

Daniel 3

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the chapter we read, and we'll take us our connecting link in Daniel chapter 3, reading at verse 16.

Daniel chapter 3, reading at verse 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and 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.

At the end of the second chapter, after Daniel's interpretation of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, we saw that he was so impressed by what he had been told by Daniel, that he seemed to be on course to a repentance, and indeed what we would call today evangelical repentance and conversion.

[1 : 41] But now we find him in this chapter unchanged in his heart, and returning again to his idolatry and to his pride.

God had spoken to Nebuchadnezzar through the dream that Daniel had interpreted for him.

And he had been reminded, as the Jews had been reminded by Daniel, that powerful though Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was at this time, it would not stand.

And though it would be replaced by a powerful kingdom itself, and that in turn by another, and that by another, history was going to show that there was only one kingdom which stood the test of time and the test of the ages.

There was only one kingdom that endured forever, and that kingdom was the kingdom of Christ. But God spoke Nebuchadnezzar, not only in the dreams that he'd had, but also in the miracles, or in a miracle that was going to be performed during his reign.

[3 : 08] And that's a miracle that is recorded for us here in chapter 3. There are three miracles recorded in the book of Daniel. This one of the burning fiery furnace, in which the men were delivered.

The miraculous writing on the wall by the finger. And the deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den. And these miracles all established the omnipotence of God.

And they were used by God to prove to the Babylonians that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the God of Daniel was the living and the true God.

And that those who put their trust in him had a faith which was not empty, nor deluded, nor vain.

And it was for that purpose we believe that these miracles, at least that was one of the purposes for which the miracles were performed.

[4 : 17] Now we remember, as we turn to look at this third chapter, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, together with Daniel, had distinguished themselves as students in the college, or what we would call today the university, through which they had passed, in which they had studied for three years, they had acceded themselves admirably, and they had distinguished themselves as academics during these three years.

And had found worthwhile positions of employment in the Babylonian Empire. But being men of principle, and men of devotion, and men of godliness, and men of honor, they were exposed, as Daniel was, to the jealous intrigue of their contemporaries.

And it was as a result of that intrigue that they were reported to the king and eventually found themselves in fear of their lives.

Now you know the chapter tells us how it happened. The chapter gives an account of this magnificent, a religious, and indeed musical festival, which was held at the inauguration, or the dedication, of this colossal image, or statue, made of gold that Nebuchadnezzar had

commissioned.

It was 90 feet high and 15 feet broad. A statue, according to its measurements, which seemed, out of all proportion, 90 feet high and only 15 feet wide.

[6 : 11] I don't know how high this building is. I haven't the foggiest idea. There are some people here, tradesmen, who can give a good idea as to how high this building is. But you think of the height of this building and a statue 15 feet broad.

And you have an idea of something of the size of this image. It represented probably one of the gods of Babylon and no doubt Nebuchadnezzar himself.

And as he erected it, so he had determined that on the day of its dedication and inauguration, a great musical festival, musical religious festival, would be held.

And whenever the music struck up, whenever the band struck up, everybody was to fall down and pay homage to this image.

Now you know yourselves that there are despots, there are men who hold complete authority as their rule in lands and they have their own picture and images, their own representation of themselves, paintings of themselves.

[7 : 23] scattered all over the land. We saw this during the time of the Gulf War when you were given, when you saw pictures of Iraq and of the ruler there.

No matter where you, where the fourth picture was taken, there always seemed to be some representation of Saddam himself in that country.

Well, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was that type of man. He wanted people to remember him. And he wanted people to pay homage to him and to pay homage to his God.

So maybe the statue represented both himself in all his glorious power and his God. And we may think that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten already the dream that had disturbed him for so long. that colossus that he had seen in his dream which had been interpreted for him by Daniel, the head of which was made of gold, which said Daniel represents yourself and your kingdom.

[8 : 28] But he had forgotten that the kingdom was to fall, that every kingdom was to fall. And he had forgotten the distinguishing feature of that colossus.

The problem was with its feet. It couldn't stand. It was unsteady because its feet was made of a mixture of iron and clay and they couldn't mix.

So when that stone came, the stone, it was able to topple the colossus. Maybe he'd forgotten his dream. Maybe he hadn't.

Maybe he set out to prove that his kingdom could stand. And the way to make his kingdom stand was to unite everyone within the kingdom.

Make sure that there were no factions within the kingdom. Make sure that there were no reactionary forces within the kingdom.

[9 : 30] Now you know this is the way that some people think and I think in some respects rightly so. I'm sure that if I was sovereign in this country that I would want to make sure that everyone in the country accepted my authority as sovereign.

Of course the sovereign knows that that is not the case. But I'm sure that the sovereign would want that to be the case. Let's have this union not only of identity but of worship.

And here we have Nebuchadnezzar suggesting to us as he suggested to his own people that the best way of ensuring that his kingdom wasn't weakened from within was to establish it a strong cultural and religious kingdom bowing down and worshipping this one image.

Now you know that there is nothing new since the Bible under the sun and even in our own day and though the impetus seems to have died down quite a bit I'm sure it will be restored sooner or later even our own day we hear so much talk about strength and numbers and the union and the unity that could come to us as a people if we only had the one church.

And so there are people who are brought into what we call the ecumenical movement. As I said it seems to have lost a lot of its impetus but that's when a movement like that is most dangerous because people very often are working behind the scenes and sooner or later it's going to burst onto the surface again.

[11 : 18] And the idea there is this one church one grey church one creed one confession one constitution all worshipping the one God let's bow down as one to this image.

Well that was the thing behind Nebuchadnezzar image at this time. And he probably wanted someone has put it like this the individual must be made to feel that he belongs to something

worthwhile something vital and something basically attractive.

Nebuchadnezzar's idea is to develop a unity of is to develop and to unify the culture of his country. But above all he requires a unifying religion. For religion itself was defined in parts of the ancient world in this way that which binds people and was acknowledged everywhere as the best kind of cement to keep our society together.

And you have the same thinking today big is beautiful. Let's get them all together worshipping the one God and falling down at the sound of the music. Well that's what he determined.

[12 : 52] And so we have here first of all what happened on the day of the dedication. this great musical festival when as someone put it all the music of the world seemed to be there.

Music from Persia music from Babylon music from Greece and when the music played everyone bowed but there was a fly in the ointment.

Nebuchadnezzar thought that it was possible that some in the country might refuse to pay homage to him and to his God.

And so he had fiery furnaces made built huge fiery furnaces into which people were to be thrown alive if they refused to pay homage to him.

Perhaps the possessor thinking was that there may be a few who might refuse to obey but to make sure that they don't run that risk I will have this sanction built the fiery furnace and no doubt he expected the Jews to people who were to a considerable extent respected by Nebuchadnezzar because the stand that they had taken and the place that the part that they played in the Babylonian society in the Babylonian economy he respected these people to an extent and maybe he expected them to accept his right and the right of the Babylonian people to worship their own God in their own place in their own culture and in their own society after all what was wrong with them just once bowing down and worshipping this God well it seems as though everything went quite well at first but then he received this disturbing news that

[15 : 07] Shadrach Meshach and Abednego were refusing to bow down and that brings us to what I want to consider particularly tonight their confession of faith they were brought before Nebuchadnezzar and asked to explain their actions with a simple question you realise says Nebuchadnezzar what's going to happen to you if you don't worship you realise you're going to be cast into this fiery furnace and who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands who is that God who will deliver you out of my hands and here he is already putting himself above both them and their God so he asks them to explain the reason for the stand that they take and they do it very simply and as this book tells us always very courteously there is no show on their part no attempt to draw the attention of the assembled masses to what they're saying there is no attempt to do what we would call today probably hold a press conference issue a statement make a press release very simply and quietly and courteously they say to the king well we just cannot compromise our position as believers in the

God of Israel we will not argue with what you're saying it is quite true we will not bow down before your image and we're not too concerned about the matter either that's the meaning of the word we are not careful to answer thee in this matter remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount be careful for nothing don't become obsessed with a thing don't become overanxious well they said to him I'm sorry but we're sorry but it doesn't bother us all that much that we're not prepared that we are exposed to this danger of being thrown into the fiery furnace but the fact of the matter is we've made our stand we know who our God is and we are not going to compromise our religious beliefs well at the best of times at any time that was a tremendous confession of faith but perhaps these men were helped in the fact that they had made a stand already that with

Daniel they had made a stand while they were in college they had made a stand on the side of God they had said no when they had to compromise their religion and you know that if you make a stand once it strengthens you to make it a second time if you don't make a stand it makes it more difficult for you to make the stand the next time that's the way the principle works perhaps you young people or Christians here tonight who have become interested in the Christian faith may remember this that when the opportunity to witness presents itself to you take it take it at once and use it because if you don't use it when it presents itself the first time it will be far more difficult for you to do it the second time whereas if you do make a stand you will find it easier to make it the next time you see making a stand strengthens you for the next test and this is probably why they were so strong this time they had made the stand before and then they said to them you have challenged our

God and we leave matters in his hand you said who is that God that will deliver you out of my hands well the God whom we serve is able to deliver us and he will deliver us but if he won't it doesn't matter we still will not worship your God so they call his bluff you didn't you you you you you throw down a challenge to our God well we are leaving matters in the hand of our God all we can do is do our duty what he does with us is in his hands I have noticed as you yourselves have noticed no doubt a tremendous interest even nationally in what the presbyteries locally have done just now recently calling a day of humiliation and prayer in this island and these islands for the 12th of this month and you know there is nothing that indicates the appalling lack of knowledge of the things of God like the difficulty that these people have in understanding the word humiliation and prayer but what I was going to get into this they have shown a tremendous interest in this question what do you expect will happen as a result what is going to come out of all this what's the answer to that question that is in the hand of the Lord we place ourselves in his hand what he does is his prerogative our duty is to address ourselves to him or as these men said to Nebuchadnezzar our duty is to stand on principle in accordance with the teachings of our own faith what [21 : 13] God will do as a result we don't know that's in his hand he may deliver us he may not but it doesn't matter we are making our stand you know it is terribly easy to use God as a means to an end when people are very ill when people are in trouble when they're passing through trial when they're going a particular crisis oh yes they will pray to God then they will address their petitions of their needs to God they say if I will that is using God as a means to an end if you do this that will be the end that I promise you that will be the end that will be achieved of course when God does it they forget the end and they forget God just like they did you see God is the end in himself these men took the stand for

God's sake what their God was going to do while that was in their hand so do we we cry to him for his own sake and we say to him do thou as thou seeest fit and then notice this also in the confession of faith they acknowledge God as their own God ere if it be so our God whom we serve these men had a deep covenant and personal relationship with God and they believed and they knew this God as the God in whose power they could rely on whose omnipotence in whose omnipotence they could trust they knew he was a God who worked and you know that the writer to the Hebrews tells that this is essential in the exercise of faith are you a believer yes how do you know when

I believe in God ah yes but faith goes further than that I believe not only in God and the God who exists works and I have seen God at work that's a language of faith I have seen him they say in my own life I have seen him in the lives of others I have discovered his power I have come face to face with his power Abraham did Moses did Isaiah did Jeremiah did the New Testament apostles did Jesus did when he said with men things are impossible but all things are possible with God and a Christian is a person who has come to discover and to know and to recognize God working at the very point of his own need God coming to his aid faith is that which shuts you in to the almightiness of

God and you are energized in moments of crisis and difficulty and stress not only by the thought of what God is but by the thought of what God has done done the God our God whom we serve and another thing about this confession of faith was this that they were convinced of God's power to deliver them from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar as I said earlier how God was going to do it the method of the nature that he was going to adopt while they left that in his hands in the same way as Paul did when he wrote to the

Christ I don't know that's in the hands of God that's in the hand of God and here Daniel is saying these men are saying the same thing as I said we don't know he says we know that God is able to deliver us from this fiery furnace he may and he may not but the fact of the matter is that if he doesn't prevent us from suffering in the furnace he will preserve us in these sufferings and he will take us out of these sufferings and whether we come out of what

[26 : 46] Paul said right to Corinthians some of us have been studying this of late in the Galilee if in this life only he says we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable and he was answering the charge leveled against him or the charge that some people say doesn't matter does it what you do doesn't matter if Christ came or not does it doesn't matter if there says Paul oh no faith enables us to live in Christ and for Christ in this world and faith enables us to look beyond this world and to long for the time when we will be with him so you see these men someone may say ah well that's having the best of both worlds exactly that's exactly what they say our God is able to

deliver us and he will deliver us either way he will deliver us if we come out of it unscathed we will continue to serve him if we perish in the flames that will be the door entering into eternal service in the presence of our

God and that's what you have at the heart of this confession of faith they believed that he would either prevent them from suffering or else preserve them in suffering and you know when you consider where these men were when you consider the dangerous situation which they found themselves surrounded by enemies ostracised from their own land and their own companions and the men when you realized that they had few opportunities for instruction in the nature of religion when you realized that they were captives in a distant land and standing before the most powerful monarch on the face of the earth at the time with no one to turn to you cannot but admire the courage of their faith and the grace of

God who sustained them and encouraged them and energized them to make such a stand what are we going to take out of this for ourselves very simply just two or three lessons one of first you and I are to be firm and steadfast on the side of truth and again secondly and this reinforces the teaching of chapter one we are never to sacrifice conscience in the interest of what is wrong thirdly never deny and never sell the truth serve fourthly at all costs whether you live or not and recognize that making a stand will not always be easy perhaps very often the thought of making the stand is more difficult than making the stand itself people have said this about suffering and people have even said this about death the thought of these things was worse than being actually in these things and so if you if you if there is perhaps who knows there may be someone here tonight who is persuaded to make a decision on the side of Christ to take a step in a particular direction in his name and for his sake but the thought of making you know you cannot the desire to do that is genuine but the thought of doing it is keeping you from doing it because it suggests to you the difficulty of it well you remember this no one ever took a stand in the name of

Christ without being given grace to do it these men didn't do it on their own as the fiery furnace was to prove there was someone with them and there will be someone with you as well and it's difficult to make a stand when people laugh at you very difficult when you're the butt of people's jokes that can be extremely difficult perhaps when you're alone and other people won't support you perhaps when the devil suggests to you well it's only once is it but once can lead to twice and twice can lead to four times this is the way it goes you see a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump make a stand I know it's going to be difficult we all know that and I don't want to go over the ground that I went over here two weeks ago but I made myself

I'm sure sufficiently clear in the light of the word of God to accept to think and to believe that people who see things in that way will accept this that the most powerful witness you can witness in this life is that of being different not of being queer or of being idiosyncratic no but of being different because the word of God constrains you to be difficult may I reiterate what I said to you young people the easy way to be a Christian is to have a fruit in both cups drift with the world when it suits you when it appeals to yourself be religious when it appeals to you as well but I say this to you on the authority of the word of

[33 : 32] God that is not correct biblical thinking be out and out for Christ distance yourself from the world be different don't be afraid to make a stand and say with the hymn writer in full and glad surrender I give myself to thee thine utterly and only and ever more to be O son of God thou loves me I will be thine alone and all I have an own Lord shall henceforth be thine own thine not mine we are not afraid of you we make your stand and we make this confession because of religious beliefs lead us to make the stand and we place ourselves in the hand of

God come what may we couldn't be in better hands did the Lord deliver them well you know the story they were cast into the fiery furnace and time has gone and I just want to rush through this briefly very fine very briefly and finally they were delivered from the fiery furnace their faith and their courage enraged Daniel he became quite unreasonable he lost control of himself he commanded the strongest men in the army should bind these three men together bind them as they were fully clothed and the furnace was heated seven times more than normal so much so that the men who threw them in were destroyed themselves and the means of his destruction harmed his own executioner more than his intended victims this is the way the devil you see the devil doesn't know he's not all knowing and the devil just got into nebuchadnezzar he was like the devil incarnate here and the devil plans and schemes and he uses means very effectively at times very cleverly but there are other times when his schemes are thwarted because he's not as clever as he thinks he

doesn't know everything and there are times when he's taken as the bible tells us in his own schemes in his own machinations it was the devil who was behind the death of christ and the devil thought if I get rid of him

I'll solve my problem but what he didn't realise was this that in putting christ to death he was destroying the foundation of his own kingdom so here these men who were executing Nebuchadnezzar's decree were caught themselves in the execution whereas their victims went free and they were thrown into the fiery furnace and we know that this miracle took place they were delivered scot-free unscathed they came out of it unscathed now I know that there are people who post scorn on this miracle of course there are people who post scorn the bible because of the emphasis that it places upon the miraculous of course there are people that are ministers to their theological colleges their bible is probably no more than a hundred pages today everything that smacks of the miraculous of the divine it's cut out it's all myth but we believe in the god who wax there are people here today tonight who have seen miracles people who have seen god and his wonderful power at work in their own lives there are people here who know what it is to be if not literally at least spiritually to be placed into a fiery furnace there are people who know the animosity of people burning against them the hatred and the persecution of people almost almost swallowing them up in Peter's day he wrote to his

Christian friends and he said don't be surprised he says about this fiery furnace of temptation into which you are being placed there are people who are being almost spiritually burnt alive because the temptation of the devil the suggestions of the devil in their mind the things that he accuses them of the blasphemies that he brings up before them oh yes there are people who know what it is to be placed in a furnace in a fiery furnace if not literally physically yet spiritually and they were thrown in bound to make their helplessness and their weakness and their inability to cope with the situation more abundant well the Christian knows what this is as well just can't cope can't cope has got no strength and no power at all in himself and yet as Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace he was quite astonished couldn't get over this he's amazed and he asks the questions flow from his lips look at this he said we threw these men in they were bound they're loose their feet were tied they're walking there were only three of them there's four now they're unharmed he's staggered at what he sees so it is in the

Christian realm as well grace as I said earlier suggests grace is given to people to cope and they cope far more adequately with adversity than they do with prosperity I've seen people who were hopelessly unable to cope with their situation surrounded by everybody and yet when they were left on their own they came into their own the Lord strengthened the Lord gave them grace to cope grace to cope how many people here tonight have been delivered from many are difficult many are evil by the power of God how many people will have to attribute all that they are and all that they have achieved to the supernatural source of their power God and God almighty oh I know as I said earlier there are lots of people who don't believe in the supernatural but if God is not supernatural if [40 : 21] God is not omnipotent if God doesn't work like this what's the point of the Bible what's the point of the Christian religion what's the point of meeting here what's the point of praying that God would save and convert the lost and what is that but the supernatural exercise of the power of God you're a Christian here tonight why are you a Christian because God in his infinite power lay his hand upon your life did what no other person could do delivered you from the power of sin and and and the power of evil and so it is that Nebuchadnezzar sees this and above all he sees what astonishes him for and as I saw someone saying to him who is it what does he look like he looks and this is the translation looks like a son of one of the gods this is what that he the king said he didn't know any better you see there was something different about this man he wasn't like he was he looked infinitely superior to them there was something unique there was something supernatural there was something dignified about this person a son of the gods of course we all know who it was it was none other than

God himself in human form as God often manifests himself in Old Testament times the angel of his presence is a Bible redeemed them or delivered them God said this when there passes through the waters I will be with thee and through the fires I will be with thee and through the flames I will be with thee Jesus said to the disciples as he said them out in the hostile world a world that is going to put them to death a world that is going to chase them from the streets and from their synagogues I send you out he said as sheep among wolves and I send you out to the gospel but don't be afraid lo I am with you in people who they haveumu or would they answer

As he goes out into that hostile world. It is this. I am with you. And says Paul of God before us. Who can be against us? Oh I know. That there were some people through very fiery trials. And were not delivered from the flames.

We know in our own beloved country of Scotland. And many were martyred for their faith. Many were put to death at the stake.

[43 : 34] Many were burnt to death. Oh yes. But the Lord was with them. And the Lord delivered them.

Out of all their troubles. They are not burning at the stake tonight. They are singing to the glory of Christ in heaven above.

They have been delivered. Transported. Translated. To the right hand of God the Father. And I come back now to the beginning.

You see my friend. In a sense I am sorry for putting it like this. Because people may think I am using slang. But I am not. You can't lose with God.

You can't lose with Christ. Because having him. You are a companion. Right through life. And if it be.

[44 : 36] That circumstances. So milited against you as a Christian. That they might be the means of your exit. From this life into the next. Well.

You will be with him then. And you will see him. As he is. You can't lose with him. But oh.

What a loss. Your life is without him. How empty. How tragic. How futile. How vain.

Do you not see my friend. If I were to ask you tonight. Look. Would you stand up please. And make your confession of faith. In the name of Christ.

Could you do it. Could you do it.