

Humility is not often a word that we like in the English language. Perhaps because it sounds so close to “humiliation” which we have experienced from time to time in a way that can break our hearts and spirits. So we shy away from this word “humility” that sounds way too close to that other word that we want to avoid.

But for the next five weeks I’m going to invite us to think about humility together and what it means from a Biblical standpoint, using the book of Daniel to guide our discussion.

Daniel is a bit of an oddity when it comes to writings from the Hebrew Scriptures. It’s part story, part prophecy, and part a foretelling of what will come at the end of the present age. Today’s scripture is one of the stories that we find of Daniel in the court. But let’s set the stage first.

Daniel is part of the Jewish people who have been captured by Nebuchadnezzar the second of Babylon. Folks have been carried off from Jerusalem and now are in a foreign land. Daniel has been selected for a special purpose within the court of the king - and he is tapped to learn a different language and custom - in order to serve this nation that isn’t his.

Throughout this time of service, Daniel becomes known as someone who has wisdom. One day the King has a disturbing dream and he gathers together all of the wise people of Babylon, hoping for an interpretation. Only none of his wise men can tell him what it means because the king wouldn’t tell them the dream, just so they could prove that they were actually wise in what they said.

Enter Daniel.

Daniel who actually stops the guards from killing the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel who had so much integrity that he wouldn’t even allow his enemies, his captors, to be killed.

Instead, he says to take him before the king and that he will interpret the dream. Only when he gets there and the king asks if he can tell him the meaning of his dream, he essentially says that he can’t, but the God of heaven whom he follows can. And he starts to recount both the dream and its meaning by the power of God alone.

The King was so moved by what happened that he fell down and mistakenly started to worship Daniel before he realized that it was Daniel’s God who had revealed everything to him.

The King knew that the dream had an important message but he wasn’t able to figure it out on his own or with his wise men. The interpretation wasn’t favorable in any way for Nebuchadnezzar, as he would be crushed by the Kingdom of God, which would last not only past Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, but forever. And yet, he allowed himself to both receive and respond to the interpretation.

Much later after Daniel, in the late 400s and early 500s in the early church, there is a man named Benedict of Nursia. He felt a call to create monasteries for men who wanted to learn how to live a holy life, in a time when it seemed like holiness was crumbling all around them. So Benedict writes down rules for these monks to follow, called *The Rule of St Benedict*, which he called a school of learning. Not school in the sense of head knowledge, but heart level, spiritually transformational knowledge.

A huge part of that rule, more than half, has to do with humility and obedience. Once again, not humiliation, but humility. And for Benedict, all humility has to start with knowing and being in awe of God, telling folks “The first degree of humility, then, is that a person keeps the fear of God before his eyes and beware of ever forgetting it.”

Why was this so important? Because it allows people to know who they are in relationship to a holy God. And that knowledge and perspective leads us to seek not our own wisdom, but God's wisdom alone.

Daniel knew this type of humility, friends. He started what he proclaimed to the King with the fact that he, by his own wisdom and strength, would not know a single thing - but he believed in and followed a God who was all-powerful enough to reveal what the King was seeking.

Benedict goes on to say that once you fear God, you can grow in the practice and understanding of humility by "imitating by his actions that saying of the Lord: I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." Once again, Daniel did not come to boast of his own accord. He didn't even come to allow for the destruction of his oppressors, even though he had the chance. Instead, he sets aside his own will and pleasure to lift up the name of God.

Not easy work.

The King could even fear God, offering grain offerings and promoting Daniel as a servant of God. But he stopped there. He didn't continue to grow in this practice of humility.

We, too, can get stuck on this idea of conforming our will to God's will. We, sometimes, would much rather have God conform to our will, yet that isn't for the glory of God. Think about it, if Daniel would have let the wise men of Babolyn be killed - no harm to him. But also, nothing changes. But because he lifted up the word of God to a King who did not know, God's glory was proclaimed.

Daniel understood the path of humility was not about lifting up himself or what he may have wanted, but instead about pointing people to God.

Spoiler for the next few weeks - there are several more steps to humility, which is often described by Benedict as a ladder - because we can move up and down depending on the day. When you came into worship today you should have received one of these ladders as a magnet, and I encourage you to put it some place for the next few weeks where you can come to God each day and ask how you are growing in humility and what you still have to learn.

Daniel had this amazing ability to put God first because he feared God above all. How about us, friends? Now by fear I do not mean be afraid of, I mean be in awe of. To know our right place in relationship to. To know that God is God and we are not and seeking God's way above all others - even our own.

Because Daniel put God first he could respond to the will of God, even when asked to do hard things. Even when he had a hard message to deliver. Because he realized that it would be God who would soften the kings heart to receive the words - not Daniel's doing.

The idea of denying ourself for the sake of God's will - its not going to make sense in today's world. It didn't make sense in Benedict's world. And it certainly didn't make sense in Daniel's world. And yet, this is the path that is the way that leads to life. Humility for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Amen.