

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

Belshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air— ²² 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.

²³ “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.’

²⁴ “This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the 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 he wishes. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, be pleased to 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.”

²⁸ All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ 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?”

³¹ 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. ³² 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.”

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from 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.

³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward 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.

³⁵ 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?”

³⁶ 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. ³⁷ 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.
(NIV84)

Theme: God Scatters the Proud but lifts up the humble.

The Magnificat, or the Song of Mary, is often associated with the season of Advent. And for good reason. Mary said these words when she visited her relative Elizabeth months before Jesus was born. But it not only fits that major theme of Advent about waiting for Christ's coming, but also another major theme of Advent—repentance. Advent is a season where we repent of our sins with humble hearts as we wait for the coming of Christ.

There are a couple lines of Mary's song in particular that fit our theme today. From verses 51 and 52 of Luke 1: **He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.**

That is exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He is proof that God humbles the proud but lifts up the humble.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. Multiple times he led his army against Jerusalem. Eventually, they would destroy the city. God used Nebuchadnezzar as his axe to cut down the unrepentant tree of David. When he destroyed Jerusalem he brought an end to the reign of David's descendants. Nebuchadnezzar killed many people, took others captive, and tore down the temple. Among the people he brought to Babylon was a man by the name of Daniel. He was impressed with Daniel and made him one of the chief officials in all the land.

Make no mistake about it, Nebuchadnezzar was a wicked man. He didn't believe in the Lord, nor did he care about him or his commands—that's why he destroyed his country and killed his people. In chapter three Daniel records the story of the three men in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar decided make out of gold a 90 feet tall statue of himself. He then commanded everyone that when they heard music being played they were to bow and worship the statue. In other words Nebuchadnezzar wanted his people to worship him as god. But three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused. They would not sin against the 1st commandment and worship that idol. So Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown in to a blazing furnace. He wanted to them die a horrible and agonizing death for not worshipping him as a god.

You may remember that God saved the three men who weren't affected by the fire in the least. This caused Nebuchadnezzar to praise God for his great power. He also issued an edict that no one could say anything bad about the Lord. But Nebuchadnezzar missed the point. He didn't repent of his own sin. He still remained a wicked unbeliever. And an arrogant one at that. Anyone who makes a 90-foot gold statue of himself has to be conceited. So God sent him a dream. And he gave Daniel the ability to interpret that dream. The interpretation of that dream wasn't a positive one for Nebuchadnezzar. His dream was about a great and mighty tree. But an angel gave a command for that tree to be cut down with only a stump left. Nebuchadnezzar was that tree. Daniel told him that God would cut him and his monarchy down—leaving only a stump. God also told Nebuchadnezzar that he would, **be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven.** In other words, Nebuchadnezzar would go insane. He would act like and live with wild animals. The food of this great and majestic king—the world's greatest power, would be grass just like a cow.

But Nebuchadnezzar refused to listen to God's prophecy. After all, he was the most powerful person in the world. Why would he think that he would be humbled by God and forced to live with animals? So he remained in his pride and arrogance. A year later he was walking on the top of his palace. And 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?** Nebuchadnezzar didn't get it. He bragged about what he had done. He bragged and boasted about himself. And so he was punished. The prophecy was fulfilled. While the words were still on his lips, God's judgment was upon him. God spoke from heaven to him. And then he became insane. He lived with the wild animals. He ate with the cattle. His hair grew long. And his nails were like the claws of a bird. He refused to repent and turn to God. And so he lost his monarchy. God also calls on us to repent. That was the message of John the Baptist. He prepared for the way for Christ. So he preached, **Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.** On the day of Pentecost when the believers began waiting for the return of Christ, Peter preached the same thing. **Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may**

be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

That is what we do during the season of Advent. We repent of our sins as we wait for the Lord. We repent of all our sins—including the sin of pride and arrogance. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we love to give ourselves credit. We believe that what we have, the position we hold in life and so on is due to our talents, our hard work, or other things we have done. We often fail to acknowledge that God has given us all of these blessings. And so we repent of our sins—acknowledging that we deserve his God’s wrath and punishment.

So we repent of our sins in anticipation of his coming. But that goes against our nature. To repent indicates that we admit that we are sinners. But we don’t like to admit that we are wrong. We believe that we are always right, and everyone else is wrong. Repentance means to have a deep-felt sorrow over one’s sins. You have sinking feeling no matter what it was because you went against the will of God. Instead, many times, when we admit we did wrong, we play it off like it’s no big deal—especially if everyone else is doing it.

Repentance is a changing of one’s mind. What you used to do, you no longer want to do—rather you want to stop that sin and turn to God. Repentance also includes trusting in Jesus for forgiveness. Notice how Peter told us to repent so times of refreshing may come from the Lord. We are refreshed when God forgives our sins. Repentance is a belief that despite our numerous and wicked sins God doesn’t count against us.

There is one more thing to talk about in relation to repentance. Our actions. While our works do not earn us forgiveness, they are fruits of repentance. If we feel horrible because of what we did, we’d want to stop doing it. We’d stop sinning and do what is right. That is why John the Baptist urged the Pharisees, **Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** If we are truly sorrowful and truly repent, than we’d do what is right. But too often we want to receive the forgiveness of sins without changing. We want our cake and eat it to. We want to keep on doing whatever we want to do, while still receiving the forgiveness of sins. Rather, when we are truly sorry over our sins we turn from our evil ways and strive to do what is right. What we do is a result of our repentance.

Just take a look at Nebuchadnezzar. After a year, he finally came to his senses. He recognized that he was proud and arrogant. That God

ruled over all things and that God put kings of the earth in their positions. So he repented. He praised God and glorified his name. He wrote, **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?”**

Nebuchadnezzar repented of his sin of arrogance and pride. He freely proclaimed God and the lord over all. And so God forgave him. He restored Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity. He gave him back his power. Nobles and other high end officials once again sought his counsel. But that’s not all. God blessed him with even more. As Nebuchadnezzar said, **(I) became even greater than before.** God, in his grace, not only forgave Nebuchadnezzar, but he gave him back everything he took away. And on top of it all—he gave him more than he ever had before.

God promises to do the same for us. He will forgive us just as he forgave Nebuchadnezzar. God forgives the sins of those who repent. Not because we are such good people. It’s not because we made amends by doing what was right. But because Christ paid the price for our sins already. He faced the condemnation that we deserved. It is truly a gift of his grace that God forgives us. He doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve.

When God gives us the forgiveness of sins he restores us to a right relationship with him. To the way we were before we fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. Through his Son, in his sight we are pure and holy just like he created us. But that’s not all. Just as God blessed Nebuchadnezzar with more and made him greater than he was before, God will also make us greater. For he will take us to heaven. He has given us the free gift of eternal life. And there in heaven we will have a perfect life—free from sin and its effects. We will be greater than before for we will share in Christ’s glory as we live with him forever.

Notice what Nebuchadnezzar did when he was forgiven. He praised and glorified God. And he told others what he had done.

Nebuchadnezzar told everyone about his sin, repentance, and most importantly God’s grace in forgiving him. And so we do the same. We praise and glorify God. He didn’t hold us to our sins forever. He

gave us what we needed to have, but couldn't earn for ourselves. This is an act of God's grace—not something we have earned or deserved. So we praise God and we tell others what he has done.

And we strive to live a God pleasing life. Sure we know full well that we will fail and sin against him. But we still strive to do what is good and right in his sight. We do this not to earn God's favor. Not in hopes that he would have compassion on us and save us because we are good people, are sincere, because we always try to do what is right. Rather we strive to obey him out of love and thanks. It is out of love that we obey God. For he has freely forgiven us. So we willingly strive to obey him in all things out thanks to him.

I'm not sure if Mary had Nebuchadnezzar in mind when she said the words of the Magnificat. But they work well to summarize his story. But not just his story, but the story of all us. Sin and grace. Sin on our part and grace on God's to forgive the penitent. This advent season let us repent of our wickedness and turn to God, knowing that he will have compassion on us and give us free forgiveness through his promised Son. Amen.