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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
February 8, 2015  
5<sup>th</sup> After Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 2 Peter 1:3-11, John 7:14-17

Hymns: 16; 394; 378; 644 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Daniel 4:31-34

31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO:** It is about the Doctrine, Jesus' doctrine.

That is what we saw in our gospel lesson this morning. Jesus' audience was impressed with His teaching, but then, when they thought about it, they challenged His teaching because Jesus hadn't been taught by the recognized scholars of His day, at least not formally. Surely in His youth He learned from Bible scholars at the temple when He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. He may also have taken some traditional instruction from a local rabbi in Nazareth. We can be certain He learned much from Joseph and Mary as He was growing up, especially concerning the divine revelation relating to His birth. But Jesus had never attended any of the rabbinical schools or associated with the Pharisees and the leading religious scholars of the day, so, in the minds of some, even of many, His teaching was suspect. You might say He didn't have the impressive credentials people look for to measure human accomplishment and human intellect that is supposed to accompany authority. They were not willing to recognize that Jesus' teaching was from God. So then they were not willing to --

**THEME:** Submit to The Authority of God's Word.

So it is in the world yet today, but this is nothing new. The record of Holy Scripture reveals time and again that people prefer the wisdom of this world to the wisdom that comes to us from God. It is not a matter of the Scriptures being too hard to understand. From the events surrounding our text we learn of --

### **I. The Clarity of God's Word.**

The Word that theologians use for this is the "perspicuity of Scripture." It simply means that God's Word is clear. If there is a difficulty in understanding the Word the fault is not in the Word of God, but in the mind of man. Many put up obstacles to understanding, obstacles coming from man's reason, and obstacles coming from man's pride.

The events surrounding our text deal with Nebuchadnezzar, the great ruler of the Babylonian empire. Before ascending to the throne he was a ruthless general leading his father's armies, defeating country after country, including the mighty forces of the

Egyptians. When he had initially defeated Judah he took only the brightest and best of the Jewish people into exile, including Daniel, and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Later when Judah rebelled against Babylonian rule, he would deal much more harshly with Judah and its people, killing most of the population, destroying Jerusalem, and Solomon's temple. Most of those who survived were taken into captivity, leaving only a few of the poorest and weakest to occupy the land. He killed the king's sons before His eyes, and then put out the king's eyes so that the last thing he would ever see was the death of his sons. This was the ruthless way of Nebuchadnezzar, and he was greatly feared by his enemies. No one wanted to be on the receiving end of his wrath.

God came to him in a dream and warned him of the fruits of his pride. Nebuchadnezzar couldn't understand the dream, and neither could his wise men and sorcerers. So, for a second time he summoned Daniel to interpret the dream, and deliver to him a message from the holy God.

One might argue that this wasn't a clear message from God, but the interpretation God gave through Daniel made it very clear indeed. The message was reinforced by the power of the dream. The message from the Lord was delivered in way that should not have been forgotten. A period of insanity would befall Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride, and his wicked and ruthless ways.

Daniel made it abundantly clear that the proper response to this dream, this warning from the Lord, was for Nebuchadnezzar to repent and reform his manner of behavior.

The Word of the Lord is clear. The Lord presents His truth to us in a number of different styles all recorded for us in Holy Scripture. Although it is written down for us in a book, it is not the word of man, but the very Word of God. We learn that this remains true for us today from the Apostle Paul in:

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

So the Lord continues to speak to us, to enlighten our hearts with the message of repentance and life that is found in Him alone. It is by His Spirit's grace and power that we are so blessed to receive in faith the Word of the Lord delivered to us through His messengers. Indeed the message is clear, God in His love has called us to life and salvation through the gospel of Christ our crucified Savior. There are those, however, who do not see the wisdom and life and authority that is in the Word. Even as the Lord warned Nebuchadnezzar through the dream and the words of the prophet Daniel, so we also are reminded of the power of God's Word over all men. We read in the epistle to the Hebrews:

**Hebrews 4:12-13** "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

That was the message Nebuchadnezzar should have comprehended from the dream and its interpretation. The Lord knows the heart and calls all men to repentance. The Lord knows our hearts also. May we not fall, as did Nebuchadnezzar, into the snare of --

## **II. Unbelieving Pride for He who Exalts Himself will be Humbled.**

It was exactly a year later that Nebuchadnezzar was admiring the great city he had built, a city whose hanging gardens are still counted as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

**Daniel 4:30** "The king spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?'"

Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself. He saw and gloried in his own greatness and wonder of all he had accomplished, and our text reports the result of his pride.

**Daniel 4:31, 33** "While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ... 33 That very hour the word

was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws."

The Lord is fully able to bring the mighty down, as He did with Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest of all men in the world at that time. He lost his sanity. He was driven from the palace. He lived like an animal for as long as the Lord had determined in His wise and powerful counsel. We are told it was seven times, but we are not told the measure of that time, if it were weeks or months. It doesn't really matter. What matters is the truth of God, and the authority of God, and that all power and all accomplishment comes **only** because **He** grants it. Those who glory in themselves and fail to glorify God will be humbled before the Lord. The mighty have fallen, and indeed they shall all bow before the Lord. Solomon in the book of proverbs made this observation for our edification and instruction.

**Proverbs 16:18** "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall."

But let us not only look at those who sit in the places of power in this world, they are not alone in being caught in the snare of pride. It can easily come upon us all. Let us rather realize that even when we work and work hard there is no room for pride and self-glory. So Paul instructs us in --

**1 Corinthians 4:7** "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Words have meaning, and I think we would do well to express ourselves carefully when making observations about the success in our lives. It is common for us to tell loved ones that we are proud of them, when we really mean we are happy for them that they have done well, or reached a certain goal. It is better for us to beware pride, either in ourselves or in others. We may indeed be well pleased for the progress and success and blessings we may see in our lives as we grow in our abilities as well as in our spiritual lives and our sanctified living. Spiritual growth was Paul's concern

in particular. Let us be careful not to pat ourselves on the back for all the great things we have done, or that we see ourselves as better Christians than others. What makes us different from others in the world? Is it not true that it is the Lord who has blessed us with all our gifts, and all our success and even especially our faith and our relationship with Him.

**James 1:16-18** “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

So what do we have to boast about, unless our boasting is in the Lord? Pride goes before a fall, and surely the Lord can bring down a man or a nation in but a moment with a word, for His Word has power to abase, and His Word has power to lift up.

So let us --

### **III. Glorify God for He who Humbles Himself Will be Exalted.**

In the time set by the Lord Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity was restored, and indeed he had learned from the experience that he also needed to glorify God. Our text reports the words of the King.

**Daniel 4:34** And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.

There is an ongoing debate among Bible commentators about whether or not Nebuchadnezzar had a true and saving faith in the Lord. There is not enough in this confession to make that determination. Here Nebuchadnezzar does acknowledge the glory of the Lord. He is brought to the realization that he himself is nothing before the Lord. He is brought to realize that even the greatness of his empire and his power and dominion is nothing before the Lord.

The Lord decrees not only regarding God the Father but also regarding Jesus that, in the end, every knee shall bow before the Lord and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The passage from Philippians chapter two is not stating that everybody will be saved. Quite the contrary. It is only in the end, when it shall be too late to repent, that everyone will acknowledge Jesus as Lord over all! The Lord is God and His dominion is an everlasting dominion.

It is a wondrous gift of grace that we have been brought to comprehend this truth now, so that we know Jesus as God incarnate, and we know the Father as only Jesus has revealed Him to us. We live under the forgiving grace of God and in His Word we have been granted the assurance of deliverance from death, and the hope of eternal glory. This faith is ours only by grace through faith. We have nothing of which to boast. It is ours by grace through faith that we might be children of God and heirs of everlasting life.

Knowing this we humble ourselves before the Lord in contrition and repentance. We humble ourselves before the Lord acknowledging the saving power revealed to us in His Word that He shall exalt us to heavenly bliss and glory! We join in confessing freely from hearts filled with gratitude, **“To God all Praise and glory!”**

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.