

Walking through the Fire
Daniel 3
July 5, 2015

Intro.

- When many of the early settlers of our country crossed the Atlantic, they believed that they were coming to build a new Jerusalem.
 - About 20 years ago, a movement gained momentum by asserting that we should no longer see ourselves in Jerusalem but in Athens.
 - This picture came from Acts 17 where Paul visited Athens and engaged in cultural dialogue on Mars Hill.
 - Thus there were churches in the United States that formed and took on this name.
 - However, what both of these perspectives failed to realize is that the church has never really lived in Jerusalem nor Athens.
 - We live in Babylon.
 - In 1968, Francis Schaeffer opened his lectures at Wheaton College by saying, “Ours is a post-Christian world.”
 - Schaeffer went on to describe what he meant by “post-Christian.”
 - To live in a post-Christian culture is to live in a society where Christianity has been previously widely known and understood.
 - However, it is now in the minority, not only in number of Christians but also in cultural emphasis and influence.
 - If it was true in Schaeffer’s day, how much more is that true today?
 - What does it look like when Babylon demands our worship?
 - A Foolish Requirement
 - A Faithful Refusal
 - A Fiery Reward
1. A Foolish Requirement (vs. 1-7)
 - a. The narrator is very repetitive in this chapter especially in these opening verses.
 - i. One of the most repeated words is the one translated in our Bibles as “set up.”
 - ii. In chapter 2, verse 21, Daniel praised God because he sets up kings, so the repeated use of “set up” here in chapter 3 signals that Nebuchadnezzar is competing against God.
 - iii. Evidently, learning that he was the head of gold in his dream has truly gone to his head.

- b. There is other repetition as well.
 - i. In verse 2, the various officials are all named by their titles and then these titles are promptly repeated in verse 3.
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar has also assembled an orchestra fitting the grandeur of the dedication of this construction project.
 - iii. All the instruments are named and then repeated again in verse 7.
 - c. All of this is focused on the response which is also used repeatedly throughout the chapter—worship.
 - i. At one level, all of these repetition is emphasizing just how imposing and daunting the requirement that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were facing.
 - ii. At another level, all of this repetition is meant to reveal the utter foolishness of this construction.
 - iii. Don't we recognize today that the more a person repeats their accomplishments, the more insecure they are?
 - iv. Aren't a detailed list of who you've invited to your party and an exhaustive list of the details just signs of an insecure person trying hard to prove themselves?
 - v. The people who fall for it are the ones who are insecure themselves.
 - d. Of course, Nebuchadnezzar had one more tactic to motivate his worshippers.
 - i. Worship the image or die a horrible death in the furnace.
 - ii. When the music from this magnificent symphony played, all the people bowed down.
 - iii. No doubt, they were afraid they'd end up on the wrong side of history.
 - iv. This is what we have to expect from life in Babylon.
 - v. The rulers of Babylon will demand that they be worshipped or else.
 - vi. Tolerance is simply another way of saying all the instruments must play the same tune.
 - e. This should help us appreciate the enormity of the pressure that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego must have felt as they made their faithful refusal.
2. A Faithful Refusal (vs. 8-18)
- a. These three men must have stood out prominently as the band blared.

- i. As the sea of grasses bowed in the wind, three lone saplings stood tall,
 - ii. They must have appeared foolish—three men barely 6 feet tall standing against a statue 90 feet tall.
- b. Did they contemplate bowing?
 - i. I heard a story of a family who moved to the United States from Great Britain for the father's work.
 - 1. The boy came home from school and told his parents that the teacher had made him stand and recite the pledge of Allegiance with the rest of his class.
 - 2. "But don't worry," the boy said to his father, "I was standing up on the outside, but I was sitting down on the inside."
 - ii. Surely Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have used the same logic.
 - iii. God, of all beings, would know that they were standing up in their hearts.
 - iv. After all, worship really is about the heart anyway, isn't it?
 - v. As long as their hearts were in the right place, God would understand, wouldn't he?
- c. However, these three men recognized that you can't separate inner love for God from outward action.
 - i. How many husbands have tried to excuse pornography by telling their wives that they don't love their wives any less?
 - ii. There is a reason why wives aren't convinced; it's not true.
- d. The church father Augustine noted that the crowd bowed down to save their lives, but in worshipping the image they were the ones who truly died.
 - i. In choosing to worship the image, they were separating themselves from God.
 - ii. Of course, on a human level, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego put their lives on the line.
 - iii. When Nebuchadnezzar heard of their refusal to worship the image, he was filled with rage.
- e. This is what life in Babylon is like.
 - i. In the previous chapters, they have proven their superiority and their usefulness to Nebuchadnezzar.
 - ii. They have been praised by him, rewarded by him, and promoted by him, but there comes a time when none of this matters.

- iii. Babylon demands loyalty, and the king will not tolerate anything less than total allegiance.
- f. Nebuchadnezzar tempers his anger long enough to make a diplomatic appeal.
 - i. He gives them a second chance, but he reiterates his terms.
 - ii. Worship the image or be thrown into the fiery furnace.
 - iii. The implication is clear: Don't get caught on the wrong side of history.
 - iv. He concludes by throwing down the gauntlet:
 - v. What god can save you from the furnace?
 - vi. Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten his dream and the revelation of the God of heaven.
 - vii. He truly believes he is the most powerful being on the planet.
- g. As we look at our world today, it appears that same-sex marriage has become the golden image that Babylon is demanding that we worship.
 - i. It is clear from the rhetoric and even from lawsuits that have already been filed that it is not enough to simply allow same-sex marriage.
 - ii. If you refuse to participate, you are branded as a hateful bigot.
- h. Let me share with you briefly why I believe this is the golden image that we must not worship, and by worship I mean value and celebrate.
 - i. By legalizing same-sex marriage, the Supreme Court legalized a relationship that is not compatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ii. If two individuals enter a same-sex relationship and never renounce it as sinful and never seek forgiveness and salvation from Jesus Christ, they will be separated from God forever and never enter into heaven.
- i. Look with me at 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

- i. Now what should really get our attention is that God doesn't single out same-sex relationships here.

- ii. He describes a whole host of people that includes all kinds of sexual immorality and adultery.
- iii. He even addresses non-sexual sins like greed, so I'm not trying to make the point that same-sex marriage is an unforgiveable sin or that my sin is okay.
- iv. The point is this: Our government is declaring a relationship to be legal that in its very essence stands under the judgment of God.
- j. God doesn't hate gays; the Bible doesn't hate gays; I don't hate gays.
 - i. My prayer is that what Paul declares in v. 11 would be true of us.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- ii. If you are here today, and you're having any of the feelings described on this list, you are in the right place.
- iii. This needs to be a safe place where we can confess our sin to each other and assure one another of the promises of God's Word that God forgives and cleanses all sin.
- iv. No one will be rejected or unwelcome at BCC for confessing sin and seeking forgiveness.
- k. My exhortation today is that we must not worship the image.
 - i. We must not bow to Babylon.
 - ii. As elders we took a stand in 2013, and this week we re-affirmed it.
 - iii. I want to read to you from our church bylaws.
 - iv. The question now is how to respond?
 - v. I want us to note three aspects of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response.
- l. First, they refused to launch a counterattack.
 - i. Look with me at v. 16.
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar asked them two questions—one at the beginning of v. 14 and the other at the end of v. 15.
 - iii. Literally their reply was, "We don't need to give a word"—meaning, "We're not only don't need to defend ourselves, but we don't need to defend God."
 - iv. Charles Spurgeon once said, "When a lion is under attack, you don't need to defend it. You simply need to open the cage, and get out of the way."

- v. There comes a time in Babylon when silence is the most powerful argument.
- m. You can bet that the most common questions that non-Christians around you will ask is, "What do you believe about same-sex marriage?"
 - i. How do we respond?
 - ii. Does this call for a Daniel 1, Daniel 2, or Daniel 3 response?
 - iii. You may want to reply by saying first, "May I ask you why you are asking?"
 - iv. When Nebuchadnezzar asked his questions, he was looking to eliminate threats.
 - v. Many people today are asking the question because they want to eliminate threats to their own lives.
 - vi. If Christians will condone same-sex relationships, then the Bible can be made to condone any action that society endorses.
- n. In this moment, you need to know if this person is merely pouncing to attack.
 - i. If yes, then you are in Daniel 3.
 - ii. You may want to respond with something like this: "God is my treasure, and same-sex marriage is one of many things the Bible says robs God of his worth, so I cannot support it."
- o. What you should pray for is that a Daniel 3 moment might de-escalate into a Daniel 2 moment.
 - i. In Daniel 2, Daniel was faced with a demand from the king and asked for time.
 - ii. You might say, "This is not an easy situation. Is there a time we could sit down over coffee, and I could show you what the Bible teaches?"
- p. As part of your preparation, you should pray that a Daniel 2 moment becomes a Daniel 1 moment.
 - i. Think back with me to Daniel 1 when Daniel and his three friends were faced with the challenge to pollute themselves with the king's food.
 - ii. Remember how Daniel responded?
 - iii. "Test us for ten days and then look at the results."
 - iv. As you share, you might say, "These are my convictions. Will you give me time to let my life show you the results?"
- q. When you do get a chance to explain God's design for marriage, make sure you include this:

- i. We don't need to fix our positions; we need to be fixed by Christ.
 - ii. We need him to rescue us from sin and give us our true freedom, not the false freedom that all forms of sexual immorality offer.
 - iii. We should strive as much as possible to get the relationship and conversation back to a Daniel 1 level, but we must prepare for the culture to keep pressing us toward this Daniel 3 moment.
 - r. In order to be prepared for that, we must pay attention to the second facet of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response.
 - i. They refused to lose confidence in God.
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar tried to shake the confidence of these Hebrews by casting doubt on God's ability to save them.
 - iii. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond, they demonstrate unwavering confidence in God's ability to rescue them.
 - iv. Like these three we must not lose confidence that God is more powerful than the greatest power that could come against us.
 - v. God is able to rescue us, not because of the strength of our faith or the sincerity of our devotion but because he is the one true and living God.
 - s. Third, they refused to let their circumstances define their commitment.
 - i. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are sure God's going to rescue them, but their commitment to Yahweh is not contingent on him rescuing them.
 - ii. Look at v. 18.
 - iii. This was not hedging their bets. This was declaring, "We are all in."
 - iv. They are willing to give up their lives rather than compromise their faith.
 - v. With these words, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego set an example for future generations of faithful believers.
 - t. Their faithful refusal was met with a fiery reward.
3. A Fiery Reward (vs. 19-30)
- a. When Nebuchadnezzar realized that he could not coerce these men into bowing down to his image, he became enraged.
 - i. He ordered the furnace to be heated as hot as possible.

- ii. Notice how the exiles will tolerate other gods being worshipped as long as they aren't forced to worship them, but Babylon will not tolerate their gods not being worshipped.
 - iii. Of course, we're beyond reason at this point.
 - iv. The Hebrews aren't even putting up a fight, yet Nebuchadnezzar bring in his strongest men to tie them up.
- b. The furnace is so hot that the flames kill the soldiers as they throw the Hebrews in.
 - i. Surely, they were immediately incinerated; but wait!
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar can't believe his eyes.
 - iii. As he looks in the furnace, he sees not three but four men walking in the flames, all unhurt.
 - iv. Nebuchadnezzar responds by calling Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out and acknowledging the greatness of their God.
 - v. As he says at the end of v. 29, "No other god can save in this way."
- c. Nebuchadnezzar spoke better than he knew, and this is the true fiery reward.
 - i. In other places in the Old Testament, God himself is the one who rescues his people, so this is probably an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.
 - ii. However, here is the greater surprise.
 - iii. There were four men in the fire, but only three came out.
 - iv. You see, Jesus really did go into the fire, but he didn't come out.
 - v. He went under the fire of judgment on the cross, and he didn't escape death.
 - vi. Jesus died as a rebel, but God vindicated him by raising him from the dead.
 - vii. As he prepared to ascend into heaven, he gave his disciples a promise, "I am with you always."

Conclusion

- We must remember that we live in Babylon.
 - We must refuse to launch counterattacks.
 - We must refuse to lose confidence in God.
 - We must refuse to let our circumstances define our commitment.
- We must remember that we can stand firm in Babylon and walk through the flames because Jesus will never leave us.