



gracefellowship

Daniel: Thriving in Exile
October 11, 2020
God is Able

As Christians we don't get a pass from painful experiences and difficult circumstances. And in the middle of our trials we can often wonder where God is or what He is doing. In a perfect scenario- at least from our perspective- God would take all our hurts and pains and trials and toss them out the window, making our lives worry free. But that's not how God operates and it's not how He chooses to grow our faith and refine our lives.

Last week we saw how God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar through His wisdom. Today we will see God reveal Himself through His power. Let's take a look together at Daniel 3.

:: Daniel 3:1-6

- 1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.**
- 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.**
- 3 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.**
- 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do:**
- 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.**
- 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."**
- 7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.**

In Daniel chapter 2 we saw King Nebuchadnezzar have a dream that disturbed him and no one was able to tell the king his dream or interpret it for him. But God gave Daniel the ability to know what the king had seen in his dream and was able to tell him what the dream meant. It was a dream of an enormous statue with a head of gold, which represented Nebuchadnezzar, and then the body was made of lesser metals, diminishing in value to the feet of the statue, which represented kingdoms that would follow Babylon as world powers. Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed Daniel's God to be the God of gods and the Lord of kings and gave Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego high positions of authority in his kingdom.

You might think something like that would humble the king to see the power of God to reveal his dream and interpret it. But over time the king actually reverts from seeing YHWH as the God of gods and he builds the statue he saw in his dream to have people worship this image as god! We don't know how much time has passed here. There are no historical markers in the story, so it could be soon after his dream or 15-20 years later.

The image in the king's dream had a head of gold. The image he constructed was overlaid entirely of gold.

- 90' high and 9' wide
- The repetitive nature of the names in verses 2-3:
 - Hearing the names of the Babylonian officials is meant to invoke the idea that everyone is going to be part of the king's ceremony and that conformity is expected at the dedication of the image. To disobey the order of the king is unthinkable when everyone from every nation and every language (those Nebuchadnezzar has conquered and brought to Babylon) are all bowing down at the order of the king.

But this is coerced worship. Look at verse 6 again:

6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

King Nebuchadnezzar requires worship of his image by force, where God offers us free will- a choice to worship or reject Him.

Just as we looked at last week, this is completely in line with Nebuchadnezzar's character. He is a harsh ruler who demands that loyalty of his subjects, no matter how brutal he has to be to get it.

:: Jeremiah 29:22

22 Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'May the LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.'

As Nebuchadnezzar sets up his image for worship he sets himself up as an anti-Christ. That term doesn't just mean someone who is against Christ, but also one who sets themselves in the place of Christ. The anti-Christ that is described in Revelation will be both these things, he will set himself up against Christ but he will also want to be worshiped in place of Christ. And again, he will force people to worship him through force with the punishment of death, just like we see happening in Daniel 3.

Our God does not force us to worship Him. Nebuchadnezzar is insecure and must force people to worship. God is not like that. God is complete and whole in who He is. We worship God because we have seen the demonstration of His grace and love toward us, therefore we respond in love and gratitude as we choose to worship Him. Worship is sincere when it is given freely, not demanded.

But with the threat of death, Nebuchadnezzar gets his wish- look at verse 7.

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

It's amazing to me how quickly everyone opens their hearts to the worship of this image as one of their gods. This was a polytheistic culture, so they had many gods to worship, but it was no problem for them to open their hearts to one more. This is why it's so important for us as Christians to keep our hearts closed to idols and make sure that only Jesus has the throne of our hearts. Our hearts are idol making factories. If we aren't careful we can turn good things in idols and replace the worship of Jesus with the worship of lesser things.

- money
- power
- relationships
- academics
- athletics
- jobs

If we aren't bowing to Jesus we can easily bow to these other things and make them gods. That's what we see happen with the people who gathered for the dedication of the statue.

Everyone does what is expected of them and conforms with the demand of the king.

Well...almost everyone! Let's keep reading.

**8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.
9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever!"**

10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,

11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

12 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, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Here we see some good old-fashioned political posturing! These men are jealous of the places of authority Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have been given by the king. As the rest of the people bowed down, these three men stood up for what they believed- there is only one God worthy of being worshiped!

You stand out when you stand up for what you believe when it comes to the worship of God!

It wasn't difficult to see these men when everyone else around them bowed down. I have no way of knowing if they came to this event with the understanding of what they would be asked to do. What I do know is they didn't decide in this moment what they would do when presented with a choice to go against their faith.

They had been taught the commandments of God from the time they were children. The first two commandments given by God to His people are:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath. You shall not bow down to them or worship them...

Years ago we were watching Survivor and the location of the filming was in a place that worshiped Buddha. Typically they take the contestants straight to a beach somewhere and drop them off on an island. To begin this season they brought the contestants to a mainland area where there was a Buddhist Temple. They told the contestants it was not a worship service, but a ceremony to welcome them to the game. One of the women in the season was a Christian and as they went into the temple and she saw how players were being asked to bow down in front of the statue of Buddha, she left the temple and walked outside. After the ceremony was over, the only question that was posed to the group was pointed to her because she didn't complete the ceremony. She stood out because she was unwilling to bow down. She told them group that it wasn't presented as worship but to her it felt like worship and she wouldn't put her face to the ground for anyone other than Jesus!

It's much easier to go with the crowd and dishonor God if you haven't made up your mind ahead of time to say He alone is your God and He alone is worthy of your worship. As Christians we need to make sure we know the Word of God and

that we develop a relationship with God that is so strong when we are pressured to go against His teachings we are capable of standing strong in our biblical convictions.

We need to function from internal convictions, not external pressures.

As you can imagine word of these boy's rebellious actions didn't sit well with King Nebuchadnezzar.

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

14 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?"

15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe 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?"

- A second chance was granted. This probably shows that they were important officials in the royal court. Otherwise, the king would have had them killed without a second thought.
- The ultimatum was given: worship or die by fire.
- What God will be able to rescue you from my hand?
 - King Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates unmatched pride and arrogance. He thinks of himself as more powerful even than the gods he claims to worship. Apparently he has also forgotten what the God of Heaven was able to do when Daniel interpreted his dream. At that point he had been told no man could do what he asked and even the gods were distant and wouldn't get involved. But Daniel firmly stated that his God was a revealer of mysteries and He alone was able to do the impossible.

How do Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond?

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand.

18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

This is one of the most bold statements in all of Scripture! These guys look at the king, who just threatened to kill them if they didn't bow to his image and they say,

“we don’t need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. In other words there was no need for a hearing or a trial or a second chance. What the king was doing was indefensible, not them. They felt no need to defend themselves or their decision, but they would not compromise their faith in order to satisfy the king’s ego.

Look at what they say to him:

“The God we serve is able to deliver us...and he will deliver us from your Majesty’s hand...”

Here’s what I think they knew that we need to grab hold of and hand on to firmly: in life or death they would be delivered. The threat of death holds no power over a Jesus follower! Why?

Death is just a doorway into eternal life!

In the NT Paul talked about this idea of living and dying for Jesus.

:: Philippians 1:20-24

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

It’s difficult to have power over someone who is able to say, “If you let me live that just means I’m going to continue to have a powerful gospel presence in this world. But if you kill me I get to be with Jesus- which is my ultimate goal!”

Let me give you two other passages of Scripture to think about when it comes to this, because standing up for Jesus in a culture that is bowing down to everything else and expects you to be like them will almost surely cost you.

:: Matthew 10:28

28 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.

:: Acts 5:27-29

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.

28 “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego displayed great confidence in God when they spoke to the king. Our God is able to save us and He will! However, they don't stop there. Look what they say next:

18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

This is a tremendously difficult thing for us, but it's so important. Because we are not God, we do not know how He is using our circumstances to further His Kingdom in ways we cannot see or understand. We must believe God is able to save us from our trials and our difficulties, but even if He doesn't we must maintain our faith in Him! God's goodness is not dependent on you being rescued from every difficult situation you face. Even if God allows you to go through the fire you can still praise Him, and we are about to see why...

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual

20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

24 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, Your Majesty.”

25 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.”

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,

27 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.

God could have saved them from the fire; He could have extinguished the flames; but instead He chose to show them that He was with them in their trial. And the same is true with you and me. The furnace probably had an opening at the top and then a door or window at the bottom. We are told they are bound tightly in their full clothing- that's an important detail because those things should have been extremely flammable. And just in case anyone wants to claim the fire wasn't actually all that impressive, we are told the flames from the fire consumed the guards who were to throw them in.

When Nebuchadnezzar looks into the fire he doesn't see 3 men, he sees 4- and the 4th looks like a son of the gods. There is something so magnificent about this man that even in the fire, he stands out. We aren't told specifically that this is Jesus, later Nebuchadnezzar says its an angel of God. In the OT Jesus occasionally makes an appearance as the angel of the Lord. It's my opinion this is Jesus, but it isn't super important one way or the other. What is important is that God rescues His faithful servants. Just not the way we might like! He doesn't save them from the fire, He saves them through the fire!

Let me close by making some applications today.

1. God allows the faithful to be tested.

God often uses the tests and trials in our lives to bring Him glory and to refine us.

:: James 1:2-4

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

We often ask the wrong question when we are going through trials and difficulties. We tend to ask "Why is God doing this to me?"

The right question to ask is: "What is God doing in and through my life for His glory and my spiritual growth?"

2. We have to be willing to act on what we say we believe.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't talk a big game right up until they started being tied up and led to the furnace. They didn't turn in that moment and change their minds, deciding to worship the image. They were willing to go to the fire and die if that's what obedience to God required of them.

God's goodness is often most obvious in places of darkness! It's interesting, when they were thrown into the fire and the ropes were burned off them, but they

were unharmed they didn't walk out of the fire. We know they could have because when the king called them out, they came to him. Why didn't they walk out of the fire before that? They were in the presence of God! They trial they were in was also where they found God to be closest to them!

In your moments of hurt and in the trials you experience in your life, it's important to know that God doesn't withdraw from you in those moments. Those are the times God comes nearest to you and walk with you through your personal fire.

In Nebuchadnezzar's final thoughts in this chapter we get a look at final application for us to use as we live for Jesus in a culture that wants us to bow down to every god except for Him.

28 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.

29 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."

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

- a. Trust in God at all times.**
- b. Defy godless commands.**
- c. Be willing to die rather than worship or serve other gods.**

We will go through fires in this life. And God will be with us. He is able to save us- but even if He doesn't, we must remain faithful and obedient to Him.

- Pray