

“Delivered Through the Fire”

Daniel 3

June 7, 2020

Prayer: *“Lord, apart from the restraining law of love for God in our hearts, our depravity would be unleashed to steal, kill, and destroy. But You have come that we might have life and have it abundantly. And once we have tasted the life of God’s love, we will let no threat, even on our life, turn us from loving obedience to Christ, our Deliverer.”*

This morning we are picking up our series, *“Extraordinary Times, Extraordinary God,”* in Daniel chapter 3. A couple weeks ago, Pastor Nick introduced us to Daniel and his three friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego) in chapter 1. These young men along with many other Jews from Judah had been carried off into exile in Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar. Yet because God’s favor rested on these young men who were unwilling to compromise their faithfulness God, He blessed them with wisdom and understanding far beyond any of their peers. As a result, they were promoted to places of influence and leadership under Neb.

Their resolve to be faithful to God resulted in God’s blessing and favor with their superiors. Yet as we are about to discover, sometimes obedience to God leads to a fire of affliction from the world. Before we jump into the familiar story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the fiery furnace, let me summarize some important background from chapter 2.

King Neb. had a dream that troubled him, and he seeks out the magicians and wise men of Babylon to explain its meaning to him. There’s just one catch. He doesn’t tell them what the dream was. They have to tell him or they will die. This was his way of making sure they weren’t just making something up to appease him.

When Daniel heard the news, he prayed and God revealed the dream to Daniel along with its meaning. The dream was of a strange statue. It had a

head of gold which represented king Neb. and his kingdom. Its chest and arms were silver, its belly was bronze, and its legs were iron. These represented a second, third, and fourth kingdom that would follow Babylon. The feet of the statue were both iron and clay representing a future divided kingdom that would be partly strong and partly brittle. Then in the dream, a stone struck the feet, causing the entire statue to crumble and the stone then became a great mountain that filled the entire earth. This stone represented an everlasting kingdom that God would set up, overcoming every other kingdom.

King Neb. was so impressed that Daniel’s God had revealed the dream, that he promoted Daniel to rule the whole province of Babylon and put him in charge over all the wise men of Babylon.¹ And though Neb, in his astonishment, acknowledged that Daniel’s God was a God of gods and a Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries, he wasn’t about to bow in submission to this God (2:47).

Neb doesn’t completely dismiss Daniel’s interpretation of the dream, in fact he takes it as a warning to strengthen Babylon by building his own statue in chapter 3 and in so doing he arrogantly attempts to counter the decrees of God. So let’s pick up the account of these extraordinary times in **[3:1-7]**.

PUT TO THE TEST (Daniel 3:1-7)

What’s the purpose of this image that Neb set up? Well notice, that while he was only the head of gold on the statue in his dream, now he sets up an image that is entirely gold. He recognizes that just like the diversity of iron and clay in the feet of a statue, his kingdom too would not hold together without some common denominator. Remember, that Babylon was a kingdom made up of conquering other kingdoms and so it was a very diverse group of people. What better way to unite the people than to create a state religion where everyone worships the same god—or at least has one god in common?

¹ It was probably Daniel’s influence over the wise men of Babylon that produced a legacy of knowledge regarding Israel’s messiah that led wise men from the east to worship the Christ child (Mt 2).

Neb realized that though he had conquered many nations militarily, his victory was not sealed until he also conquered the people culturally. This is why in chapter 1 he was giving all the best Jewish young people a Babylonian education and Babylonian names. He was eroding and diluting their national identity in attempts to make them Babylonians. And so Neb instructs the kingdom to add his patron god, Nebo, to their repertoire of worship.

It's interesting to note that Nebo can be identified in the first letters of Nebuchadnezzar's name, which means, "Nebo, protect my boundaries!"² Neb is demanding all the leaders of his kingdom to worship this god, hoping that he will be persuaded to keep Babylon's boundaries from crumbling.

Yet we were told in 2:44 that the only enduring kingdom will be the kingdom that the God of heaven will "set up" (Note: "set up" is used 8 times in chapter 3 regarding Neb's idol that represents a kingdom Neb is trying to establish in place of God's). And ironically, he has set up this idol in the very plain where the tower of Babel had once been. There where God had diversified the people, because they were united and intent on building a godless kingdom, Neb is now trying to unify this diverse people to build an enduring pagan kingdom again.

Well, it's in these extraordinary times of kingdoms in conflict—the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God—that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are put to the test. Which king will they serve? **[3:8-15]**

COUNTING THE COST (Daniel 3:8-15)

"What god is there that can deliver you out of my hands?" (vs. 15). Remember, Babylon is the world power—she is on the top. And Neb is at the top of Babylon—no man more powerful on earth at the time.

I don't have to explain these verses to you. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego are being put to the test. Either they will worship the golden image

which means forsaking their God, Yahweh, who said, "you shall not make for yourself a graven image or worship it" (Ex 20:3-4), or they will die in a blazing furnace.

Yet these 3 men are not the only ones being put to the test. Neb is also testing their God when he says, "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" (15).

What will S, M, and A do? What will God do? What would you do in this situation? I think many of us would be tempted to rationalize, wouldn't we: "Well, we didn't make the image and we can bow down without actually worshiping it—we know in our hearts it's not a true god. And besides, we weren't asked to denounce Yahweh. After all, God has raised us up to these places of influence. We can't be influential for the Lord if we are dead. Certainly much greater good could be accomplished if we just fudge a little on this one and have many more years to live for the Lord..." ***We are masters of rationally leading our hearts away from God!***

But Jesus said, "*Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Mt 10:28). In other words, choose your fire—the fire of affliction from men or the fire of judgment from God. **[3:16-18]**

TAKING A STAND (Daniel 3:16-18)

Notice several things here:

First, they are resolved to honor God: "we do not need to give you an answer" (16). That is, "there's no decision to make. We don't have to think about it or defend ourselves." Why? Because they had already resolved in their hearts that they would not forsake their God. *They had determined before the test came how they would live in the face of testing* (chapter 1). But it might be good to ask, what's being tested? Their faith? Obedience? Faithfulness? Yes. There's no true faith without obedience because

² Gleason Archer, Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel. Pg. 32.

obedience is the outworking of faith (James 2:17). Faithfulness is the obedience of faith consistently practiced which demonstrates true loyalty to God.

Second, they respond with *faith* that God is both *able* and *willing* to deliver them (17). The first has to do with God's power, the second with God's goodness and personal favor toward you.

Third, they respond with humility. "Even if He does not..." (18). They are not presuming upon God nor are they demanding of Him. They humbly acknowledge that God alone has the prerogative to decide whether it is best for them to live or perish. They simply yield to God's wisdom and will.³ Remember, *whenever God seems not to deliver us from a situation in which we are trusting Him, it is not because He is unwilling (or unable) but because in His wisdom He sees and understands how to work out His good purposes beyond what we can presently comprehend.* So trust in God's ability and willingness and yield to His wisdom and will.

Our relationship with God was never meant to be circumstantial—choosing to obey or not obey based on consequences. Walking with God so as to avoid any hindrance to His favor is of greater value than avoiding any suffering from the world—even death.

Now having entrusted themselves into God's hands, they have only to wait and see what will happen. They will either live or die by faith. **[3:19-23]**

ENTRUSTED TO GOD'S HANDS (Daniel 3:19-23)

One thing we must take away from the book of Daniel is that while obedience to God results in blessing and favor from God, it may also result in the fire of affliction from the world. Obedience to God will result in blessing *and* suffering! But when we resolve to trust and obey God regardless of the cost of obedience, He will walk through the flames of affliction with us. **[3:24-30]**

FINDING GOD IN THE FIRE (3:24-30)

Furnaces in this time were used for firing bricks. They were fueled by coal and with the use of air shafts, could reach 900-1000 degrees centigrade. It was like being thrown into an incinerator. Yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were not consumed or even singed, nor did they even smell like smoke when they came out. God had indeed delivered them.

In vs. 15 Neb had asked rhetorically, "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" In reply, the 3 men testified in vs. 17 that their God was both able and willing to deliver them from the furnace. And finally, in vs. 29 Neb answers his own question as he declares, "there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way!"

The point of this story is *not* that we will never experience harm when we trust God (but quite the opposite!). The point is that we should resolve to obey God even when it may cost us everything. But what we can depend on is this life principle—***there is no fire of affliction that will come to you as a result of obeying God, but what God Himself will be present with you in the fire.***

God is certainly able to deliver you out of the fire and He may. But what if He doesn't? Take this encouragement to heart: *God does a greater work of purification through the fire of affliction when He walks through it with us than when He delivers us out of it.*

The message of Daniel 3 for us today is this:

Because our God alone is both able and willing to deliver, we must resolve to trust Him with unwavering obedience regardless of the cost, knowing He will not forsake us in the fire of testing.

The Sovereign God who alone can deliver His people, is worthy of our sole allegiance, singular worship, and unwavering obedience.

This points us to the heart of the gospel. Jesus lived the only perfect life of sole allegiance, singular worship, and unwavering obedience to the Father. And He walked through the fire of God's judgment that would have

³ Ronald Wallace, BST: "The Message of Daniel" (ed. J.A. Motyer), pg. 67.

consumed us, enduring its heat and torment, yet came out unscathed to offer eternal life to those who trust in Him.

Prayer Challenge: *“Lord, grant me the faith to trust in Your ability and willingness to deliver me and grant me the resolve to be unwavering in my obedience when it is Your will for me to walk through the fire of testing.”*