

“Humble Pie”

Allan Pole on Saturday evening, December 11th, 2021



Theme: Let us humble ourselves before the Lord does it for us.

Text: Daniel 4:1-37

Here's a thought: Someone has advised, "Humility learned now helps us avoid humiliation later."

James Matthew Barrie was born in 1860 in Scotland. He was the ninth child of ten (two of whom died before he was born). He was a small child and drew attention to himself with storytelling. When James Barrie was six years old, his elder brother David (their mother's favourite) died in an ice-skating accident on the day before his 14th birthday. This left his mother devastated, and Barrie tried to fill David's place in his mother's attentions, even wearing David's clothes and whistling in the manner that he did. One time, Barrie entered her room and heard her say, "Is that you?" "I thought it was the dead boy she was speaking to", wrote Barrie in his biographical account of his mother Margaret Ogilvy, "and I said in a little lonely voice, 'No, it's no' him, it's just me.'" Barrie's mother found comfort in the fact that her dead son would remain a boy forever, never to grow up and leave her.

As a result of his childhood trauma, Barrie suffered from psychogenic or stress dwarfism so he remained unusually short. I could relate to him in junior high because most of the girls were taller than me. Thankfully, I grew to average height in high school. James Matthew Barrie is best known as the creator of Peter Pan.

Knowing this about J.M. Barrie helps us appreciate the significance of his conclusion: "Life is a long lesson in humility."

We read of how the most powerful king on the planet was humbled in Daniel 4:1-37:

1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! 2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from

generation to generation. 4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. 5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. 6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. 7 When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. 8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) 9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. 10 These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. 11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. 12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. 13 "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times [years] pass by for him. 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 the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.' 18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." 19 Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar 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. NIV

The Bible provides many opportunities for us to learn powerful, profound life lessons from the people on its pages. Let's look at a couple of these lessons today.

Humble Pie is Not Delicious



King Nebuchadnezzar issues this declaration, looking back on his experience with the Most High God who performed miraculous signs and wonders for him. With unusual vulnerability, he declares of the Lord, “How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” How did the ruler of the world’s most powerful empire at the time reach this place of humble confession?

God warned King Nebuchadnezzar through his dream and Daniel’s interpretation that He would drive Neb into the wilderness. Here was another opportunity for the king to humble himself and surrender to the God of heaven and earth, but he refused. The Lord in His mercy gave the king a whole year, but there was no change. Finally, when the king boasted of his conquests and accomplishments, the Lord followed through with His warning and drove him into the wilderness.

God uses the wilderness to break us and empty us. The Bible refers to the wilderness more than we might realize. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness after he killed an Egyptian and fled from Pharaoh (Acts 7:30). Moses must have wondered about the purpose of his life, but the Lord eventually appeared to him in a burning bush and called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1-4:17). After growing up as a prince in Pharaoh’s household, the Lord took Moses through His preparation for leadership.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt with great signs and wonders so they could settle in Canaan - the land promised to their forefather, Abraham. What could have taken as little as *11 days*, however, took them *40 years*! They wandered in the wilderness while the Lord dealt with their pride, rebellion and yearning to return to slavery. The Lord could take the people out of Egypt in a few short hours but it was quite a different task to take Egypt out of the people. Only a handful whose hearts were pure lived through the 40 years to see the Promised Land.

The Lord directed the prophet Samuel to anoint young David as king over Israel, but it took about 15 years for him to become king. During this time, David killed the giant Goliath, fought many battles and fled from King Saul. The Lord did a deep work in David’s heart and taught him many valuable lessons while he waited, obeyed and cooperated. He had opportunities to seize power before his time but he refused to take matters into his own hands.

Someone has advised, "Humility learned now helps us avoid humiliation later."

John the Baptist lived and preached in the wilderness. He prepared the way for the Messiah by calling people to repentance. John did not go into the cities, towns and villages to declare his message. With great humility John let his followers turn to Jesus while he announced, "He must increase but I must decrease." John lived in the wilderness and he called his listeners to embrace the humility and brokenness of the wilderness with him.

The Apostle Paul went through his own wilderness experiences before he wrote Philippians 2:1-11:

1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. NIV

If we spend our whole lives in the city with crowds of people, we tend to forget how vast the wilderness can be. We can get so caught up with the busyness of everyday life, but when we go to the wide-open spaces, we are reminded of how small we are. I have looked across a desert in Namibia. I have driven through the Rocky Mountains. In these moments I am humbled. I have had my dreams shattered. I have mourned the deaths of family members and friends. I have made many mistakes. I have been let down, rejected and abandoned. In these moments I am broken and humbled. These are painful moments. These experiences can leave scars. I do not ask for them yet life shares up generous helpings of humble pie.

What happens inside when you look back on painful experiences in your life? Is there anger? Is there disappointment? Is there sadness?

Humble Pie is Not Delicious

But Humble Pie is Nutritious



King Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel are a study in contrasts. We are told in Daniel 1:1-5 that King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem. They stole treasures from the Jews' beloved temple and captured King Jehoiakim and the wealthy people of nobility. Young Daniel was among this upper crust of Jewish society. He was without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was taught the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years so they could enter the king's service. Daniel went through a wilderness experience early in life. He had *everyone* and *everything* near and dear to him taken away. He could have been filled with bitterness. He could have done everything possible to undermine King Nebuchadnezzar and the mighty Babylonian empire. He could have kept to himself and hidden in fear.

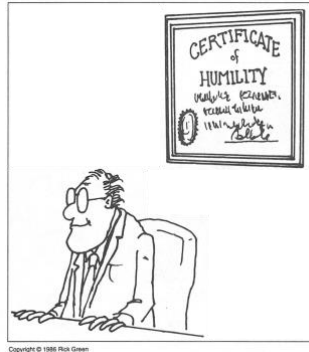
Daniel was fed a large, continuous helping of humble pie. Even though it was not delicious he recognized it was nutritious. He accepted the people and circumstances he could not change and focused on who and what he could change. Imagine how Daniel felt when he heard the king say in Daniel 4:9:

Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. NIV

Daniel was given the name "Belteshazzar" in chapter 1:7, thus he even had his name taken from him! I don't know about you, but this would be a rock in my sandal every time I heard it. I would want to correct people and say, "No, no. My name is not Belteshazzar. My name is Daniel." However, he did not correct King Nebuchadnezzar when he called him this name. Instead, he swallowed his pride and had another bite of humble pie each time he heard his Babylonian name.

It would have been like nails on a chalkboard for me to hear the king say, "I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you." I would want to chastise him: "No, your majesty, I have the Spirit of the Holy *God* (not gods) in me!" Daniel chose his battles wisely. He knew when to speak up and when to remain silent. He discerned when to correct and when to let it go. He had eaten humble pie and grown stronger from it. The result of such humility, wisdom and perseverance was a life shining brightly in a dark time in Jewish history.

Humility is a funny thing. The moment you think you have it is the moment it disappears ...



James 4:10, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” NIV

The Apostle Peter went through his own wilderness experience when he denied knowing Jesus three times on the night he was betrayed. The Lord restored the once brash, self-confident Peter and went on to empower him and use him in incredible ways. This same, but dramatically different, follower of Jesus writes in 1 Peter 5:5-6:

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. NIV

Nebuchadnezzar was driven from his throne and lived like an animal in the wilderness for seven long years! Finally, the turnaround comes as the king describes in Daniel 4:36-37:

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. NIV

Humble pie is a healthy pie. The Lord has a unique way of working all things together for good. What will you do with the painful experiences in your life? Will you choose to let them make you *bitter* or *better*?

Humble Pie is Not Delicious But Humble Pie is Nutritious

Let us humble ourselves before the Lord does it for us.

