

Sunday 31st January 2021

Daniel 4:1-37 (God's authority)

Talk by Kemi Ogundipe, Prayers by Betty Friend

Good morning, welcome to our online service. I am Kemi.

We will begin our service with a short prayer, Betty wrote the prayer of intercession, but Sue will read on her behalf, I will read the bible passage, preach and conclude with a prayer.

Let us pray-

Holy Father, and creator of heaven and earth, you made all things according to your word. You made us the head of creation by your authority, we are here to worship and praise your name. May our worship be accepted before you. Amen.

Sue will now lead us in prayers of intercession.

Intercessions

Our loving heavenly Father

We come to you with our thanks and praise, and bring our cares and concerns to you, confident that you hear and answer our prayers.

We are sorry for the wrong things we have done that displease you. Help us to overcome our faults. We pray for our world which you created, but, largely as a result of human actions, is being marred by violence, famine, flood, civil unrest, climate change and pollution. Lord help us to do whatever we can to limit these problems. Only you can change the world, but we can make a difference.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

We pray for nations suffering under unjust and repressive regimes; soften the hearts of leaders that they will govern with integrity for the good of their citizens. Lord, please protect missionaries and aid workers often in difficult and dangerous places. We ask for strength and comfort for our persecuted brothers and sisters in so many parts of the world, largely ignored by the media. Today we especially think of Christians in Pakistan, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, and North Korea. Thank you for the work of Release International, Open Doors, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and others seeking to support our suffering worldwide church.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Today is World Leprosy Day and although we tend to think of it as a rare disease, it is very much active in some countries. It is a disease which can be treated, and we thank you for the work of the Leprosy Mission bringing healing and the hope of Jesus to sufferers. We thank you for the work of scientists who, over many years have advanced treatment of many illnesses, not least through the production of a vaccine to combat coronavirus. We thank you for the speed with which the vaccine is being rolled out and pray that it will be available in countries which do not have our advanced health care.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our country and community. For politicians, that they will make decisions in accordance with your will. Thank you for those keeping our essential services running. Help people to be patient and follow the lockdown rules, and not abuse shop workers and the police as they do their jobs.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

We pray your hand of protection on our family here at St. John's. We pray that your Holy Spirit will touch those attending the Alpha course, that they will come to know your amazing love and grace. We look forward to welcoming a new vicar to lead us as we merge with Holy Trinity and thank you for those who have kept things running smoothly during the long interregnum. We pray for those who are struggling at present and ask your comfort, healing and support for Andy, Audrey, Val, Julia, Sue, Emma, Keith and Barbara. Let us take a moment to pray for those known personally to us who are in need of your presence at this time. We ask your comfort and strength for the bereaved and those suffering with long Covid and thank you that Zak is now out of hospital. Lord bless us during this coming week and help us to live as you would wish.

We will now join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen**

Reading

The reading is from the book of Daniel Chapter 4:1-37.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a Tree.

King Nebuchadnezzar to the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live in all the world, may you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the most-high God performed for me. How great are his signs how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

I, Nebuchadnezzar was at home in my palace contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and the visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So, I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.

When the magician, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me, finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream.

(He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and spirit of the holy gods is him)

I said Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the Spirit of the holy gods is in you. and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream: interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while I was lying in my bed: I looked and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land, its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the end of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from every creature was fed.

In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of the heaven and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let, his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the most- high is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowest of men.

This is the dream that I King Nebuchadnezzar had. Now Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my Kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can because the Spirit of the holy gods is in you.

Daniel Interprets the Dream.

Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So, the King said "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.

Belteshazzar answered, "My lord if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! the tree you saw which grew large and strong with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air, you, O king are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

You, O King, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying "Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven.

Let him live like the wild animals until seven times pass by for him. This is the interpretation, O, King, and this is the decree the most high has issued against my Lord the King: You will be driven away from people and will live with wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the most- high is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone who wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your Kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that heaven rules.

Therefore, O, King be pleased to accept my advice: renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.

The Dream is Fulfilled

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the King was walking on the roof of the royal palace Babylon 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”? The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you, you will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the most-high is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar, was fulfilled, to anyone who wishes, he was driven away by people and ate grass like cattle, his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards 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.

All the peoples of the Earth are regarded as nothing, he does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the Earth, no-one can hold back his hand or say to him; what have you done?

At the same time, that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my Kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 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.

This is the word of the Lord - **thanks be to God.**

Talk

Today’s passage is a continuation of our sermon series on the book of Daniel, “Trusting God in trying times” and the theme of the passage is God’s authority, you may have heard people say that God is our authority in every area, the reason why they say it is because he is the creator of heaven and earth, he created man in his image and also give man authority over the living creatures (Genesis chapter 1:26) God is the ultimate authority simply because he is the lord and there is no other, he is the father of mankind and as such he has authority over us.

God said in (Jeremiah Chapter 25:9-12) “I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon declares the lord, and I will bring them against this land and his inhabitants and against all surrounding nations. I will completely destroy and make them an object of horror and scorn and an everlasting ruin, I will banish from them

the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of milestones and light of the lamp, the whole country will become desolate wasteland and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years, but when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians for their guilt declares the Lord and will make it desolate forever”.

King Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest and most powerful of all Babylonian Kings. His name was mentioned in many Old testament books however he is spoken of most in the book of Daniel. God had told the Jews that they must obey him, he warned his people for a long time to repent for their sins of idol worshipping but they did not listen and continued to do evil. He was permitted by God to punish the Jews, eventually the Babylonian army was destroyed and took captive all survivors, apart from a few poor farmers, fulfilling the prophet Jeremiah’s warning and God’s disciplinary action of his people. Nebuchadnezzar, himself worshipped idols but God still authorized him to punish the Jews.

In verses 1-3 Nebuchadnezzar wanted to tell everybody in all the nations how great God is, and this does not sound the same as him, although he had met Daniel and his friends.

In earlier chapters we know he discovered that they were wiser than all other wise men, maybe he knew that they worship the real God, but this did not make him worship God, because he was clearly still a sinner later. God helped Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) to understand the King’s dream in Chapter 2, Daniel narrated to the King the meaning of his dream then Nebuchadnezzar said Daniel’s God was greater than all gods, he said that God rules over Kings, but still the King did not honour God, and later the King put Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace.

When God saved them, the King told the people to worship the real God and that he would punish anyone who would not obey, but still, he did not believe personally. The King was comfortable and thought that he did not need God, but God had plans for him and gave him a dream. Many of us are like Nebuchadnezzar, thinking we do not need God, perhaps we only pray when things go wrong, God loved us so much that he expects us not to just speak to our friends when we need them, that would not be polite or true friendship, we always talk to friends.

God wants us to be his friends. He wants us to talk to him all the time by bringing all our needs to him in prayer; as one of our worship songs says, what a friend we have in Jesus, what a privilege we have to carry everything to God in prayer. Trusting in him at all times especially this trying time of the new coronavirus variant spreading while at the same time many people doubt the vaccine’s effectiveness, lockdown restriction is a long way to be lifted warned by the government, many people lose hope because they are looking at what is happening. If we look at what we see, we will not have hope, but praying always will help us to develop an intimate relationship with God and through this our faith will be developed and we will have hope and trust in God’s words, we are saved by a hope from God’s promises, it looks to the future; Christ our hope. Romans Chapter 15:13 says “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy Spirit”. All this reveals our sermon series ‘trusting God in

trying times' encourages us to focus on Christ the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The King called his wise men to tell him what his dream meant, this time he told them what was in his dream, but still they could not interpret it, though in chapter 2 the wisemen made a promise if the King told them the dream, they would tell him the meaning. Daniel interpreted the King's first dream, but Nebuchadnezzar only called Daniel last, we do not know why the wise men did not interpret the dream to the King, we do not know why the King called Daniel, he probably knew that God gave him the dream, he knew that he was an evil man, he knew that God would tell him bad news, he may have guessed what the dream meant, but he feared to hear bad news.

Daniel heard the dream, he was uneasy for a time, he knew that God was telling Nebuchadnezzar bad news; perhaps Daniel liked the King although the King was evil, perhaps Daniel felt sorry for the King. He did not want to give him bad news, Daniel told the king that Nebuchadnezzar was like the tree, he was a powerful King. He had power over the whole Earth.

The orders the angels gave in the dream were from God. God would punish the King, he would take away the King's power and his mind, he would give the King the mind of an animal and there will be a day when the king will agree that God rules over kings, before the king would get his proper mind back, and God would make him King again.

A year later, the King was on the roof of his palace, he was proud of all that he had done, he was the most powerful man, he could do whatever he wanted to do, or that is what he thought. He thought he did not need God, but God spoke to him, the dream came true and God told him what will happen. He took away his power, he was chased away by people when the time was right, he was able to think about God. Only then did he worship God and agreed that God rules over everything. He agreed that God was more powerful than any King, and he got his own mind back. Only when he was humbled and stopped trusting in his own power, did Nebuchadnezzar receive honor from God. When he worshipped God, God gave him his power and became King again. He was made greater than he was. Nebuchadnezzar changed.

We are told in verses 1-3, because God changed him.

We saw the manifestation of human pride in Nebuchadnezzar. His response to his fall and recovery is given to us in his own words, published in this passage.

It has been inserted into the book of Daniel, a prophet by inspiration, and so it has become a part of sacred writing and a memorable part, Nebuchadnezzar dared to make himself a rival with the Almighty for sovereignty and was perhaps more powerful than any mortal man ever was.

Similarly, our Society has a Class system, where people are proud of their positions. Many people, including me I admit, have egos that demand we are proud. We compete with, and disrespect one another, but whenever we have too much pride or confidence, it causes us to make mistakes that lead to setback and failure. God condemns it and it dishonors God as

it says in the book of Proverbs Chapter 16:18. God loves us immeasurably and wants us to live a humble life and have respect for one another, to be Christlike as Jesus, despite being God, became fully human and accepted humiliating execution.

What are our life lessons from the downfall and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar?

The King's life teaches us that humility and obedience to God matter more than worldly achievements, no matter how mighty a person may become, God's power is greater. Nebuchadnezzar conquered nations but was helpless before the almighty hand of God.

God controls; he is above all those who are above us, he limits the power and authority of all the government, business, religious leaders, even the rich and powerful to carry out his plans in the world, while we may feel as though we are free to do what we please, he is sovereign over all our plans and desires.

Daniel had watched kings come and go including Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel understood that only God should be worshipped because ultimately only God holds Sovereign power.

Let us pray:

May the grace of God uphold you, his peace, love surround you and bring you safely through this day and always. Amen.