

Poised Under Pressure Series – Part 2
The God We Serve - Daniel 3
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Intro: Explain historical context of Babylonian Kingdom and Judean Kingdom, context of who Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were. Emphasize historicity of the events; this is not a fictional account. Some archaeological evidence of the statue.

Read entire chapter.

As believers:

1. We will be at odds with the culture. vs. 12

This is the normal course of things. God's people are at odds with the culture because they ARE God's people and not the world's. So often we find ourselves going against cultural trends. Jesus, in John 7:7 explained this would always be the case, when he said, "the world hates me because I testify that what it does is evil". And again in John 15:19 when he told his disciples because he called them out of the world, therefore the world hates them. Jesus says he calls his followers out of the world and the world hates them because of this. You see, for the people of God this is the normal course of things.

It was certainly the case for Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; they clearly knew to whom they belonged, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And they could never belong to the Babylonian culture.

Verse 4, the herald loudly proclaims, this is what you are commanded to do. First notice, it is a command, and second it is a command given to "peoples, nations and men of every language". All the world is commanded to fall down and worship the image. In reality, much of the known world was present because of the vastness of the Babylonian empire. Because it was Nebuchadnezzar's policy to appoint native rulers to govern conquered provinces, these rulers would have been present for this event. So the whole world, as it were, was commanded to worship the image.

In a more subtle way our culture commands us to obey and worship without objection as well. Recently I saw a car advertisement in which a young couple is told this would be the perfect car for when they "move in together". So we are to understand that marriage is no longer the norm but "moving in together" is. We are taught by God's word that marriage is the basic building block of society and the condition for sexual intimacy and procreation. Yet, the culture commands we do not object, or we will be labeled, religious fanatics, holier than thou, and bigots.

So this is what the 3 Hebrews faced and much worse. In verse 12 we see the accusation brought against them. They begin by pointing out their nationality, "some Jews", who pay no attention to you, don't serve your god, and don't worship the image. The first accusation is not completely true. The 3 Hebrews were faithful administrators of the Kingdom and as such paid attention to the king, but in eternal, spiritual, and moral matters they did not. As Christians, we can be and should be the best employees, employers, citizens and neighbors. But in eternal, spiritual, and moral matters we have only one King, Jesus.

So the question for us is this. Is there enough evidence in our lives that accusation could be brought against us, that we pay no attention to the king of this world, that we don't serve the god of American

culture and we don't worship the image of man? Is there proof that our master alone is Jesus Christ? If so, if you are following Jesus, it is certain that you will be at odds with the culture. Perhaps one of the surest proofs that Jesus alone is your king is that you find yourself at odds with the culture.

As believers:

2. We know the one true God who is worth living for and dying for. vs. 15-17

So the King is furious with rage. The choice is made clear, worship the image and live or disobey and die. The image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up was most likely an image of the Babylonian god Marduk and not of himself as some suppose. But either way no God fearing Jew could worship any god but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

You may be thinking at this point that the means of execution seems odd and maybe even fanciful. But upon further consideration it makes perfect sense. To make such a large statue, one 9 stories high, that was overlaid with gold, it would have been necessary to have a huge furnace to smelt metal for gold plating. A furnace for that purpose would have been necessarily very large and could reach temperatures as high as 1,800 degrees. What better way to dispose of disobedient subjects?

Verse 15, the king tells the Hebrews, *"I don't care who your God is, worship my god or you will be put into the furnace."* And he then says, *"what god will be able to rescue you, there is no god who can deliver you from my hand. I am the great Nebuchadnezzar!"* He is challenging them at their very core, their hope in God. He tells them in essence, *"why are you hoping in God? No god can save you from a furnace like this!"*

Our Lord faced the same king of mocking and ridicule. When on the cross and under great suffering, the chief priests and scribes said, *"he trusts in God, let God deliver him."* In other words, *"you trust God where is your God now?"* Most of us will be faced at some point with similar circumstances in our lives, where it will seem all is lost, and God is nowhere to be found and Satan will be whispering in your ear, *"where is God now?"* You will need to decide at that point, do you know the God who is worth both living for and dying for?

The 3 Hebrews had met the great king once before. After their training had ended they were brought before the king and he questioned them at some length and found them better than all else. Now they were face to face with him once more. The Hebrews responded there is no need to defend ourselves. You knew us, met us after our training. You saw our integrity and abilities and placed us in positions of authority. Even here in a foreign land as captives we serve our God. Look at verse 17; they refer to God as the God we serve. It didn't matter to them that God had let them be conquered and become captives, they were living for him. He was the God they served. Even in the face of certain death he remained the God they serve. They lived faithful to him in captivity in Babylon and were now willing to die for him in Babylon.

So once again we are faced with a question. Is the God you serve worth living for even when things are not going well? Is the God you serve worth giving your life for?

As believers:

3. Our obedience results in God's glory and can change the culture. vs. 28-29

So the 3's obedience did result in them being condemned to the furnace. God's answer for them was not escaping the consequence's altogether. Rather they entered the furnace and in the midst of the furnace he is there and enables them to endure the furnace without harm. Think of it, they endure the furnace without harm. Something no one thought possible or anticipated. Everyone thought either God will cause them to escape the furnace or die in the furnace. No one was anticipating surviving the furnace. But that is exactly what God did for them. He enabled them to survive the furnace.

I think this is THE observation to make. It was the observation Nebuchadnezzar makes. He is amazed and astounded that they are surviving the furnace and that they are not alone.

So, this is God's promise to us, even if we must enter the furnace he will be with us. *"I will never leave you or forsake you,"* Jesus said. I'm reminded of this promise also from Isaiah 54:17, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper and every voice that rises up against you in judgment thou shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from me says the Lord."

Of all the ways God could have delivered the 3, He does it in such a way that it results, first, in God's glory. Nebuchadnezzar literally gives praise to God. In verse 26 He calls God the Most High God, there is no God greater than the God of the Jews. In verse 28, he states, praise be to God. Now, remember the context in which this is happening. The whole world as it were is present to worship a statue of the Babylonian God Marduk. And what the whole world hears is the great King, Nebuchadnezzar, (who had the statue built) giving praise to the God of the Jews and declaring he is the Most High God!

Secondly God delivers the 3 in such a way that it results in the culturing being changed. Nebuchadnezzar decrees that in his kingdom the name of the God of the Jews is to be honored. In his kingdom it is to be known that no other god can save in this way. How amazing!

JUDEAN KINGDOM

Josiah – 640-609 BC

Jehoahaz – 609 BC (3 months)

Jehoiakim – 609-597 BC

Jehoichin – 597 BC (3 months)

Zedekiah – 597-586 BC Jerusalem and Solomon's temple destroyed

BAYLONIAN KINGDOM

Nabopolassar- 625-605 BC

Nebuchadnezzar – 605-562 BC