that you learned that heaven is sovereign.

Therefore, O King, may my counsel be acceptable to you. Atone for your sins with righteousness and your iniquities with purse, with mercy to their pressed, so that your prosperity may be prolonged. I find it curious that no one, none of the other interpreters of the time, could actually give King Nebuchadnezzar an answer to his dream. I think that's sort of interesting, because it seems pretty straightforward, but perhaps they didn't want to give that interpretation, because think about what Daniel is doing by saying to the King, look at what you've done.

You think that you've grown mighty. You think that you have it all figured out, but in reality, you have missed it. You've lost the plot. You have forgotten who is truly in control in this situation. And clearly, we know that this king may not be so receptive, seeing that he has at times, or he lets his anger out.

He shows negligence to others. And Daniel is saying to him, you need to be. You need to reevaluate what you're doing. You need a reality check that all those things, that beautiful tree that you imagined at the beginning of your dream, showing how great it was, how extended to all the earth that you saw yourself, is that that's not the reality that you've missed.

What is truly important? You've turned to the things of the world instead of the things of God. And as much as for myself, I wish I didn't relate to King Nebuchadnezzar as much as I wish that there aren't times where my own ego gets in the way of my life, even though I don't want to sometimes acknowledge that maybe I have created an inflated version of myself.

I know that I do for myself. I see this as it comes out in my need to be perfect. I am a perfectionist and I want everything to work out perfectly. That's why I'll make a detailed list and have a plan. Sometimes though, this perfection then also drives me to care more about how other people perceive me. It's showing up and saying, look, I did all these things.

Look how great I am. I turn and crave that. Someone else will say, good job! Look how great you are that someone will uplift all my accomplishments and accolades, that they'll see that as what's truly important. I too will make myself. Sometimes it's I try to be perfect by feeling like I know everything. Like I have all the knowledge in the world thinking that I need to be the smartest person in the room, and I have to have it all figured out.

So then I start to try to learn and grow and do all these things. But when it comes down to it, there are times where I don't know where I'm really actually trying to focus on the wrong things. I'm

focusing on the things of the world that are saying, yeah, you should be the smartest. You should be achieving for all these things.

Yeah, you should live in the fanciest neighborhood in town. Yeah, you should have the nicest car. You should have all these things. And that's when I start to find my value in. That's when I start to see that who I am as a person only stands firm when it's based on all of that. And especially I see this too, as I work with college students.

It can be so easy for them to be so focused on the grade point average. And I get it. And they want to do well in school. They want to get the good grades. But then too, when it comes for graduation, it's about what job can I get and about how many clubs that they can be a part of.

Trying to check off the resume to make it look nice. And when it comes down to it, I see them feeling burnt out, feeling overwhelmed, and not really recognizing that that's not what is most important. Because when we start to focus solely on the accolades of the world, when we start to focus on those achievements and those merits and everything else, we need to reevaluate, we need to pause and say, is this truly what is best?

Is my desire to overwork? Actually what I need to be doing? Or is that because I'm letting my ego or other people's perspectives of me get in the way that I'm building up this tree, that isn't actually the reality?

It's easy to do. Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't celebrate the achievements, the graduations, but when that becomes our sole identity, we have to do something about it. So what then? Do we do? What then do we do so we do not become a stump in the ground? Well, this one is a word that I don't always use.

But it's repent and you may be going repent. I don't like that word that's on scary, because that's immediately what I think is. That does sound scary. It sounds like something I see those signs where it's like, repent, the end is near. I don't like that. But repentance is a way. And this is something too, that even in our baptismal vows we are asked this question.

Do you renounce the spiritual? The spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world and repent of your sin? You're asked that or those who were walking alongside you in your baptism journey. Your parents were asked that question of do you repent of your sin? And that is something that I think that we do not have an understanding of what it looks like to repent.

Because even what I find when you look at the Webster definition of repentance, it talks about a feeling. It's about that you regret doing something. And sometimes we don't even recognize that we're caught in these systems that are causing us to do things that the world rather than the ways of God. And that, for me, is why I like to turn to the Hebrew word and the Hebrew understanding.

Because the Hebrew word for repentance is tissue that and tissue. The does not mean to feel guilty or to feel bad, or to shame yourself, but it literally means to return, and specifically it means to return to God. This means that when we are starting to go in those ways of focusing on the world where we have turned our gaze to thinking about our accomplishments, our own ego, our own pride, that we need to repent.

And so we need to return to God. We need to turn around and go back in a different direction. I love this because that's what it should be about. It's about turning our worldview into a worldview that allows for us to see the ways of God, not just what everyone else in our world says are most important. Because what God is turning us to is not to care about how many likes we got on social media to find our fulfillment.

It's not to find our worth in putting other people down to build ourselves up. It is not about thinking that we need to be doing better, or that we need to have more money, or that we need to have the newest and the greatest thing in order to be following in the ways of God. Instead, it is returning to who God has called us to be, which is beloved, which is one who cares about the needs of others.

Who shows mercy and kindness and compassion? Repentance is a homecoming to our true selves. It is putting aside everything else and turning to God to say, I need to rely on you. I need to trust in your work. It is that idea that God is the one who is sovereign, that God is the one who has control, that God is the one that we need to be following in, that it means that we start to care for those who are on the margins.

We start caring for creation because we're willing to put aside our own biases, to make sure that everyone knows that they are not to be isolated or ostracized, but they're to experience welcome and compassion. And that even when we may fall, that God is calling us to return home, to return back to that beloved community for King Nebuchadnezzar, the reality did set in.

This dream did become truth. But he took those words that Daniel had proclaimed to atone, to repent, to show mercy to the oppressed. And he changed his ways. And after he experienced great hardship, he then says, Daniel continues to describe it in this way the book of Daniel. When that period was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me.

I blessed the Most High and praised and honored the one who lives forever, who lives forever. For his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of Earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wills for the host of heaven. And then inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can stay, who can stay his hand, or say to him, what are you doing at that time?

My reason return to me and my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My counselors and my Lord sought me out. I was reestablished over my kingdom, and still more great greatness was added to me. He was reestablished. He returned. He came back. There is something greater when he recognized that who is truly in control, that the true way that he needed to be following was through the sovereignty, through the power of God.

So what are we going to do? Are you ready to acknowledge, to repent, to turn your heart to God, to seek to following the ways of God, which challenge us to put aside our own ego, challenges me to put aside my need for perfection, my need for the accolades and the accomplishments. To have that reality check, to return back to who God has called each of us to be.

So what I ask, and or what I encourage you this week, is maybe to consider what are those ways that you may be focusing on things of this world, rather than of the things of God? How can you start to experience this abundant sovereignty of God? Maybe it's sharing those things that you want to work on with a trusted friend.

Maybe it is spending time this week just even praying to God and saying, I confess God. I miss the mark. Or maybe it's just waking up each morning and being reminded that God is the one who is in control. God is a leader, and we are to follow in the ways of God, to show justice and compassion to all, to bring about true flourishing for the world, to bring about a life beyond what we could ever imagine. Not a facade, but a reality.

Will you pray with me? Almighty and sovereign God, we return to you. We turn away from the vices of the world and turn to your love. This week, may we recognize your power and loving presence, knowing it is through you we are to follow in all that we do. May we show humility over pride. Returning to your love. Together we pray. Amen.