



Towards the end of last week's sermon, I made a comment about how the Bible states that in the last days there will be mockers. Sometimes we can justify a mocking tone because we believe we're correct, and others need to really pay attention to us. But the Bible doesn't say that mocking is ok as long as we're right, does it? Even as I ask this question, I imagine that some of you with greater biblical knowledge might say, "Yes, it does! There are examples in the Bible of God's people mocking." Probably the most well-known example is Elijah and the prophets of Baal. It's a sad scene of the myriads of false prophets trying to get Baal's attention in various ways, and then Elijah, after hours of this, says things like, "Maybe he can't hear you! Maybe he's busy." And, literally, Elijah says, "Maybe he's relieving himself." This sounds close to mocking, right? Maybe you could think of Isaiah and how he poetically writes about idolatry, talking about how people take wood, and with part of it, they make a fire, and with another part, they carefully carve and then bow down to worship it. Isaiah is doing what the proverbs say, "Answer a fool according to his folly." Let the fool see what he's doing, and maybe he'll come to his senses, right?

But how does this relate to what I said last week about mocking? I do believe there's a place for answering a fool according to his folly, but the type of mockery like Elijah, I don't believe is for Christians to exert in our day. And, the reason goes back to what we discovered last week. The New Testament doesn't call Christians to follow the example of Israelites and prophets within Israel. The New Testament calls Christians to follow the example of prophets and Jews in *exile*. Yes, within Israel, Elijah did this because the false prophets were in the homeland! But we don't see Daniel doing things like this because he's not in his homeland. The same is true for us, Christians. We are not in our homeland. My temporary address is 16240 Quincy Street, Holland, MI. My eternal one is with the Lord.

This eternal reality ought to shape how we live. This eternal reality, according to Scriptures, ought to affect our hearts towards the world – which would in turn shape our speech and actions towards those around us. Because of Jesus, we have been forgiven, set free, made part of his Kingdom, and we await *home*. As a result, we pray that others might experience this kindness of God, too, and that God might work through us to draw others to his Kingdom. I hope that's our prayer.

But what does this look like in everyday life? Well, let's go back to Daniel again to see. I'm so thankful for this book because we see the implications of living for God's glory in exile. We practically see how we are called to live for God's glory, too. Now, we've made it through 3 chapters, and we enter into the 4th chapter. Because we get into the story, though, I want to share what I think the main idea is of this chapter: **God's sovereign justice and grace should compel exiles to faithful witness.**

But what does this phrase even mean? Well, we'll define it as we go along, but I do want to take a moment to explain what I mean when I say "sovereign." Sovereign refers to God's complete rule and power over *everything*. When I say sovereign justice, I mean that nothing can thwart God's justice. Injustices will fall under his justice, and he will make all things right someday. When I say sovereign grace, I mean that if God decides to show grace, he will show grace, and nothing can stop him. This word

sovereign essentially is expressed by Nebuchadnezzar by the end of this chapter. He praises God because he's sovereign and he rejoices that God can do *whatever* he pleases to do whenever he pleases to do it. But how does Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful world ruler at the time, get to a point to where he's praising God that God is all-powerful – even over him?

Let's get into some background. At the end of chapter 3, after the fiery furnace incident, we're told that Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are promoted even higher in the province of Babylon. And, we're told Nebuchadnezzar blessed God. But, let me ask you something. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar has actually turned to God here? I don't think so. For a few reasons – including some from chapter 4 – but let's just focus on his decree in verse 29. He essentially speaks the same way about God as he does about the idol he created. With his idol, if you didn't worship it, you'd die. With God, if you spoke against him, you'd be torn limb from limb and your house ruined. Let me ask you something, do you think this is God's goal? No. If you haven't perceived this yet, Nebuchadnezzar liked his control. Don't we all? But Nebuchadnezzar could exercise his control in all sorts of ways. And so, he's still in charge. He feels good being in charge. He gives lip-service to God and he still does things his own way.

Yet, as I said last week, even in Nebuchadnezzar's sinful persistence and refusal of God, God is still pursuing him. Isn't this phenomenal? This reminds me of Jesus' words to Peter, when he says that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against [the church]" (Matt. 16:18). The point of Jesus' statement is, I think, that the kingdom of hell is going to lose citizens. God's gospel is more powerful than hell's gates. And so, elsewhere, Paul talks about what happens when people turn from their sinfulness and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. They're taken from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Jesus.

What does this have to do with Nebuchadnezzar? He's in the kingdom of Babylon. This is symbolic. He's in the Kingdom of Darkness! But can the hold of Darkness keep God from saving Nebuchadnezzar? No! God has purposed to save people across the spectrum. Like I said last week, God saves the oppressed and the oppressors! This powerful grace and justice of God should shape how we think. This sovereign God, and his ways, should shape how we act! He saved us from the Kingdom of Darkness. Now we are exiles. So then, how ought our thinking and actions to be changed? Let's dive into Daniel 4 to discover more.

1. God is just (vv. 4-33).

Chapter 4 is an account from Nebuchadnezzar's perspective. He's sharing a story. Beginning in verse 4, he tells a story about another dream that he had – a dream that his interpreters and astrologers couldn't interpret. There is a tree that grows expansively. It is so large that it feeds all the people. Birds nest in it. Animals take shade under it. But then, we're told a "watcher, a holy one" – who is some sort of angelic figure, comes to make a declaration. Look at verses 14 and following: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.'¹

What does this all mean? Well, Daniel is eventually asked to interpret. According to this narration, Nebuchadnezzar states his name is Belteshazzar – the name he had given to him according to his god.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:14–16.

But Nebuchadnezzar knew something was special about Daniel. He says that he thought the spirit of the holy gods was in him (v. 9). Daniel eventually gives the interpretation. Verse 22 reveals that the tree is Nebuchadnezzar. His power and rule have reached to such amazing heights. But the watcher says to cut down the tree to the level of grass. Read verses 24-25 with me: O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.² By the way, some translations may say seven years. The ESV says seven periods because that's a more literal translation. We're not exactly sure how long 7 periods is, but it was a length of time to humble Nebuchadnezzar.

So, this was Daniel's proclamation. Then we're told that Nebuchadnezzar just goes on with life. He persists in his ways. We have no inkling of change in his heart. He's still the same man. Then, a *year* later, we read this, beginning in verse 30: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."³

God is sovereign in his justice. As has already been stated over the previous weeks, Nebuchadnezzar was a notoriously wicked man. His persistent heinous sexual acts would even be appalling to modern senses. Injustice flowed in the wake of Nebuchadnezzar's presence. I can only imagine how many people longed for Nebuchadnezzar to die. How many longed for his kingdom to cease. How many people were deported from their homes and had their livelihood's destroyed because of the king of Babylon?

As you think about this wicked king, it's only appropriate to wonder, "How long, Lord, until you bring justice?" Is God just? Have you ever wondered that about God, living in this world? I've prayed this even this past week as I've been lamenting over what people are experiencing in Afghanistan and Haiti – and countries I don't even know about right now. Is God just? When will he make it all stop?

This story of Nebuchadnezzar reminds us that God hates oppression and that God is just. Not only does God declare punishment, but God brings it about. And, Ventura, this is the same God we serve today. He hasn't changed. He will shine forth his justice through his children in this world, but someday he will bring about the fullness of justice after Jesus returns! In light of this, we can live in hope. God is just. God will keep his promises. Justice *will* come. Praise the Lord!

But God is not only the God of justice. God is the God of all grace. So, let's see this reality in this chapter as well:

2. God is gracious (vv. 1-3; 34-37).

Nebuchadnezzar preps us for where this story is going in the first three verses of this chapter. Look at them with me: King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:24–25.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:30–32.

High God has done for me. ³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. ⁴

How did Nebuchadnezzar turn into a man who not only praises God, but essentially becomes an evangelist, pointing others not to himself, but pointing the people, nations and languages to the One who is greater? Do you see this? Again, remember what the book of Revelation tells us. People from all tribes, nations and tongues will bow down before God. Here, Nebuchadnezzar is declaring God's greatness to all peoples, nations, and languages! What happened?

Well, we're told the purpose of God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar. There are individual and global purposes. In verse 17, we the global purpose: . . .to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.⁵ God's aim is that the entire world would know that He is the Ruler and he is in control of everything. But is that all God wants? Does God simply want people to acknowledge he's the Ruler over all? I can acknowledge God is the Ruler, but not worship him, right? Yes! There are probably plenty of people who fill churches each Sunday who acknowledge God with their lips, but their don't really value him supremely and love him. They may be like Nebuchadnezzar a chapter ago. They're passionate about defending God, but they don't worship him. They like their life, their way under their control.

God is not content with this, and neither should you (if you live this way). God's goal is that our hearts would be melted and moved by him – to love and honor him. Listen, God is the most glorious – and for God to give us himself is for God to give us the greatest gift. And, this is what Nebuchadnezzar realizes! Now, right here I want to stop for a moment. Earlier, I said that God is just. There were probably many who wanted Nebuchadnezzar dead. They wanted him destroyed or maybe even tortured. They might have been happy with Nebuchadnezzar going crazy and they were waiting for the moment for him to die. But he doesn't die! What happens? Grace intervenes.

I am saying all of this because I want us to see that grace is shocking. And, if it shocks us, it may be because we don't realize our own need for grace. Or, we don't realize how much grace God has given to us. If it weren't for God's grace in my life, I could be as bad as Nebuchadnezzar. But, God is the God of all grace! God sets out to rescue the oppressed, and he even reaches the oppressors. Having said this, this doesn't mean God didn't care about the injustices. No! God truly disciplined Nebuchadnezzar – to cause him to see his sinfulness. And Nebuchadnezzar seems to genuinely repent. Read the final words of this chapter in verses 34-37: ³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason 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 endures from generation to generation; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" ³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. ⁶

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:1–3.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:17.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:34–37.

Nebuchadnezzar praises, extols, and honors *the* King of heaven. God is no longer a god among gods. He's the King of Heaven. God is no longer someone Nebuchadnezzar defends and puts in his pocket. God does whatever he wants whenever he wants. God is not prideful. Nebuchadnezzar was. And God humbled Nebuchadnezzar. And, as a result, Nebuchadnezzar says he came to his senses. His reason returned to him. He finally has seen clearly!

Oh, if you're listening here today and you've never turned to God for reconciliation, I hope you hear these words. God is worthy to be trusted, served, and followed. God is worthy to be worshipped. Whatever you're living for now pales in comparison. If you're living for your control or power or fun or whatever it is, God is greater. Will you turn to him now? Don't wait. Is he calling you today? Don't silence him. He will accept you and welcome you into his arms. I know this because of this story and because of what this story points to. The reality is that Nebuchadnezzar here is a figure who points to Jesus. In the Scriptures, Jesus calls people who are weary to him and he will give rest. Jesus will bring a Kingdom where there is the Tree of Life. Jesus is the One in whom we find nourishment. And where Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was destroyed and has passed away, Jesus' Kingdom never passes away. And, do you know why? Because Jesus conquered death.

Think of this, Nebuchadnezzar was a ruler who grew his kingdom at the expense of people. Jesus is the only Ruler whose Kingdom exists at the expense of himself. He came to be crucified, and on the cross, he took the punishment that our sins deserved. On the cross, Jesus took the just punishment. And because of the cross, anyone who trusts him receives God's sovereign grace! God is just and gracious. But there's more. Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death and he rules from Heaven even today! His Kingdom lasts forever. And someday he comes again. This Savior loves us! This Savior cares. He gives life and salvation to the oppressed and the oppressor. Do you see God's sovereign justice and grace? Have you embraced God's sovereign justice and grace? If so, this leads us to the final point this morning:

3. Exiles are compelled to faithful witness.

So far, our emphasis has been to see how God has acted towards Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon. God is just and gracious. How should that cause us to live as exiles in this world? Remember Jeremiah 29:7? God commands his people to live this way: **But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**⁷

We see this behavior continue with Daniel towards Nebuchadnezzar. I want to briefly bring out three points. **Faithful witness includes:**

Showing concern for worldly leaders (v. 19). Yes, genuine concern. And, this doesn't simply mean we're concerned for their eternal state. While we are concerned about their eternal state, we should also be concerned about their temporal state. When Daniel found out what was going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar, I want you to hear again Daniel's response. In verse 19, we read, "¹⁹Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him."⁸ By the way, we're not sure why Daniel was alarmed. He could be alarmed for Nebuchadnezzar or he could be concerned for his own life – that if he interprets this dream, he'll die. Either way, trusting God doesn't mean we're perfectly fearless! That said, moving on in verse 19, Daniel says, "My lord, may the dream

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 29:7.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:19.

be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!”⁹ What?! Really? Daniel really cares about Nebuchadnezzar. He doesn’t wish bad on him.

You know, this past year, though, I’ve seen even Christians post and say horrible things about leaders that they disagree with. And I think they disgrace their witness as Christ-followers and exiles in this world. Seriously, if a certain governmental leader was shot or sick or harmed, some Christians might rejoice instead of pray for their repentance. These leaders were created in the image of God and God cares for their souls. Will you care for them? Exiles are concerned.

Speaking the truth in love (vv. 19-26). To have a concern for someone doesn’t mean we’re silent and we don’t speak, though. There are times and scenarios that we *must* speak. But I think sometimes people think speaking the truth means you have to be like Elijah with the prophets of Baal. To be bold means to be sarcastic. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I see Daniel’s response in verses 19-26, I see a man who exhibits James 1:19, “let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”¹⁰ Daniel doesn’t speak immediately. He’s in turmoil within himself. He pays attention to what God says first. He’s caring and careful in his words, and he doesn’t say, “Yes! This is what’s going to happen to you, you mean Ruler!” He’s quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Why? Because he’s concerned for Nebuchadnezzar’s eternal and temporal well-being. He wants this man to know the riches of God’s goodness. This is what exiles do. Our home isn’t here so we don’t fight angrily for the here and now. Instead, we long for people to know the Savior. And this leads to the final point:

Calling leaders to saving repentance (v. 27). Read verse 27 with me: ²⁷Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”¹¹ Daniel states the interpretation of the dream. He expresses his concern for Nebuchadnezzar’s temporal welfare, but now he gets to the heart. “Please listen to what I’m saying, King.” First, break off your sins by practicing righteousness. How does one practice righteousness? This isn’t Daniel saying, “Just come up with better laws and be more moral.” In 1 John, we read that only those who have turned to God through Christ make a practice of righteousness. Daniel is calling Nebuchadnezzar to humble himself before the Lord so that God will empower him to live for God’s glory, not merely his own. Does Nebuchadnezzar listen? Not immediately. It takes years until God gets a hold of Nebuchadnezzar’s heart. But Christians, please take heed to this example. Exiles faithful witness is never in vain. God is worthy to be trusted no matter what. God is worthy to be followed. And, people (whether government rulers, oppressors or oppressed) need to know that there are people who care for them. God cares for them! **As citizens of his Kingdom, may we care for them. May we give them the life-giving message of Jesus and the gospel. May we point them to a Kingdom that is to come that will never fade away, and may people (in God’s timing) turn to the Lord and proclaim him to every tribe, nation and tongue. God’s sovereign justice and grace should compel exiles to faithful witness.**

As we conclude our time together, I simply want you to ponder these three principles. In what ways is God working in you to display his glory more? How are you graciously and winsomely showing love and concern for those around you? Do they know you’re an exile, longing for them to be home with the Lord, too?

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:19.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jas 1:19–20.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 4:27.