WHEN GOD TESTS YOU WITH SUCCESS

A few years ago, celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain killed himself in a luxury hotel room in France. He was a man who traveled the world meeting famous people, eating the finest foods that money could buy. He was wealthy and successful. I heard someone say on the radio last week that he had everything in the world to live for, except purpose.

We are continuing in our series No Compromise from the book of Daniel. We have talked a lot the past few weeks about pain and suffering. Sometimes the greatest problems we face in life are not a result of our failures, but of our successes. Have you ever seen success ruin a person? Of course, you have. It goes to their head. It changes their character. Like Anthony Bourdain, the news is full of stories of musicians or athletes or actors that became successful and then destroyed their lives through bad choices. For every nine people who can handle pain there is probably only one who can handle fame. Last week we talked about God's refining fire. Suffering can refine us, but so can success;

Proverbs 27:21 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.

Compliments and criticisms are kind of like chewing gum. You can chew on it a little but you have to be careful not to swallow it. Because both of them can really mess you up. Human beings are the only animal that God created that when you pat them on the back their head swells.

2500 years ago, Nebuchadnezzar was one of the most successful men on planet. His father had been the king of Babylon. He was a young general in his dad's army and he almost single handed had defeated the powerful Assyrian Empire. He returned to Babylon a conquering hero. When his father died, he became the next ruler. He expanded the Babylonian Empire in all directions. He made Babylon one of the most beautiful cities in the world. He built the hanging Gardens of Babylon for his wife which were called one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. They were compared to the pyramids in terms of their grandeur and quality.

However, Nebuchadnezzar had a problem and we talked about this last week. It was his pride. His life had seen one success after another so he was a proud man. Last week we talked about the fact that Nebuchadnezzar built a huge statue of himself because was not content to simply be called king, he wanted to be worshipped as a god as well.

The story picks up in chapter 4. Years have gone by and again, Nebuchadnezzar is given a very troubling dream. He calls his astrologers in to try and interpret his dream but they are unable to do it. Again, he calls for Daniel to interpret the dream for him.

Daniel 4:25-27 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.

Daniel tells the king that because of his pride, God was planning to remove him as king for a season. Nebuchadnezzar would lose his mind and behave like an animal.

However, there was good news. This discipline was avoidable. If the king would just humble himself and listen to God and honour Him with his successes then the fall could be avoided. Unfortunately, the king did nothing about this. He had the dream; he got the clear interpretation and then he immediately ignores it. He just went on living the way he had been. He failed the test of success.

Daniel 4:29-33 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.

Why didn't Nebuchadnezzar heed the warning that Daniel gave him? Why didn't he act on what he had been told? Too often we do the same three things that Nebuchadnezzar did;

a. We get Comfortable

Daniel 4:4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

This happens to all of us. When things are going good, we just get comfortable and complacent. Does this sound to you like somebody who is praying every day? Someone who is living a life of faith and trusting God for everything? When you are in pain you go through your day thinking 'God I need your help right now'. When things are going great you are thinking, 'Let's go to the beach.' Pleasure often pulls us away from God. When things are going good pride creeps in and we forget Him.

Remember the lesson of the whale; when you get to the top and you're ready to blow that's when they harpoon you. Be humble or you will stumble. The middle letter of pride is I. It is also the middle letter of sin. Pride is the sin that got Satan kicked out of Heaven. It is what made Eve eat the fruit in the garden. It is when we take our eyes off God and focus on ourselves.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 3:34 He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

If you struggle with pride in your life you need to address it soon. Pride places you on the opposite side of God, and that is not a good place to be.

b. We Ignore the Warning Signs

Often in your own life when things are going good you don't see the warning signs. You figure that as long as the car is running there is no need to look under the hood. Often the signs are not seen because pride blinds us. When I was in Brampton, our stage had a lot of lights pointing at me. Those lights were there so that people could see me and so they got a good recording of the message. However, those lights were blinding. They were so bright that you had a hard time seeing anything else.

If you are a person that spends a lot of time in the spotlight, you need to be careful, because pretty soon you will see nothing but the lights. You will let the attention go to your head. I learned a long time ago that compliments, like gum, can be chewed but never swallowed.

When I was first starting in ministry we were in Kuwait and there was a senior pastor named Pastor Jerry. There are some people here this morning who were in Kuwait that remember him. On Sunday nights we would great people together at the door after the services. Once a couple came up and shook his hand enthusiastically and said it was the best sermon they had ever heard, that their lives were completely transformed. They went on and on how he was the best communicator they had ever heard. He just smiled and said that he was glad they had enjoyed it. After they had left, I leaned over and asked what he REALLY thought of it. He smiled and said "I'll ask my wife later and she will tell me how it really went."

Nebuchadnezzar was in the spotlight and he let it go to his head. God warned him. He did not just remove him as king but first gave him the chance to repent and told him that his humbling was avoidable. Nebuchadnezzar chose not to listen.

Let me ask you a question this morning, has God been warning you? How do you know you have spent too much time in the spotlight? You have stopped seeing other people. You are ignoring the needs of the people around you. It is all about you. That often results in conflict. You are having problems in a relationship with your spouse or kids. Maybe it is chaos. Things in your life just seem to be falling apart. Perhaps it is confusion. You just do not know what you are suppose to be doing with your life right now. Be careful…

c. We Put Off Doing what is Right

Daniel 4:29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon

Instead of acting on what he was told, Nebuchadnezzar ignores Daniel's advice. He puts off doing anything. Let me ask you this, if God warned you in a dream that you were soon going to lose everything that you ever worked for in your life if you did not change, would you wait 12 months before doing anything about that? I hope not. And yet I meet so many people in life that are putting off God's will for their life.

Satan asked his legions to devise a way to deceive more people into hell. A first demon said, "I will tell them that there is no hell. Then they will continue in their evil and not worry about the consequence for their sin. That will surely work!" "No" said the devil "the bible is very clear that hell is real." A second demon said, "Then I will tell them that there is no heaven. Then there will be no reason for them to lead a good life. That will work even better!" Again the devil said "that also will not work for the bible is also clear on the existence of heaven." A third demon listened to them and then said, " We aren't going to tell them that there is no hell or that there is no heaven. To get more people into hell, we will simply convince them that there is NO HURRY!" The devil smiled…

Nebuchadnezzar ignored the advice he was given. Instead of acting and moving, he puts it off. What was the result?

Daniel 4:33 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.

He lost everything. For 7 years he lost every relationship, every title, every accomplishment. One of the most powerful men on earth drooling on himself, out of his mind and out of touch with reality.

But God has mercy on Nebuchadnezzar and after this period of humiliation he restored him. I want you to see now the steps that Nebuchadnezzar took back to sanity. This is the road to recovery. And he did three things. Three things got him into trouble, and three things got him out of trouble. When you have a major failure in your life you need to do these exact three things. He looked up, he woke up and then he spoke up.

Daniel 4:34-37 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.

1. Look to God – I raised my eyes

It says he raised his eyes towards heaven. Maybe you are here today and this is where you are at right now. Outwardly you are a success, but inwardly you are a mess. Your life is falling apart. You are looking for help from everyone except the one who is truly able to help you. You think that doctors or your spouse or the government can help you with your problem, but you are wrong. You need to look up to God today. You need to refocus your life on Him. I said this a few weeks ago, but there are times in our lives that God has to lay us flat on our backs before we will finally look up to him.

Remember the story of the prodigal son. You have to get fed up, then own up, and then offer up yourself to God.

2. Lean on God's wisdom and strength – His dominion is eternal

Acknowledge God's greatness and reject any idea that you can do it on your own. Get your focus off your own problems and on to God's goodness and strength. That means you worship, you turn your attention away from other things and put your focus on God. How do you do that? Church is a good place to start, but it means reading your bible and praying every day. It means getting together with your small group. It means filling your day with Jesus.

In good times people often start to back off. I don't need to go to church this week. I will just go once a month instead of weekly. You spend time away on holidays or the cabin and your focus is on just relaxing. We will go to church when we get back. I will do my quiet time later.

Really? Is there anything more important in your life than worship? That is what created you for. It is priority number one. When I am on vacation, we always try to get to church. I miss it. For some of you here today, you need to make a recommitment to be at worship every single week. Not once a month or once every two weeks. That is just the minimum.

When Nebuchadnezzar did this, it says his sanity was restored. That is what happens when you replace pride with praise. That is what happens when you acknowledge that;

God's kingdom is greater than my accomplishments
God's power is greater than my strength
God's will is greater than my understanding

3. Let others know how God saved you – sharing your testimony

Nebuchadnezzar looked up, then he woke up but then he spoke up. He told others how God had saved and changed him. What Nebuchadnezzar was a pretty difficult and humbling experience. You go from being a powerful ruler to a lunatic out drooling in a field. He could have been embarrassed about what he had gone through. He could have just tried to forget it and sweep it under the rug. Instead, he writes it all down as a testimony for the whole world to read.

This is a pretty humiliating experience. To be the most important man on the planet and now you're out there drooling living like an animal and you can't even put sentences together. He's not shy, he's not embarrassed about his fall. He's not embarrassed about how God restored him. In fact, he tells the entire world. He tells anybody who listens.

Daniel 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world …

The first verse of this chapter tells us that he wanted to share his testimony with everyone who would listen. He made it available to everyone. What was it that he wanted to tell the world? The last verse of the chapter says;

Daniel 4:37 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.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? You live in Egypt and you get a royal letter from the leader of the most power empire on earth at the time and this is what it says!

Daniel 4:2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

Several people asked me the same question after the service last week, do you think that Nebuchadnezzar was saved, will we see him in heaven? I do not know. His testimony was pretty clear, so he certainly knew enough. Whether he ever went from saying that Jehovah IS A god to saying that Jehovah IS MY GOD, one day I guess we will find out.

Let me ask you a simple question this morning, Has God done anything for you? Is your testimony clear, is Jesus your Lord and saviour? Has God saved you from anything? Has he shown his grace to you in any way? Have you been changed by God in any way?

If so, then who are you telling? How are you getting that message out?

Maybe you are thinking to yourself right now, I would be embarrassed to do that. I would be embarrassed to tell someone my testimony or right it down and send it to someone. That is called pride, and that is what got Nebuchadnezzar into trouble in the first place.

James Cash Penny was a man who understood success. In the 1920s he had the country's largest chain of department stores, over 1,700 stores each one bearing his name. He was wealthy and well known. When the Great Depression struck in 1929 he almost lost everything. He was heavily in debt. Constant and unrelenting worry began to take a toll and he had a nervous breakdown. He checked himself into the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan. He was constantly tormented by periods of hopelessness and despair. His very will to live was rapidly eroding. "I got weaker day by day. I was broken, nervously and physically, filled with despair, unable to see even a ray of hope. I had nothing to live for, I felt that I hadn't a friend left in the world, that even my family had turned against me."

Afraid that he would take his own life, the doctors gave him sedatives. One night he knew that he was going to die, so he got up and wrote farewell letters to his wife and son, saying that he did not expect to live to see the dawn." But he did wake up. It was a Sunday morning, and when he woke he could hear singing coming from the little chapel down the hall. Going into the chapel, he heard the hymn God Will Take Care of You. He would later write, "Suddenly something happened. I can't explain it. I can only call it a miracle. I felt as if I had been instantly lifted out of the darkness of a dungeon into a warm, brilliant sunlight. I felt as if I had been transported from hell to Paradise. I felt the power of God as I had never felt it before."

His life was transformed when he looked to God. When he leaned on God instead of relying on his own strength. He went on to live a long and successful life. He shared his testimony with everyone and used his success to the glory of Christ.