

Daniel 3:1,14-28 “Trial by Fire” 4/28/24

Today, in our exploration of the book of Daniel, we have reached the passage often called the Firey Furnace - If we went to Sunday School, we probably heard it there first - Today's chapter may be the very next chapter in our Bibles, but it takes place about 20 years after Daniel had interpreted the king's dream

In that dream, Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great image made of all different things like gold, silver, bronze, clay and iron - The head of gold symbolized Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom - The other elements symbolized future kingdoms

Today's passage begins, “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon”¹

This 90-foot-high golden idol could not have been solid gold - There wasn't that much gold in all of Babylon - This was certainly a gold plated wooden framed statue - It was surely a massively huge, amazing work of art

Had Nebuchadnezzar built it as a beautiful statue, it may have brought him fame throughout the ancient world - But instead, he wanted the thing to be worshipped - This was a problem, a big problem

Worshipping that idol of gold would break one of the 10 Commandments - The second commandment is recorded in Exodus 20:4-6 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”

¹ Daniel 3:1 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

That makes obeying Nebuchadnezzar a whole different thing - Now instead of deciding whether to obey the king's crazy idea - They need to decide whether to obey Nebuchadnezzar or to obey the Lord our God

Peter and the apostles found themselves in a similar situation - They were being told to stop teaching others about Jesus - Acts 5:29 records their response, "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made the same choice - They would obey God and refuse to bow down to the giant statue of gold - Trusting in God instead of fearing the fiery furnace

They did indeed get thrown into that furnace - Which must have been a large industrial furnace because it was large enough for four men to be able to walk around in its flames - That fourth man was either an Old Testament appearance of Jesus or an angel

Perhaps it was the furnace used to melt all the gold required for making the 90-foot-high idol - But that is skipping ahead in the narrative - First, we need to meet some tattletales - Daniel 3:8 "Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews"

As you probably already know, I live in a retirement community - We own a condominium there, and we have a condominium association that seems to think their sole purpose in life is to make lots of rules

We have a lake in the community, and the association enjoys making lots of rules for it too - No swimming, no fishing, and no boating is allowed - What we really need is a no geese rule, because they make an awful mess

Recently the association's robo-call called to remind us that there is no fishing in the lake - And they went on to add that if we saw someone fishing, we should call the police on them

At about age 3, boys and girls alike stop liking tattletales - For many years the railroad bridge over Route 72 in Manchester said, "Snitches get Stitches"

Could my condominium association really think that I will see one of my neighbors fishing - Only to call 911 to demand that they send police to arrest that fisherman? - If I were willing to do that it would lower my social status to that of the Chaldeans in today's passage

Maybe it is not a fair comparison, because never in a million years would I report one of my neighbors for fishing - But the Chaldeans actually did tattle on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - And even worse, God's Word says they did it maliciously

Here's the catch - If we are as faithful as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego it is going to draw attention - Once we draw closer to Jesus, the world's people start to be able to see our Lord in us - And the more His holiness shows in us, the more evildoers' sins become obvious to them

There is no longer a 90-foot-high idol on the plain of Dura - In its place are the sins of this world - Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "The god of this world is the devil, and he claims implicit obedience. Sin in some form or other is the image which Satan sets up and requires us to serve.

The tyranny of the world is fierce and cruel, and those who will not worship its image will find that the burning fiery furnace has not yet cooled²

The true believer's stand must be taken, and we must determine that we will obey God rather than any other person - The love of the world and the love of God will no more mix than oil and water

² The Biblical Illustrator, Joseph S. Excell, editor, originally published 1887 in London, England, © public domain

Perhaps, like the heroes of today's passage, we say, "We will not bow before the gods of this world, but we will worship God only; we will follow Christ, and Christ alone"

This is a brave choice, because when we are sincere in the faith, we are promised trials; but choosing Jesus over anything this world has to offer, you will never regret it - But don't think you will live unnoticed, because the light of Christ shines through every Christian

Nebuchadnezzar was a great blessing to these three holy men - He was their king, their employer, and their influential friend - He was their benefactor, for he had set them in high office in his empire

Many young Christians are tried with this same temptation - There are worldly advantages that may be gained by ungodly employers who are like little Nebuchadnezzars; and this is a great peril

They are tempted to do wrong by one who is their employer, their boss - Now comes the test - Will they endure the trial hour? Will they be faithful to Jesus or faithful to their paycheck?

Nebuchadnezzar was probably amazed that there could be anyone on the earth who would have the presumption to not obey him - Even worse was that these were men he had personally praised

The three men, choosing the furnace and God to bowing to the idol and turning their back on their faith were a powerful witness Nebuchadnezzar - In the closing verses of the chapter we read of the king praising God in Daniel 3:28

"Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God"

Like these three faithful men, we too should be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear - Are we able to show why we are believers in God, why we worship the Lord Jesus Christ

Look at life in the light of eternity - Do not judge the situation by the king's threat and by the heat of the burning fiery furnace, but by the everlasting God and the eternal life which awaits you

I hope that there are many here who can quietly say, "Yes, it is true; I am determined not to bow before sin, come what may" - Do right for Christ's sake, without considering any consequences, because If you take care of God's cause, God will take care for you

The easy way out was to bow down to the huge idol every time music played - But there were three men in that great crowd who stood tall when everybody else bowed low

Their faith was in the true and living God and in the word that He had spoken to their people - Knowing the history of the Jewish people, they were confident that the Lord was in control, and they had nothing to fear

We are to be the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of today - Faithful followers of Jesus - Solid in our faith - Shining for the world to see the light of Christ in us - Confident that the Lord is in control, and that we have nothing to fear