

The Fourth Man

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 April 2018

[0:00] Please be seated. God bless you. Turn with me to Daniel. If you've got a Bible, Daniel chapter 3. If you need a Bible to borrow, we've got some on the back table there. And you're very welcome to wave your hand and grab one. Page 672 in this one.

Now, this morning, I don't have a sermon for you. I've got a book. I've got lots and lots of pages, but I'm the opposite of my dad. He only had a few pieces of paper and talked a lot. But I'll give you the Reader's Digest version.

Talking about the fourth man. The fourth man. And Daniel 3 from verse 1. Daniel 3 from verse 1. We see Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold. He commanded this very large golden image to be made. And he appointed all the rulers and officials from all over the nation to come to worship his idol.

It was a massive golden image. 90 feet high and some seven foot wide. It was impressive. You could see it for miles. It glistened in the sun. Glowing gold. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to dedicate this statue and he wanted everybody to be there.

In verse 2, it tells us how he sent to gather together the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

[1:34] Verse 3, it says that they all gathered and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. You can imagine, here's just an artist's representation. They didn't have the smartphone to take the picture back then.

But you can imagine, it was huge. It was massive. 90 foot high. And anybody who was anybody was there. All of his leaders, his governors, his officials to this great event.

This was the event of the century. Nebuchadnezzar wanted all of his political leaders to be there. Thousands gathered. The city was in party mode. This was the biggest day in the history of Babylon.

Verse 4, it says, Then a herald cried out, To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages, that at what's on you hear the sound of the corner, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, all kinds of music.

You fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And verse 6, And whoso forth not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace.

[2:46] That's what we call the pressure to just go along with the crowd. There's a lot of that, isn't there? You saw it in school. You can remember. I can remember. You know, I used to have a pommy accent. I had to get rid of it pretty quickly.

Because there's pressure to conform. There's pressure to not be different. To conform. To go along with everybody else. Even though I spoke English correctly as a pommy.

But we had to join in with everybody. You had to join in. And just fit in. And that's what happened here. You had to just fit in and do what everybody else did, even though you knew it was wrong. Follow the crowd. It's called peer pressure. It can drive anyone, including Christians, to turn from God and choose those things that do not glorify Him. You know, even psychologists have done tests and research.

They set up an experiment that was very interesting where they got teenagers to see how they handled group pressure. So they brought in these 10 adolescents.

[3:47] You know, these 10 teenagers into this room for a test. And each group of 10 was instructed by the teacher to raise their hands when the

teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts that were on the wall.

And what one person in the group didn't know was that nine of them had already been told to vote for the second longest line. And the experiment began with nine teenagers voting for the wrong line. And the one odd one, the victim, would typically glance around and in confusion slip up their hand, even though they knew it was wrong. It was the wrong line.

And so the instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. And time after time, the odd one out would simply raise their hand and go along with everybody else in the group.

And apparently the conformity was 75% of cases. And this was true of small children and high school students as well. Peer pressure. Just go along to get along.

[4:54] Just fit in. Just go along. Just conform. And we see that pressure to conform, that peer pressure, it's especially strong for teenagers.

Whether it be the wearing of immodest clothing, going to join in with questionable movies and music and such. A lot of pressure to conform these days, to just fit in, to go along.

And here Nebuchadnezzar threatened the death penalty for those who did not obey. Into the fiery furnace with them. But God says we are not to worship an idol under any circumstances.

Now I've been around the place here and there and I see some people have got little statues of Buddha or whatever it be. The Bible says don't make an image. Certainly don't bow down to it under any circumstances.

Exodus 20 verse 3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. That's one of the Ten Commandments. At the dedication the king summoned the leaders of the people.

[5:55] And all were commanded to fall down and worship the image whenever they heard the sound of the music. Now there's a lot of pressure to conform even now, today. Romans 12 it says be not conformed to this world but rather be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That ye may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. Now Nebuchadnezzar's religion had a jazzy tune. You just wanted to tap your toes and get your stride and you just wanted to join in.

And he had a full band. He had the orchestra. It was rocking. There was all kinds of music. And now it was time for his rock band to strike the tune, to get the rhythm, to start the beat and to call to worship.

Come and bow down. All you people come and bow down. Everything was ready for the big event. The big worship event. The golden image. The musicians, the priests, the people.

Everybody who was anybody was there. What a stirring religious experience it was. And the people's emotions were stirred. You can imagine the atmosphere of that special moment.

[7:02] The whole nation gathered. Masses drawn in by the spectacle like a powerful magnet. You can imagine the enormous mob conformity. You look back through history to big rallies at Nuremberg.

When a charismatic man got everybody to say, Hi Hitler! Hi Hitler! And everybody was looking around.

Better put my hand up. That was the conformity. The excitement of this event was just as palpable. This was the big event. The people could bow down to this false god and swear law and allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom.

Or to the furnace with them. Here was the picture. If you like. Verse 7 tells the music struck up. All the people fell down and worshipped.

Multitudes. They gave their allegiance to King Nebuchadnezzar. They grumbled in the dirt. Their faces to the dirt as they worshipped this man and his golden lifeless image.

[8:06] They still do such a thing in North Korea today. North Korea today. That would be a nation to go as a missionary, wouldn't it? Whoa. Glory.

The orchestra began to play. A band struck up an awesome sound. You know, they had the greatest orchestra you could gather, I can imagine. And the catchy tune.

Oh, it was just humming in your mind. And you just had to join in. And bow down across the plain of Jura. And bow down and worship the image. And if anyone refused, they were going to be thrown into the burning, firing furnace.

So there's a lot of good reasons to just join in and do what the crowd does. And a lot of people do that today. They just go along with the crowd. Go along with the crowd.

There's a lot of that today, isn't there? In churches too. And among Christians, they go along with the crowd. And they just adopt the mediocre, you know, middle of the road.

[9:07] Don't get too fanatical. And there's all kinds of idols around in this nation. Australian idols. Some people make their idols of possessions of people, popularity or pleasure.

And they get spiritually desensitized. Everybody else is doing it. Why can't I tune into what they tune into? Why can't I just bow down and go along?

That's what people think. And logic, you know, human comfort and, you know, our selfish ways says, Oh, I'll just go along with the crowd.

I won't stand out from the crowd. And it came to light that three men did not bow down. Three men did not bow down.

And these three men, these certain Jews, spoke in verse 12 when they were summoned.

[10:17] And of them they were accused. Oh, king, these three have not regarded you. They serve not thy gods nor worship the golden image which them have set up.

They were accused. They were committed to standing true, to standing firm. These were the three men. Their nation had been ransacked. And their temple was in ruins. Their articles of religious worship was placed in heathen temples and their god was mocked.

Yet in the face of this adversity, three faithful men would not bow to a lifeless image, no matter how large, impressive or expensive.

You know, I imagine King Nebuchadnezzar didn't spare any expense to make sure this was pretty impressive. But they would not bow down to this image nor to the man. Because the word says, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

These three faithful men lived under biblical authority. What mattered to them was what pleases God. And so should it be for us. But Nebuchadnezzar was not impressed with these three.

[11:27] It put a bit of a dampener on his big day. You know, they were raining on his parade. This was, this is not cool. You know, they're, they're a bucking my authority here.

And verse 13, in his rage and fury, he commanded, bring them to me. So they brought these men to the king.

Verse 14. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, is it true? O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Nebuchadnezzar looked them in the eye and he says, is it true? That is a good question. It's a question we ought to ask ourselves.

Is it true? This is really the question the world is asking today. Because many, many of us in Sundays are bowing down to what the world bows down to.

[12:34] And the world wants to know, like Nebuchadnezzar, is it true? Do you really believe? Are you fair dinkum? Are you really a Christian? Or is it just something we say we believe?

But when we get out on the plain of Jura, when we're told everybody's got to do this, we're no different from all the rest. We're no different. Is it true?

It's a big question. Verse 15 we see, he gives them another chance. Look guys, I'm going to give you another chance. Maybe you didn't understand the directions here.

This is the deal. At what time you hear the sound? You fall down and worship the image which I have made. Well, but if you worship not, you shall be cast into the burning, firing furnace.

And who is that God? That she'll deliver you out of my hands. The king gave them a lifeline here. Another chance. Now Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, of course they were the pagan names they were given.

[13:42] They had actually Hebrew names which worshipped and honoured the Lord God. They could have compromised. They could have weakened. They could have just said, oh, okay, maybe it's not such a big deal.

I can just bow down for a few seconds and it's all over. Just dust off my knees and she'll be right, mate. They could have argued. Why they could have just gotten along and gone along with the

crowd.

Just make the king happy. Not make any waves. Just move on. They could have said, when in Babylon, do what the Babylonians do. Their faith was a big test here.

The king was saying, just go with the flow. Just go with the flow. Don't rock the boat. Just fit in. That would have been the easy way out, wouldn't it?

The easy way out. It must have been a tempting offer. Yet, they stood firm. The burning, fiery furnace. They were starting to hear the crackling of those flames.

[14:45] And they responded yet with courage and conviction. And they respectfully answered the king. They didn't want to undermine the king of the nation.

Verse 16, it says, Oh king, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. We're not going to, we're not taking this lightly.

But sometimes it's okay to disobey. To have courage enough to be different. Because it's always right to obey God. Rather than men. When there's a conflict.

When there's a question. And they let Nebuchadnezzar know that right was right. And wrong was wrong. And that's not negotiable. Yet, it's a tragic thing. That many would bow down.

End the plain of Jura. And just go with the flow. They stood. They stood in faith. And their confession was this. God is able.

[15:48] Whatever our need. He is able. Brother, sister. He is able. Isn't he? Isn't he? He is able. Ephesians 3 verse 20 says, Now unto him that is able.

To do exceeding abundantly above. All that we ask or think. He is able to answer our prayer.

According to the power that worketh in us.

More than we can even imagine. More than we can think. Our God is able. Or stop and think.

Whatever your situation this morning. God is able.

In 2 Corinthians 9 it says, God is able to make all grace abound towards you. Grace. Do you have need to overcome temptation? He is able to succor to help them that are tempted.

Hebrews 2. Do we need salvation? Wow. Everybody needs that. Get that one right. Wherefore he is able to say to the uttermost.

[16:51] To the uttermost. Them that come unto God by him. Hebrews 7 verse 25. Now I like how one preacher says he's able to say to the guttermost. You might think, oh preacher I'm just too sinful.

You don't know what I've done. For I'm just really blown it big time. I'm too far gone. Nobody's too far from God. He's able to say to the guttermost.

To the uttermost. To the extremity. I actually met someone who said he got saved in the gutter. He had a drinking binge one day.

And he collapsed in the gutter. And then he found God there. God can find you wherever you are. No matter how low you are. No matter how far, far away from him you are.

Do you need salvation? God is able to save. To the uttermost. Do you need security? He is able to keep that which I've committed unto him.

[17:48] To Timothy 1. Do you need strength? He is able to keep you from falling. Beyond your own. To present you faultless. Before the presence of his glory and exceeding joy.

Three faithful men. They declared, God is able. God is able. They bow to his will yet. They submit to his sovereignty. It tells us there in verse 17.

If it be so. If you're going to throw me in the burning, fiery furnace. Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace.

And he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, being known unto thee, O king, we will not certify gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Now, by this time, steam was coming out of the king's ears. You know, he was just... You know, he was enraged with fury and anger and wrath.

[18:49] How dare you? Our God is able. But if not, we're still not going to bow down. Question is, who or what are you going to worship?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they refuse to worship or serve any God but the living God.

Well, some time before, some years before when they first arrived in Babylon, they were called to a

royal service.

They were selected to be in the University of Babylon, to get their best training, to be the king's attendants. But yet they determined not to defile themselves with the king's royal food and wine. They rather fasted and ate other food. And it says in Daniel 1 verse 20, there were ten times more advanced in wisdom and understanding than all the kings, magicians and enchanters of the whole kingdom.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. That is how they were different. And they would not bow down. It took courage for them. The courage of their conviction.

[19:58] The courage to stand. The courage to believe. The courage of faith. They would not bow down to any idol. They would bow only to the living God.

Young people, older people, when we face peer pressure, when we face culture pressure, find your faith and courage in this.

When the king heard about it, he was very angry. They knew it was wrong. And they trusted God. He gave them another chance.

They refused. The band began to play. Everybody bowed down but three faithful men. Three young men stood up. Our God, whom we serve, is able.

We will not serve our gods. They stood together. Our God. There was a fellowship there. The strength in fellowship. If you're a Christian and you're here and there, wondering, get in fellowship.

[21:00] Get in fellowship. Get together. Get in. Get alongside. Hook arms with somebody else who can encourage you. And you can encourage them. Our God, whom we serve, we will not bow down.

We will not worship. Our God. There's a strength in fellowship. And it's that we serve our God. We face peer pressure.

Sometimes we face fear pressure. Fear pressure. Sometimes it gets fearful, doesn't it? You get face to face with an angry king. You get face to face with an angry boss who doesn't like your Christian witness.

Your faith will be tested. Act with courage. Their lives are governed by an inner principle, not an outward pressure. They stood with conviction.

It's been said we have a lot of opinions in the church today, but we don't have as many convictions. Opinion is based on what we think. Conviction is based upon what God says.

[22:02] Verse 19. It says, The king commanded to heat up that furnace seven times more than normal. But these godly men stood firm.

He is able to save them. This was faith in God. It was faith under all circumstances.

Being true to God no matter what. God can deliver you. From whatever your situation, trial your test. Here is the king, Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king on the earth.

Defied by three of his own trusted officials. They were part of his government, these three young men. They were placed in a position of trust.

They were wearing official robes. And so this was especially angering for the king. And he was boiling mad, furious. He bought these three.

[23:05] Some 20 years had passed when they'd come from Israel. He'd given them Babylonian names. He'd educated them. He'd appointed them to high positions in his government. They had power, prestige, wealth.

After all this time, they still don't know what they're supposed to do. To worship me, he says. To worship my image. This was a clear-cut decision.

There was no moving them. Their commitment was unshakable. If we're controlled by the word, we will respond with courage. If we're controlled by the world, we'll respond with cowardice.

This would be their greatest test. Fear pressure. The test of their faith. Should we just go along with the crowd? Just this one time? Can't we just...

I could bow down really quick. Just hit the ground with a few seconds and then nobody would even notice. That might have been what some people would think.

[24:04] We're going to get lost in this big multitude. Who's going to even notice whether we're just bowing down? Who's going to even know? Who would even care? Who would notice? What about us?

Do we sometimes take the easy road when it comes to our Christian witness? I'll just sort of keep it. I'll be a quiet Christian. I'll just be a chameleon Christian. I'll just sort of change colour when depending who's around me.

The colour of my language and what I talk about. What I do. Verse 20 we see that... And he commanded the most mighty men of his army to bind them and cast them into the fiery furnace. So here they were brought up to the edge of this pit, this burning furnace. And perhaps they thought of the promise of God in Isaiah 43 too.

Where God says, When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt. Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Verse 22, The king's commandment was so urgent, the furnace so exceeding hot, the flame of the fire killed those men.

[25:10] Now, the fire was so hot it killed the soldiers who threw them in. Malachi 3 verse 3 says, God is a refiner's fire. Sometimes he'll put us through the fire.

Wow. It's not always comfortable in the fire, is it? But the fiery trials it tells us in the Bible. They set us free. The size of the furnace you are in is in relation to the quality of your faith.

And the hotter the furnace, the more quality of the silver and the gold that comes out at the other end. The hotter the fire, the greater the work God is doing in you.

God's doing something. To you, in you, through you. It's been said that a silversmith heats the silver and gold to such an extent that ultimately he sees his own reflection.

Maybe God's doing that for you. Brother, sister, the furnace might be the centre of God's will for you. Verse 23, it says, Sometimes our faith has to face the furnace.

[26:22] It might be a difficult situation. Maybe the loss of a job. A child on drugs. Some difficult circumstance. What's going on? Our faith will be tested.

It's not something unusual or strange thing. It can be very much God's thing. And the furnace was so blazing hot, it killed the ones who carried them to the furnace.

And they fell in. These three young men. But they remained in the fire uninjured. And the king saw them walking in the midst of the fire. Verse 25, it says, He peered in to the observation window.

He got as close as he could to that heat to be able to take a good look into the furnace. And he says, Look, I see four men.

Loose. Walking in the midst of the fire. And they have no hurts. And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. This was amazing.

[27:28] Nehemiah didn't see three. He saw four. What? He only threw three in, didn't we? Interesting. The Hebrew number for four is Dalet.

It means a door. Jesus is the door. Jesus is the way. The door. When the king looked in, instead of being burnt to death, they were alive.

And the only thing that got burnt was the ties that held them. The binding that held them was burnt. The fourth one looked like the Son of God.

Now, King James puts it, Son of God. Capital S. That's who it is. And Nebuchadnezzar called the three men to come out of the furnace, calling them servants of the Most High God.

Verse 26, Jesus saved them. Jesus was there, joining them in the furnace. He says to you, to me, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

[28:33] You are not alone. If you're in the furnace, you are not alone there. He is there. He is with you there. Right there. He never breaks his promises, and we always can find, in the fiery furnaces of life, he will always show up.

And all the saints of the ages can testify, the fiery trials of their faith, that in that time, the Lord is present, in the fire with them.

So verse 26, it tells how he calls them forth. Come forth, you servants of the Most High God. Come here, he says. And it says, verse 27, people saw they had no fire.

The fire had no power. Nor was the hair of their head singed. Nor their coats were changed. Nor the smell of fire was on them.

The point is, the fire had no power over them. The trial had no power because they had submitted to the power and will of God.

[29:34] The Lord Jesus says, in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be ye of good cheer. I have overcome the world. John 16, 33. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God's power, and he promoted them.

At the end of it all, they would not bend, they would not bow, and they would not burn. What about you? They would not bend.

Just have a quick bow. No one will see. They would not bend. They would not bow. They would not worship anything but the true God. And they would not burn because God intervened in person. You know, there's that pre-incarnate presence of the Lord Jesus. A Christophany, yeah, a theophany.

The Lord Jesus, a manifestation prior to his coming in the person as the one maid of a woman.

[30:38] He came before that because the Lord Jesus is pre-existent. He was no ordinary man. He got in with them and he will get in with you.

And you can come out stronger. Brother, sister, the fire will come but he is there. And he will make it work for our own good. Verse 25, their bonds were loosed.

That, the only thing the fire burnt up was what bound them. In the flames of our trials and tests, we can be set free, freer than ever before.

We can get stronger and firmer and more faithful and more richer and fuller in our faith as a result of the fire. Why didn't the Lord spare them from the fire?

Because he got glory in sparing them through the fire. And what a valuable lesson. God may let you go through the fire. The dumbest thing you can do is to quit when you're in the fire.

[31:43] Don't do that. He will go with you and he will bring you out. He walked with them. And we see the closing part of chapter 3 tells how the king said there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

and he he actually promoted faith in the almighty God. The fire did not restrict them it released them.

What will you do? When it comes to the fire when it comes to the crunch when someone says are you really a Christian will you bow and bend with those who have no character or integrity or will you be controlled by the word by the conviction that you'll respond with that and not with compromise.

You know there was a young Korean Christian taken by the communists and they determined to make a public example of him and they commanded the entire village to appear in the town square and a communist soldier led the young Christian to the centre of town put a pistol to his head and shouted denounce Jesus Christ and embrace communism or die.

The young man looked around at the crowd and raised his head towards heaven and shouted I believe in Jesus Christ I believe Crack he was dead he wouldn't bow he wouldn't bow these three faithful men wouldn't bow they didn't bow they didn't bend and so they didn't burn how about you?

[33:19] Have you selted it in your heart? Have you made that determination? Have you consciously purposed that when the winds blow and the rains descend when wickedness comes in like a flood you will surely stand firm on the rock of ages Christ Jesus it's about where you're built isn't it?

Will you notice the idols and fall in line and worship them? What are the idols in your life? What are those things that get in God's way from him having his sway having his way with you?

Character is functioning with inner principle and not yielding to outer pressure character conviction or will it be compromise? Will we face the challenges with grit with determination with faith as these three faithful men and the fourth man will join us in the fire he is the one he said I will never leave you nor forsake you through the flames he will go with you we could say much much more about the appearances of Christ the testimony of Christ right through the ages you know I'll put it on the Facebook page of all the things about Jesus who he is I'm talking to someone lately who in effect when you boil it all down to it they denigrate Christ they denigrate him they say he's a created being no sir he's from everlasting to everlasting he is the fourth man in the fire he was there with them with the three through the flames you know there's much much more

I'm conscious there's much much more I could say here today he is the Passover lamb he is the high priest he is the city of our refuge he is our kinsman redeemer he is my shepherd I shall not want he is the suffering prophet he is the fourth man in the midst of the fiery furnace he is the

