

God Rules but Man Chooses

#0549

Study by W.D. Frazee

There is something very interesting about the fourth chapter of Daniel. Do you know who wrote the fourth chapter of Daniel? Daniel didn't write the fourth chapter. Not a word of it. He copied it down. He put it in his book, but the name of the man who wrote the fourth chapter of Daniel is in the first line. What is his name? Nebuchadnezzar.

I wonder who he was writing to?

"Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth..." Daniel 4:1

Does that take anybody in here this morning? We are all in on this, aren't we? Yes.

"Peace be multiplied unto you" *Ibid*.

That is a good message, isn't it? Yes.

"I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me" Daniel 4:2.

Who is this talking? Nebuchadnezzar. And who was he? The king of Babylon. Now you know in all ages Babylon has been the enemy of God, and His people, and His church. It thrills my soul, friends, to know that the hand of God reached right down into that citadel of sin, that fort of the enemy, that headquarters of the Devil and pulled out the king of Babylon. One of these days, you and I, as we walk the streets of gold we will see two men walking down the street arm in arm, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Isn't it wonderful? Nebuchadnezzar is going to be there forever, a star in the crown of Jesus.

I will tell you it took something to get him, friends. You know much of the book of Daniel is concerned with the efforts of God to reach Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. Through Jeremiah the Lord says, We would have healed Babylon but she is not healed. God gave three great messages to Babylon as He is giving three great messages to this last generation. In the second chapter He showed Himself as the revealer. In the third chapter as the Deliverer, and in the fourth chapter, the one we are studying, as the Ruler. Three great messages.

Each one had its effect on Nebuchadnezzar. You remember, he was so impressed with Daniel's interpreting the dream that he gave glory to the God of heaven. But after a little time the impression went away except that he remembered

about the image and decided that he would make one, not just with the head of gold, but with what? All of gold to show that Babylon would last forever.

His cruel heart found expression in that awful decree that whoever would not worship that golden image would be roasted in the furnace. But God spoke to his heart through three young men that weren't afraid to stand up when all the world was bowed down. And before that day was over the king of Babylon was on his knees acknowledging that there is no god that can deliver after this sort.

You would think that would have settled him, wouldn't you? But no, he was a hard customer—a difficult case. There may be some difficult case here this morning, my friends. I want to assure you that God loves you and God will go to any length to teach you this lesson, the lesson that is in this fourth chapter.

Now you will find it repeated here several times. Again and again it comes back like the refrain of a song, “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” You will find that in the seventeenth verse, the twenty-fifth verse, and the thirty-second verse. And you will find similar thoughts scattered elsewhere in the chapter.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar, in spite of all the God had showed him in the second chapter and the third chapter, he still thought of himself as somebody. And God in mercy gave him this dream in the fourth chapter of the great tree. Remember, the whole fourth chapter is the king himself telling it. Nebuchadnezzar saw this great tree, so big that the fowls of the heavens got there fruit from its branches, and the beasts of the field gathered under its shade. A wonderful tree. Then he heard the decree of heaven, “Cut down the tree, but leave the stump until seven times pass over until the living know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.”

Daniel was called in to interpret this dream. He told him. He said, “You are the tree, and unless you get busy and take a different attitude, turn from sin and let God rule your life, you will have to learn it the hard way.”

That is what happened. He went on. Finally one day he was strutting out there on that mighty wall of that wonderful city and looking out over that vast expanse of splendor, he said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” Daniel 4:30.

God said, This is done. O Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken. The kingdom is departed from you. I am going to drive you from men.

He lost his reason. He was driven out a way. And some of you will understand when I say when I tell you that he was put on a reconditioning program. He got plenty of exercise out there. Sunlight. Fresh air. He was on a vegetarian program. Read about it there. Quite different from what he had been used to in his palace. He even had some hydrotherapy. You can read about that. It says he was wet with the dews of heaven. And out that there with those eight remedies all converged on him, even then it took seven years, my friends.

You know, we human beings, we tend to want quick solutions to thorny problems. The man that is the hero in medicine is the one that can discover something that you shoot it into you, and right now the results of all your sins are gone, and you can keep right on sinning.

But God had something more important to do in Nebuchadnezzar. And it took seven years to do it. Day after day, week after week, year after year went by and still that man without his reason was out there with the beasts of the field. But God was speaking to him in the sunlight. God was working with him as he listened to the songs of the birds, and as he mingled with nature. He was clear away from all the cares and affairs of state, entirely away from the influence of those magicians and sorcerers. Clear away from anything that would suggest the glory of man in his own works.

Finally, he said at the end of the days:

"I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High" Daniel 4:34.

Thank God, he could look back over his whole life now and know that God had been dealing with him.

"...and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou Daniel 4:34-35.

The king of Babylon had learned that the King of the universe was above all. That God is running things.

Have you learned it? That God rules? God reigns?

"...He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth" Daniel 4:35

Now there is another fact besides this fact. If this were all there were to it, my friends, there would be some things we would see around us that wouldn't be here. There wouldn't be any dying men in Vietnam this morning. God doesn't want people to suffer. Does He?

There wouldn't be any little robins getting pecked to death by bluejays. There wouldn't be any thorns on the roses. There wouldn't be any pain or sickness or death if God had His way.

Oh but you say, "I thought you just got through with the fact that God is running things, that God does rule, that He is in charge, that He is King of the universe?" Yes.

That is true. It is all true. But it isn't all there is to the truth. Let's turn now to Revelation the third chapter, and the twentieth verse. You know, I like to study the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation together, don't you? We have just heard from Daniel now on the rulership of God. Now we are going over to the book of Revelation. We are going to find another fact to put with this.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" Revelation 3:20.

Who is this standing at the door? Jesus. He is the King of the universe. He is the One that Nebuchadnezzar learned to bow to. Is that right?

"Do you mean," someone is thinking, "Do you mean to say that this One that rules the universe and brings kings to terms, brings them under dominion, that somewhere He is standing at somebody's door and knocking?"

"Whose door?"

Yours and mine.

"Well, what does He want?"

To come in.

"Well, why doesn't He come in? If He runs everything and rules everything, why doesn't He come in?"

Ah, here is the mystery, my friends. That the Omnipotent One waits helpless while you and I make up our minds. That is right. Here is this other fact that goes with the first great fact. The first great fact is that God rules. The second great fact is man chooses. And both are true. And the wonderful thing is, friends, God is so wise and so wonderful that He can keep both facts facts, He can keep both truths true.

I am not wise enough to do it. But He is. Eventually, because He is King over all, this whole universe will be at peace. But God has time. He can wait while the beings He has chosen to give the power of choice to exercise that choice and make up their minds. He hasn't abdicated, but He has waited. He has never turned this world over to you. He is still the King. But He will give you a chance to decide what your relationship to His kingship will be. He will never force you.

Now because both these facts are facts, both these truths are true there is a sense in which man can limit God. Let's turn over to the seventy-eighth Psalm and read it right out of the Bible. When I say this, I do not mean that God is not all-powerful. No. But God, who does have all power, has chosen to limit Himself. If He

can do anything, then He can choose to limit Himself. Can't He? Yes. The seventy-eighth Psalm, and the forty-first verse. Speaking of Israel in the desert.

“Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” Psalms 78:41.

Tell me, friends, did something get done there in the desert? Oh yes. Did God do some things for them? Yes. And through them? Yes. They got out of Egypt. That was wonderful. They got through the Red Sea. That was wonderful. They were fed for forty years miraculously by manna. That was wonderful. They found water flowing from rocks. That was a mighty miracle. God spoke to them from Sinai and wrote His law on the tables of stone. Guided by divine instruction they built the sanctuary, the dwelling place of God. The fiery pillar was above them all the way those forty years.

Friends, those are wonderful things. Aren't they? Nevertheless, they limited the Holy One of Israel. Oh, there was so much He wanted to do for them, and with them, and through them that didn't get done. Why? God was on His throne, but He was also at the door knocking. And Israel, in the desert, refused to let the full benefit of His universal sovereignty be exercised in their behalf.

This seventy-eighth Psalm is talking about the experience about diet. God wanted to give them the very best in diet. They insisted on second best. And may I say, God went along. He didn't abdicate. But to a certain extent, He let them have their way. As the 106th Psalm says, “He gave them their request, but sent leanness unto their souls.”

And so it was all along the way, friends, when they asked for a king, an earthly king that they could see. How Samuel wept! God said, “Samuel, they haven't rejected you, they have rejected Me.” But God didn't abdicate. He still kept control, and yet, because of that earthly king there were some things that God longed to do for them that didn't get done. Isn't that true?

My dear friends, I bring it to your soul this morning. I say to you as individuals, as institutions, human beings are still needing this two great facts. I ask you, as individuals, and I ask this church, this institution, what will you do with these two great facts? I tell you this, you cannot successfully fight against God and win. No. But you can limit Him for the present. You can delay His program. You cannot eternally frustrate Him. You cannot forever defeat His plans. But you can dilly-dally. And your life can be, not the demonstration of His infinite power, but the demonstration of how far God will let you go in limiting Him and thus give exhibition of His longsuffering, His tender mercy.

Oh friends, do you know there have been very few people in this world that have let God do all He wanted to do with them? Very few. Even of those who at last find mercy as the thief did there on the cross, and are rescued as exhibitions of the mercy of God in pursuing men to the end. Yes. People like that.

But, oh, how few, who, like Enoch, walk with God and let God take them all the way home. But, friends, this last generation is going to see a whole group of

people, yes, thank God, at last the entire church that will walk with God as Enoch did and let God have His ultimate way, His infinite way fully in their lives. And do it, mark the point, without in any way violating their power of choice.

This that I have just read from Revelation is a part of the Laodicean message, and who is that to? The last church. You and me. And to us Jesus, the King of the universe, says, "Oh I am standing at the door. Your door, knocking. I am the King. I can do anything." Why not let that infinite power be exercised in your behalf?

And I say, "Lord, sure. That is fine."

Ah, but He says, "I am waiting."

"What are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for you to choose what I have chosen. I am waiting for you to decide what I have decided."

This is the meaning of Calvary, my friends, as the Sovereign of the universe hangs with pierced hands and feet while men and devils exhibit what sin can do, and the broken heart of Christ shows what God will do to reveal His love.

Christ on the cross was still the King of the universe. But oh how He longs to find some way to get human hearts to open up. You know, we are told that the man who painted that wonderful picture of Jesus standing at the door knocking, you have seen it. That when He completed the picture He invited a number of His close friends to view it. And as they stood there looking at it, finally, one man said, "Friend, haven't you forgotten something?"

"What?" he said.

"The latch on the door."

"Oh," he said, "The latch is on the inside."

The latch is on the inside. If that door ever gets opened, you will open it. Why not do it right now? What do you say? Why not do it right now? There is a stranger who stands at the door of your heart. But you must open the door. And think of the possibility as all the potential of the King of the universe is joined with your little human choice. No wonder inspiration says, "As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent." The King of the universe chooses to exercise through you, as an individual, and through you, as a group if we will cooperate, His sovereign will. His eternal purpose. His glorious plan.

Friends, let's learn what the king of Babylon learned. What do you say?

"...the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" ... "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand" Daniel 4:17, 35.

Why not take that will that He has given us, that strong will, that stubborn will that has so often exhibited itself in closing the door and keeping it closed? What has it gained? What has it accomplished? You may look as Nebuchadnezzar did at what you have built up and say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" Ah, friends, none of us has begun to get together what Nebuchadnezzar had. But his pride must come down. His selfishness must be put aside. His arrogance must be humbled. From within that hard heart, that stubborn heart. From within that heart the door must open that the King of the universe might come in.

Friends, the King of heaven and the king of Babylon finally got together. What about you and me? Shall we say this morning, "Dear Lord, there is just one thing I want and that is what You want. There is just one King that I want to rule on the throne of my heart, not self, but Jesus."?

I wonder if there is anybody here this morning that as we study these solemn, yet sweet and precious things from Daniel and Revelation, you realize that in some way or ways you have been limiting God and this morning you want to give Him everything that all His plans may be gloriously fulfilled to the praise of the glory of His grace? If there is somebody like that would you just stand in silent acknowledgment of the conviction of His Spirit and the response of your heart?

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W.D. Frazee Sermons
P.O. Box 129, Wildwood, GA 30757
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755
www.WDFsermons.org
support@WDFsermons.org