

Daniel - God Delivers His Servants

by William Fitch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God and standing for Him in the face of a hostile world, using the stories of Nebuchadnezzar and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to illustrate the benefits and consequences of trusting in God.

Duration: 33:03

Scripture: Daniel 3:12, Daniel 3:18, Matthew 6:33, John 15:19, Colossians 3:3, 1 Peter 1:7, 1 John 2:17

Topics: "Deliverance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of trusting in God and walking in His ways. The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is used as an example of unwavering faith in the face of adversity. The preacher highlights three lessons from the story: the futility of fighting against God, the temptation to turn away from God, and the goodness of trusting in God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that those who live their lives hidden in Christ will have eternal life.

Transcript

O Lord, be Thou in our midst in all Thy risen power, and speak Thou the word to our hearts that most we need, for the glory of Thy name. Amen. In the 18th verse of the third chapter of the book of Daniel, there is one of the most profound, challenging, and glorious verses in all the Bible.

Be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. We are studying the book of the prophet Daniel, and this morning we come to the third chapter which continues to develop the story of King Nebuchadnezzar, and also the amazing and miraculous history of the confessing church under his rule. The third chapter is most significant in that it's here for the first time that the people of God come into open conflict with the commandments of the King.

It's, of course, the teaching of all the Bible that there is a basic, fundamental, and therefore abiding antagonism between the church and the world. The relationship of the church to the world around her is one of inherent hostility. They just do not belong together.

That's our Lord's teaching. In his last discourse to his disciples, as recorded in the 15th chapter of St. John's Gospel, he says, If you were of the world, the world would love his own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

And he goes on, Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my sake, they will keep yours also.

Elsewhere he tells his disciples how deadly the hatred of the world for his church would be, and how his disciples would continually be the target for the reproach of the world around them. All this he taught. And in doing so, he was expressing the unanimous testimony and witness of the entire Bible.

For all the Bible declares that there is a fundamental antagonism between truth and error, between darkness and light, between purity and impurity, between love and selfishness, between God and the devil, between the church and the world. And it's in the third chapter of the book of Daniel that this fact becomes apparent for the church of that hour. And it's here that the issues for the children of God become unmistakably clear.

Now it's very interesting that Daniel isn't here in the third chapter. Why that is so, we are not told. His three friends are here.

Perhaps he was far removed at this time on business for the king. Perhaps he'd been sent abroad on some ambassadorial mission. And perhaps that was so ordered in the providence of God, in order to show that not only Daniel can stand, but men of Daniel's band can stand for God.

Even when the greatest isn't with them, we're not told why. All we are told is that the conflict revolves around three young men who were friends of Daniel, whom we have met already in chapter one. Met and seen proved in the first chapter, and now we see them about to be proved in another way.

And the question to which all heaven and hell are attended is this. Will they stand firm? Will these three men under the pull and pressure of this alien society and environment stand for God, or will they go down? That's the question. Let's see what happens.

You recall the story? Nebuchadnezzar made a great image of gold. It was three score cubits high and six cubits broad. That means it was ninety feet high and nine feet square in base.

But that's not all. Nebuchadnezzar is not satisfied only with the image. There must be a dedication of the image.

And so before us there is past a dazzling military review. All the music of this pagan world is summoned. The military bands are there in force, and all peoples and languages and tongues and kindreds are summoned to attend.

Because the king must have his place. And this image of gold that he has raised must be dedicated with all Jew pop and ceremony. But that's not all.

Nebuchadnezzar ordains that this image be worshipped. The image becomes a religious question, as ultimately all our images do. Nebuchadnezzar the king decreed, Whoso follows not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast into the burning fiery furnace.

There's a situation, a test, a choice before the confessing church. Here is the either or. You either bow the knee to the god of this world, or you take the consequences.

What will the answer be? In this position Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego find themselves. Informers tell the king. They tell him that there are three men who refuse to bow down.

Possibly there were more, but there must always be a special target. And these three are cited as men who refuse to bow down and worship the image. At this, Nebuchadnezzar is very angry.

He summons these men. He addresses them. He warns them.

But all the concentrated fury of this manner cannot avail to bring these men to heel. Now listen. Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods.

That we will not worship the golden image which thou hast set up. And so the die is cast. The irrevocable choice is made.

We will not serve the gods of earth. We serve the god of heaven. Oh, there's a story.

What are the lessons? Ah, there are multiple. We must be extremely selective. I want to be as simple as I can.

I want to suggest, first of all, that from this chapter we learn this. We learn how vain it is to fight against God. How vain it is to fight against God.

You see that in the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Because you see, God is seeking Nebuchadnezzar. He's after the soul of this manner.

And ultimately God is going to win, but Nebuchadnezzar isn't ready as yet. On the contrary, the story of this chapter is the story of a man in flight from light. The story of this chapter is the story of a man rebelling against divine revelation.

Last Sunday morning we studied the second chapter. And we saw there how the dream that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed was given to him. And then when he summoned wise men to interpret it and to tell him the dream first, God revealed to him his dream and the interpretation thereof through his servant Daniel.

And through his servant Daniel God told Nebuchadnezzar that there was another kingdom. A stone would be hewn out without hands and that that stone would grow greater and greater and would fill the earth. And Nebuchadnezzar in his heart trembled as he heard that word.

There the gospel was preached in all its fullness to King Nebuchadnezzar and he knew the truth. He knew what he ought to do, but as yet he hasn't done it. Will he give in? Will he yield to God? Well, he's not prepared to do that as yet.

The story of the third chapter shows us a man hardening himself, refusing to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. God has whispered within his heart and the word has come, but now he rebels and refuses and runs. And his rebellion takes a strange course.

Yet when you analyze it you see how absolutely fundamental it is. There are two elements in this course of rebellion. First, exaltation of self and secondly, hurt to others.

He makes an image of himself, an image of God and he says all will bow down. He exalts himself and he says if anyone will not worship they will be cast into the fiery furnace. Isn't this what always happens when a man flees from light and love? The image of God becomes dimmed and his own image becomes more and more important.

He exalts himself and in that exaltation of self there is always hurt to others. How many a fiery furnace there has been prepared by reason of a man's flight from God. Well, that's what's happening.

And yet ultimately Nebuchadnezzar is going to realize how vain it is. There's a sense in which the story of Nebuchadnezzar is the story of the prodigal son of the Old Testament. He comes back.

Yet God has many strange ways in which to lead him yet. Oh, if only he had been wise. What misery he would have spared himself.

He's yet going to be broken mentally. He's yet going to be cast out into the field to eat grass like the beasts of the earth. He's going to be brought very, very low before he will acknowledge that God alone is God.

But he's not ready yet. He's still fleeing. God has spoken.

But he just won't listen. How vain to run from God. I wonder if you've been running away from God.

I wonder if you know this morning as you sit here in church what you ought to do. I wonder if God has revealed to you his will and you know what you ought to do. God has spoken.

God speaks in so many ways. Varied, different, diverse. Merciful, miraculous, mysterious.

God will sometimes speak in the verse of a hill. God will sometimes speak in the coming of a friend. God will sometimes speak in the taking of a loved one from outside.

The silent majesty of death. God will often speak in an hour of joy. Coming of a little child into a home.

How many there are who in such a moment have vowed to God that they will be different men. But that hour passes. And they just don't fulfill their promise.

What about you and me this morning? Has the Lord a controversy with you? Me. How vain it is to fight against God. Here is Nebuchadnezzar thinking that he can bring the church under his control.

Here is Nebuchadnezzar imagining that he can say to these men, Thou shalt do this. But no. Here are men who have taken their lives in their hand and the countenance of nothing.

If only God will be God and exalted in his heaven. And they stand for God and they will not bow the knee to the gods of earth. Like Saul of Tarsus.

Fleeing from God. Then a long arm of everlasting mercy reached from heaven and held him. Later he said, who was I that I should fight against God? Who indeed was I? Oh, we certainly learn that.

How vain it is to fight against God. I want to suggest to you that we also learn from this chapter. Learn so clearly how tempted we are to turn from God.

If ever men were tested and tried and tempted, these three men surely were. I think just for a little. Think of their situation.

Was even Moses himself within the palace of Pharaoh blessed greater than these men? They are surrounded on every side with materialistic things. Everywhere there are the trappings of sensualism and humanism and temporalism. On every side there is the pull and pressure of the world.

All around them there is the glory of earthly power. They are beset on every side by the vision of gold, the sound of music, the pageantry and display of an Eastern potentate. Remember they were young men.

Young men to whom naturally these things would appeal, to whom would they not appeal? Essentially. Because here are the gods of man and the gods of earth and they're being offered to these men. Still more there is the explicit commandment of Nebuchadnezzar the king.

An absolute commandment. This is what you will do. You will bow down.

It's never easy to go against the law of the land. Why which of us here today have ever tried to do that? None of us here have faced this test, have we? The test of loyalty to the state or loyalty to God. Thank God we live within a community.

Thank God we live within a dominion from which we are spared as of now this particular tension. These men were thus tried and tested. It must have been very great.

When you analyze it and begin to compare our own situation with theirs, you begin to see that there is a special congruity towards their situation and our own. Because they were being called to worship the gods of this world. And so are we.

And there has never been an age in which the Christian church has not been faced with this particular temptation. To love the world. To place its confidence in the things of this world.

To set itself after the pattern and according to the spirit of the age. And to yield herself to that spirit. To all men and women, you and I find ourselves surrounded with this on every side.

There is the pool of convention. There is a strong, strong pool of the cultists of thought. There are the philosophies of the day.

There are the thought forms of our age. There is a particular currency and commerce of thinking. And if you don't run along with that, you are considered just so different and there is reproach upon you.

Just because of one's faith, willingness to stand for Christ, one can suffer reproach. Sometimes one doesn't mind. Other times one does.

It's easier for some people to stand it than others. I've had a university professor say to me, But no thinking man could ever believe that. To follow in that kind of thought is to become obscurantist.

Is to recognize and to rate yourself as out of date. That was all right for a couple of centuries ago, but today in this day of enlightenment, think again. What do you do? What do these three young men do? They refuse to conform.

They refuse to bow down. They recognize the authentic voice of the Holy Ghost. That the spirit of the age was the spirit of Antichrist.

They knew that in their yielding to that spirit, they would be going contrary to the law and commandment of their God. And they said, we will not bow down. It is possible to stand alone.

By the grace of God. You can't do it in your own strength, my. But by the grace of God, you can.

Yet these men faced one final test. Test, as I say, from which we have been spared as yet. Who can tell what the next 10, 15, 20 years will hold for the world? Who would ever have imagined that the things we have seen happen, the tricks 1939 and 1949, could have happened.

This world is a sinful world. These men were called to face something so unimaginable to the mind of man. That they truly faced the final test.

Because the commandment was that if anyone would not bow down, they would be cast into the burning fiery furnace. In other words, the issue was death. The issue was the gas chamber.

The issue was a furnace. The issue was destruction. The issue was the end of life.

We are free from that. Thank God. Sometimes I wonder if it wouldn't be better for the Church in Canada if there were more persecution.

I don't know. What do you think? It's so easy for us. Thank God we have been delivered from physical testing.

And yet, there may be a still more subtle testing. That by the very removal of that, and ease and sloth finding a road of entrance, we have yielded to the temptation, and we have let down the ropes, and we are coasting along. And we think we can coast.

Listen, men and women, you and I dare not attempt to coast like that. There is only one safety for the child of God, and that is to be altogether sold out to his God. As these three men were.

Because on every side there are pools and pressures and programs. They are all temptations. Thank God for three men who stood for God.

Well, there are two lessons. How vain it is to fight against God. How tempted we shall be to turn from God.

I want to suggest that we learn here also how good it is to trust in God. What an amazing story. Three men against the Empire.

Now, we are not careful to answer to your king in this matter. Our God, if he wants to do so, will deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. But if not, we want you to know that we will not bow down, nor serve the golden image that thou hast made.

How good it is to trust. Here are three men who had faced all the possibilities. Faced all the facts.

And saw that the final fact was God. Had said within their own hearts and had said to one another, I am going on with God. And that is good.

It is so sweet to trust in Jesus. Just to trust him day by day. It is good.

It is a miracle. Because it is the act of God. This is natural.

You and I can do this by ourselves. This is God at work. Faith is the mightiest act of God.

The gift of faith. This is mystery. It is the mystery of the witnessing and confessing church at the heart of a godless and anti-Christian society.

This is glorious. Because here are men who see the other kingdom. Here are men who see beyond the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of our Lord.

Our God. It is good to trust in God. These men trusted in God and praised him for their creation.

For their preservation and for all the blessings of this life. They praised God for the wonder of his salvation. And for the assurance that he would save them still.

We have found that he has saved us in the past. He is saving us now. And we are persuaded that he will yet save us still more gloriously.

And that is good. It is good to trust the promises of God as these men did. It was good to walk with God as these men did.

It is good to trust in God. Because look, tremendous blessings flow from this. For one thing, there was perfect integration of personality, was there not? All the warring strife within their own divided personalities in the past, had that ever been, are now drawn together into one great-hearted purpose.

They will walk with God. They are integrated. Poised.

Balanced. Assured. With no doubt whatsoever.

For them the issue is settled. God is God. They will walk with him.

And what happened? They were cast into the fiery furnace. The story is here. Miraculous.

Unimaginable to the human mind. For this is God at work. And they are cast into the fiery furnace, these three.

Then you remember the story? Somehow or another the king was worried and concerned and troubled because God is dealing with him still. And he comes down. And he is able to look into that fiery furnace.

And he says, I see not three, I see four men walking in the form of the four. He is as a son of God. It is good to trust in God.

He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. There are three lessons.

How vain it is to fight with God. How tempted we are to turn from God. How good it is to trust in God.

One final note. How long they live, whose lives are hid with Christ in God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They live forever. They are here this morning. Their witnesses with them.

Across the dividing years their voices call to us. They say, count it all lost, my brethren, when you fall into diverse testings. The trial of your faith be much more precious than of gold that perishes.

Though it be tried with fire, let it be to the praise of your God. He that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Forever.

The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof. The man whose life is hid with Christ in God will abide when earth and seas are fled. When the words are on fire, his voice will be heard in exultation to his God.

They shall be mine in that day when I make up my due. They shall be mine. Truly how long they live, whose lives are hid with Christ in God.

To such a life may God of his infinite mercy bring us all today. O Lord, in thee we trust. Thou art our hope, our confidence, and our help.

O be thou with us. God grant that our lives may be given over altogether to thee. Take thou complete control.

Lead us on, save us, help us. Bless us. For thy great love's sake.

Amen.

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