

Three Godly Men - Daniel 3

Background:

1. Exile was God's judgment on disobedient Israel – *persistent warnings by His prophets were ignored*

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

2 Chronicles 36.15-20

For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

Lamentations 3.31,32

2. Far from Home – *all the foundations of their faith (Temple, Priesthood, Sacrifices, Festivals, and Community) were destroyed*

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

Psalm 137.1-4

3. Tested and found Faithful – *God's vegetables were superior to Nebuchadnezzar's delicacies*

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food...To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

Daniel 1.15,17

1. Pressures to Conform

a. Distortion of God's Truth

You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance...You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. Daniel 2.31,37,38

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3.1

Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. Isaiah 40.17

b. State Religion

So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language...Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." Daniel 3.3,4,6

And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. Revelation 13.1-8

c. Popular Media

As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up... Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Daniel 3.5,7

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2.15,16

2. Challenges to Compromise

a. Popular Attitudes

But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3.12

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12.2

For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Philippians 3.18

They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 1 Peter 4.4

b. Powerful Authorities

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Daniel 3.13-15

"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"
John 19.10

3. God our Confidence

a. Our Judge

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter."
Daniel 3.16

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
Matthew 10.28

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.
1 Corinthians 4.2-5

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.
1 Peter 2.17

b. Our Protector

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.... So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.
Daniel 3.17,27

Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.
Jeremiah 32.17

"Everything is possible for him who believes."
Mark 9.23

c. Our Wisdom

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."
Daniel 3.18

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."
Luke 22.42

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. 2 Timothy 4.18

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Revelation 12.11

4. The Reward of our Convictions

a. Intimacy with God

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Daniel 3.25

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine...When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" Isaiah 43.1-3

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3.10,11

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3.13

b. Influence in High Places

Anger: Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, Daniel 3.13

Amazement: Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." Daniel 3.24

Acknowledgement: Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Daniel 3.28

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. Daniel 2.44

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Daniel 3.30

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

Luke 23.8,9

"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

Acts 26.25-27

c. Impact on the World

Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

Daniel 3.29

In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Daniel 1.20

The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

Daniel 2.47

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. 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?" 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. 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.

Daniel 4.34-37

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Acts 12.21-24

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2.12

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Revelation 17.14

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How have I responded when God has taken me into new places, perhaps unexpectedly, like these three men? Looking back on my response, what could I have done differently to be more Christ-like? How much is my faith connected to my location?
2. Tasty meat or only vegetables again!? A change in location makes for many different changes – diet, dress, routines, friendships, and more. What truths from God’s Word do I need to hold on to in the midst of changing circumstances?
3. Have I ever tried to make the Bible say what I wanted it to say? How can I make sure that my interpretation of Scripture is faithful to God’s true meaning?
4. How much is my faith in God connected to my national identity? What is the danger of mixing nationalism and Christianity? What does it mean to be a ‘global’ Christian?
5. How can I resist the pressures of the media to buy, wear, use, eat, and lust after the toys and treasures of this world? How can I increase my contentment in Christ?
6. Am I ready, if necessary, to say ‘no’ to the authorities because I must say ‘yes’ to Jesus. What are some dangerous areas in the church-state relationship where I **may** be compromising?
7. How I have experienced God’s protection and deliverance in situations where I have been under attack? What did God use to accomplish this relief? In what ways has this experience made me stronger?
8. Today many Christian teachers promise that it will always go well for believers, in every way. The three men have a different teaching – *God can save, but He will do what is best*. What is biblical faith? What does it mean to ‘walk by faith, not by sight’?
9. How has God used terrible tragedies – in your life and/or the lives of your loved ones – to bring others to salvation? How can we be more ready to ‘go through fire’ if God so calls us?
10. What is necessary for the leaders of this world to come to repentance? What might be the impact of their salvation? Should we make them a special focus of our evangelism? *****