

Speaking Truthfully Daniel 4

I want us to imagine a fictional, modern-day king Nebuchadnezzar, let's call him Tom Nebuchadnezzar Clarke.

Tom is the head of the largest international conglomerate, which has bought up huge amounts of land in all the major countries of the world, and he's pretty great!

Tom can stand in the penthouse suite of his London tower-block mansion and look out at building after building that he owns, and which he, his wealth and his companies have built.

People just keep paying him more and more money.

Tom has a team of advisors, the best you could have – he's poached many of them from local companies, and wooed them to come and work for him with bigger salaries and luxury lifestyles. (He has an aggressive business model)

All this means that Tom doesn't actually need to work every hour. In fact, although we know that money can't buy happiness, and many rich people feel an emptiness inside...

Tom has a lovely family, two young boys and a loving wife. He gets to spend a good amount of time with them, and of course, they can have anything they want, because money is no object. His boys play at his very own 360 play – 10 times the size of the one in Stevenage. And his wife regularly goes shopping in Paris and Milan, they have everything.

Tom's middle name is named after some *god* of wisdom. But Tom didn't just get lucky. He worked hard in school, he worked hard in his first job, quick to get promotions, he has always earned what he's got, he did it himself!

You'd want your kids to follow in his footsteps!

But, there's one thing Tom Nebuchadnezzar Clarke is lacking, I wonder if you worked out what it is. Tom doesn't know, doesn't have: the Lord.

He gives money to charity, he's even set up a huge charitable foundation which gives away millions of pounds a year, but he doesn't have any personal relationship with the lord.

In fact, Tom is *very far* from the Lord, because he doesn't think he needs him – at all, and has no space in his life for him. He is totally self-reliant, and he's happy. You might be able to think of people you know like that, who just don't think they need God at all.

And King Nebuchadnezzar was like that. But this chapter, Daniel 4, is a huge encouragement for us. Imagine Tom Nebuchadnezzar Clarke became a Christian, and he decided to pay every newspaper in this country, and every news website, to run a front page story.

Headline: How I came to Jesus, by Tom Clarke.

Subheading: The lord be with you all: the story about how Jesus called me.

Wouldn't that be fantastic? Wouldn't that encourage you.

You'd think – Wow, if the Lord can save *him*, he can save anyone!

And that's what's going on in v1 when it says

“King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: 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.” It's a press release!

We're going to spend most of our time thinking about just how amazing it is that the Lord saved Nebuchadnezzar. Our first two points are about that.

And we'll finish by learning from Daniel, who is a good example for *us* with how (just like God) he is so loving to the lost.

Firstly though

1. No one is beyond saving.

Last week we saw God rescue his faithful people, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who trusted him; this week we see the rescue of an enemy, one who stood against God. I hope that makes you think "Wow what a great God we follow" – who even saves his enemies! What love that takes.

We're supposed to think that king Nebuchadnezzar is extremely lost, extremely far from God, and that if God can save him, he can save anyone. If Nebuchadnezzar who is <<this far>> from God can be saved, my friend definitely can be.

If you shut them, open your bibles back to the end of Chapter 3.

v28 "Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!

They trusted in [God] and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

But listen to what King Nebuchadnezzar says at the end there:

29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

At the start of chapter 3 he was ranting and raving about how everyone should worship *him*, he threatened to kill people.

After this amazing display of power from God, and an amazing rescue, Nebuchadnezzar is still ranting and raving and threatening to kill people, still thinking he's at the centre!

And that, to add to what had come before. In Chapter 1 Nebuchadnezzar had seen greater wisdom in Daniel and his friends, even in their youth, than in his own advisors.

That was a whisper from God

In chapter 2, Daniel was able, with God's help, to not only interpret a dream for the king, but actually tell him what it was in the first place!!

That's God speaking directly to Nebuchadnezzar, but he doesn't *really* hear – Nebuchadnezzar needs to say "there is no other God" but he doesn't, and he soon forgets.

In Chapter 3, God challenges Nebuchadnezzar, his talking becomes a shout, and God wins, he makes Nebuchadnezzar look silly – as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego survive the fiery furnace.

However, although Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God, in a sense, he still thinks he is at the centre, he will not personally respond.

He won't say "I will personally worship, submit to and follow God"

All this happens over quite a number of years, Daniel must have been tearing his hair out.

Again and again thinking, “ugh the king!” - “What is this man doing now”!!

In v4 we see Nebuchadnezzar’s own summary of how lost he is.

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, **contented** and **prosperous**” – He’s really *really* lost, because, he is living without God in his life, and he is very *very* happy.

This is an utterly disastrous situation to be in.

If your friend, or the person you love, is unhappy with their life without God: well there is hope they might seek him- but if they are living without God, and really contented, settled and happy in their lives, well it’s very difficult! They are lost!

And Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t think he needs God, because he is so great: v30 “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by **my** mighty power and for the glory of **my** majesty?” – Like Tom surveying *his* square mile of the city.

What foolishness! When everything we have, everything good, our own natural talents, our friends, our opportunities, all come from God! What a fool!

Sure, Babylon was great! Not only the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the ancient wonders of the world, but huge, grand civic buildings, temples and a wall so massive and renowned that Herodotus tells us that chariots of 4 horses strong could turn around on top of the wall!

None of us can look at our lives and think – “look how well I have done” – and have anything to compare to Nebuchadnezzar, none of our friends can do that either – he was perhaps the most powerful and grandiose man on earth.

And that’s the point.

If Nebuchadnezzar can turn to follow God, then anyone can – he is the extreme case, and God can even cause him to follow him.

He finishes the chapter v35

“God 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?”

“I, Nebuchadnezzar” v37 “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”

Praise God, no one is beyond saving, not Nebuchadnezzar, not you, and not your loved ones.

But secondly,

2. Sometimes God needs to take things away

This should be a sobering point for us.

God should be the most precious thing in our life, the most precious thing in our hearts.

Anything more precious is a challenger, and sometimes God needs to take those things away from us.

I wonder if you noticed v5 in our passage. The place where we see the great man Nebuchadnezzar, really afraid.

Nebuchadnezzar has this dream of a tree, a majestic, large, strong tree – a place where the animals sheltered and found food. The tree which was to be chopped down.

And how does he feel about it? He is genuinely afraid.

The commentaries say that a tree was a common image used to talk about Babylonian kings. Nebuchadnezzar's advisors knew probably what the dream meant, and so did Nebuchadnezzar. He is terrified because this dream means he is going to lose the thing which is most precious to him. Imagine Nebuchadnezzar, lying in his bed, thinking over, if this dream is true, I, the tree, will lose my power, my influence, my glory, my kingdom – that's what's most important to him so he's afraid!

Daniel comes and interprets the dream – he is brave, *and kind*, and tells the king the truth – more about that later.

But what happens, 1 year later – v29 the king has *forgotten* the warning, he's back, just the same, strolling on his palace roof – “look at what I've done, what I have built by my mighty power and for my glory”

And the voice comes from heaven “you fool” v31 “[Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you”](#) and he loses his mind, acts like an animal, and is driven away from society.

Like the rich CEO being taken away to a mental hospital, away from his empire and his family.

Historians were sceptical, but we have writings from a Greek man Aby-denus speaking of Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious disappearance for a few years just before the end of his reign – and then we found another record written by Nebuchadnezzar himself, describing the time he had no joy and didn't worship his God Mero-dach any longer

People who don't follow Jesus often assume that if God is there, he is weak. They assume that if he is there, we can set the limits of his involvement in our lives.

Nebuchadnezzar learnt that that's not true. God wants all of us. Jesus says love the lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. And when God takes everything Nebuchadnezzar *has* and *loves* away from him, it is a wonderful act of kindness!

You either build your life on the Rock that is Christ, or one day you come crashing against it. For Nebuchadnezzar it wasn't too late.

God warned him, he didn't listen; he shock him, it wasn't enough; so he broke him – and wonderfully, Nebuchadnezzar came to God.

You must come like a *child* to God, like *subject* to his throne, like a *beggar* to a rich man. And Nebuchadnezzar needed *a lot* of help to do that. Sometimes God needs to take things away.

And for many of us, this should be a challenge to how we think:

I wonder how closely our ambitions line up with some part of my description of Tom Nebuchadnezzar Clarke?

Ambitions for ourselves, or ambitions for our kids.

Perhaps not all of it, not the money perhaps, but just the family side. Not being the greatest, but just comfortable.

So we can say “I was at home, contented” And yet, we forget to include the lord in the picture. You could have everything, and yet have nothing. It looked like Nebuchadnezzar lost everything! But the reality is - comparatively he lost nothing, and gained everything. If we gain Christ, we gain the whole world!

Now you have to be careful, when we see someone lose something precious to them, someone, or their life crashes we **cannot** say God has taken it away because it was an idol for them. It isn't always. We live in a broken world full of suffering.

And for yourselves, if you're a Christian, and something really really difficult happens, and you wonder “Is God punishing me?” then the answer is NO! Jesus took all your punishment on the cross, there was none left, you will never ever ever ever face God's punishment, it's already dealt with. God won't punish the same sin twice. You can be sure you are never punished.

So when we see someone lose something, we cannot say it was necessarily an idol for them. But we *can* say, every time that happens, that person has an opportunity to look to God, whatever the hardship, to seek him.

That they would gain more than they lose.

Look again at that final verse, v37. Take out Nebuchadnezzar's name put your own name in, or your friends name – “Now I ___ 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.”

Wonderful words, and sometimes God needs to take things away so that we'd say that.

Now, finally – let's consider Daniel's love for Nebuchadnezzar: And my third point:

3. Our love for the lost should be beyond what is reasonable

In v27 Daniel finishes his explanation to the king.

“Your Majesty, [*please*] accept my advice: 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” Daniel really cares for Nebuchadnezzar, when after all the years, and all he's done (I mean he tried to burn Daniel's closest friends alive!) Nebuchadnezzar doesn't deserve that.

But just like God never gives up on Nebuchadnezzar and shows kindness to him, Daniel does too – and that is the calling on our lives! How we should be with our friends and loved ones.

All Nebuchadnezzar's advisors are afraid of talking to him about the dream. And in v19 we see Daniel is afraid too.

Afraid because it was pretty common in those days to shoot the messenger – and Nebuchadnezzar seemed to enjoy killing people.

But that's not the only reason Daniel is afraid – he really cares for Nebuchadnezzar, and he feels some of his pain.

He says “My lord, if *only* the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” - “I'm so sorry”, says Daniel, he's sad!

Astonishing really.

Nebuchadnezzar stands up against the lord with all he is, and Daniel loves the lord. But I think Daniel is patient and caring towards Nebuchadnezzar, because the Lord is patient and caring towards Nebuchadnezzar. And he walks closely with the lord.

Our love for the lost, also, should be beyond what is reasonable – when we meet Tom Clarke type characters – people who don't think they need the lord, people who are lost – we are to love them in ways that are far beyond what is reasonable.

Treating them as if they'd never *said* that, or *done* that, giving them a fresh start, over and over again. May the lord give us patience, and that kind of love.

It won't mean by the way, that we don't challenge people, and that we don't speak up.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar what the dream meant! He made it really clear that Nebuchadnezzar needed to deal with God – that God was his ultimate adversary, not Daniel, but Daniel was if you like, a faithful messenger, a faithful witness.

When you talk to people about God, about faith and about Jesus Christ, tell them the whole truth, confront them if necessary – but do that in order to help them to deal with God – to be ready to meet him on that final day. When everything from this world will count for nothing, except for whether you have Christ.

We can feel afraid can't we. I felt nervous the other day talking to a complete stranger, what will she think of me if I say the activity holiday I'm helping to run is actually all about teaching people about Jesus! she'll think I'm very extreme, I seemed like a nice young man, but actually I'm quite strange.

How much harder can it be when we stand to lose something in relationships with friends, or those close to us. when we stand to lose out at work or whatever it may be.

There are loads of reasons to be afraid – and Daniel was afraid v19, it doesn't say he didn't feel it! But he did speak up! And if all the things of the world ultimately count for nothing compared to knowing Christ, then we should speak up too. “have you ever thought about coming to Church?” “do you wonder what God thinks about that”

What a great example Daniel is to us, in the face of such an unreasonable man, Daniel's love goes far beyond what is reasonable! So may the lord inspire us, that no one is beyond saving, so great is his love, so that we too would love others, especially when the lord needs to take things away from them.