

Daniel 3:1-30

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[0:00] I hope you have a Bible with you this morning and that you'll take it and join me in Daniel chapter 3. When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.

And he said to him, Jesus said to the centurion, I will come and heal him. But the centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go and he goes and to another, come and he comes and to my servant, do this. And he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

I wonder what Jesus would say of our faith. Would he find it admirable or would he find it wanting?

[1:34] Some weeks ago, I told you that the book of Daniel has three major themes. Just to ensure that you're caught up, I'll remind you of them at the outset of our study today. They are, number one, the rise and fall of man.

Man comes and he goes. Number two, the immovable sovereignty of God. And number three, the resilient faith of Daniel and his friends in a hostile culture.

We're going to note all three of these themes in today's text with a particular focus on the resilient faith of Daniel's friends. It's Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who were renamed, and as they're referred to in chapter three, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

We will read the entirety of the chapter. And I'm going to stop and make some brief comments along the way just to get us caught up in the story of what's happening. And then we'll get to the outline of our text.

So Daniel chapter three, beginning in verse one, let me remind you before I read, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

[2:50] Daniel chapter three, verse one and following. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth six cubits.

He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. So we'll stop there just for a moment. Beyond the dimensions of this image of gold, which was approximately 90 feet tall and nine feet wide.

It's massive. Nine stories, if you want to think in those terms. We do not know for sure what it was an image of, right? We get the general shape of it, but not otherwise.

But I want to say to you that it is likely that we are meant to have Nebuchadnezzar's dream from chapter two in our minds, where he has a dream of an image.

And this image that he dreams up, we can read about in chapter two, beginning in verse 31. As Daniel's telling the king his dream, he says, You saw, O king, and behold, a great image.

[3:58] This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold. Its chest and arms of silver.

Its middle and thighs of bronze. Its legs of iron. Its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you look, the stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces.

So as we looked extensively over the past couple of weeks, right? This was an image that represents different dynasties, different nation states, and how one day there would be a kingdom that would come and replace all of them.

Daniel goes on in verse 36. Verse 36. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom the power and the might and the glory, and to whose hand he has given wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them are you are the head of gold.

Right? So this represents Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon, the head of gold of this image. And then we can read on down in verse 44 of chapter 2.

[5:20] And in those days of those kings, the kings that follow him, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this.

The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. So this dream that's given to King Nebuchadnezzar, right, of this varied, materialized image, we don't know exactly what it is, this very material image, the head of it, being of gold, represents Nebuchadnezzar.

And there's a kingdom that's going to come and replace him. And we saw all throughout the chapter, both the rise and fall of man, Nebuchadnezzar's not going to last forever, and the immovable sovereignty of God, this kingdom that is being set up by Christ.

But it seems that, in chapter 3, in opposition to what Nebuchadnezzar should have learned from the dream, that he has become proud. I suggest to you that this image on the plain of Dura was Nebuchadnezzar's way of saying, not only am I the head of gold, but I am the whole image.

[6:49] And by my might, I will reign forever. I think this is a response to the dream. We don't know how much time has passed, but he seems to be saying, oh yeah, I will be the whole image, the gold image.

And I will have anybody that's in any position of power in Babylon come and bow to it and recognize that I am Nebuchadnezzar. Now, we know, of course, Nebuchadnezzar reigns, his reign passes. His throne has long since been overthrown, right? Exactly what Daniel was shown this dream meant is what has come to pass.

And we know there is a kingdom that will last forever that is being established. All right. Verse two. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent together the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

This is anybody in any position of power. Verse three. Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

[8:07] And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, you are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Remember at the end of chapter 2 that Daniel made a request of the king, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were made governors of Babylon. So they were included in this number.

They were gathered to this plain where a great number could gather to worship at this dedication. Verse 8. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of

music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.

[9:30] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Now, we have to imagine the scene just a bit.

But the typical illustration of this scene shows the image. And it shows Nebuchadnezzar on a pedestal on a throne next to the image. And it shows a fiery furnace there all in one setting.

We don't know for sure if that's the case. But it very well may have been. Clearly, the command to do it and what would happen if you didn't do it was very clear. He had laid it right out for them.

So just imagine just, I mean, thousands upon thousands of people. And there's this great ruckus of music. I can't imagine what that would have sounded like, all of those varied instruments. We know the bagpipes were in there, so it was a bit of a mess right away.

[10:36] I'm looking at Clay, who loves bagpipes. But when this happens, this sea of people falls down to the ground. Down to the ground.

And standing in the middle of this crowd are these three men. Everybody else is prostrate, and they are standing up. And I wonder what the conversation preceding this dedication might have looked like.

The command was given, these three men knew they were to be faithful to their God. And what might it have looked like? Are we going to bow down?

And I have to just imagine that one of them said, of course not. Our names are, instead of the names that have been given to them, our names are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Which mean, respectively, God has been gracious. Who is what God is? And God has helped.

[11:44] So they're determined not to bow the knee to a false god. To not obey the command of Nebuchadnezzar. So verse 13.

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

Now if you are ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.

But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?

Now I can appreciate, we talked about parenting a bit the last couple of weeks, Father's Day. I can appreciate that Nebuchadnezzar sets clear expectations and clear consequences.

[12:53] And we're going to see that he's going to be very consistent. But I just again want us to imagine, we don't experience this kind of audience.

We're not drawn into the presence of a king, a sovereign, right? One who is judge, jury, executioner, right? Nebuchadnezzar is furious with rage, and he can do whatever he wants to do.

I mean, the closest thing we may experience is being called before a judge. But even a judge has rules, regulations, laws that are placed over him or her to make their judgments.

Not the case with Nebuchadnezzar. This would have been a fearful thing. And note the last part of verse 15, that King Nebuchadnezzar issues a direct challenge against the God of heaven, right?

He is so prideful. He is so full of his own reign that he says, who is the God who would deliver you out of my hands, right?

[13:59] He is declaring himself more mighty than any God. Certainly of the one and only God. So now, verse 16. Listen to the response.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. What faith to speak to a king, a king mighty like this Nebuchadnezzar in this way.

Would we stand before the king with this kind of moxie, with this kind of nerve? I pray that the Lord would find me and would find you this faithful.

Verse 19. The Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually.

[15:17] He did, and I think this is meant to show how furious he was. He was that angry. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to cast them into the burning, fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, which I think is meant to picture haste. They just were bound and thrown. They were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace.

Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Do we not cast three men bound into the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said, But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt.

And the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Now, a lot of people at this point make a lot of conjecture that this was Christ. We don't know. But a messenger from God certainly came and rescued them.

[16:29] Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning, fiery furnace. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

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.

Therefore I make a decree, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins. For there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

[17:38] So note again this theme of the rise and fall of man. You see at the end of chapter 2, they are promoted. Chapter 3, the major part of the body, they are disobedient, and therefore they are punished.

And there again at the end of chapter 3, the rise once again of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So briefly this morning, I just want to make two observations from the text.

Number one, the resilient faith to obey God's commands. And number two, the resilient faith to submit to God's will.

So faith to obey and faith to submit. Number one, the resilient faith to obey God's commands. There is this striking statement, verse 17 and 18, but verse 17, if this be so, our God whom we serve will be able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace.

And he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood before a king who tempted them to disobey God's law in order to obey the king's law.

[18:47] But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego feared and loved God and knew the first and the second commandments. Exodus chapter 20, verse 3 and following, you shall have no other gods before me.

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 below 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. I have to imagine that first half of verse 5 is in their minds as they stand on this plain of Dura. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Their recorded response expresses no wavering, but I wonder how they may have been tempted to capitulate.

Maybe they were tempted by situational ethics. If we do not bow down, we will be put to death. Certainly God wouldn't want us to die.

[19:47] God would be okay if we bow down. He wouldn't want us to die. Maybe they were tempted by an argument about the culture. The Babylonians will not understand the laws of our God and we do not want to offend them.

We will bow now so that they will listen to us later. Maybe they were tempted by the forgiveness of God. Our God is a merciful God and is more understanding and forgiving than Nebuchadnezzar. They were tempted to presume upon God's kindness. Maybe they were tempted to make a silent protest. We can bow down on the outside, but in our hearts we will stand.

Perhaps these are some of the ways the text doesn't tell us. They are just resilient. We will be tempted in some of these ways in days of adversity.

Maybe we already have. Will we stand? Will we believe that God's commands are to be revered and obeyed?

[20:55] Will we have this kind of confidence in our God? They say, if this be so, we don't bow down and you throw us in the fire. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand.

Oh, King. Will we know God's commands when the day of adversity arrives? Will we know how we are to navigate those days?

Beloved, the matter may not be as simple as whether or not we will bow to a giant image. It may not be this clear cut for us. If we are to discern the way of obedience, we will have to be steeped in God's word.

Not just the parts of it that we like and enjoy, but the totality of it. We're going to have to know God's word. To this point, I've put a fairly extended quotation on the bulletin for you this morning.

Just briefly, I want to cover over this. This is John Flavel, old, one of the great pastors. He said, if you want to discover God's will, govern your search by these rules.

[22:11] Number one, get the true fear of God upon your hearts. Be truly afraid of offending him. Number two, study the word more and the concerns and interests of the world less.

So God has spoken to us by his word. So if we're concerned about what God would have us do, then we need to go to his word to find out. Number three, and the point of this is, don't just let this be a heady thing.

He says, reduce what you know to practice and you shall know what is your duty to practice. Take those things that are true and see how they are to be lived in your life.

Number four, pray for illumination and direction about the way you should go. Beg the Lord to guide you in straits and not to suffer you to fall into sin.

And then number five, this being done, follow providence as far as it agrees with the word and no further. Now, a little story to this point.

[23:16] This has nothing to do with adversity at all. But we were at a big family event yesterday and one of the members of the family has a very nice sports car.

And I just overheard him talking about how the car was a God thing. And because he was very interested in the car and the car was for sale, but he wasn't so sure. So he waited a month and a month later, it was still available and for sale.

And this was his summary of it being a God thing. God had said he should purchase this particular vehicle. Now, maybe I don't want to catch any judgment. On the particular car and the particular man, the man who loves the Lord, that's all great.

But this was his evidence for the purchase of this particular vehicle. The word is meant to be our guide, right?

We ought to be able to make Bible cases for the decisions that we're making in our lives, right? We ought to know what it means to be obedient to the Lord.

[24:14] Second, note with me, the resilient faith to submit to God's will. So verse 18, they say to the king, but if not, if God does not deliver us out of your hand, that's what they're saying, but if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

Some well-meaning people treat faith as a means for bending the will of God, saying things like, if you only have enough faith, such and such will come to pass.

Those of you who don't know, Clay, I'm going to tell a story about you. Those of you who don't know Clay Naylor, Clay has cystic fibrosis. He now has had a double lung transplant. He's doing much better than he once was.

But when he was in his college years, he had about 20% of his lung capacity. It left him winded, just crossing a room. Many times, Clay would lean on me to not pass out because he was so out of breath.

And Clay had person after person after person tell him that if he just had enough faith, God would heal him. Starting in my early 20s, I've had a lot of chronic tendinitis pain.

[25:32] I don't mean to compare this at all to Clay cystic fibrosis, but the pain that I've experienced, and I've had people tell me that as well, right? If you just have enough faith, right, then God will heal you.

Some of you may be aware in 2019, kind of a big kerfuffle in Bethel Church when a two-year-old named Olive passed away. They called their church and people and people and people nationwide into praying for the resurrection of this two-year-old.

Her mother wrote online, we are asking for bold, unified prayers from the global church to stand with us in belief that he, being God, will raise this little girl back to life.

I don't have a great problem with that statement. It's this next part. She says, her time here is not done. And it is our time to believe boldly and with confidence, wield what King Jesus paid for. It is time for her to come to life. And she wasn't raised. And the thing, I mean, all kinds of things about that situation saddened me.

[26:40] But where are these poor parents left? Who is their God? If they have done the thing they think they need to do, practice faith to bend His will, and He didn't do it.

I don't know how their faith even exists any longer. And perhaps it doesn't. I don't know them. Our God is an immovable sovereign.

He reigns over all things. And He is good. He does every bit of it for the good of His people and for His glory in the world.

So we ought not use faith in this way. And we see this with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Not only do they know that God is able to deliver them, they believe that God is going to deliver them. But they say, but even if He doesn't, guess what?

We'll remain faithful. We will still not bow to your image. So just as an exercise, I just want us to take a quiet moment, a brief pause.

[27:40] I'm going to land the plane soon, I promise. I want you in your mind, you may even want to write this down, to put the phrase out, our God whom we serve is able to.

You see that phrase in verse 17. Our God whom we serve is able to. And complete that phrase with the grandest thing you think that God could do for your life.

Our God whom we serve is able to. But if not, it's the rest of the sentence.

But if not, I will remain faithful. I will believe that He's a good and a sovereign God. I will believe that He knows better what I need than I know.

That the infinite has the right. He's the best being to speak into and to act for the finite.

[28:52] We too often think that we know what's best. I change my mind day to day about what may be best. Praise God that He knows what's best and He is in control.

Our God whom we serve is able to do anything. Blank. Fill in the blank. He's able to. But if not, we must, God's people must remain faithful.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are delivered from the furnace and they are promoted to a place of prominence once again. This may or may not be the case for us.

In Hebrews chapter 11 you see a great hall of faith as they call it. Many people who by faith were delivered. By faith were rescued.

And then the author of Hebrews also gives us a list of people who by faith were tortured and beaten. Thrown into lion's dens. Etc. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are the heroes of this episode but they are not the heroes of our faith.

[30:06] They are types of the one to come. They are meant to help us rightly consider the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ stood against the temptation of the devil.

Matthew chapter 4 verse 8 and following records the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and he said to him all these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me.

Similar language there. Then Jesus said to him be gone Satan for it is written you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. Jesus Christ in the face of certain death submitted himself to the will of his father as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane Mark chapter 14 verse 36 Abba Father all things are possible for you remove this cup from me yet not what I will but what you will.

And so we know at least I hope you know that Jesus despised the shame but for the joy set before him endured the cross believing that God knew what was best in that situation and because of his obedience Jesus has been promoted to an everlasting place of prominence.

You see how the narrative drives us to Christ. Paul writes in Philippians chapter 2 verse 8 and following being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

[31:47] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Beloved Jesus is the hero of our faith. He is our great example of the resilient faith to obey God's commands and of the resilient faith to submit to God's will.

And so as his people as his disciples his followers we should look to him who is the founder and the perfecter of our faith. Let's pray together.