

Fearing the Lord in Impossible Situations

Daniel 2

I'm not going out on a limb when I say that at some point in your life you will face an "impossible situation." By that I mean that you will face a *threat to your well-being* that goes beyond your wisdom and your power to address. Humanly speaking your situation will be impossible.

- * Mental or physical health: You may have a condition where there are no simple solutions or no solutions at all.
- * Work or career: Perhaps the culture of your workplace is such that your work is draining the life out of you. And there's nothing you can do about it.
- * A relationship. It could be your relationship with your spouse, your parents, your children, or a friend. You have done everything humanly possible to make that relationship healthy. But it's still broken.

The list could go on and on. At some time in our lives you and I will face threats to our well-being that go beyond our wisdom and our power to address. Some of you are facing such situations right now.

Today we are going to see how Daniel faced a seemingly impossible situation. We're considering Daniel in the context of our current sermon series on wisdom because he is one of a few people in the Old Testament who are singled out for their wisdom. (The other two we'll consider in coming weeks are Joseph and Solomon.) The book of Daniel emphasizes that Daniel and his three friends were young men who feared the Lord. In other words, they related to God as he really is. Consequently, in a seemingly impossible situation, they had wisdom and they experienced God in amazing ways.

Daniel 2 reveals ***three bold truths about God*** - about who God really is. If we fear the Lord we will understand these three truths and relate to God appropriately in the midst of impossible situations. And like Daniel and his friends, we can have wisdom and we can experience God amazing ways.

Before we consider chapter 2, let me summarize chapter 1 since it sets the context. We learn in chapter 1 that Daniel and three other young men were set apart for special training in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. We learn that these four young men distinguished themselves by their wisdom. We're specifically told that Daniel had understanding when it came to "visions and dreams." Here's the summary statement about all four of them in verse 20:

20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers that were in all his kingdom.

And so we head into chapter 2 knowing that because they feared the Lord, these four young men were head and shoulders above all the professional wise men in Babylon. The superiority of their wisdom and therefore their God will soon become evident.

In light of that context, let's consider **three bold truths about our God**. These three truths will inform what it means to fear him in the midst of "impossible situations."

Our God gives his wisdom and displays his might. (Daniel 2:1-24)

Chapter 2 begins by telling us that Nebuchadnezzar had dreams that left him troubled and sleepless. So he gathered together some of his wise men. He told them, "Tell me my dream and its interpretation or else you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be torn down." They said, "How about YOU tell US the dream and we'll tell you the interpretation." But he refused. Finally in verse 10 they made this telling statement:

10 The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.¹¹ The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

They basically admitted that they were helpless to meet the king's demand. They had a pantheon of gods, but they were completely irrelevant because their "dwelling is not with flesh." In other words, their gods were elsewhere and they didn't communicate with them!

At that point Nebuchadnezzar went from being troubled to being angry and furious. He commanded that "ALL the wise men of Babylon be destroyed." Daniel and the three others were among that number. They were in an impossible situation, right? They had been sentenced to death by a brutal king because his own wise men had made him mad. When Daniel heard the decree, this was his response:

14 Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.

"Prudence and discretion" should sound familiar if you were with us when we studied Proverbs 1. In Proverbs 1:4 the author said that the proverbs were written to impart these very things:

4 to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—

Daniel was no longer simple/undecided; because he feared the Lord, he was wise; he had prudence and discretion. This is reason #57 why we should feast on the proverbs: we will be equipped to respond when we find ourselves in impossible situations. We'll have an intuitive sense of what to say and what not to say.

Instead of responding with outrage or defiance or anything else that would have made the situation worse, Daniel asked the messenger to explain the situation to him. Once he understood the king's demand, he requested an audience with the king, confident that God would reveal to him the dream and its interpretation. Then he went and told his

friends, “Seek mercy from the God of heaven so that we aren’t killed along with the rest of the wise men.” In contrast with the Babylonian gods, their God heard their prayers and answered in power. (See Deuteronomy 4:7.)

In a vision that night God revealed to Daniel the dream and its interpretation. Beginning in verse 20, Daniel prayed a prayer praising God for his wisdom and might. I’ll read just a couple verses. . .

20 Daniel answered and said:
“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

In verse 21 we see that God not only *has* wisdom and might; he also *displays* his might and *gives* wisdom to people:

21 He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;

When it came to God’s might, we’ll see later in the chapter, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was about how God would remove him as king and set up other kings in his place. And when it comes to wisdom, God “gives wisdom to the wise.” As we saw in Proverbs, if you fear the Lord, you are humble and teachable, therefore you become more wise.

The truth about God we learn in these first 24 verses is that ***Our God gives his wisdom and displays his might.***

We’ll talk about his might in the next part of the chapter. But in relation to his wisdom, here’s the implication:

Implication: If we fear the Lord, we will seek wisdom expectantly.

Remember that if we fear the Lord we relate to him as he really is. And so if he really is a God who has all wisdom and generously gives wisdom to his people, we will relate to him accordingly. James 1 tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should come to God and ask in faith because “he gives generously” and “without reproach.” God is neither stingy nor reluctant when it comes to giving wisdom. Like Daniel and his three friends, if we fear the Lord, we will seek wisdom expectantly when we’re in situations that seem impossible, believing that he loves giving wisdom to his people. This isn’t being presumptuous; this is taking God at his word and walking in the fear of the Lord.

Bring to mind a situation you’re facing that is beyond your wisdom and power to address. Answer this question honestly: Are you seeking wisdom expectantly, believing that he has the wisdom you need and that he loves giving you that wisdom? Or are you hoping that things work out? Or are you trying to figure things out independent of God? Daniel and his friends remind us that we should seek wisdom expectantly. We do that

through Scripture, through prayer, and through conversations with spiritual-minded people who know God. And there are many in our midst who know God and know how to seek Him.

In verses 25 through 45 we are told another truth about God that informs what it means to fear him in the midst of “impossible situations.”

Our God is establishing a kingdom that will never end. (Daniel 2:25-45)

These verses describe Daniel’s conversation with Nebuchadnezzar. In verse 30 Daniel is careful to make sure that the king understood why he now knew his dream and the interpretation.

30 But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

Did you catch Daniel’s humility there? He told Nebuchadnezzar that in himself he didn’t have more wisdom than the wise men of Babylon; but his God did! His God made known to him the dream and its meaning.

Next Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar his dream that had left him “troubled and sleepless.” “You saw, O king, and behold, a great image.” Here’s the description:

32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

Next a stone that “was cut out by no human hand” (i.e., it was fashioned by God himself) struck the image and smashed it to bits. And the stone “became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

The interpretation was rather straightforward. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, “You are the head of gold. Your kingdom is going to be smashed to bits. Then three successive kingdoms will arise and they too will be smashed to bits.” Then in verse 44 we learn the significance of the stone:

44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. . .

The fact that God would one day set up a kingdom that would last forever is repeated two more times in Daniel (3:3, 34-35; 7:13-18). The implication for Nebuchadnezzar was clear: You would be foolish to set yourself up as a rival king to the God whose kingdom will never end; you would be wise to worship and serve him! [See Note #1]

The truth about God we learn in verses 25-45 is that ***Our God is establishing a kingdom that will never end.*** That being the case, here’s the implication for us:

Implication: If we fear the Lord, we will submit to the King.

If God really is establishing a kingdom that will never end, if we fear him we'll **enter into that kingdom** and **gladly submit to the King** of that kingdom. That is the safest place to be when you're in an impossible situation - under the protection and authority of the King whose kingdom will never end. [See Note #2]

Turn with me to Daniel 7. There we find a prophecy about this King and his kingdom that points us directly to Jesus Christ. We read in Daniel 7 that Daniel saw a vision about four great beasts (symbolizing four great kingdoms) arose on the earth. In the midst of that vision, Daniel saw that the kingdom that would never pass away is given to "one like a son of man."

13 "I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

In the Old Testament, when someone is referred to as a "son of man" sometimes it merely refers to a human (over 90x Ezekiel was called "son of man"). But here this "one like a son of man" is coming "with the clouds of heaven," which signifies divine authority. This one like a son of man comes before God, the Ancient of Days (see vv. 9-10). Notice what God gives him:

14 And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

In other words, this one like a son of man is going to be king in the kingdom that will never end. He is going to be both human and divine. If you've read the gospels, you know that Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God. And he often referred to himself as "the Son of Man," a clear reference to this passage in Daniel 7. Let me give you three examples from the gospels that make clear the type of king Jesus is. In Mark 10:45 Jesus said:

45 "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

He is a king who gave his life so that we may no longer be slaves to sin. He's the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. In Luke 9:22 Jesus warned his disciples:

22 saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Finally, when Jesus was asked if he was the Son of God, he replied this way in Matthew 26:64.

64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

That’s another clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man who gave his life for our sins, who was raised on the third day, who is now seated at the right hand of God, and who will come in power on the clouds of heaven to fully establish a kingdom that will never end.

Since that’s who Jesus really is, if we fear the Lord, we will **gladly submit to Him** as our King. If you have never bowed the knee to Jesus and confessed him as Lord, this life is your window of opportunity to do so. If you have come to the place where you are convicted of your sinfulness, confess that to God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You will be rightly related to him. And now you’re in a position to live under his authority and protection.

That’s what we all need when we’re in situations beyond our wisdom and our power to control. Jesus will shepherd us through this life and will safely bring us into his eternal kingdom. If you read the rest of Daniel, you’ll see that that’s true whether we’re promoted to places of authority in this life or whether we’re persecuted.

The third truth about God that we see in Daniel 2 is this:

Our God’s reputation grows when his people walk in wisdom. (Daniel 2:46-49)

That’s what happened in Babylon when Daniel and his three friends feared the Lord and walked in wisdom.

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

Nebuchadnezzar went from troubled and sleepless to angry and furious to face-on-the-ground humbling himself before Daniel. Here’s what he said:

47 The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”

What a remarkable statement coming out of the mouth of the king of Babylon! This would not have happened if Daniel didn’t fear God and walk in wisdom. God put Daniel in that impossible situation so that his wisdom and might could be on full display to a pagan king. The last couple verses tell us that Daniel and his three friends were all promoted to positions of prominence in Babylon.

The truth about God we learn in verses 46-49 is that ***Our God's reputation grows when his people walk in wisdom.***

If we fear the Lord, we will relate to God as one whose reputation is linked to the way we live our lives. Here's the implication:

Implication: If we fear the Lord, we will be vigilant about becoming wise.

Just like wisdom wasn't optional for Daniel's God-given assignment, becoming wise isn't optional for us. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are part of the body of Christ. Jesus says, "If you want to know what I'm like, look at my body, the church! See how they speak and how they act."

Since we are called to represent God accurately, we need to be vigilant about becoming wise. We need to "weave the parachute before we jump out of the plane"; when we're in a free-fall, it's a little too late, right? Because Daniel was already wise, when he was placed in an impossible situation, he responded with prudence and discretion. Because Job was already wise, when his world exploded he fell to the ground and worshiped God. And in both cases, the reputation of God grew - both on earth and in heaven.

Of course Jesus warned us that some people will hate us just like they hated him. But if people end up hating us, let it not be because we're foolish in the way we speak and the way we act, especially in the midst of our suffering. And similar to Nebuchadnezzar, if we fear God and become wise, some people will notice and want to know our God. And similar to Daniel, we can tell them about our God and about Jesus whose kingdom will never end.

At some point each of us will find ourselves in impossible situations. As we walk in the fear of the Lord, we can be confident that he will give us wisdom and display his might!

Note #1: Nebuchadnezzar did humble himself before Daniel (see 2:46). But in the very next chapter guess what he does. . . Right after his terrifying dream where he was "the head of gold" on a great statue, he erects a huge golden statue and demands that everyone bow down and worship it! He would learn the hard way that God is able to humble those who walk in pride (4:37).

Note #2: Daniel 3 and 4 illustrate this in powerful, unforgettable ways. In chapter 3, for example, Nebuchadnezzar told Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down and worship the golden image or else he'd throw them into a fiery furnace. Their response was, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us and he will deliver us. But even if he doesn't, we will never serve your gods or worship your golden image."