

The Fiery Furnace

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[0:00] The Fiery Furnace Israel, in the account there, they were taken away from their land and the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, took numbers of them captive. And four young people, four young people were especially chosen. There was Daniel and three others. And verse 4 of Daniel chapter 1, it says, describes these children, these young people, these young men, they were children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured and skilful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge and understanding science and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. So they picked out these four gifted young men. And verse 17, it says, where did their gifting come from? It says that God gave them this knowledge. God gave them knowledge, verse 17 of Daniel 1, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. The king favoured Daniel and his three friends. They were brought to the king's palace to be trained to serve for the king's court, to be trained up to serve amongst his wise men or his advisors of his kingdom. And this is a story that especially young people, but all of us can learn from as Christians, as God's people. We can learn from and relate to what happened to these four young people, really Daniel, although in the account we're looking at the three of his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were the Babylonian names they were given. And the first thing I'd like us to note here is the culture pressure, the culture pressure that these young men were under. They were made to fit with Babylonian culture. These young men, they were given new names because really these four Hebrews, Daniel included, had names that glorified God. Their names were names that had God's name. For example, Daniel has got L, E-L, which is one of the names of

God. God is my judge was his name. They changed his name to Belteshazzar. Bel protects his life. They gave him a name that was the Babylonian God, Bel. Another name for Marduk, the chief God of the Babylonians. Hananiah means the Lord has favoured. He was given the name Shadrach, which was to do with Aku, the Babylonian God of the moon. Then Mishael, again that word El in there, who is like God. So it was a name glorifying God, our God, the God of the Bible. They gave him the name Meshach, which again has the God of the day, Aku. Who is like Aku, they made his name. And then Azaria, or the Lord helps, was given the name Abednego, or servant of Nego, or Nabu, is the God of wisdom in the Babylonian system. The Babylonian God of wisdom, supposedly, where we get also like, for example, Nebuchadnezzar. Nebu protects my son's life was what Nebuchadnezzar's name meant. So just to capture this, these four men had Hebrew names glorifying the God of the Bible. They were given names glorifying the gods of the Babylonians. Because Nebuchadnezzar, he wanted to wipe out faith in the one true God. He wanted to wipe out faith in the Hebrew God, the one almighty God of the Bible. And there was a culture that was designed and devised against the God of the Bible of the day. And guess what? In Australia, the culture that you live in, the culture of Australia is a culture that is against the God of the Bible. It's a godless one, and increasingly so, as the school system, for example, it promotes anti-Bible beliefs and rejects Christian truths. But God had other plans to overcome what Nebuchadnezzar's plans were, that the true and living God would prevail over the powerless idols of the day. And here were these men, these three young men had, sorry, these four young men had three years of training, and they were given the choice, they were to be given the choice food that

was prepared for the king's table and his wine. But when it came to this, Daniel went to the man in charge of this special school, and he said that they'd rather not eat the king's meat and partake of the king's wine.

Now think about it, Aussie culture again. Aussie culture again is beer-soaked, it's sodden, it's boozy, it parties on without thought to its destiny and its doom. It drags people along with it. There's a culture war that is underway even today. There's the culture pressure for young people and older people, for everybody here. We're in a culture war, aren't we? There's a culture pressure going on. And chapter 1 verse 8, what does it say about these young men? They didn't want to defile themselves. See that there in chapter 1 verse 8? They did not want to defile themselves. Now to defile means they didn't want to get dirty. Today's culture is rife with immoral images on TV, in music, sex and profanity that's immoral and against God. And Australian Christians, especially Australian Christian young people, Australian Christian teenagers, the devil's got his sights on you. He's got you in his crosshairs. He's trying to aim his weapon at you and overcome you and sweep you along. Premarital sex, drugs, alcohol on almost a daily basis. That's the enemy's plan. It's the culture pressure of our world. In 2 Peter 2 verses 7 to 8 talks about righteous Lot. Just Lot. He had his soul.

His righteous soul was tormented by the lawless deeds. Now Lot put himself in that situation. He was living in Sodom. He put himself there and the culture was all around him. It was influencing and affecting him. And it can do that too with us, can't it? The culture of Australia can influence and affect us. So we need to watch out about the culture, about the impact of the culture, about what we associate with and who we join in with. For example, young people. If you muck around, if you spend your time with people who are swearing all the time, you're going to end up swearing. Likelihood is it'll rub off on you. People who spend their time drinking or doing drugs, if you mess around, if you hang around people like that, it's going to affect you. It's going to affect us. Whoever we spend time with, it's going to affect us. So we want to choose the culture that we associate with and those pressures that are around about us.

[7:28] And instead of being influenced by that sort of culture that's against God, instead let's think about how can I spend time with God? How can I come closer to what God wants for my life? How can I understand what God wants for me by reading the Bible, by praying and singing and not entangling myself in sinful situations and associations? And so we see what happened. These young people later in the story will see when they realised that they had a godly culture and they were true to the God of the Bible, that God blessed them and helped them and gave them courage to obey later with even stronger challenges that they were to face. So the first one was the culture pressure. The second thing you can see from this story is the crowd pressure. You could say peer pressure. The crowd pressure. What was going to happen in King Nebuchadnezzar's time? He decided he was a very proud and puffed up king. What does it say in chapter 3 verse 1? Have a look there. It says that there's a great big image that

Nebuchadnezzar erected on the plain and it was 75 foot high and seven and a half foot wide. It was quite a massive structure. You can imagine seven and a half foot wide. It's wider than I can reach and 75 feet high. You know it's probably, I don't know, four stories high I'd imagine. And this was a great golden image. An image that was gilded with gold. And verse 4 it says that the herald cried aloud. Now a herald was someone, he came along and he made a big announcement. He made a big declaration. He was like the media of the day. He was like the spokesman of the media of the day.

And the herald on him and he went, You know he recalled the citizens of the land. He had called them to come and hear this very important message, this announcement that he made. In verse 4 it says that he cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages, that at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up. So the king said that when he blows his instruments and sets the sound going, the music happening, that everybody was to bow down to the image that the king had set up. In verse 6 it says, And whoever doesn't fall down and worship shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery

furnace. So here he was, all the rulers, all the appointed officials of the day came to this central place. Here was this massive statue, 75 foot high. Can you picture it? A golden image. It would have been shining in the sun. It would have looked beautiful. It would have looked like a great artistic design, perhaps the best of its day. And there was a load of crowd pressure here. There was a load of crowd pressure because how many people were there? Everybody, who was anybody, was there. Everybody was there in this central place. And there was a great pressure to conform, a great crowd pressure, peer pressure to bow down and just go along with the crowd, join in with them, join in with something even though you know it's wrong. And people today, young people, older people, there's peer pressure, peer pressure that is around about us today. Peer pressure to join in, to go along with the crowd. For you as a Christian, just to go with the flow and join in with everybody else, even though you know it's turning from God and it's choosing those things that do not glorify him.

[11:04] Now one day there was a psychologist who got a group of, there was a psychologist one day and he tried an experiment with a group of teenagers. So, and he designed this experiment to show how teenagers can be affected by peer pressure, by group pressure. And the plan was simple. He brought this group of ten adolescents, so ten young people, ten teenagers into a room to test out what would happen. And there was a group of ten and he instructed them to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. There were some lines on the board and they were to point the, and he was to indicate which was the longest line and they were to indicate which one they felt was the longest line. But what one person in the group didn't realize was that nine of the others in the room had been told before to vote for the second longest line. And the experiment went on that nine teenagers voted for the wrong line and the victim, the one who didn't realize what was happening, he just fired everybody else. He followed what all the other nine people did, even though he thought that that wasn't the right answer. But because he didn't want to be standing out from the crowd, he followed the rest of them. And it's true with peer pressure, isn't it? You know, you can see examples of it all around us, even what's just happened, in terms of young people are influenced by the young people that are around them. And so the instructions were repeated and the next card was raised and time after time the self-conscious victim would sit there saying that the shorter line was really longer than the long line because they lacked the courage to disagree with the group. And this conformity happened in about 75% of the cases. So it's kind of been established that this is what happens if you're in a group, tend to go with what the group says. So this is what happened in Daniel's day with these three

Hebrew children. Now Daniel wasn't on the scene, we take it at this time, but the whole crowd was there and they were bowing down to this huge idol, but these three stood their ground. And they were not going to bow down and succumb to the peer pressure, to the crowd pressure. And the pressure to conform, it's very strong for young people, especially today. It's especially strong for teenagers, the pressure to conform, whether it's wearing your modest clothes, whether it's music, movies that are not godly. And there was lots of pressure to conform in Nebuchadnezzar's day because they threatened death. Imagine that. If you want to go with the dumb thing at the time, as far as the ungodly authority was saying, that they were going to be facing death in a fiery furnace if they did not obey. And Exodus 20 verse 3, it says that, So God says we're not to worship idols or other gods under any circumstances.

So here they were, these children, these young people, these young men, at this great dedication, the king summoned all the leaders of the people, and they were all commanded to fall down and worship the image when they heard the sound of the music. There was a lot of pressure to conform, a lot of peer pressure, a lot of crowd pressure. Romans 12, 2, it says, And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

God wants us to be transformed. He wants our minds to be transformed, not to be conformed to the world and its ungodly ways and dangerous things that would damage our spiritual life. Like 2 Timothy 2 says, it says, Flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

So the question is, will we succumb to the crowd pressure? You might feel like you stand out like a sore thumb, whether it's in your social group or your school life or your work life. As a Christian, you might be one in a crowd that loves the Lord and everyone else is just going the way of the world. And where you can, try to hang around with a positive peer group, with a good peer group. As when we come as Christians to church, we want to associate and fellowship with God's people like it encourages us to, to assemble together with God's people. That's a good thing to do. It's a great habit and it helps us if we can mix with Christians because that can influence us and we can help others too. So we see in this story, it's about culture pressure. You're under culture pressure. We live in Australia. We live under a system that is not particularly godly at times. As much as had a godly beginning, we know it's increasingly a godless culture. And we're also living with crowd pressure wherever we mix and live and go about our day by day. And the third thing I'd like us to see about this story that's really enheartening for us is the courage. The courage that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to use their Babylonian names, they would not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue. And it took a lot of courage, didn't it? It took a lot of grit, a lot of guts, a lot of strength for those young men to not bow down with the rest of them and to defy the very king of Babylon. It was the courage of conviction. Now as a Christian young person, older person, you can have the courage of your convictions, the courage to stand, the courage to believe, the courage to have faith. And these young people, they would not bow down to the idol.

[16:38] They would bow only to God and their faith was strong. Young people, older people, when you face the culture pressure, when you face the crowd pressure, find your faith and courage in Christ.

Find your courage in Him to stand up for what you believe in. When the king heard all this, he saw what was going on. He even gave them a second chance. He thought, well, maybe they'll bow down when I ask them personally. Well, I'll order them personally because he's the king.

And especially when they knew what they were going to suffer for not bowing down to the image, but they knew that it would be wrong to worship an idol and they trusted in the Lord. And when Nebuchadnezzar heard that, these young people had refused to obey him. He was very angry.

In the account here in Daniel, it says his face was changed. You can imagine his face contorted in rage and frustration and anger. And Nebuchadnezzar, he was really enraged.

And yet the young people in verse 17, it says, verse 16, it says, they talked to King Nebuchadnezzar. We're not careful to answer thee. If our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Here they were before the king of the land, really one of the greatest kings of the world of its day. And he was furious. He said to his servants, verse 19, go and heat up that furnace seven times hotter than it normally is heated. And bind these three rebellious Hebrews and throw them into that dreadfully hot fire. Throw them into that dreadfully hot fire.

[18:29] But these godly young men, they were not afraid. They had told Nebuchadnezzar that they believed God would help them. But even if he did not, they would not worship the king's image. And this was not the if not of doubt, but it was rather the if not of supreme faith in God. No matter what, we're not going to bow down. Even if we burn up, even if God was to allow us to burn up, we will not bow down.

Their faith was in God. No matter what God allowed to happen, that they were going to trust their lives to his care. And it's like Hebrews 7.25, he is able also to save them to the uttermost, but come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. This was a faith in God no matter what.

It wasn't faith for expecting something in return. Faith to expecting that necessarily they would be saved and necessarily demanding that of God. But it was a faith trusting in God no matter what. No matter what the circumstances their faith would see them through. No matter how difficult the pressure, the threats or the punishment.

And when we are Christian, knowing the Lord Jesus is our Saviour, knowing God personally, we know that he can deliver us and he can help us. He is faithful for us and he will see us through. He will either deliver us from a trial or he can miraculously sustain us and strengthen us in a trial. So he was Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king on the earth, defied by three of his own trusted officials really, as well as you know, his leaders in training. And these, so he told them to heat the fire up. He commanded his best soldiers, his most mighty men, it says in verse 20 of Daniel 3, that they would grab him, bind them, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. It was so hot that even the soldiers who carried them there were burnt to death on the way. And we'd imagine it was a kind of a pit. So as they fell to their deaths, the Hebrew children being bound, they fell into the place where the furnace was at the same time. And the three young men, yet they remained in the fire uninjured whilst the soldiers were burnt up. And the king then looked in and he saw, verse 25, he saw them walking in the midst of the fire. And it says, look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt.

And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Verse 25, it's amazing, isn't it? That here was this amazing spectacle of these three Hebrew children as they trusted their Saviour, that the Saviour came and accompanied them in the fire. It says that he was like the Son of God. That's how Nebuchadnezzar described as, instead of they weren't being burnt to death, they were alive, they were unbound, and they were walking around in the fire. And instead of three, Nebuchadnezzar saw four. The fourth one looked like the Son of God. And Nebuchadnezzar, verse 26, he called out, servants of the Most High God, is what he called them. He recognized that these were men of God, that God had miraculously dealt with them and protected them. Verse 27, it says that the fire had had no power over their bodies. The trial had no power over them because they were thoroughly submitted to the power and will of God. And it's like us as God's people, as John 16 says that, as the Lord Jesus promises to you, in the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. And here were these three, unburnt, unharmed, not even their hair singed, and unscorched garments, not even the smell of smoke on them, not a whiff of it. God had miraculously intervened. And Nebuchadnezzar himself, he acknowledged

[22:29] God's power. He issued a decree then that threatening death for any who blasphemed the God of the Bible, and promoted these three to positions of honour in his kingdom. And he even gave praise to God in Daniel 3, 28. He says, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him and have changed the king's word and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any God except their own God. God used this amazing, these difficult circumstances that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found themselves in to bring glory to himself and to ultimately benefit them. And just to recap, just think about how can I apply this scripture in my life? How can I apply this learning? What happened to these three? They had an encounter culture pressure. You have a culture pressure. You're an Aussie or you're living in Australia.

This nation, this culture, this society, this godless world that we live in has an influence on us. We can't help but be influenced by it and impacted by it to a degree. But we don't want to be saturated by it. We don't want to be conformed to this world. We want to be transformed. We don't want to be conformed to the culture. We don't want to be conformed to the crowd. The crowd pressure and following the crowd to go with the flow, to go with the majority. We don't want to go with the flow when it's going the wrong way. As the Bible says, that broad is the way that leads to destruction. The majority are lost and hell bound. Yet for us, we have found the narrow way, the way of salvation, and we've trusted Christ and he is our saviour. And we won't follow the crowd. We'll follow Christ. Follow Christ. And thirdly, find courage. Whatever faces you. It may not be a fiery furnace for you, but there might be challenges for you to stand up and be counted, to stand up for your faith in Christ, to stand out from the crowd, to be a Christian wherever you're living and working and going about your day by day. Have courage. Have the courage of your convictions, the courage of faith. And faith comes as we trust him. It's not a doing of our own, a working of ours, it's a doing of his, a doing that's done. As he said, it is done. It is finished. It is completed.

The finished work of the cross where he bled and died to carry our sin and pay for the penalty of it. And if you can trust him, if you can have the courage to say, yes, Lord, I believe.

Help my unbelief. Help me to follow you. Help me to live for you. Help me to be yours. I want you to be my master, my Lord, my saviour. You can trust him. You can follow him. And he can be yours for eternity. And people today, let us be encouraged by the testimony, the witness of these three young people and learn from their example and apply it in our lives each day ahead as he gives us grace and strength to. We're going to pray and commit this to the Lord. Lord, we pray. We thank you, Lord, for this time, for anyone here and those that were here, Lord, that you would bless them. Help them to see their great need. Help us to see our great need to trust you, to follow you, to not conform to this world, to not conform to the crowd and the culture, but to follow Christ soundly and clearly and courageously as you give us strength to, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.