



Honour God alone \* Daniel 3

May 16, 2021 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

You've probably seen it before – two grizzled cowboys, one in white, one in black, saunter slowly towards one another down the street in a frontier town. The one inevitably says 'this town ain't big enough for the both of us' and then they get down to working out who's gotta go.

That's what our passage in Daniel is about today. Not the cowboy part, but the 'this town ain't big enough' part. The implication there is that only one cowboy can have authority in that town and the other's one's got to go.

It turns out that our hearts are like that too. There's only room for one. And Daniel 3 invites us to ask: who it is that has the central place in our hearts? Who has the place of primary allegiance in our lives? Is it God or something else? Because God alone is worthy of our allegiance.

Turn with me to Daniel chapter 3 and I'll show you why I say that. Daniel chapter 3.

Now Daniel chapter 3 starts with an episode of 'Adventures in missing the point.' If you remember back to last week, the king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a giant statue. That statue symbolized the rise and fall of kingdoms, the futility of human power and the everlasting nature of God's kingdom, but Nebuchadnezzar heard all that and said – a golden statue – what a great idea!

So, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold (not just the head – like the dream – but the whole thing of gold – admittedly, probably gold plating) ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

It's not entirely clear if this was a statue of himself or a statue of his god; I suspect it was probably a little bit of both. Ancient rulers had a habit of conflating the two and then verse 2 -

2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.

3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

Technically these are the ruling classes in Babylon but the exhaustive repetition here makes me think that this is the author's way of saying 'all the sheeple.' They're all there to do the king's bidding. They do what the king wants and so they're all standing there in front of this giant monstrosity of a statue.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language:

5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

There's no middle ground with Nebuchadnezzar, is there? Tell me the dream or you're going to get killed. Worship my statue or you're going to get killed. These guys thought they were just here to see King Nebuchadnezzar's latest vanity project, but now, they've got to worship this golden god or else

they get thrown into a blazing furnace – probably the brick kilns that were used onsite in the building the statue. What would you do in their shoes? Bow to the image or risk the flames?

Well, these guys weren't too interested in being the guests of honour at a weenie roast and so, verse 7 - 7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Dan 3:1-7 NIV).

They chose to worship this lifeless pile of gold and wood and stone as a god. Fear of Nebuchadnezzar or self-preservation or legitimate reverence for what they thought was a god got pride of place in their hearts.

But not everyone played along. The author's shown us satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates bowing down when they hear the horn, flute, zither, lyre but now he reveals that there were some who did not bow. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. As of last week (2:49), they were administrators in the provinces of Babylon, which was where this was happening, and so they had to decide – honour God as God alone or push Him aside to make room for another.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to diminish God and so they refused to bow to the statue.

They kind of stood out like a sore thumb. So, verse 8 - 8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.

9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!

10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,

11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon--Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego get ratted out for remaining faithful to YHWH.

Nebuchadnezzar did NOT like this at all and so verse 13 - Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? [He just can't wrap his head around that. When he says 'jump' people say 'how high' but now here's people refusing his will. But Nebuchadnezzar is a benevolent kind of guy and he's willing to give second chances so he says:].

15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (These Babylonians are pros at foreshadowing).

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. [What god will rescue us from your hand? OUR God, the creator of

Heaven and Earth. They are so convinced of YHWH's deliverance that they are willing to defy the king. But while they know God's power, they don't know His purposes and so they add].

18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." [implied – because we know that God is greater than you and we trust Him more than we fear you].

That is one of the most powerful affirmations of faith in the whole of the Bible. They are utterly convinced that God alone deserves their allegiance and they are not about to demote Him and make Him share space with an idol. Even if it costs them their lives, they will not budge. 'Better to die, faithful to God, than to live a lie and serve a fraud.'

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual

20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remained faithful to God and they paid the price. Into the fire they went.

But they were right – the God they serve was able to save them.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king."

25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,

27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. [The guys that were out there, honouring a bunch of gold and wood and bricks saw what a REAL GOD can do]. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

God had delivered them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! *They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.*

29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for *no other god can save in this way.*" 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon (Dan 3:8-30 NIV).

[What god will be able rescue you from my hand? Nebuchadnezzar asked. YHWH, the LORD, the creator of Heaven and Earth.]

Now, I want to take just a minute to unpack what Nebuchadnezzar says in verse 28 - "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! *They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.*

That's really the crux of this passage. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusted in God and refused to make Him share space in their hearts with anyone else. They would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar or his statue because they knew both were frauds. They put their faith in God and God alone and they were right to do so. Because God is a powerful God. God is a saving God. He delivered them from death and they knew that even if He hadn't, He would not forsake them.

That's what I find most moving about this. They knew that God was working for good, even if they didn't know HOW God was working for good and so they committed themselves to YHWH's care, no matter the cost. I like how Bryan Chappell puts it – 'In His will is in His care.'<sup>i</sup> One of Charles Stanley's '30 life principles is' – 'Trust God and leave the consequences to Him.'<sup>ii</sup> Because God is powerful and faithful.

The idol on the other hand – Nebuchadnezzar's statue – what did it have going for it? Nothing, except for the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music. It couldn't save them. It couldn't deliver them or intervene on their behalf. That's something only God can do.

And so that's why the takeaway for this passage is this – Only God can save so honour God alone. Only God can save so honour God alone. Let me unpack that for you a piece at a time.

Only God can save. Only God can deliver. Only God can ransom our souls and preserve us for all of eternity. Remember what Luke 19:10 says – Jesus – the Son of God – came into the world to seek and save the lost. He paid the price for all the times we bowed to idols so that at the great judgment seat of God we can plead 'nothing but the blood of Jesus' and enter into eternal life. What do you think the people who worshiped Nebuchadnezzar's statue are going to say?

God alone can save. Jesus alone is the deliverer. When we put our faith in Him we are guaranteed eternity with Him and so He deserves our utter allegiance here and now.

And I don't want to undercut the fact the God is our deliverer in THIS life too. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, God deserves our allegiance whether He rescues or not, but the fact is, HE DOES rescue! We've been getting emails from BCS about the senior kindergarten teacher's retirement (Barb Foster) – get ready, save the date – then we got an email on Monday asking for prayer because she'd been in a car accident. Tuesday though, there was a second email, praising God for His faithfulness – in it she wrote –

Here is how God worked within the first 5 minutes after my accident.

The first responder was a volunteer firefighter.

The second responder was a retired firefighter.

The third responder was an off-duty police officer.

There was a person who witnessed the accident.

No one can tell me there isn't a God who cares.<sup>iii</sup>

God alone deliverers us.

And I think the fiery furnace is a pretty good picture of how that works. He doesn't always deliver us FROM the furnace but He delivers us THROUGH it and He is with us every step of the way. People debate who that fourth person was in the furnace with Shadrach et al – Was it Jesus? Was it an angel as Nebuchadnezzar thought? I suspect that it WAS the Jesus *before* the manger because what did they say Jesus *in* the manger would be? Immanuel. God with us. Even if He doesn't deliver us out of fiery furnaces, He brings us through them and He is with us every step of the way. He is with us in the funeral home, in the doctor's office awaiting results, in the conflicts and broken places of our lives just as much as He was with Shadrach et al in the furnace.

God alone can save... so honour God alone.

Frankly, that's the whole point of this passage – to motivate us to honour God alone – to give Him first place in our hearts and to elevate Him above all else. God is the only one who can save so He is the only one who deserves our allegiance. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that and so they refused to bow to the king's idol. They refused to demote God to 'just another good-luck charm' in their religious arsenal and so they made Him the centre of their lives.

Now we don't have physical idols to deal with but we definitely face the same temptation to let other things overshadow and crowd out God. "Possessions, careers, relationships, hobbies, sports, entertainment, goals..."<sup>iv</sup> self – that's a big one – all of these things can challenge God for first place in our hearts. Any time that you put something before God in your decision-making process, then you've got an idol on your hands. If it challenges God for primary allegiance in your life, then it's asking you to compromise the same way that Nebuchadnezzar asked Shadrach et al to do.

These hearts though aren't big enough for the two of them – God's gotta stay and the other's got to go.

I'd encourage you to take an inventory of your heart to see what's taking up space there. Anything that challenges God for first place in your heart, you need to root it out. It may not be comfortable or convenient or financially profitable to do so, but can that thing save you? Only God can save...

... so honour God alone.

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<sup>i</sup> Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel according to Daniel*, pg. 66.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.intouchcanada.org/read/30-life-principles>

<sup>iii</sup> Barb Foster, "Quick update regarding Barb Foster" email to BCS community, Tuesday May 11, 2021.

<sup>iv</sup> "Understanding contemporary idols can help us to understand why they prove to be such a powerful temptation. An idol can be anything we place ahead of God in our lives, anything that takes God's place in our hearts, such as possessions, careers, relationships, hobbies, sports, entertainment, goals, greed, addictions to alcohol/drugs/gambling/pornography, etc."

<https://www.gotquestions.org/idol-worship.html>