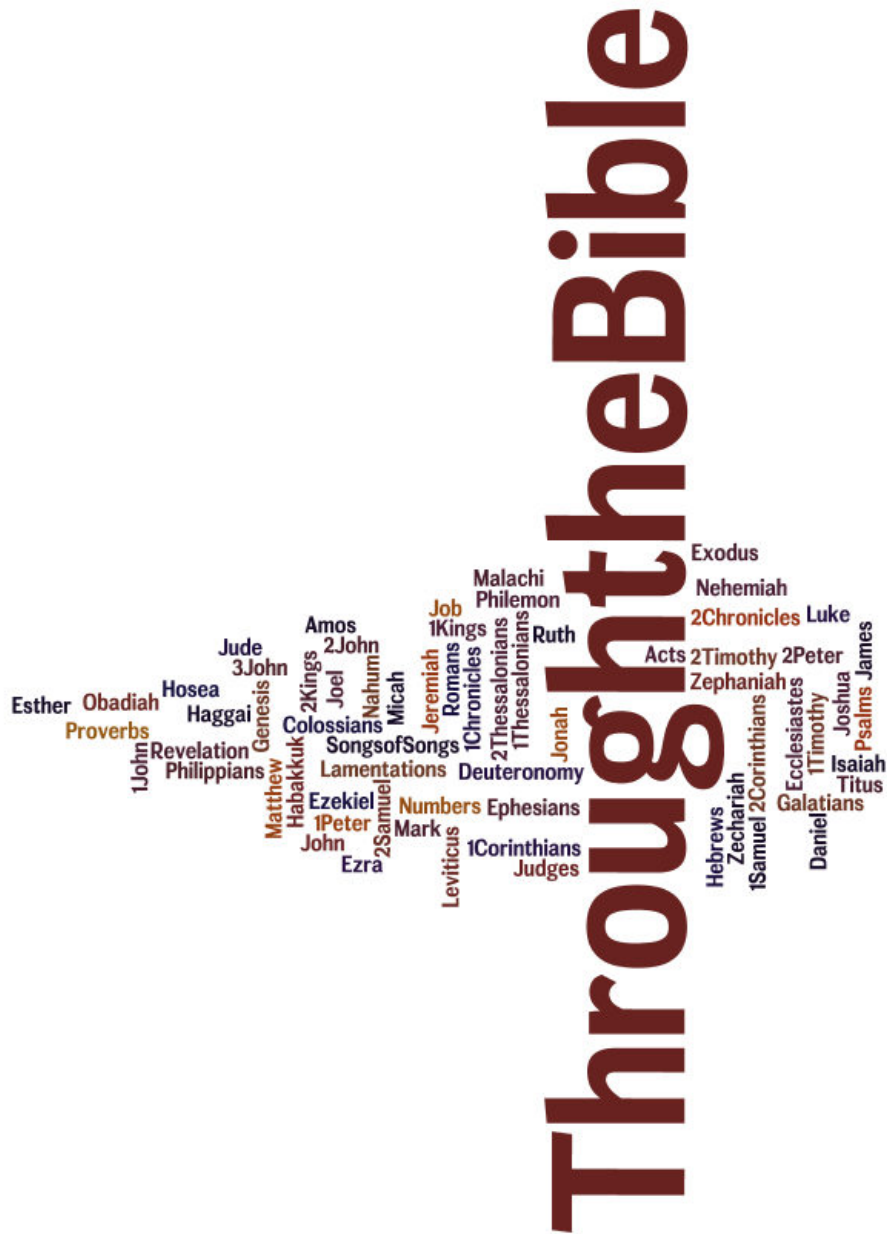




# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action

in the community of Cornton



April 2013

*Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided. (v.13)*

Ezekiel is given another 2 living pictures to enact for the people. In the first he is to set the cooking pot up and place water and meat into it. Then, he is to pile wood under the pot, and bring the water to a furious boil. I think the Lord is telling the people they are in hot water. God is saying that the meat in this pot, instead of releasing those delicious juices, has simply released scum or rust. Their lives were stained with sin and now that is rising to the surface for all to see. This once great nation was destroyed by sin. It was no longer sweet tasting.

The second living picture is a tough one for Ezekiel. His wife, the delight of his life, is about to be taken from him. And he is told not to mourn like the people usually mourn. He is to keep his hat and shoes on, and his mouth closed. He will groan inwardly but show no obvious signs of mourning. She dies and he does as God told him.

Why did God ask Ezekiel to do something that seems so unfair, difficult, and unnatural? He wanted to illustrate to the people of Jerusalem that just as the prophet's delight was taken from him, so also their delight - the temple - would be taken from them. Ezekiel pronounced God's judgment on Israel, stating that they would lose their temple to the Babylonians.

Like Ezekiel, they were told that they would not mourn in the normal way (v.23). The destruction of the temple would be so horrifying, and their guilt and grief so overwhelming, that normal expressions of sorrow would be inadequate.

What a lesson! When we don't obey God, we should mourn (James 4:8-9). Sin is serious.

**Pray:** confessing your sin before God and asking him to have mercy on you and cleanse you.

**Reflect:** do I heed warnings and confess my sin and change my ways?

**Tuesday 2 April 2013**

**Ezekiel 25:1-17**

*Because you said “Aha!” over my sanctuary when it was desecrated....therefore I am going to give you to the people of the East as a possession. (v.3)*

I always remember the day the school bully got a taste of his own medicine. He was forever picking on people who were smaller than him and not as strong as him. Then a new lad appeared who was just the match for him. He caught him picking on one of his friends one day and laid into the bully who later went away upset and hurt. And we all cheered and smiled and said ‘serves him right.’ It is amazing how often in life we use that attitude and think it is alright. Here in Ezekiel 25 and the following chapters we come across 7 prophecies against the nations around Israel.

The first is against the people of Ammon who rejoiced when Jerusalem fell. They shouted when the people were taken into captivity and the temple destroyed. Because that was their attitude, what happened to Judah would happen to them, and Rabbah, their capital will be destroyed. Their people will be taken into captivity. In other words, what you sow you will also reap!

Now how does that apply to us today? Simply, you will never move up when you put others down! Secondly, you will never get ahead when you try to get even! You see, our responsibility is to love people as much as they are willing to allow us to, and let God take care of the rest. Vengeance is His, not ours! And it is easy to get into that mode where you are constantly putting people down and trying to get even with them. God is saying “Don’t go down that path, you won’t like the results!”

The Moabs are prophesied against for they think all gods are the same. God proved He alone is God. Edom was prophesied against for they took advantage of Israel when it was down. And Philistia was prophesied against for their deep rooted bitterness that saw them take revenge against Israel. God is in control and will deal with our enemies. Our task is to love them, warn them, and point them to God.

**Pray:** asking God to bless those who persecute us.

**Reflect:** do I love my enemies or do I rejoice in their downfall?

*Because Tyre has said of Jerusalem: "Aha! The gate to the nations is broken and its doors have swung open to me; now that she lies in ruin I will prosper," therefore...I am against you. (v.2)*

Over the recent months we have witnessed many High Street stores closing down. And many people are like vultures...they rush into the stores to see what they can buy at cheap prices. It is almost as if they are rejoicing at someone else's downfall and profiting from it.

The sin of Tyre was her rejoicing over the destruction of Jerusalem, not because she hated them, but because of greed. You see, Tyre was about 40 miles north of the borders of Israel, a sea coast city. And Tyre dominated the sea routes, but as they transported goods by caravan through Judah to Egypt, they would be taxed. Jerusalem, in a sense, was the gateway to the south, to Egypt, but not any longer. Now they could transport lots of goods southward, and they would be tax free, enabling them to make lots of money now that Jerusalem was out of the way. Because of that attitude, God was going to wipe them out as the sea would cover the land!

And for the historians among you, go and check out the story of Alexander the Great conquering Tyre. Everything he and his army did fulfilled what God spoke of in his prophecy against Tyre. They eventually took the city and flattened it, only to discover a small number of people within it. During the siege the people of Tyre had evacuated to a small island half a mile off the coast from the city. Alexander used the rubble from the city to build a causeway over to them and he conquered them.

How does this apply to us? Do we rejoice over the fall of others so that we may gain things? Covetousness is an insatiable desire for worldly gain, it is greed! And it is not a good thing and it is not of God. It is as Paul said in Colossians 3:5-7, *'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.'*

**Pray:** asking God to take away our love of money and possessions.

**Reflect:** do I desire more wealth or do I use what I have to help others?

*You say, O Tyre, "I am perfect in beauty." Your domain was on the high seas; your builders brought your beauty to perfection...now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters; your wares and all your company have gone down with you. (v.3, 34)*

Tyre has not been destroyed yet. It was in 588 BC that the Babylonians attempted, and then some 150 years later Alexander the Great completed the task. And yet, when you read this, their destruction was so certain, that God calls for them to issue forth a funeral dirge for Tyre, as if it already happened. Why? Because what God says will come to pass, you can take that to the bank! A reminder that all God says in His Word comes to pass. Take heart from the encouragement that he will never leave you nor forsake you, but be aware that he is coming to judge the world.

The people of Tyre saw themselves as strong, powerful, wealthy. And this is all described by the illustration of a ship, which is interesting when you consider this city was a maritime community. This ship was put together beautifully. The wood they used was strong, beautiful and resilient. The oars that were made could cut through any sea with ease. And the sails they made could guide them wherever they wanted to go, near or far!

Now you read of that and one thing comes bursting through these verses, PRIDE! Many nations have been brought down, destroyed by this thing we call pride. And all pride really is, when you think about it, is a sense of superiority, seeing yourself as something you are not. And anyone who is filled with pride has no room for God! Proverbs 26:12 says this, '*Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*' Why is that so? Because self-conceit or pride in a person blinds them to their sense of need for God and in God's eyes they are worse than a fool. At least he may see his weakness, the fool, and see his need for God and turn towards Him. There is a little hope in the fool, but nothing in the person who sees himself as wise!

**Pray:** asking God to help us see ourselves as we truly are...sinners in need of His grace and mercy.

**Reflect:** do I think of myself better than I am?

*You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. (v.15)*

As a young man in the late 1600s, Edward Teach joined the crew of a British ship that was headed to the Caribbean. Much later in his nautical career, he managed to capture a merchant vessel and turn it into a 40-gun warship. Teach soon became known as Blackbeard - the most feared pirate in the hemisphere. Blackbeard had some success as a pirate, but his “career” abruptly ended when he encountered a contingent of the British Royal Navy. In a desperate battle, he and his fellow pirates were killed, putting an end to their terrorising exploits. He started well but then wickedness overtook him.

Chapter 28 is a prophecy against the king of Tyre who has come to believe he is a god (v.2). There are many in our world today who think like that – just ask Shirley Maclain the actress. How deluded we can become when we think more highly of ourselves than we ought. God communicated through Ezekiel’s prophecy, “To men, you are wise and intelligent. You are rich. You have power and influence. But you are not a god, and I will demonstrate this to everyone by your death.”

As the chapter continues the king is described and we get a picture of Satan. Long ago in the heavenly places, an angel fell into spiritual piracy. Lucifer was a cherub who stood in the radiant glory of God (Ezekiel 28:11-15). But his own self-love replaced love for his Creator. Desiring to be like the Most High, he led a rebellion and was cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15). Today he and his henchmen are doing whatever they can to commandeer the lives of human beings (Luke 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Even so, we don’t need to be afraid. Satan is a dangerous enemy, but Jesus sealed his ultimate fate when He rose from the dead. And He has given us everything we need to withstand the devil’s attacks (Ephesians 6:10-18).

**Pray:** thanking God for giving us the victory over sin and Satan.

**Reflect:** do I love myself more than I love God?

*I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams. You say “The Nile is mine; I made it for myself.” But I will put hooks in your jaws. (v.3)*

I am stunned at how many times we fail to learn from history. We repeat the same mistakes others before us have made. Someone once said that the thing we learn from history is we don't learn from history. In the case of the Egyptians their problem is pride. This is something we have seen regarding some of the other nations that God has prophesied against. This is the last of the 7 nations to be spoken to and they are getting four chapters addressed to them.

Pharaoh thinks he is something he is not. He is seen as and acts like he is a god. This man saw himself as great, like the great crocodile of the Nile River who does whatever he pleases. He is boasting of all his accomplishments, all he has done, how he built this great nation. Red flag's should be going up! “Danger! Danger!” lights should be flashing! Why? Because God says ‘*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*’ Proverbs 16:18. If Pharaoh is this monster then the fish are his people. And God is saying that He is going to wipe them out, destroy them and Pharaoh.

The second complaint against Egypt is that they have been no help to Israel. Judah kept looking to Egypt for help to fight against their enemies, and they were no help at all. A staff is something you lean on, that helps you walk as you go on your way. It should be made of wood, giving you stability as you walk. You would never want to use a reed as a staff, for it would break when weight was put on it, and would cut your hand. Egypt was no support for Israel; they were like the reeds that grew abundantly along the banks of the Nile River, fragile and unable to support any weight, so fragile that even the wind could bend them.

The two lessons from this are that we watch that pride does not lead to our destruction. Secondly we must lean not on others but always only on God.

**Pray:** thanking God that he is our rock and strong deliverer.

**Reflect:** do I trust in others rather than in God?

*For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near. (v.3)*

Maybe you have heard of the story of the frog that lived in a pond that was drying up. And he tried to figure out a way to rectify the problem before the pond dried up and it was too late. One day a couple of ducks landed beside him in the pond and he said to them, “You know, it must be great to fly above the land, what a view you must have! The things you see, it must be great! Do you think you can place a stick in your mouths and show me the land, the things that only you can see? Then, maybe when you are done, you can place me in a pond that has an abundant water supply!” The ducks agreed to the frog’s proposal and picked up a stick, put it between them in their mouths, and began to flap their wings. As they did the frog opened his mouth and grabbed hold of the stick tightly with his mouth. And soon they were off flying over the land. A farmer walking by and seeing this frog flying above the land, being held by a stick between two ducks, marvelled and said, “Who thought of such a wonderful idea?” And the frog opened his mouth and said “I diiiiiiiii.....” Pride comes before the fall, be careful!

This is the warning message coming from these four chapters. The phrase ‘the day of the LORD’ is used here and throughout the Bible we read of it in relation to the second coming or the rapture. In essence it is a generic term used to describe any time God brings judgement. And he is about to bring judgement on Egypt due to their sin and pride.

All their pride, all their idols, all their gods were going to be brought down to the ground, they would not stand (v.13-19). God was going to pour out His judgment upon sin. That is no different today. Look at the boasting of people today who are living in sin - they see it as their strength. The lying, stealing, cheating, sexual perversions, immorality and so on. And they say “No” to God, but God says He will split “No” open and pour out His fury upon sin. Make no mistake about it, if you don’t know that He is the Lord, you will! Watch out for sin and pride in your life.

**Pray:** asking God to help you trust in him and not in the things of the world.

**Reflect:** do I trust in what I have rather than in God?



*Who can be compared with you in majesty? (v.2)*

I don't know about you but when I was growing up I always wanted to be a footballer. I would watch certain players and compare myself to them. I would long to be them. Even in adulthood we compare ourselves to others. Who do you want to compare yourself to? A movie star? A rock star? Bill Gates or some other rich person? Or some brilliant person? Maybe Billy Graham? And I guess the question is "Why do you want to be that person?" Think of it this way, and I hope you will then have a proper perspective of the situation. God created you like you are. Now there is nothing wrong with desiring to be all that God wants you to be, but not to be something that God did not intend you to be. That is pride!

And that is the problem for Pharaoh. He thought of himself as being so great, as a god. So the true God is asking him who he would compare himself to, but before he can answer that question, God is going to answer it for him. God likens Pharaoh to the great nation of Assyria. They were powerful, ruthless, strong and the only nation in Mesopotamia to invade Egypt and destroy its capital city, Thebes in 633 BC. And God likens them to a mighty tree, the cedars of Lebanon. But as big and strong as this nation was, God cut them down by the hands of the Babylonians. Just like the Assyrians fell, so too will Egypt, and their final destination will be the pit of hell itself.

How do you think of yourself? Do you see yourself better than others? Do you see yourself as head and shoulders above the rest? Are you doing it your own way? Are you the master of your destiny? Do you think you can really pull it off? If you do, watch out! With that much pride there is no room for God, and you will be brought down in this life and then also laid low following death. And I will guarantee you this, in hell you won't be jockeying for position to be the most important person in hell! You see, everyone loses there and you will have an eternity to think about all your glory that you received on this earth, and how it is nothing now.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive you for the pride in your life.

**Reflect:** do I think of myself more highly than I ought?

*When I strike down all who live there, then they will know that I am the LORD. (v.15)*

Pharaoh saw himself as strong as a lion, able to devour anyone he wanted. He saw himself as this powerful crocodile swimming in the Nile River. And because of his strength, because of his power, he did as he pleased. He stirred up all kinds of trouble, moving back and fourth, doing what he wanted. And it does sound impressive, and I'm sure he terrified many people and nations. But what man sees as strong, powerful, invincible, God sees as nothing.

God is going to destroy Egypt and bring the people into captivity. All those nations that looked to Egypt for help, all those nations that sided with Egypt, sending them mercenaries to fight with them, all those nations that were close to Egypt, when Egypt fell to Babylon, their hearts sank. They knew that it was only a matter of time before Babylon came upon them and destroyed them. Prior to their captivity the waters were muddy as they trampled back and forth doing as they pleased. But now the land is desolate. The people are in captivity and the rivers are running crystal clear because there is no one left to disturb them.

The proud Egyptians under their very proud leader were heading for the pit of hell. And so were many other nations around them (v.22-32). What brought all these nations down, all these people down? PRIDE! And of course, the middle letter in the word "pride" is "I" and that will always get you in trouble. They refused to acknowledge the Lord, they had an "I" problem, and now they are in the pit of hell with a great company of people who felt as they did.

How can we overcome pride? Remember who is the giver of all good gifts, who it is who gives life and breath. And when we remember God, be grateful and thankful for the very life he gives us each day.

**Pray:** thanking God for all He gives to you – especially for life and breath.

**Reflect:** am I a grateful person?

*My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. (v.31)*

Cold terror gripped the heart of a soldier as mortar rounds whistled overhead, rifles cracked, and the Vietcong closed in. Suddenly he felt ripping pains as a bullet tore into his chest and arm. Yet it wasn't the end for this soldier. According to an article in The New York Times, the bullet was slowed by a New Testament he was carrying in his shirt pocket. Years later, the young man still treasured the blood-stained book with the ragged hole through the middle. He believes it saved his life.

This is a nice story, but it says nothing about the life-saving spiritual help the Bible was designed to give. In Ezekiel 33, we read that the ancient Israelites used the words of the prophets to make them feel good but not to change their lives. They took passages out of context to support their confidence (v.24). They found pleasure in listening to the words of the prophet (v.30), yet the Lord said, "They hear your words, but they do not do them" (v.31). The result? They came under divine judgment.

Regular intake of God's Word is a worthy practice, but it's not an end in itself. The prophet Ezekiel spoke to an audience who loved to listen but refused to act. God gave us His Word so we could read and learn from it – applying it to our daily lives. It is our instruction manual for living life the way God intended. Yet for many of us we simply read it, think "Oh that's good" and then put it down and forget it as we go about our lives. We are to live out God's Word. Jesus said in Matthew 7:24 *'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.'*

Then as now, God's Word is not to be cherished as a good-luck charm or to soothe the mind by bringing temporary relief from anxiety. It was given to be obeyed so that its help would not be just for this life - but forever.

**Pray:** thanking God for His written Word and asking Him to help you live it out in practice.

**Reflect:** do I put God's Word into practice in my life?

*I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. (v.11)*

In Ezekiel's day, God was rebuking the shepherds for their failure to shepherd like He shepherds. These leaders and rulers were caring for themselves, not God's sheep. In figurative language, the Lord describes what they were doing: feeding themselves by eating the fat, clothing themselves with the wool, and slaughtering the fat sheep. What do these things mean? They refer to the fact that these rulers were in that position only for what they could get out of it. They failed to serve the people, and were only serving themselves. Every benefit they derived was at the sheep's expense - many times, at the expense of the people's lives.

We see this philosophy continue in our own age. Picture some of the regimes we have seen and continue to see in the world today – corrupt leaders who live in opulence while stealing from their own people and watching them starve. Some recent examples include Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq; General Joseph Mobutu of Zaire; Idi Amin of Uganda; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; and Nicolai Ceausescu of Romania. Unfortunately, the list goes on and on and on - both past and present. Let us not get so greedy for wealth and power that we forget to serve others in Jesus' name.

The Lord declares that He Himself is going to step in and shepherd His people. He will deliver them. He will seek them out. God is promising them that they will be gathered from the nations. They will be restored to the land of Israel. He is going to search for the lost and bring them home.

Our Lord does not come looking for us and once He catches us puts us into a forced labour camp. Ezekiel tells us that God brings us home, to a place where we will be feed, nourished and He makes us to lie down and rest. Isn't the Lord good!

**Pray:** thanking the Lord for being the Good Shepherd.

**Reflect:** do I serve others rather than myself?

*Because you harboured an ancient hostility...I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. (v.5, 6)*

The eighteenth century King of Prussia, Frederick William I, could not stand his brother-in-law, the English King George II. As Frederick lay on his death bed in the year 1740, his Lutheran chaplain urged him to ensure that his conscience was clear by forgiving his enemies. This was the only way to make sure of his place in heaven. "Are you certain?" asked the King. "Absolutely," answered the cleric. "In that case," said Frederick to his wife, who was standing nearby, "write to your brother and tell him I forgive him...but be sure not to do it until after my death."

Bitterness is a terrible trait that eats away at a person and ruins relationships and lives. In the passage today we learn of the Edomites were racked with bitterness. The Edomites occupied the area of land to the south of the Dead Sea. They are the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. And it seems that all the deceit, all the conniving that Jacob perpetrated upon Esau resulted in anger and bitterness towards Jacob and ultimately the Jewish people.

And what Esau felt was passed on to his people, the Edomites. They had an "ancient hatred" or an "everlasting hatred" towards the children of Israel. That hatred, that bitterness continued to grow and be passed on to future generations. In 588 BC the Edomites sided with the Babylonians in her assault upon Judah, never letting go of that anger, that bitterness, but just trying to get back at them for what was done to Esau, their father! And now God was holding them accountable for their actions against His people.

We as Christians can allow bitterness to affect us, and it can grow until it is shows in our actions towards others. We need to deal with those feelings by giving them to God or we can let those bitter feelings get the better of us. Ask God to help you forgive the hurts of the past and to let go of them.

**Pray:** asking God to help you let go of past hurts.

**Reflect:** do I harbour bitterness in my heart towards another?

*And wherever they went among the nations, they profaned my holy name.  
(v.20)*

Companies that compete for consumer spending know the importance of protecting their name and reputation. Shoddy quality or poor service can cause profits to plummet.

While on a trip, I saw a car rental company experience a customer-service disaster. When people arrived at the rental counter to pick up their keys, they faced long lines, discourteous staff, and inconvenient conditions. Their reaction was predictable: frustration and anger. I doubt that many of those customers would ever rent cars from that company again. The agency's name had become an object of mockery.

This reminds me of how Israel's behaviour brought disrepute to God's name. Because they had lived like their pagan neighbours, the Lord scattered them among the nations. The unbelieving world laughed at both Israel and the name of her God. The Jews were carried off into captivity, which made the other nations say, "What's the deal? Aren't these 'God's people'? If their God is so great, then why were we able to remove 'God's people' from 'God's land' that He supposedly gave to them?"

God's response is that He would not tolerate this profaning of His name. He tells Israel that He is about to act - not for their sake, but for the sake of His name. He is going to "vindicate the holiness" of His name.

Let's bring this situation up-to-date. As Christians, we bear the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. What does the world think of Him by what they see in us? Bringing honour to His name is more important than a great corporation living up to its name. Our lives really have only one purpose - to reflect our Lord. We must guard against doing anything that will cause others to profane His holy name.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive us for the times we bring dishonour to His name.

**Reflect:** are there any ways I do not reflect the Lord Jesus in my life?

*Prophesy to these bones and say to them “Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!” (v.4)*

There was a well known children’s song as I was growing up called ‘Dem Dry Bones’ – it was a traditional spiritual song. It was well used to teach children about anatomy. It went ‘Ezekiel cried, “Dem dry bones!” Ezekiel cried, “Dem dry bones!” Ezekiel cried, “Dem dry bones!” – “Oh, hear the word of the Lord.” The foot bone connected to the leg bone, the leg bone connected to the knee bone, the knee bone connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone connected to the back bone, the back bone connected to the neck bone, the neck bone connected to the head bone, Oh, hear the word of the Lord!’

Another vision appears for Ezekiel; another living picture. God took Ezekiel to a mass graveyard that was filled with dry bones. The language used pictures the dead nation - lifeless, scattered, and bleached - just as a dry tree pictures a dead nation to which only God can give life. The Lord asks Ezekiel if they could live. Poor Ezekiel, what can he say. From a human perspective, of course not. But from God’s point of view, of course they can. So Ezekiel throws the ball back into God’s court and says “O Lord God, You know.”

Then God does the impossible. God tells Ezekiel to proclaim to these bones that life will enter them. As Ezekiel spoke as he was commanded, all of a sudden these bones came together, the muscles and ligaments came together, and flesh was covering all of this. You know, “The thigh bone is connected to the knee bone. The knee bone is connected to the leg bone...”

This was to be a picture to the people that God would reassemble Israelites from all across the world and restore the nation of Israel to life again and give them His Spirit. The captives in Babylon saw their situation as hopeless. But God was encouraging them and telling them He will bring them home from their captivity, and He did! What a wonderful picture of God’s grace, drawing his people back to life again.

**Pray:** thanking God for our new life in Christ Jesus.

**Reflect:** do I look forward with anticipation to eternal life with God?

*In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had lone been desolate. (v.8)*

A decade or so ago Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins wrote a series of fictional books based on end times prophecy – the “Left Behind” series. In the gripping drama we read all about the uprising of the anti-Christ and the attacks on Israel as the tribulation period started. If you are into fiction novels then these are good reading.

Those attacks on Israel at the tribulation are the key feature of Ezekiel 38 and 39. These are difficult chapters to read and analyse, and yet I believe they do give us a picture of the end times. The word of the Lord again comes to Ezekiel and he speaks it to the people. This passage describes an alliance of nations that is going to gather together to wage war against Israel. Most likely from the north, Russia and Turkey, from the East, Iran and from Africa in the south Libya, Ethiopia and Sudan.

The timing is hard to work out but it speaks of ‘*after many days*’ and ‘*in future years*’ in verse 8 and then in verse 16 we get the phrase ‘*in days to come*’ or ‘*in latter days*’. This phrase is used elsewhere in the Old Testament prophets to refer to the time period connected with the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus and the corresponding end of this present age.

What is not in doubt is the outcome. God will deal with all the enemies of Israel. God has brought them all together in one place and he will bring an earthquake which will shake them up. There will then be infighting followed by disease then storms of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur. The final result of all of God’s actions is that many nations will know that God is the Lord (v.23).

Worrying times but we can take heart – as we see in this passage we do not need to fear the future because God is sovereign. Keep looking to him.

**Pray:** thanking God that he is sovereign.

**Reflect:** do I worry about the future? Keep looking to God.



*I will be zealous for my holy name. (v.25)*

Ezekiel 39 describes the aftermath of the disaster of chapter 38. For seven years the people will burn the many weapons that are left on the ground. They won't need to gather wood for fuel for the number of weapons is great. Then we read that it will take them seven months to bury the dead – that's how many lives will be lost. Everyone in the world will have seen this judgment take place, but the people of Israel will have a turning point - they will know that the Lord is God. They will realise that their time of exile was well-deserved, and God will pour out His Spirit on them. As all of this happens we learn that our sovereign God is in control and he wants people to know who he is and how holy his name is.

Names are important. If you ask for Kleenex, you won't necessarily get that brand of tissue. The same is true if you request Scotch tape, a Coke, or a Thermos. Specific trademark names often take on broader meaning than the original product. Those names, though, are important to the companies that own them. That's why a corporation like the Coca Cola Company, which may have the most widely known trademark in the world, maintains a large legal department. It even has field inspectors to protect its "name."

Much more is at stake, however, when the name of God or His Son Jesus Christ is misused. His is the most important name in all the world. That's why He will one day show everyone the difference between how His name is abused and what it actually stands for. He will reveal to all living creatures why God and Jesus Christ should be used with the utmost respect and honour.

That is why we need to ask for the Lord's forgiveness when we are guilty of disgracing His name. There is so much to be gained by using His name reverently, and there is so much to lose by taking it in vain. God is jealous for His holy name!

**Pray:** asking God's forgiveness for times we bring dishonour to his name.

**Reflect:** do I bring honour to God's name by how I live, speak and act?

*Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the house of Israel everything you see. (v.4)*

There is a sense to which Ezekiel could easily have finished at chapter 39. The first 24 chapters dealt with Israel's removal from the land, chapters 25-32 with historical judgements against other nations, and chapter 33 with a historical call to repentance and the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 34-39 deal with Israel's literal, future return to the same land. Indeed chapters 38-39 describe a future invasion of Israel and the aftermath of that. Looking at it like that, the remaining chapters then would deal with the period after Jesus' return during what some theologians call the millennial period. This is hard stuff to get our heads round.

Ezekiel is shown a breathtaking picture – it is the picture of a new temple. Now keep in mind the city was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. And now, around 573 BC Ezekiel is shown the land of Israel, only now it will be restored and in this land will be a glorious temple. And it is as if he is being lifted up and transported through it. I was amazed in recent years when you could begin to take virtual tours of buildings using computer graphics and photographs. It is quite stunning to sit on your computer and go through a building. And each part of the temple is described and careful measurement given. Chapter 40 deals mainly with the outside, the gates and the entrance to the temple.

The key bit of all this for me is what Ezekiel is told: he will see and hear some wonderful things and he is to pay close attention to it all. Why? So that he can tell the children of Israel all about it. He is to offer them hope of what is to come.

God has revealed so much to us in His Word. He wants us to pay careful attention so that we can go and tell others. He calls for us to be faithful servants who will share the gospel with others – to talk of salvation through Christ's death on the cross, and the hope of eternity in heaven to come.

**Pray:** thanking God for our future with him in glory.

**Reflect:** do I share the glorious picture of eternity with others?

*And on the doors of the outer sanctuary were carved cherubim and palm trees like those carved on the walls. (v.25)*

This is the pattern of an ideal Temple, which was presented in thought to the prophet's mind, as the pattern of the Tabernacle was shown to Moses on the Mount. The measurements of the sanctuary are to be the same as in Solomon's temple and twice as large as the tabernacle in the wilderness. The man with the appearance of bronze brought Ezekiel into the sanctuary, but he alone went into the Most Holy Place, reminding us of the ancient temple and tabernacle restrictions of entry.

It is interesting to notice the minute measurements and specifications - even to the ornaments of cherubim and palm trees. We cannot but remember that the plan of our life is also worked out before the face of God, and that we shall live to the best purpose when we make all things according to the pattern shown us on the Mount of prayer and vision. God has our lives all planned out. Jeremiah reminds us of that in Jeremiah 29:11 *'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'* One lesson from this then is to keep walking in God's ways and following his plan for our lives.

Another interesting aspect of this walk through is that they are constantly rising. They climb the stairs and move upwards. And what a wonderful reminder in life to keep our eyes looking upwards too. Life is hard and difficult and when we feel down the temptation is to look down at our feet and around at our problems. Ezekiel is kept looking up. When we look up we see Jesus, high and lifted up. When we look up we see the One who died to save us. And when we look up we look expectantly for Jesus to come again - the angels told the apostles that Jesus would return in the same way he left them.

Stick to the plan and keep looking for Jesus.

**Pray:** asking God to help lead and guide you through life.

**Reflect:** do I look expectantly for Jesus' return?

*It had a wall around it...to separate the holy from the common. (v.20)*

Visiting castles and old mansions and stately homes can be interesting. You get to see the opulence of how some lived and yet alongside invariably you see the cramped conditions where the servants stayed. Kings and queens, lords and ladies, all had their servants and they wanted them close by so they could call on them at all times. Servants' quarters were often small and cramped.

Here in Ezekiel 42 we see servants' quarters but they are entirely different. The rooms detailed here are for the priests who ministered in the house of the Lord. The priests will have quarters to live in that will be located both in the north and the south of the temple. And in this area the priests will eat the most holy offerings. And the garments they wear will be changed as they leave, for their garments are to be sacred or set apart for ministering unto the Lord.

Interestingly for me is the description of a wall round the entire temple. The temple is set as a square 500 cubits in length and breadth. A wall is around the entire temple area and it tells us why it is there – to separate the holy from the common. Here we see a separation from that which is sacred and that which is secular.

What does that mean for us? Well our bodies are described as being a temple of the Holy Spirit. With that in mind we are to build a wall of separation in our lives. We are to separate ourselves from sin and from all that is sinful. Now that is hard when we are called to be in the world but not of the world. The lures of the world tempt us. That is why a wall should be built...not simply a line drawn. It is easy to see the obvious and to build a wall of separation – Galatians 5:19-21 details the acts of the sinful nature. Other things are not so obvious and are a matter of personal conviction. We are called though to be holy as our Lord is holy. Get that wall built and stay away from sin.

**Pray:** asking God to help us build a wall that keeps us from sin.

**Reflect:** what does it mean for me to live a holy life?

*I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the East. (v.2)*

I've had the privilege of viewing some glorious sights in my life. Edinburgh Castle as a backdrop to a fabulous firework display. Buckingham Palace and St Paul's Cathedral in London. Loch Ness on a fine calm day. Mount Teide, volcanic mountain in Tenerife. Disneyworld in Florida. And perhaps the most emotional and glorious sight – the sight of a new life entering the world.

But nothing I've ever seen comes close to what some Old Testament people saw. Moses, the people he led, Ezekiel, and others witnessed the most breathtaking sight of all time. They had a glimpse of the glory of God - a visible manifestation of the Lord's invisible being and character.

Moses experienced it on Mount Sinai, and his face shone (Exodus 34:29). The Israelites saw it in the cloud, before God provided them with quail (Exodus 16:10). Ezekiel saw God's glory return to the temple, and he fell to the ground (Ezekiel 43:1-5).

The glory of God will return to fill the temple as a sign of fellowship with His regenerated people. And that is a great reminder to us that we need God's presence in our lives. The beauty and grandeur of the temple mean nothing if God is not present! The beauty and grandeur of a church building means nothing if God's not present! The beauty and grandeur of an individual means nothing if God is not present!

Someday we who have been redeemed by Jesus will experience that inspiring sight. God's glory will shine in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-11). And we will see our risen and glorified Saviour, the Lord Jesus (1 John 3:2).

This hope encourages us as Christians to keep going. For nothing in this world compares to seeing God's glory!

**Pray:** thanking God for his daily presence in our lives.

**Reflect:** are you looking forward to heaven?

**Sunday 21 April 2013**

**Ezekiel 44:1-31**

*I looked and saw the glory of the LORD filling the temple of the LORD and I fell facedown. (v.4)*

Close Encounters of the Third Kind is one of the classic Sci-fi films. It was released in 1977 and won an Oscar. Steven Spielberg's tag line was simply "Close Encounter of the First Kind - Sighting of a UFO. Close Encounter of the Second Kind - Physical Evidence. Close Encounter of the Third Kind - Contact. WE ARE NOT ALONE"

In our Christian lives we have those three types of contact with God and it is perhaps the third that we desire most. I have had close encounters of the first kind – sightings of Him. From my earliest days as a child in church I have seen Him work. I have close encounters of the second kind – physical evidence of Him. I have watched Him step into the physical realm and move on my behalf. However, I am holding out for me and holding out for you for a close encounter of the third kind – contact. Daily interaction. Daily communion. Daily presence. Daily relationship. We encounter many things when we come to church...but do we encounter God?

Ezekiel is taken to the front of the temple and he witnesses the glory of the Lord filling the temple. He is so close to God at that moment that all he can do is fall facedown and worship. Nothing else matters in that moment. He has seen God's work. He has witnessed the evidence of God at work. And now he is up close and seeing God's glory filling the temple. It blows his mind...and in that moment he bows down and worships. Oh that we would have a relationship with God that is rich and deep.

Ezekiel is then given instruction to pass on to the people...and this is a reminder to them that they have disobeyed in the past and are living in the consequences of their rebellion. He explains how they are to conduct themselves in the temple and in worship. We have a responsibility too to let people know how to conduct themselves in life and to encourage them to live God's way.

**Pray:** asking God to help us encounter him in the whole of our lives.

**Reflect:** am I looking for mere knowledge or do I want a close personal relationship with God?

*When you allot the land as an inheritance, you are to present to the LORD a portion of the land as a sacred district. (v.1)*

Two little boys were given a box of chocolates each from their grandfather. The first boy took the package into his room, ripped off the covering, tore into it and stuffed the chocolates into his mouth until he was one big mess of smeared chocolate. The other boy unwrapped his present there in front of his grandfather. He opened the box and looked at all the lovely chocolates. Then he raised the box to his grandfather and said 'Thank you for giving me these chocolates. Here, you have the first one.'

The little boy wanted to first give to the giver of the gift. And that is a great principle that we often teach for giving in our Christian lives. God is the giver of all good things and he provides for all we need in life. In return it is good to come back and offer to him our gifts of love and gratitude. I think it is right that we give him the first portion of our income which is why when I pay the cheque into my bank account the first thing I do is take my tithe out and place it in the envelopes for the month.

There is an element to which this is what Ezekiel shares next in chapter 45. The land is about to be divided out. The first land assignment is about the Lord's house. This is as it should be because the land allocated must be the first in the people's hearts, thoughts, and minds. The Lord must be the centre of all. He must be the first priority. The question in our lives is what place does the Lord have? Is he our first priority?

Ezekiel then considers the nature of our dealings with people. The Lord is speaking to the princes, and He is telling them that they are to serve the people with honesty, with justice; they are to have fair work ethics. You see, they are representing the Prince, the Lord! And then he goes on to remind them of offerings for special holy days. All of this comes out of gratitude to God for all He has done. Friends, if the Lord has first place in our lives, then giving will be easy for us.

**Pray:** thanking God for all the good gifts He has given you.

**Reflect:** does the Lord have first place in my life?

*No one is to return through the gate by which he entered, but each is to go out the opposite gate. (v.9)*

“You,” said the doctor to the patient, “are in terrible shape. You’ve got to do something about it. First, tell your wife to cook more nutritious meals. Stop working like a dog. Also, inform your wife you’re going to make a budget, and she has to stick to it. And have her keep the kids off your back so you can relax. Unless there are some changes like that in your life, you’ll probably be dead in a month.”

“Doc,” the patient said, “this would sound more official coming from you. Could you please call my wife and give her those instructions?”

When the fellow got home, his wife rushed to him. “I talked to your doctor,” she wailed. “Poor man, you’ve only got thirty days to live.”

We smile and laugh at the woman’s unwillingness to change and the effect that will have on her husband but truth be told we have that same unwillingness in our lives. Many a time we come to church and leave the same way we came in. That ought not to be.

Notice here in Ezekiel 46 that if the people enter by the north gate then they are to leave through the south gate. If they enter by the south gate then they are to leave through the north gate. Now what in the world is that all about? I believe the Lord is showing us that we should never leave a worship time with Him the same way as we came in. There should be a change in our lives. God should have spoken to our hearts. He should have challenged us. Too often, in churches today, people come in and do their time, fulfil their obligation, and leave the church as they came in, unchanged! That should not be! God wants to transform your life if you will let Him! You should not leave His presence the same way you came in!

**Pray:** asking God to keep working on your life, transforming you into the image of His Son.

**Reflect:** do I allow God’s Word to impact my life?



*He measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle deep. (v.3)*

I didn't learn to swim until I was in high school. We had never gone swimming as kids and as such I had a fear of water. I didn't like getting my hair washed and the water going all over my face. After some weeks of learning the basics of swimming using arm bands and floats, our PE teacher took us up to the deep end of the pool and told us to jump in. I was petrified. I couldn't swim very well and I didn't like water over my head. What was I to do? I was filled with fear but I was being encouraged to trust my instincts and trust the teacher who assured me I would dive under then rise back to the surface. And of course in the end I jumped in and overcame my fear.

Its interesting here in Ezekiel 47 that he is given a vision of flowing water. As the man in Ezekiel's vision measured the river, he carried Ezekiel along with him. As a result, the prophet was led into every deepening waters. God wants to do this same thing in your life.

Look at the picture and be encouraged. Ezekiel starts off ankle deep. This represents the step of faith that saves the soul. It is truly great to be saved, but it isn't the end! Yes, He brought us out, but He also wants to lead us on. Many stop right here and never go one step farther with God. There is much more to being saved than just getting saved! He is then knee deep. The knees speak of prayer. This represents a life that is learning dependence upon the Lord. This is the person who prays and tries to live their life in faith before the Lord. Then the water is waist deep and at this point we can feel the power of the river sweeping us along. We can still stand and remain there in our own strength. It's not the end there though – we are to go deeper still, fully allowing God to lead and guide us through life. At each stage the man took Ezekiel with him...God wants to walk with us each step of the way.

**Pray:** asking God to help you dive right in and go deeper in your relationship with him.

**Reflect:** what stops me from going deeper in my relationship with God?

*And the name of the city from that time on will be: the LORD is there.  
(v.35)*

Thomas Dorsey was a black jazz musician from Atlanta who was known in the early 1920's for the suggestive lyrics he combined with original music. Then God touched his life and in 1926 he gave up the suggestive music and began to write spiritual music. In 1932 times were hard for Dorsey as they were for nearly everyone trying to survive the depression. Perhaps it was because of his past music and also his musical style some said his music was too worldly. The most difficult night of his life came one night in St. Louis when he received a telegram telling him that his pregnant wife had suddenly died. Dorsey was filled with grief and his faith was shaken, but instead of wallowing in self-pity, he expressed his agony the only way he knew how. He wrote this song: "Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, Lead me on to the light; Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home." In that moment he experienced Jehovah Shammah – the LORD who is there.

As Ezekiel draws to a close we are reminded of the fact that God's presence has returned among his people. God had been present with his people. We see that in the Garden of Eden as God walked in the cool of the night with Adam and Eve. We see it in the Tabernacle as God dwells with Moses. We see it in the temple of Solomon. But God's presence left the temple in Ezekiel 10. The people had sinned and were far from God. Despite various warnings by the prophets they continued in their rebellion. And so God decided to leave them to it.

Our God is gracious and compassionate and has promised to come back and save his people. We have seen some of that in the latter chapters of Ezekiel as the glory of the Lord filled the temple once more. The picture here of course is God's presence with us in eternity. This message brought hope for Jews in captivity. Let it bring us hope too that one day soon we will be with God in the heavenly city for all of eternity. In the meantime he is with us by his Holy Spirit.

**Pray:** thanking God for his presence with us day by day.

**Reflect:** do I experience God's presence with me always?

*But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.  
(v.8)*

Looking out the window of an airplane, you can see the winding paths of rivers below. Except for some man-made waterways, all rivers have one thing in common - they all are crooked. The same is true if you climb nearby Dumyat and look at the River Forth – it meanders back and forth quite a bit. The reason is simple - rivers follow the path of least resistance. Rivers find their way around anything that blocks their flow because they take the easy way.

The same can be said for some people. Because they fail to resist the devil, they yield to temptation and deviate from the path God would have them follow. Unlike Daniel, who *'resolved not to defile himself'* (v.8), they bend to worldly pressures and compromise what they know is right. We need to be careful in life that we do not do the same. I remember being asked to work on a Sunday for the Highland Games, but refused as it was a Sunday and I was going to church. My boss respected that and asked someone else. I could easily have given in thinking it's a one off but compromising in one area soon leads to compromise in others.

Daniel's example, and that of his friends, is a great one. Daniel was in a precarious situation. Many of his countrymen had been brutally killed in the Babylonian attack. Many others had been taken away into slavery. He was among the few who were in an enviable situation - being made comfortable, provided for, and educated, along with the promise of entering into a high-ranking position. Common sense would tell us, "Don't make waves, don't take a stand." But Daniel's relationship with the Lord was real and true. He could not, would not, allow himself to be polluted by the Babylonians, whatever the cost.

The challenge for us is in the words of an old children's chorus 'dare to be a Daniel'. Let's stand up for our faith regardless the cost.

**Pray:** asking God for courage to walk in his ways always.

**Reflect:** do I compromise to make life easier for myself?

*Surely your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries. (v.47)*

Just this last week as I write this, the television news reports are carrying images of Saddam Hussein's statue being toppled in Baghdad – it has been ten years since he was overthrown. It is an abiding image that reminds us that the kingdoms of this world will not last.

In Moscow stands the New Tretyakov Gallery, a museum that displays art and artefacts from the days of the former Soviet Union. Scattered along the banks of the Moscow River near the museum are statues of once-powerful leaders that have been smashed and disfigured. Images of Stalin and Lenin have their noses knocked off and their heads separated from their bodies.

These gloomy scenes bring to mind the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. He saw a statue with a glorious head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a torso of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay (v.31-33). It portrayed the succession of four great ruling nations of the world. From history we know they were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then a stone '*cut out of a mountain but not by human hands*' (v.45) rolled down and smashed the statue to smithereens. This pictured God's judgment of those four kingdoms and His supremacy over all the earth.

One day God will judge the nations of the world, and their monuments will lie in ruins. No matter how powerful the nation, all will crumble beneath the outpouring of God's holy wrath. We can be confident that Jesus Christ, the King of kings, will rule the world in righteousness, justice, and peace. What a glorious prospect!

Daniel knew what the dream meant for God revealed it to him. Later in his prophecy he will speak of the future days. Sometimes we worry about the future yet the Bible assures us we don't need to. God is in control and is bringing his purposes to bear. One day Jesus will rule forever and ever.

**Pray:** thanking God that he has already won the final victory over Satan.

**Reflect:** do I worry about the future?

*But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (v.18)*

Nearly every day we face questions of conscience. We must choose between doing what pleases God and what appeals to our own selfish desires. Government officials may be tempted to accept bribes and to make unethical decisions. Employees are sometimes asked to rearrange numbers or file false reports. Students often face temptations such as cheating and plagiarism.

As Christians, we face situations in our daily lives that are conscience-testers. They help us to see whether we are serious about the integrity God expects of us. We know our choices will have good or bad consequences, but the real test comes when we must decide what to do.

What is the greatest protection against making the wrong decision? It is trusting God to take care of us as we choose to do what's right, regardless of the outcome.

And nowhere do we see that more exemplified in Scripture than in Daniel 3. Daniel's three friends are in a hot spot. The king has erected this great gold statue and has decreed that everyone bow down and worship it or face death. Now Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have no intention of doing this and are reported to the king. He is furious and orders that they bow down or be thrown into the fiery furnace. They are faced with that question of conscience and know they can only serve and worship God. They refuse and say that God will save them from the fire. What confidence. But notice what they also say '*but even if he does not...*' – even if they are not saved they still trust in God alone and cannot worship any other.

I hope I would have the same courage and confidence and commitment as these three men if faced with a similar choice. Each day we are faced with choices to compromise our faith...let's be bold and remain faithful to God.

**Pray:** asking God to help us be bold, loyal and true to him.

**Reflect:** do I have the courage of my convictions?

*And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (v.37)*

A strong, young brute often swaggered around town boasting that he could walk a barbed wire fence in his bare feet with a wildcat under each arm. So goes the story according to the Iron County Miner. The braggart got a rude awakening, however, when he married a strong-willed little lady who made him wash the dishes twice a day.

Another rude awakening occurred when a platoon sergeant roused a new recruit after his first night in an army barracks. "It's four-thirty!" bellowed the sergeant. "Four-thirty!" gasped the rookie. "Man, you'd better go to bed. We have a big day tomorrow!"

We are all inclined to dream our way through life until someone or something confronts us with the real world. For Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon, the wake-up call lacked humour. He had thought he had it all made. Daniel describes him from his dream as a tree great and strong that is seen and admired from afar. Sadly the dream also shows someone cutting the tree down with only the stump remaining. Daniel tells the king he will be cut down in his pride and will live like a wild animal for seven years.

Daniel's advice was for the king to renounce his sins and to do what was right, and also for him to help the poor and oppressed. If this happened he may regain his prosperity.

Before his encounter with God, Nebuchadnezzar thought he had life well in hand. Suddenly he found himself on his hands and knees eating grass like an animal (v.33). After 7 long years (v.32) he learned that in the real world everyone must live under authority, everyone is on God's time, and everything we possess is a gift from His gracious hand. Let's learn the lesson before we have to be cut down to size.

**Pray:** asking God to keep us humble.

**Reflect:** am I proud of my own achievements or do I give glory to God for His work in my life?

*But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. (v.22)*

Bob went to a psychiatrist. “Doc,” he said, “I’ve got trouble. Every time I get into bed, I think there’s somebody under it. I get under the bed; I think there’s somebody on top of it. Top, under, top, under...you gotta help me, I’m going crazy!” “Just put yourself in my hands for one year,” said the shrink. “Come to me three times a week, and I’ll cure your fears.” “How much do you charge?” “A hundred pounds per visit” the psychiatrist said. “I’ll sleep on it,” said Bob. Six months later the doctor met Bob on the street. “Why didn’t you ever come to see me again?” asked the psychiatrist. “For a hundred pound’s a visit? A friend cured me for free!” “Is that so! How?” “He told me to cut the legs off the bed!”

Be careful where you get your advice from. Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar has taken over from his father but he too has bad dreams. Like his father he turned first to his advisers and wise men but they were no help to him. Suddenly the queen remembered about Daniel and Daniel is brought before him and offered great rewards if he can help. Daniel is given the interpretation for the dream and tells Belshazzar all about it.

The problem is a heart condition – and its pride. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, two kings of Babylon, were told that they had misplaced hearts of arrogance and pride (v.20, 22). As a result, God judged both of them. Nebuchadnezzar was made low until he recognised that the Most High God ruled over all (v.21), and Belshazzar was slain (v.30).

We would do well to examine ourselves often to see the condition of our hearts. Do we depend on God daily? Do we acknowledge that all we have and are is by His mercy and grace? Do we live as His grateful servants, yielding to His will? Only as we recognise the importance of genuine humility and acknowledge our dependence on Him can we live with clean hearts.

**Pray:** asking God to help us examine our lives and live for him.

**Reflect:** how often do I examine my heart?