

Teaching for 10-3-07

Warning From a King

As we are currently immersed in political campaigns, the media and bookstores are filled with contributions from political figures who want to convince us of their particular insights and wisdom. From the economy to the environment to insights on the war, there is no lack of advice from those in powerful positions.

Even in the Church, there are plenty who seek to convince us that their program to change the world is the answer. Many Christian books and messages have been marketed to the Church with new “wisdom” about the latest and greatest ministry strategies.

There is, however, one former political leader whose message we have missed in all the flood of wisdom. A profound lesson was given centuries ago from a man who was in his time arguably the most powerful political figure on earth. He was a controversial figure, but his message is one of the most relevant messages available in our world and Church today. It is the message of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar was the king who destroyed Jerusalem and brought the Temple articles back to Babylon. He also brought Daniel, his friends, and Jewish captives back to serve him.

King with an Attitude

He was a mighty and a powerful ruler, and he knew it. The Book of Daniel (4:28-33) describes a scene from this king’s life that should make us all stop and take stock of our attitudes. Standing in his palace (likely the famous “hanging gardens of Babylon”), Nebuchadnezzar looked out over the beauty of his vast city and stated: “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

As those words were still on his lips, a response from God came upon him in one of the most dramatic judgments of Scripture. For seven years, this mighty and powerful king was driven from human society, ate grass like a cow, and lived in the open wilderness with the dew collecting on his body. In a frightening description of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar’s fingernails and toenails grew to be like bird claws and his hair was as long as eagle feathers.

The Lesson of Pride

We might dismiss this story as the judgment of God on an evil and unbelieving king. But we should not be so quick to miss the powerful lessons for all of us. The first is the issue of pride, which is a subtle and insidious enemy. If we think we do not deal with pride issues, we have already succumbed to its deception.

Like a weed, pride can keep coming back. Even when you pull up a root that is obvious, you can be sure there are other issues of pride lying hidden—waiting to themselves later. When you take deliberate steps to kill the weeds, they will most likely crop up again.

Pride is deceptive. It can creep into our churches and our ministries and be well hidden, only to

be revealed by subtle hints. Pride will manifest itself in possessiveness and control. Any time we seek to control or manipulate those around us or under us for the purposes of guarding and protecting our ministry or the kingdom we have built, we are dangerously close to Nebuchadnezzar's downfall moment.

Plenty of Warning

The frightening truth about this story is that the king had been warned in a dream a year earlier that judgment would come. He was exhorted by the prophet Daniel to repent, turn to the Lord, and change his ways. The Scriptural evidence indicates that the king ignored this warning and suffered the consequences.

We must not ignore God's Word when He says that He resists and opposes the proud (James 4:6). Just because God waited a year before passing judgment does not mean that He was not continuously standing in opposition to the pride in Nebuchadnezzar's heart. We deceive ourselves if we think that God does not fully see and stand against the pride in our hearts. The longer we resist confession and humility, the greater will be our own humiliation.

A description of pride is really quite simple. Pride answers the question of who gets the credit. Does your ministry point to God or to yourself? When we say that we have a plan or a program to save the world or our city, we have already given in to the subtlety of pride. Although there may be or may not be obvious signs to others, the ultimate judge of our hearts is our Holy Jehovah God. As He did with Nebuchadnezzar, He will give us opportunity to repent and turn from our pride. Because He loves us, He will confront us and chasten us (Hebrews 12:6).

If we submit to His early promptings (by the voice of His Spirit and possibly the words of others), we will find His love and grace in abundant supply. If we resist and continue in our pride and arrogance, we can be assured that His hand of correction will be upon us. Our God will not let sin go unpunished. Let us heed the warning from King Nebuchadnezzar.

Detecting Pride in Yourself

A couple of suggestions may be helpful in detecting pride. Don't rely on yourself to judge whether you have pride in your heart. First, ask the Lord to show you. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring deep conviction to you. But we can still be self-deceived, and so asking others what they see in you can be helpful in detecting pride. Don't choose those who fear being honest with you because they might have something to lose. Instead, go to those who can be honest with you, which might even include those who oppose you. That's true humility at work! Then submit your heart, your mind, and your ministry to the Lord for His glory alone.

If you are serious about God's warning to not live as Nebuchadnezzar did, join in this prayer before the Lord:

Father, I confess that pride infects my heart. Show me the depth of my pride. In Your mercy, give me the grace and the strength to humble myself before You and others. May I even submit my ministry and church to You, lest I have in any way made it my own kingdom. I desire that You alone receive all the glory and praise. In Jesus name, Amen.