

I Get It...Finally! Do You?

Daniel 4

"I am King Nebuchadnezzar. I greet all the peoples, nations, men of every language, who live in all the world, and especially my friends at The Village Church. May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me...and for you. How great are His signs! How mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom! His dominion endures from generation to generation!

I know you expected to hear Pastor Don this morning. He told me that some of you would be disappointed. But he told me not to worry, that you are the most amazing group of believers he's ever seen and that you would be excited to hear my story.

I want you to go back with me some 2500 years ago. We thought we were well off and that life couldn't get any better. But your pastor was showing me around for a little while and my how things have changed. I've never seen such a beautiful area like the Lord has given you here...the trees, the river, the flowers and plants you have all around, your residences. And then all the advances you have made in science, medicine, food and transportation. I'm not sure how we were ever satisfied with chariots and horses, now that I see all these vehicles you have – different colors, different styles, and most of them are air conditioned. Talk about comfort...is there anything you don't have?

But I want to tell you this morning about my experience with the God of heaven and earth. I like to call Him the God Most High, because that reminds me that it is God alone who rules everything in heaven and on earth. I believe that my experience with the God Most High is very similar to your own experience with him today. That's right. The lessons that God Most High taught me are some that He wants to teach you, too.

You can turn to Daniel 4 if you want to follow along. While you are turning there, let me remind you...when my army conquered Judah by a siege on Jerusalem, I brought back to Babylon some of the items from the temple of their God along with some of their best and brightest young men. Four of them proved to be gems. I'm sure you know them...Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego. Right from the start they were head and shoulders above everyone else, including my own wisemen. They kept saying it wasn't them, they were not smart, not talented, not wise and not particularly men of character. They kept giving the credit to their God, someone I had never heard

of. But with us Babylonians, that's no problem. He was just one more God to add to my collection of gods. But it soon became clear that He was unlike any of my gods. When Daniel was able to tell me the dream and the interpretation, I think you have that in your chapter 2, I said "wait a minute! a God who gives his servants that kind of wisdom is some kind of God. And then, when I decided to build the huge image of my god, 90 feet tall and covered with gold, and invited everyone to a huge party where they would bow down and worship the image, which meant they were really affirming my absolute authority as king, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego refused. I'd never seen anything like it. I mean everyone knelt when the music played because they all knew the drill. But not them. I even gave them a second chance to save their lives, but they refused. They were willing to die rather than do something their god had forbidden. You know what happened. I threw them into the furnace and watched, expecting to see them burn like a torch. But instead, someone was in the furnace with them, protecting them from the flames. It looked to me as if it was a divine being, either their God or one of His angels. And they were able to walk out of the furnace completely unhurt. Instead of everyone talking about my 90 foot statue, they could not stop chattering about Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, wondering how they acquired such faith in their God and how in the world their God could protect them from such a calamity. What a God they had!

So, it was about 20 years after these events that I had a dream. You have dreams, don't you? Well, here's my dream. I dreamed about a large tree in the middle of the earth. The tree was as tall as the sky and its branches reached the ends of the earth. What a tree...I'd never seen anything like this before. Not only was it big, but beautiful as well. The leaves and fruit provided protection and food for every animal and bird in existence. Magnificent! But then, someone that looked like an angel jumped into the dream, as if he was coming from heaven. He shouted *"cut the tree down, trim off all the branches, remove all the leaves and scatter all the fruit. Tell all the animals and birds to flee and find new places to live. And let the stump and roots stay in the ground with an iron and bronze fence around it, surrounded by the grass of the field."* He continued *"let the stump stay there among the animals and plants for seven years and let the mind of the stump be changed from that of a man to that of a beast."* Wow...and if that wasn't terrifying enough, look at what he said next as the reason for this dream. VERSE 17 on screen.

- 17 " *'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 all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.'*"

I was terrified to say the least. It didn't sound good and if I was somehow in the picture of this dream, I could be in real trouble! So, what did I do? Call Daniel you say? No, I didn't call him, at least not at first. I knew Daniel would come up with the right interpretation, he always did you know, but every time he did, he gave credit to his God. The same God. The God who gave them wisdom and favor chapter 1. The God who told him about the dream in chapter 2 and protected Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in the fire in chapter 3. No, I wanted to avoid getting slammed by their God once again, so I called my wise guys and gave them another shot. Unlike what I did with the last dream, this time I planned on telling them the dream. I thought for sure they could do it. But no, once again, they let me down. You know, there is a part of me that thinks they might have come up with the interpretation but were just too stinking afraid to tell me. Whatever! So, I called Daniel and explained the dream to him.

I know this sounds hard to believe, but I could sense something really bothered Daniel after I shared my dream with him. I'd never seen him like this before. He hesitated and I tried to wait patiently. After almost an hour, I finally said to him that everything would be ok, that I could handle whatever the dream meant, or so I thought. So, Daniel finally relented and began wishing that the meaning of this dream had to do with one of my enemies rather than with me. Not a good place to start! But he continued and told me I was that tree...that my kingdom was great and strong and provided all the food and shelter and resources for all those in my kingdom, which extended even to the far reaches of east and west. But then there was the messenger. What he said meant that I would be cut down and driven from my throne and from my people and that I would live like an animal with animals for seven years until I acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes. I would lose my mind and act like an animal for seven years! Tough stuff from Daniel's God. Daniel's advice for me: Look up on the screen VERSE 27.

- *“Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”*

Ask God to forgive me for my sin and start doing what is right, especially as it concerns the poor. Maybe God would change His mind, Daniel offered. I took his advice under advisement.

I began to think about what Daniel said and decided to make a few changes. I lowered the tax rate and encouraged my judges to go easy on taking bribes and make sure the poor got an occasional handout of food once in a while. But my heart wasn't really there and when my leaders started complaining about these new things and what a pain they were to administrate, I sort of let things go back to the way they were before the dream. And guess what happened...NOTHING. Weeks went by and then months went by and no judgement from God. I was uncertain at first but the longer this went on, I thought for sure that I had dodged a huge bullet...that God had forgot about the dream, or that He was busy with other things, or that maybe he wasn't as hard as Daniel had said He was, holding us accountable for everything we do. I'm sure you know people who think that way... "God won't really do what He has promised, will He? It might sound like this, "A loving God wouldn't send anybody to hell, would he? Or "God will let me slide by when I choose to sin because He knows I'm weak and He knows I'll ask Him to forgive me. He won't discipline me, will he?" Let me tell you plain and simple...O yes, He will. God hates sin so much that He will put anyone in Hell, for all of eternity, who refuses to accept His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus and your Bible is absolutely clear that He loves you too much to take your sin lightly.

So, one year goes by, a whole year, and I'm out on the roof of my palace in Babylon looking at all the great things I have built. One of them made the list of seven wonders of the ancient world – the Hanging Gardens I made for my wife. And I could also see the amazing wall I built around Babylon. "I built these by my power...for my glory!" As soon as those words came out of my mouth, I immediately heard another voice, from heaven: *"King Nebuchadnezzar, your time is up. What I predicted will happen, NOW! You will lose your throne; you will lose your mind. You will live with the wild animals for seven years."* And it happened right away. I know some of you are saying "really?" That's right. I was unwilling to be cared for as a human, so they treated me as a beast, and I began to even look like one. For seven years. Until one day...

I looked up. I looked up to heaven, something I hadn't done for at least seven years and maybe not ever....and the Most High God restored my sanity. He had taken it away at the snap of a finger and, when I finally turned my heart to Him, he returned my mind to me. Not only did He return my mind, but believe it or not, he restored me to my throne as well. But I was a changed man! God had to go to amazing lengths to deal with my pride. Insanity...for seven years...like an animal...for seven years! And you know what? I am so glad He did. You see, if God hadn't chosen to humble me, I would be one of those sitting in hell right now because I was a proud man. Pride keeps us

from coming to know the God Most High and pride keeps us from growing to trust the God Most High.

Hopefully, this morning, you do not remember me. If you go home and tell others about the king who was in church with you today, you missed the point. I am here this morning to tell you about my God. He's the One I want you to talk about tomorrow with your family and friends. What have you learned about Him today?

1. **The Most High God is absolutely in control of everything that happens in His world.** If you don't believe me, then tell me...how would I ever know about Him if I didn't bring Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego from Jerusalem to Babylon? I never would have heard the truth about God Most High. But I did, and it changed my life.
2. **Our pride keeps us from our God.** If He hadn't slammed me to the ground, I would not have looked up to Him because I was proud of all I'd done. Satan wants us to believe that somehow, someday, we can live without God. Let me tell you, without a doubt we can't. That's where our pride stands in the way. It keeps us from looking up. It keeps us from seeing our need, and it keeps us from seeing God's grace. God resists the proud but pours out His grace on the humble. Is my picture not enough? Look at the cross and be reminded that Jesus humbled himself when He took on human flesh to become our Savior. His sacrifice on our behalf provided forgiveness for all of my sins and for yours as well if you trust Him. And because He did, God lifted Him up and exalted Him to the highest place. He is just! DON'T LET YOUR PRIDE KEEP YOU FROM GOD. Receive the gift of salvation by putting your faith in Jesus. HE IS JUST!
3. **God keeps His promises...always has and always will.** And you are worried about the difficult things you face? Try seven years of insanity. God keeps his promises, every one of them, for blessing and judgement. I'm sure that you, just like me, begin to doubt God because sometimes, maybe often it seems, to take his time in fulfilling his promises. I get it! What should you do? Pastor Don thought you might ask that question so he gave me a suggestion that might work for you. He said turn to Hebrews chapter 11 and read it over a few times. The faith that God gave his children in that chapter is the same faith that he has available for us when we ask for his help. HE IS IN CONTROL AND HE IS RIGHT!

What a picture we have of God Most High!

I want to conclude my time with you reading together, in unison, the great words the Holy Spirit gave to me about My God (and hopefully Your God) Most High.

On Screen V 34, 35, 37.

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?"

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.

Pastor Don asked me to pray for you. I would be honored!